Research, Scholarly Activity and Research Ethics Policy and Procedures

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Policy Statement

This policy establishes the framework through which City of Bristol College supports, provides oversight and assures the integrity and ethical conduct of research and scholarly activity undertaken by its staff, students and external collaborators. The College is committed to promoting a culture of ethical, responsible and high-quality research and scholarship that enhances teaching, learning, professional practice and the student experience.

The aims of this policy are to:

- promote ethical, responsible and high-quality research and scholarly activity
- ensure compliance with legal, regulatory, ethical and institutional requirements
- support scholarly practice and pedagogic research that enhances teaching, learning and professional practice
- protect the integrity, safety, wellbeing, and dignity of researchers and participants
- uphold the principles of research integrity, transparency and accountability
- ensure research activity aligns with academic standards and sector expectations.

The College recognises that research and scholarly activity should be primarily practice-based, pedagogic and professionally informed. Data collection arrangements will therefore be proportionate to the scale, risk and nature of the activity.

Scope

This policy applies to all research and scholarly activity conducted by:

- college staff
- students enrolled on Higher Education programmes
- visiting researchers
- collaborative partners
- volunteers or trainee teachers involved in research activity.

It applies to activities including:

- practice-based research
- pedagogic research and scholarship
- action research
- consultancy involving research outputs or activity
- knowledge exchange and innovation activity
- student dissertations and research projects
- collaborative or externally funded research
- research linked to Higher Education programme delivery.

Where research is undertaken in partnership with a validating or awarding university or other funding body, the individual carrying out the research must also comply with the relevant regulations and ethics requirements of that institution.

Anyone undertaking a research project outside a programme delivered by City of Bristol College must adhere to the research and ethics procedures of the designated institution. The applicable procedures and evidence of any approval required by that institution must be presented at the point of College approval. Where the activity also falls within the scope of this policy, the College's requirements continue to apply.

Definitions

Research
A systematic process of investigation leading to new knowledge, understanding or insights.

Scholarly Activity
Professional inquiry undertaken to enhance teaching, learning, curriculum development, professional practice or subject expertise.

Research Integrity
A commitment to honesty, rigour, transparency, accountability and ethical conduct in research.

Research Misconduct
Behaviour that falls short of good research practice, including fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, misrepresentation or breach of ethical obligations.

Responsibilities

Higher Education Academic Board
Has overall responsibility for oversight of research and scholarly activity.

Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel
The Research Ethics Panel is accountable to the Higher Education Board. The Head of Higher Education Quality will submit an annual report summarising its activities, decisions, emerging issues, and recommendations. Significant ethical concerns or risks may be reported to the Board at any time.

The Research Ethics Panel will comprise the Director of Director of Student Experience, Quality and Safeguarding, the Data Protection Officer, and other appropriately qualified staff as required to provide relevant expertise and independent oversight.

The Panel. is responsible for:
- ethical review of research activity
- monitoring compliance with this policy
- providing advice on ethical matters and data protection in relation to proposed projects

Researchers
Are responsible for:

- complying with this policy
- obtaining appropriate approvals before starting research
- adhering to ethical standards and approved protocols
- protecting participants, data and outputs
- declaring conflicts of interest

Managers and Supervisors
Are responsible for:

- supporting staff and students to engage in scholarly activity
- ensuring appropriate oversight of research
- promoting awareness and understanding of this policy

The College
Is committed to providing an environment that supports ethical and high-quality research and scholarly activity, including training, guidance, resources and oversight.

Higher Education Quality and Partnerships Manager
Responsible for maintaining procedures and guidance, including the revisions of this policy, and maintaining a log of requests submitted to the Research Ethics Panel, for reporting to the HE Board.

Policy

Principles

All research and scholarly activity must be guided by:

- honesty and integrity
- rigour in design and conduct
- transparency and openness
- respect for participants
- beneficence and minimisation of harm
- fairness and justice
- accountability and responsibility

Scholarly Activity and Teaching Excellence

Scholarly activity is a core component of Higher Education provision and supports:

- development of teaching practice
- subject expertise
- curriculum innovation
- research-informed learning

Activity should demonstrate clear benefit to students, professional practice and the academic community.

Compliance with Legislation and Sector Guidance

Research and scholarly activity must comply with:

- UK data protection legislation
- safeguarding requirements
- equality and diversity legislation
- intellectual property law
- relevant partner organisation requirements

The policy aligns with recognised sector frameworks for research integrity and responsible research practice.

Research and scholarly activity procedures must follow and align with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fifth edition (2024). The Higher Education Quality and Partnerships Manager must check for subsequent editions when reviewing the policy and procedures to ensure that they remain aligned with the most up-to-date guidance.

Approval of Research

All research must receive appropriate approval before commencement.

Approval routes may include:

- supervisor approval for low-risk activity

- review by the Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel
- approval through partner organisations or external bodies

The risk factors identified in Appendix A will determine whether the project requires supervisor approval, Panel review, or full Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel approval.

Research involving human participants, personal data or sensitive topics must undergo ethical review via the Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel

Proportionate Ethics Review

The College operates a risk-based approach to ethics review:

- Low risk – minimal ethical concerns
- Medium risk – identifiable participants or moderate complexity
- High risk – vulnerable groups or sensitive issues
- High-risk research will be reviewed by the Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel.

Informed Consent and Participant Rights

Researchers must:

- obtain voluntary informed consent
- provide clear information about the research
- be transparent about any use of persona data gathered through the research
- ensure participants understand risks and benefits
- respect the right to withdraw
- consent should normally be recorded in writing.

Participants must be informed at the point of consent that they may choose not to participate or withdraw from the study. If a participant chooses not to participate or withdraws after their data has been collected, the researcher must delete the information gathered from that participant and provide written confirmation to the participant that deletion has been completed. The consent information must explain how to request withdrawal and deletion and any limits on identifying and removing data once it has been irreversibly anonymised.

Safeguarding and Welfare

Researchers must ensure that participation does not expose individuals to unnecessary harm. Particular care must be taken when working with:

- children
- vulnerable adults
- sensitive or distressing topics

Safeguarding procedures must be followed where concerns arise.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

Researchers must ensure:

- lawful and secure processing of personal data
- appropriate anonymisation or pseudonymisation
- secure storage and controlled access
- appropriate and defined data retention and disposal

Confidentiality must be maintained unless disclosure is required by law or safeguarding.

All research records and information must be held in accordance with City of Bristol College's applicable privacy statements and Data Protection Policy. Records and data collected for student research projects must be stored securely in the student researcher's City of Bristol College OneDrive account, with access restricted to authorised persons. These storage arrangements and the applicable privacy information must be explained to all research participants at the point of obtaining consent to participate.

Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence may be used to support research where:

- researchers remain accountable for outputs
- content is verified for accuracy
- use is transparent where appropriate
- sensitive or personal data is not input into AI systems

Partnerships and Collaborative Research

Collaborative research must be governed by formal agreements covering:

- roles and responsibilities
- ethical approval processes
- data ownership and management
- intellectual property
- dissemination arrangements

Researcher Competence and Support

Researchers must ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct research responsibly.

The College will support this through:

- training and development
- mentoring and collaboration
- access to resources and funding where appropriate

Dissemination

Research and scholarly activity should be shared appropriately within the College and externally where relevant.

Dissemination should aim to demonstrate impact on:

- teaching and learning
- professional practice
- student outcomes

Monitoring and Reporting

Research activity will be monitored through mechanisms such as:

- appraisals and reviews
- quality processes
- feedback from students and partners

Breaches and Misconduct

Allegations of research misconduct will be investigated in accordance with college procedures.

Misconduct may include:

- fabrication or falsification of data
- plagiarism
- failure to obtain approval
- breaches of confidentiality or ethical standards

Research activity must cease where ethical approval is withdrawn.

Procedure

Staff and students must follow these procedures which are set out in the Appendices.

- Research Ethics Risk Checklist [Appendix A]
- Research Ethics Approval Process [Appendix B]
- Research and Scholarly Activity Procedure and Application Form [Appendix C]

Linked Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Data Protection Policy
- Research, Scholarly Activity and Research Ethics Policy and Procedure 2026
- Safeguarding Policy
- Freedom of Speech Code of Practice
- AI Guidance
- Relevant partner organisation policies and regulations

Version:	
Approved by:	SLT
Date of approval:	November 2026
Date for Review:	November 2029
Lead Officer:	Higher Education Quality and Partnerships Manager
Senior Manager responsible:	Director of Further and Higher Education

Appendix A – Research Ethics Risk Checklist

Applicants must complete the following checklist when applying for ethics approval.

Participants

☐ Research involves human participants
☐ Research involves students of the College
☐ Research involves children or vulnerable adults

Sensitive Topics

☐ Research involves sensitive personal experiences
☐ Research involves distressing subject matter
☐ Research involves safeguarding concerns

Data Protection

☐ Personal data will be collected
☐ Participants may be identifiable
☐ Third-party datasets will be used

Institutional Risk

☐ Research may affect the reputation of the College
☐ Research involves external organisations

Artificial Intelligence

☐ AI tools will be used for literature review
☐ AI tools will be used for analysis or writing

International Collaboration

☐ Research involves international partners
☐ Cross-border data sharing will occur

Where risks are identified, mitigation strategies must be described.

Risk Thresholds and Approval Requirements

The College operates a risk-based approach to ethics review to ensure that scrutiny is proportionate to the nature, scale and potential impact of the research.

Low Risk Research

Research may be classified as low risk where:

- no vulnerable participants are involved
- no sensitive topics are explored

- no personal or identifiable data is collected
- there is no significant risk of harm, distress or reputational impact
- no safeguarding concerns are identified.
- Where all responses in Appendix A are "No", the project may proceed with supervisor approval.

Medium Risk Research

Research may be classified as medium risk where:

- participants are identifiable
- personal data is collected
- research involves College students or staff
- external organisations are involved
- AI tools are used within the research process
- online, digital or social media research is undertaken.

Projects meeting one or more of these criteria must complete Section B of the Ethics Application Form and receive approval from the Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel or nominee.

High Risk Research

Research will normally be classified as high risk where:

- children or vulnerable adults are involved
- sensitive personal experiences or distressing topics are explored
- safeguarding concerns may arise
- significant psychological, social, legal, reputational or physical risks are identified
- international data transfers or cross-border data sharing are involved
- sensitive organisational or institutional data is used
- the research could adversely affect the reputation of the College or partner organisations.

High-risk projects must be reviewed and approved by the Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel before any research activity commences.

Escalation

- The Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel may require any project to undergo a higher level of review where the nature, scale, complexity or potential impact of the research warrants additional scrutiny.
- Research involving human participants, personal data, vulnerable groups, sensitive topics, safeguarding concerns, or other medium- or high-risk factors identified in Appendix A must undergo ethical review through the Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel process.

Appendix B – Research Ethics Approval Process

This document outlines the process through which staff and students at City of Bristol College obtain ethical approval for research conducted under the auspices of the College.

The Research Ethics Approval Process ensures that research activity:

- respects the dignity and rights of participants
- complies with ethical, legal, and regulatory requirements
- demonstrates research integrity and transparency
- protects researchers, participants and the College.

The process supports the College's commitment to responsible research practice consistent with expectations promoted across the UK research sector.

All stages of this approval process must follow and align with the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fifth edition (2024), and any subsequent edition adopted following policy review.

Oversight

Ethical oversight of research activity is provided by the Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel.

The Panel reports to the HE Academic Board.

Responsibilities include:

- reviewing research ethics applications
- ensuring ethical standards are applied consistently
- advising researchers on ethical matters and data protection in relation to proposed projects
- monitoring research integrity and ethical conduct
- reporting annually on research ethics activity to the HE Academic Board.

Structure of the Ethics Approval Process

The Research Ethics Approval Process consists of three sections:

Section A – Project Overview and Ethical Risk Checklist

Completed by all researchers.

Section B – Detailed Ethical Considerations

Completed when research involves primary data collection or potential ethical risks.

Section C – Ethics Review and Decision

Completed by supervisors, reviewers, or the Research Ethics Panel.

Distinction Between Primary and Secondary Research

Section B is normally required only for primary research, meaning research involving direct data collection from participants.

Projects involving secondary research using publicly available data may not require completion of Section B where no ethical risks are identified.

For projects undertaken outside a programme delivered by City of Bristol College, applicants must identify the designated institution and present its applicable research and ethics procedures, together with evidence of any required institutional approval, at the point of College approval.

Research Ethics Application Form

SECTION A – Project Overview and Ethical Checklist.

Name of Applicant:
Student ID (if applicable):
Programme of Study:
Type of Assessment or Research Activity:

Supervisor Name and Department:

Title of Research Project:

Date of Submission:

Overview of the Study

Describe:

- the aims and purpose of the research
- research questions or objectives
- research methods to be used
- types of research participants involved.

Ethical Risk Screening Checklist

Applicants must confirm that:

☐ The British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fifth edition (2024), have been consulted and the proposed procedures align with them. Relevant additional professional ethical guidance (e.g. BSA or BPS) has also been consulted where applicable.

☐ Ethical and safety considerations have been discussed with the supervisor.

Ethical Risk Questions

Yes / No

1. Will the research involve collecting personal information from identifiable individuals?
2. Will the research involve confidential information not currently in the public domain?
3. Will the research involve vulnerable individuals?
4. Will the research require permission from a gatekeeper organisation?
5. Will participants receive incentives or remuneration?

10. Could the research cause psychological, social or reputational harm?

11. Does the research raise ethical issues requiring further review?
12. Are there potential health or safety risks to the researcher?
13. Will access to the final report require restrictions for ethical reasons?

14. Will artificial intelligence tools be used in the research process?
15. Will research involve digital platforms, social media or online communities?
16. Will research involve international collaboration or cross-border data sharing?
17. Does the research involve sensitive organisational or institutional data?

If **NO** is selected for all questions, research may proceed with supervisor approval.

If **YES** is selected for any question, Section B must be completed.

SECTION B - Detailed Ethical Considerations.

Applicants must address the following areas.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

Explain:

- how participants will be identified and recruited
- how they will be invited to participate
- what information will be provided about the research.

Participant information sheets should normally be used.

Vulnerable Participants

If research involves vulnerable individuals (e.g. children, vulnerable adults), explain:

- how participation will be facilitated safely.
- what steps will minimise potential harm.

Informed Consent

Explain how informed consent will be obtained.

Researchers should normally provide:

- participant information sheets.
- consent forms.
- clear explanation of participants' rights to withdraw.

Where children participate, parental consent and child assent may be required.

Participant information sheets and consent forms must explain the applicable City of Bristol College privacy statements and how research records and data will be stored. For student research projects, they must state that records and data will be stored securely in the student researcher's City of Bristol College OneDrive account. They must explain how a participant can decline participation or withdraw and request

deletion of data already collected, and that the researcher will delete that participant's information and confirm completion in writing. Any limits on identifying and removing irreversibly anonymised data must be explained before consent is obtained.

Dependent Relationships

If participants are in a dependent relationship with the researcher (e.g. students, employees), explain how voluntary participation will be ensured.

Research with Colleagues or Workplace Participants

Explain how potential power dynamics or conflicts of interest will be managed.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Describe:

- who will have access to research data
- how anonymity will be preserved
- how pseudonyms will be used where appropriate.

Researcher Safety

Researchers must consider their own safety and wellbeing when conducting research.

Potential environmental or situational risks should be identified.

Future Use of Research Data

Explain whether research data may be used beyond the current project (e.g. publication or future research).

Additional participant consent may be required.

Data Protection and Data Management

Explain how data will be:

- stored securely
- anonymised where appropriate
- retained and destroyed after completion.

Research must comply with UK data protection legislation.

Confirm that all research records and information will be held in accordance with City of Bristol College's applicable privacy statements and Data Protection Policy. For student research projects, specify the student's College OneDrive account as the storage location and describe access controls. Explain how these arrangements will be communicated at consent, how a participant's information will be deleted if

they decline participation or withdraw after data collection, and how written confirmation of completed deletion will be provided.

Artificial Intelligence and Digital Research

If AI tools are used in research:

- explain how they will be used
- confirm that outputs will be verified
- confirm that confidential data will not be uploaded to AI tools.

Feedback to Participants

Explain whether and how research findings will be shared with participants.

Possible forms include:

- summary reports
- presentations
- copies of research outputs.

Project Duration

Start Date
End Date

Document Checklist

Applicants must submit relevant documents where appropriate:

☐ Participant information sheet
☐ Consent form
☐ Interview schedule
☐ Observation schedule
☐ Survey instrument
☐ Literature review framework.

SECTION C – Ethics Review and Decision.

Completed by supervisor or Research Ethics Panel.

Possible outcomes:

Pass
Research may begin under supervision.

Conditional Pass
Research may begin once specified conditions are met.

Revise and Resubmit
The application must be revised and resubmitted.

Refer to Research Ethics Panel
Further review is required.

Supervisor Signature
Date

Moderator / Reviewer Signature
Date

Further Comments from Research Ethics Panel (If applicable)

Signature (Research Ethics Panel Member)

Date

Ethics Monitoring

Researchers must inform the Research Ethics Panel if:

- research methods change significantly
- new ethical issues arise during research.

Research Integrity

The College is committed to maintaining a culture of responsible research practice.

Researchers must:

- conduct research honestly and transparently
- report findings accurately
- comply with research integrity expectations.

Allegations of research misconduct will be investigated under institutional procedures.

Appendix C – Research and Scholarly Activity Procedure and Application Form

This procedure outlines the process through which staff at City of Bristol College may apply for support to undertake research and scholarly activity associated with Higher Education provision.

Research and Scholarly Activity Application Form

Applicant Details

Name of Applicant:
Role / Job Title:
Department / Programme Area:
Courses associated with (if applicable):
Name of Line Manager:

Project Title

Working title of the proposed project or activity.

Project Summary (200 words)

Provide a short summary of the proposed project.

Research Focus

What do you intend to investigate in this project?

Rationale

Why is this research important?
Explain how the project will benefit teaching and learning at the College or the wider sector.

Methodology

How will the investigation be conducted?
Include research methods and data collection approaches.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

Outline expected outcomes and outputs, such as:

- innovations in teaching and learning
- publications
- conference presentations
- curriculum development.
- Explain how findings will be disseminated.

Project Timeline

Provide a timeline indicating when different project activities will occur.
Monthly timelines may be used for longer projects and weekly timelines for shorter projects.

Collaboration and Partners

Link to Postgraduate Study

Is the project linked to work required for a Masters or Doctoral qualification?

Yes / No

If yes, please explain.

Where the project is undertaken outside a programme delivered by City of Bristol College, identify the designated institution and provide its applicable research and ethics procedures and evidence of any required approval for consideration at the point of College approval.

External Funding

Please identify any other funding sources applied for or intended.

Budget

Provide details of project costs including:

- staff time
- dissemination costs
- travel and subsistence
- materials
- other costs.

Submission

Completed applications must be submitted electronically to the Higher Education Quality and Partnerships Manager for review and consideration by the Research, Scholarship and Ethics Panel.

Applicants will be notified of the outcome following the relevant Panel meeting.