UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH

RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

February 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The University of Saint Joseph is committed to ensuring that its research is embedded within a comprehensive and inclusive ethical framework.

1.2 All members of the University, service providers, and participants, including joint work with third party organisations are expected to be aware of, and implement, the ethics and integrity of research at the University, and to ensure that research conducted at the University meets the highest ethical standards.

2. DEFINITIONS

Anonymity: When participation is anonymous it is impossible to know or trace whether or not an individual participated and there is no way to determine or trace the connection between individual participants and the results. Anonymous information is information which does not relate to an identified or identifiable person or to personal data rendered anonymous in such a manner that the data subject is not or no longer identifiable.

Confidentiality: This concerns data: secret, private, or not for release to the public.

Consent: Agreement and/or permission. For consent to be valid it must be given freely, without coercion, and must be clear on, and specific to, that to which the consent is being given, informed and an unambiguous indication of the participant's wishes. In some circumstances consent can be given by an agreed, approved third party and/or with legal authority acting on behalf of an individual to indicate their consent.

Data Protection Laws: This includes any law, statute, declaration, decree, directive, legislative enactment, order, ordinance, regulation, rule, or other binding restriction which relates to the protection of individuals with regards to the collection, processing, usage, and disclosure of personal data to which a participant in the research is subject. Data protection can also include codes of conduct and practice.

Integrity: Integrity in the research requires research to be conducted in a way which meets the professional and ethical standards expected of researchers at the University, and which enables others to have trust and confidence in the research, its methods used, and its findings.

Personal data: Any information relating to an identified or identifiable person (who can be identified, directly or indirectly), particularly by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the identity of that person. Data can be sensitive, requiring high levels of protection and are subject to local laws on collection, release usage, including, but not limited to: race, ethnicity and ethnic origin; gender; religion; beliefs; values; membership of political and/or employment associations/parties; genetic and biometric data (e.g. used for identification); health and medical conditions; criminal records.

Principal Investigator: The lead investigator on a research project, typically the main holder of the funding or the named head of the research project.

Privacy: This concerns people: respecting participants' rights over their personal information, to withhold giving information and or/having that information used, together with respecting informed consent, non-identifiability, and non-traceability.

Pseudonym: A fictitious name that replaces or removes information that identifies an individual.

Research ethics: The moral and ethical principles, values, and standards (including legal and professional) that guide all dimensions and stages of research, which involve the protection of the welfare, wellbeing, and rights of all parties involved in the research, together with the integrity, rigour, and credibility of the research project and its outcomes.

Research Project: a planned and systematic investigation into an identified area of interest, concern, or problem, with the purpose of generating new knowledge, methods, understandings, insights, outcomes, and/or solutions. It typically involves, but is not limited to, identifying research purposes, research questions, designing a study to address these, collecting and analysing data (interpreted widely, e.g. empirical, non-empirical, argument, scholarship), and drawing conclusions based on the findings.

Research Student: Student who is registered for a postgraduate degree at the University.

Research with human participants: research which includes (non)interventionist, (non)invasive, and (non)intrusive procedures at one or more stages of the research.

Research: 'A *process of investigation leading to new insights effectively shared*' (the UK's Research Excellence Framework, 2021). 'Research' is interpreted broadly, to include all investigations undertaken to acquire knowledge and understanding, whether funded or unfunded. It is a systematic, careful investigation and exploration, undertaken to gain and promote new and new ways of considering knowledge, facts, principles, understanding, ideas, insights, ways of thinking, theoretical and/or practical applications, and new conclusions, to increase the stock of knowledge of society, humanity, and cultures. Typically, it entails scholarship, data collection, analysis, evaluation, interpretation, and documentation that accords with suitable methodologies established by relevant professional fields and academic disciplines. It can include scholarship, basics research applied research and experimental research (e.g. the Frascati Manual). It includes

research output that is published, disseminated, or made publicly available in the form of research outputs, and (confidential) reports.

Risk assessment, risk mitigation, and *risk management*: identification, analysis, and evaluation of several features, including, but not limited to: the risks involved in the item of the research: what are the risks; risks to what and whom; the nature of the risk(s), e.g. health and safety, physical harm, emotional wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, reputation, financial, legal, institutional, personal; the level of the risk (e.g. minimal to high); the likelihood of the risk: how likely are these risk to occur; the duration of the risk (e.g. short-term to long-term); the steps taken to avoid/minimise the risks (safeguarding); the steps taken to ensure the protection of the participants and the researchers; how the risks will be communicated, mitigated, managed, handled, monitored, and recorded (safeguarding); what the benefits are of taking the risk, for whom and/or for what; the significance of the benefits and for what and whom; how and how far the benefits outweigh the risks.

Risk: 'the effect of uncertainty on objectives' (ISO 31000): a situation in which opportunities and consequences (both positive and negative) are not entirely predictable, e.g. in which there is a chance or possibility of exposure to danger or to something which is unwelcome, harmful, damaging, negative, and indeed exposure to something which is welcome, beneficial, and positive. Minimal risk in research is where the probability and magnitude of possible harm(s) implied by participating in the research is no greater than those which participants encounter in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research proposed. Maximum risk is where health, safety, life, people, wellbeing, institutions etc. are in significant jeopardy, e.g. physical, psychological, emotional, legal, compliance-related, financial, operational, strategic, institutional, personal (e.g. privacy and confidentiality), reputation etc.

Safeguarding: the ethically and morally defensible steps taken to put into place the protection of the welfare, wellbeing, and rights of all the participants in the research, and that potentially negative risks are minimized, controlled, and/or eliminated.

Student: Any person who has registered on a programme of study with the University, at all levels and types. This includes students from outside the University who are visiting as part of an exchange or similar programme.

Vulnerable human participants: Minors, people with learning or communication difficulties, patients and/or people in care or in need of care, people in custody or on probation, and people engaged in illegal activities, e.g. drug abuse, participants who needs community care services because of mental or other disability, age, or illness and who are, or may be, unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

3. PURPOSES

The purposes of this policy are:

1. To establish, promote, and ensure high standards of ethical practice in the conduct of academic research.
2. To identify the duties and responsibilities of the members of the University and its committees in ensuring the highest ethical standards of research in the University.
3. To clarify the mechanisms that the University employs to monitor and review its activities in relation to research.
4. To meet the University's concern to safeguard and protect the rights, dignity, health, safety, and privacy of research participants, the welfare of animals and the integrity of the environment. The University is also concerned to protect the academic freedom of researchers and the reputation of the University for properly conducted, high quality research.
5. To ensure the provisions for ethical approval and to assist researchers, supervisors, and students undertaking research to identify appropriate ethical issues, and to address them in the planning and implementation of research.
6. To align the University's research ethics standards with internationally recognised ethical guidelines and principles, promoting a global perspective on ethical research practices.
7. To encourage and facilitate engagement with the broader community, seeking input and feedback on research projects, especially those involving or impacting local communities.
8. To emphasise the importance of maintaining the security and privacy of research data, including guidelines for the responsible handling, storage, and sharing of sensitive information.

4. NEED FOR A POLICY

The University recognises the need for research and researchers:

- to adhere to the highest ethical standards in the development, implementation, dissemination and consequences of research.
- to undertake due diligence to minimise risk.
- to adhere to all relevant policies and codes of ethical practice in research in the University.
- *inter alia*, to protect the integrity and reputation of the university.
- to meet its responsibility to ensure the highest ethical standards and a culture of ethics in its research work, and to meet its duty of care to all its stakeholders in ensuring these.
- to safeguard and protect the rights of those engaged in or affected by research, including the University and the participants in the research.
- to fulfil the responsibilities of the University in ensuring adherence to agreements made concerning research undertaken in the name of the University.

5. SCOPE

5.1 This Policy applies to:

- all staff and students of the University who are engaged in research, also to visitors, individuals, collaborators, or parties conducting research in the name of, or at, or with, the University.
- all research undertaken by, on behalf of, or under the auspices of, the University, across all the academic disciplines, including administrative research (that which is undertaken within, or on behalf of, administrative and service offices/units), and research undertaken by or within the University.
- all those who host, conduct, participate in, and disseminate, results of research.
- University spin-out companies (in which a new company emerges from an existing one and operates independently of the existing organization) if the University retains a controlling interest in them. In the event of individual members of the University staff being involved directly in spin-out companies that are not owned by the University, they should ensure that their involvement in the work of the company does not compromise the reputation of the University. If in doubt they should seek guidance from the University Research Ethics Committee.
- Research Funding Recipients: the policy also applies to individuals or entities receiving research funding from the University, ensuring that external collaborators adhere to the same ethical standards as those upheld by the University.
- Research on emerging technologies: the policy applies to research involving emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence where unique ethical challenges may arise.

5.2 This policy does not apply to operational actions or decisions taken by the University e.g. financial, estates and facilities, procurement, or human resource matters, as these are subject to different procedures.

5.3 Where, as part of their assessed degree programme, students are seconded to a third-party organisation, they might work on research projects in which the research is directed by that organisation and not the University, and which may involve human participants, human tissues, personal data etc.. Whilst the ethical assessment of this research is not covered by this policy, the relevant academic unit (e.g. Faculty/School/Institute/ Department) which is involved should obtain formal written reassurance from the organisation hosting the student that it has procedures to ensure that the research is undertaken ethically.

5.4 All research requires either ethical approval or confirmation that ethical approval is not required. Researchers and supervisors overseeing students' research projects have a responsibility to consider whether their student's research needs ethical approval or whether it concerns matters excluded from the approval process.

5.5 The University recognises that statutory, professional, regulatory, or other bodies might have requirements which also need to be met before a research proposal can be approved. In such cases, the University's research work must still adhere to this Policy, and, if necessary or

advisable, advice should be sought from the University's Research Ethics Committee if the University's Policy contradicts or is does not align with those of a statutory, professional, regulatory, or other body.

5.6 In some cases, the University will accept the ethical approval granted by other organisations/bodies as a substitute for its own approval and procedures. Such cases should be approved by the University Research Ethics Committee.

6. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

6.1 The University is committed to the development and practice of ethical research; in this, it ensures due diligence, risk analysis, equity, and safeguarding in the planning, approval, conduct, reporting, outcomes, dissemination, and consequences of research.

6.2 The University and researchers at the University should adhere to the principles set out below, which set out the responsibilities and values relevant to research. These are designed to promote consideration of possible wider consequences of their work, and to engage critically with the ethical issues and challenges in the conduct of high-quality research, e.g. rather than regarding policies and codes of practice as simply procedures to be followed.

6.3 The ethical principles that the research should ensure include, but are not limited to:

- Excellence of the research
- Purposes, significance, and value of the research
- Sharing the intrinsic value of knowledge and learning
- Honesty in the research
- Integrity of the research and it promotion and deepening at individual and institutional levels
- Validity and reliability of the research and its findings
- Rigour: this is an ethical requirement
- Cooperation and relationships in the research
- Accountability for all the aspects of the research
- Responsibility (e.g. to the University, the funding and/or commissioning bodies, the research community, the participants, stakeholders, professions and professional standards and requirements, the community, the general public, statutory requirements and behaviours) and being responsible stewards of financial, environmental and material resources
- Addressing conflict of interest
- Disclosing, where appropriate, relationships, personal or financial, that might be regarded as compromising scholarly judgement
- Training and skills of researchers
- Care, health and safety, and respect (for all parties involved in the research)

6.4 Principles underpinning the ethical conduct of the research include, for example:

- consideration of the impact of the research, including, but not limited to: its potential implications for subjects, participants and non-participants, and uses to which the research can be put.
- guidance on procedures for working with participants, including, but not limited to:
  i. informed consent, voluntary consent
  ii. rights
  iii. confidentiality, privacy, non-traceability, pseudonymisation and anonymity
  iv. freedom from coercion
  v. risk analysis, risk communication (e.g. to participants), risk evaluation, and risk management
  vi. safeguarding and minimising harm (including the total avoidance of words or actions which might suggest grooming behaviours, especially towards vulnerable persona or minors)
  vii. special consideration and protection of vulnerable respondents (e.g.: minors; vulnerable adults; those with relevant special needs; those with disabilities; those in care and secure institutions; prisoners; aged; intellectual capability; those with cognitive impairment; those in unequal relationships; beneficence (and to what and whom)
  viii. non-maleficence and non-malfeasance
  ix. *primum non nocere*
  x. data protection, privacy, and disclosure
  xi. requirements for the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access (e.g. students at school, members of a self-help group, care home and nursing home residents)
  xii. sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, gender; drug use; ethnicity; race; abilities; politics; religion; illegal activities; language; culture; behaviours)
  xiii. administering drugs, food or other substances to participants; interventions and side-effects
  xiv. obtaining tissue samples (including blood) from participants
  xv. invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures
  xvi. prolonged or repetitive testing
  xvii. collection or processing or transferring of sensitive personal data (including from secondary sources) without explicit consent from the relevant parties
  xviii. participant research
  xix. offering incentives and rewards for participation in the research
  xx. secrecy: secret document or materials
  xxi. use/misuse/abuse of outputs.

- consideration of covert research, non-consent, no consent sought, deception, and the conditions that support it.
- due diligence in investigating potential funders and funding sources.
- ensuring highest quality outputs, including for example, but not limited to:

        i. fair, reliable, valid, true, accurate, and honest presentation of findings

        ii. avoidance of bias

        iii. acknowledgment of researchers and participants where appropriate

        iv. accessibility of results.

- avoidance of conflicts of interest.
- legality.
- conformance to requirements, including ethics requirements and approvals.
- ensuring that participants are no worse off as a result of participating in the research.
- avoidance of undue intrusion, disrespect, indignity, stress, distress, physical discomfort, embarrassment to person(s) and other parties, and other potential harm.
- academic freedom.
- academic integrity: researchers should endeavour to ensure that:

        i. the required expertise is available and appropriate research methods are selected.

        ii. the research outputs are consistent with the standard of factual accuracy and the timely submission of the highest possible quality 'deliverables'.

        iii. in principle and whenever it is appropriate, research findings are open for peer review and are published.

        iv. any debts to previous research as a source of knowledge, data, concepts and methodology are fully acknowledged in all outputs.

        v. any actual or potential conflict of interest is properly disclosed; and

        vi. the research does not infringe upon public interest and the interest of the University or the rights of others.

- Reciprocity.
- avoidance of plagiarism, theft of intellectual property, misrepresentation of data and other fraudulent behaviours, discriminative or exploitative conducts, undue delays in completing research projects, waste of public resources, activities damaging the interest of the University, activities threatening environmental safety, and other types of misconduct.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 The development and oversight of research ethics at the University operates on the subsidiarity principle, i.e. as appropriate, research proposals are scrutinised at the Scientific Council level and, where necessary or appropriate, the final decision on their research ethics is taken by the University's Research Ethics Committee.

7.2 The University and its title holder as legal persons are responsible for promoting and endorsing a free, honest, transparent, and healthy academic environment supportive of the implementation of high ethical standards for academic research. As legal persons, both the University and its title holder have legal, contractual, and managerial responsibilities for the timely delivery of high-quality outputs in externally funded research projects. The senior management of both entities should be aware of such responsibilities, practice due diligence in the prevention of misconduct and support the implementation of the Code in all research activities involving members of the University.

7.3 The University Research Ethics Committee has responsibility for ensuring that research on humans and animals meets required standards of ethics, and, where relevant, there are wider consequences of ethical significance, before approving, rejecting, requiring revisions to, signing off etc. a research proposal. The University's Research Ethics Committee's research ethics responsibilities include, but are not limited to: oversight, approval, practice, monitoring, review and reporting of research and its ethics with human subjects and animals, and with concern for research integrity and consequences of, and safety and welfare in, human, societal, environmental and professional protection and development. Research with, on and for humans and animals must accord with the policies, practices, and requirements for research ethics at the University and Faculty levels.

7.4 The University's Ethics Committee is set up by the Executive Council to perform the following functions：
   i. provide guidance on the compliance and implementation of the Code in the University;
   ii. review and assess the development of more detailed ethics guidelines in faculties and institutes that are applicable to research in their academic fields and to monitor their implementation in practice;
   iii. promote the discussion of the Code and raise awareness amongst professors, researchers, staff, students and other members of the University community;
   iv. review and provide response to inquiries submitted by researchers and/or their faculties or research institute in relation research ethics;
   v. coordinate and monitor the assessment of ethical issues in research projects and other research activities funded by external entities and other activities involving external entities;
   vi. conduct the investigation into any dispute or alleged violation of academic ethics;

vii. Take disciplinary action or make recommendations to the relevant authority in the University for disciplinary action;

viii. Advise the Rector and Executive Council upon their request on ethical issues involving the University.

7.5 All faculties, schools, institutes, departments, and research centres in the University are responsible for the promotion, compliance, and implementation of this policy, the Code of Ethics in Academic Research, and, where necessary (i.e. non-compulsorily), their own additional guidelines on professional ethics through the research conducted by their members and students. They should endeavour to engage their members and students to ensure full compliance and effective implementation of the policy, the Code and, if they have their own additional guidelines on research ethics, those documents.

7.6 Where deemed necessary by the faculties, schools, institutes, departments, and research centres, the Scientific Councils of these can formulate their own additional guidelines on professional research ethics in accordance with the general principles above. These additional guidelines should serve the specific needs of research ethics in the faculty, school, institute, department, and research centre in question.

7.7 Where appropriate, the Scientific Council of a faculty, school, institute, department, research centre may adopt and apply a code of professional research ethics that is widely recognised in the profession or in an academic institution of prestigious status.

7.8 To assure consistency in ethical standards, faculty- or institute-based guidelines or codes of ethics are subject to review and monitoring by the University (e.g. through the University Research Ethics Committee in the first instance).

7.9 The Principal Investigator is responsible for any research to ensure that all the colleagues involved in that research are aware of and comply with the policies of the University and with the contents of the approved ethics application for the research.

7.10   The University expects all researchers (whether staff, students, visitors) to take personal responsibility for familiarising themselves with this Policy, specific policies, and guidance on research at the University, and with the procedures they need to follow for the research or studies they undertake. Supervisors are expected to assist their students in becoming familiar with this Policy, and the ethical review process.

7.11   Failure to comply with the ethics requirements and procedures, or any breach of this Policy will be taken extremely seriously and may be construed as misconduct or gross misconduct and handled by the appropriate Committee in the University.

8. REFERENCE

This document should be read in conjunction with the following documents:
- Application to the University Research Ethics Committee for Research Ethics Review/Approval
- Code of Ethics in Academic Research
- Flowchart for Ethics Approval by the University Research Ethics Committee
- Framework for Research
- Research Policy
- Quality Assurance of Research
- Strategic Plan for Research
- University Research Ethics Committee
- Application to the University Research Ethics Committee
- Educating Today and Tomorrow (chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/Educare%20oggi%20e%20domani_INGLESE.pdf)
- Donum Vitae (https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html

9. REVIEW

This policy takes effect from 6th February 2024 and is subject to ongoing review and amendment as appropriate. Amendments to this policy are made by the Executive Council in response to advice and recommendations from across the University.

Author: Executive Council

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