CISL research ethics policy

Scope: CISL-led grant or donation-funded research

Background

1. CISL's research ethics policy is part of a wider process of ethics and integrity review which is set out in the policy of the [School of Technology](#) and the [University Good Research Practice Guidelines.](#) CISL attaches considerable importance to the maintenance of high ethical standards in the research undertaken by our academic and research staff, whether supported directly by CISL or funded from external sources. Research undertaken at CISL should conform to generally accepted ethical principles and the [University of Cambridge Policy on the Ethics of Research Involving Human Participants and Personal Data](#).

2. Ethical approval for research projects at CISL is generally needed where data are being collected in the course of an empirical research project or in the case of projects which involve the collection of data concerning living persons, which may be new/primary data (not already in the public domain), or in some cases existing/secondary data. Should data be in the public domain, the researcher is required to indicate appropriate recognition of any references and sources throughout the project or written consent should be obtained prior to the start of the research. Advice on whether approval is needed should be sought at an early stage in research planning, and in any event before the research begins. The details of the review process can be found in this document and further guidance can be obtained via the [University's Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct website](#) or the CISL Research Team.

3. Research at CISL may involve a wide range of users, participants, volunteers, and others. In all cases, it is important to plan the research carefully, ensuring scientific validity and considering any potential ethical issues. CISL adopts an initial 'lightweight' ethical review model followed by appropriate escalation, which is grounded in current best practice and takes inspiration from consultation with other Schools and Universities.

4. CISL recognises that in many cases outside research partners or funding organisations have their own ethical policies or require research proposals to undergo independent ethical scrutiny. This ethical code should be seen as a complement to these existing standards, not a replacement for them. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain any necessary permits, licences, and to follow local requirements prior to starting the research.

5. CISL's ethics policy has been reviewed by CISL's Management Board, by the School of Technology's Ethics Committee and the University Research Ethics Committee.

Area of application

1. Ethical issues can arise in a wide range of situations, including those relating to research, plagiarism, safety, professional practice, race and religious equality, copyrights and patents, privacy and freedom of information. The relationships between CISL and its national and international funders, including commercial partners, may provide scope for conflict of interest and ethical dilemmas. International research may bring along additional difficulties beyond those encountered within the UK.

2. Good governance and safety is already subject to University regulations, so the avoidance of harm is the main focus of this ethical code. Legislation will often dictate how to approach and solve certain ethical dilemmas, but it will not always be sufficient, and should not be the only driver of CISL's approach to ethical issues.

3. All materials prepared for publication should respect academic professional standards, including the recognition of previous work and the involvement of other researchers. It is CISL policy that all publications openly declare the source of funds used to support the work.

Review process

1. CISL's ethical review process involves several stages (see Annex A.1.):
   a. self-assessment by the researcher using a standard checklist (derived from CJBS)
   b. a review of relevant documents and the self-assessment by CISL's Research Team
   c. which might lead to a further review from CISL's Research Oversight Committee (ROC)
   d. which might require referral to a School ethics panel such as the School of Technology Ethics Committee or the Psychology Ethics Committee for advice and approval
   e. any research involving NHS data, staff, patients or facilities, as well as certain other forms of social science and clinical research, may require further approval from the NHS National Research Ethics Service. Guidance on if research requires NRES approval can be found via the Health Research Authority Decision Tool for research and the Health Research Authority Decision Tool on NHS REC Approval. Additional guidance is available on the NRES Review webpage, the University Research Integrity website and in the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research.

Step 1.a. - Self-assessment

1. self-assessment requires individual researchers to determine, in the light of CISL and University values and standards, what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour. Academic staff are encouraged to discuss issues with their colleagues. In all circumstances, researchers should act with rigour, honesty and integrity in all their scientific work. They are also required to have respect for life, public good and the law. They have to ensure that their work is justified, minimising any adverse effect it may have on people and animals. It is the researcher's responsibility to seek further guidance in case of doubt. This can be obtained

via the [University's Research Integrity website](#), the [UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#), and from the CISL Research Team.

2. The aim of this assessment is for the researcher concerned to consider whether any ethical concerns are raised. If there are no ethical concerns, then the researcher may proceed with their research work. However, if the researcher has any doubts concerning the ethics of their proposed research work, or whenever the research involves human subjects, steps b-e may apply.

3. Any study involving participation of human participants will require Public Indemnity insurance and further guidance can be found in the University's [Insurance Section](#) for studies involving human participants.

4. University policy statements and guidelines may be useful when undertaking self-assessment:

    - [Ethics, Good Practice and Misconduct](#)
    - [Statement on Plagiarism](#)
    - [Ethics in Research](#)
    - [Good Research Practice](#)

5. To complete the self-assessment every researcher at CISL is required to complete the Research Ethics Checklist & Risk Assessment documents.

6. Self-assessment is expected to be sufficient for uncomplicated cases, however it is likely that research involving any of the following factors may require steps b-e of the review process (see above):
    i.   Research involving human subjects who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children or people with disabilities).
    ii. Studies that are likely to cause the subject physical or mental distress or embarrassment.
    iii. Experiments or other data collection involving deception.
    iv. Sensitive personal data stored in a form that would allow individuals to be identified
    v.   Research that may expose participants to a risk of legal or disciplinary action.

Step 1.b. – Internal CISL review

1. If the research project involves human participation but the researcher considers the potential risk of harm to the participants to be minimal, then it may be appropriate to seek light-touch review from CISL's Research Team which can provide guidance on Step 1.c. or can confirm that the research may proceed without further review.

2. In the first instance, CISL's Research Team will provide ethical and travel risk approval based on self-assessment using the checklists. If the research may proceed without further review,

the researcher will receive a letter confirming ethics approval for the assessed project. No project should commence prior to receiving their ethics approval confirmation letter.

3. Should CISL's Research Team be unable to provide ethical and travel risk approval using the checklists, it will escalate the review process and forward all relevant documents to its Research Oversight Committee (ROC). This initiates a full review process and researchers will be notified of this decision.

4. CISL's Research Team will provide termly updates to the ROC about approved self-assessment documents using the checklists. This review will ensure quality and consistency of CISL's review process and provide transparency of CISL's research activities.

Step 1.c. – Review by CISL's Research Oversight Committee (ROC)

1. Should CISL's Research Team be unable to provide ethical and risk approval for self-assessment using the checklists and require further review, CISL's ROC shall decide whether to provide consent directly for the research, establish a Specialist Panel to review difficult cases, or request an appropriate body elsewhere in the University to do so such as the Psychology Ethics Committee. Please note, it is expected that self-assessment and, where appropriate, an internal review by CISL's Research Team, will handle the vast majority of cases.

2. A Specialist Panel may, at its discretion, request advice and guidance from colleagues within the School of Technology or outside experts. It will aim wherever possible to notify the applicant within two months of the request for review. If difficulties arise, it will consult with the applicant and seek to resolve any issues. In case of conflict within the panel, the decision of the chair will be binding.

3. A Specialist Panel will consist of at least three faculty members who have no personal or departmental conflict of interest with respect to the particular research concerned, plus additional specialist experts, where appropriate. A senior representative of CISL's Research Team (or their nominee) will chair the Specialist Panel provided that they have no conflict of interest.

4. Research in the following areas cannot be approved by self-assessment or by CISL's Research Team alone and guidance will be sought from the School of Technology Ethics Committee before referral to the appropriate review body:

    i.   research involving clinical procedures using human participants, NHS patients, staff or facilities, or data gathered from NHS patients, staff or institutions
    ii. research involving the use of human tissues
    iii. research involving animals in scientific or experimental procedures, including field-based research. Research involving animals is overseen by [Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body](#) (AWERB) and beyond that expected of Research Ethics Committees (REC) operating under the University's Ethics Policy.

Amendments

1. Should the research require any amendments subsequent to approval, the researcher should email detailed amendments to research@cisl.cam.ac.uk for review. Depending on the extent of amendments *i* or *ii* may apply:

   i. Minor changes or updates may include updating contact details or requesting short-term extensions. These amendments can be submitted via email will be reviewed and approved by CISL's Research Team. They do not require re-submission of self-assessment checklists.
   ii. Major changes or updates may include amendments to the project protocol and may increase the research's risks. Substantial changes will require a re-submission of self-assessment checklists and will be subject to CISL's research ethics review process (1.a.-1.e.)

About the Research Oversight Committee (ROC)

1. The ROC consists of a minimum of four distinguished academics from departments that represent the cross-disciplinary nature of research at CISL. It is chaired by CISL's Director and its members are confirmed by CISL's Management Board.

2. The ROC forms a subcommittee to CISL's Management Board and is mandated to provide senior academic governance and quality assurance of CISL's research activities. In particular, its purpose is to:
   i. quality assure the design and delivery of CISL's research strategy and processes;
   ii. open doors to research opportunities and partners;
   iii. oversee appointment of Prince of Wales Global Sustainability Fellows and other academic staff, including agreeing an appointment committee, advising on sources of candidates, and chairing the committee, for each Fellow; and
   iv. support the development of transdisciplinary research strategies within the Cambridge environment.

3. The ROC shall:
   i. facilitate an independent review of the ethics of a proposed research project when requested by CISL's Research Team
   ii. serve as CISL's Research Ethics Committee
   iii. investigate and, where necessary and appropriate, address any potential breach of this Ethical Code for Research referring to the University Policy on Misconduct in Research as necessary.

Grievance

1. Any member of CISL may raise a grievance about ethical issues in research by writing to CISL's Research Team, citing the circumstances involved. They, or if necessary, the ROC, with

or without external consultation, will seek to resolve the grievance to the satisfaction of all parties.

2. One or more members of CISL may raise a grievance about a decision concerning ethical issues in research by appealing to the University Research Ethics Committee.

3. If a formal ethics-related complaint is received from a participant in a research project or a member of CISL, any work relating to that participant or project must cease until the complaint is resolved. The lead researcher should submit any relevant documents to CISL's Research Team, who may decide to seek further guidance from the ROC.

Data sharing

1. All data collection and storage related to CISL research projects should follow CISL data sharing and protection policy and guidelines and, where appropriate, wider data sharing requirements of the University.

2. Quality assurance in the construction in case of coded data should wherever possible be ensured through parallel coding, mutual monitoring, and feedback between the project researchers. In the case of field work, interviews should normally be conducted by two members of the project team, recorded (unless the respondent does not agree to this, in which case contemporaneous notes will be taken), and transcribed. There should be checks on transcription quality. The coding of the qualitative data should normally be checked using parallel coding, mutual monitoring, and group-level feedback between the researchers.

3. Background details to the data collection process should where relevant be provided to ensure that the datasets can be understood in context. In the case of the field work, an explanatory file should normally be created, providing details of the location and period of the fieldwork and anonymised data on the interviewees. Where appropriate, details of the links between the different data sources used as part of the multi-methods of the project should be provided.

4. Project data should be stored in relevant standard file formats. Datasets of coded material should normally be prepared as Excel files. Quantitative data collected through field work and data drawn from publicly and commercially available datasets to be used in the project should normally be held in Excel and Stata files for analysis. Coded material from the qualitative interviews should normally be stored in Word and PDF files.

5. During fieldwork, data should normally be backed up on a daily basis using portable hard disks and, where possible, CDs. Once collected, confidential and private data in the form of the interview transcripts should be held on password-protected network files. For back-up purposes, these data may where appropriate also be held on CDs which should be kept in a secure place.

6. Team members should be made fully aware of data protection, confidentiality and privacy issues attaching to the use of data from interview transcripts and other relevant sources.

Transcripts should not normally be shared with third parties. Where transcripts are made available through the UK Data Archive once the project has been completed, the relevant material should first be anonymised.

7. Copyright and database rights from datasets vest initially in CISL and then in individual members of the project team according to the terms of University of Cambridge's Intellectual Property policies as from time to time amended.

8. The Lead/Principal Investigator has overall responsibility for quality assurance and legal and regulatory compliance in the collection, storage and analysis of the data.

Implementation

This code will be shared with all research staff. Its implementation may be audited once every three years by CISL's ROC and a report with suggested changes will be shared with CISL's Management Board.

Annex

Annex A.1.: Process for research ethics review (1.a-e)

Which stage is appropriate?	What does the review process look like?	Who approves the research?
Stage 1	Self-assessment using standard checklist	Approved by CISL Research Team – researcher will receive email confirmation

In case of ethical concerns, proceed to Stage 2

Stage 2	CISL Review by Research Oversight Committee (ROC)	Approved by ROC – researcher will receive email confirmation

In case of ethical concerns, proceed to Stage 3

Stage 3	Review by (appropriate) School Ethics Panel as recommended by ROC	Approved by (appropriate) School – researcher will receive email confirmation

In case research involving NHS data, patient data, or clinical research, Stage 4 applies

Stage 4	Review by NHS National Research Ethics Service	Approved by NRES