Research Ethics Policy

Common Awards Research Ethics Policy and Guidance[1]

2026-27

Scope of this Policy

This policy applies to all students enrolled on Common Awards programmes delivered by Lindisfarne College of Theology (LCT). It specifically applies to all **students who are undertaking independent learning projects, dissertations or extended projects, which involve research involving human participants. It also applies to students submitting work for placement-based modules.**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Common Awards Research Ethics Policy and Misconduct, which sets out the procedure to be followed in cases where a suspicion arises that a student has not followed their TEI's Research Ethics Policy when pursuing academic assignments for a Common Awards module.

There is much activity carried out by students, especially in placements and contexts, which does not count as research for the purposes of this policy, for example asking people to fill in sermon feedback forms or writing a reflection on a pastoral visit. Nevertheless, these activities may still have ethical implications, and these are dealt with in **Section A**.

Sections B and **C** deal with students who wish to engage in **research involving human participants** through theuse of **questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or formal observations of activity**. Separate advice and permission must be sought for any research activity involving human participants not covered under these headings.

LCT is committed to treating all human beings with respect, and expects the highest standards of integrity inthose who are its students. The well-being of participants in

[1] LCT has adopted the Common Awards Research Ethics Policy and Appendices, with only a few minor alterations. For the original policy, see https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/common-awards/resources/templates-forms/ [accessed 20 May 2026]

research and placement work must be at the forefront of the researchers' concern and any risk must be minimised.

Review of this Policy

This policy will be reviewed by LCT every year, or earlier if a serious concern is raised in the Common Awards Management Committee.

A. Placements and Experience-based Reflections

Work leading to placement or other experience-based reflections does not generally count as research for the purposes of this Policy. Although the student may use encounters with others for their reflections, the emphasis of these forms of assessment is on self-reflection and integrating that with critical theological enquiry. The sources for reflection will primarily include journals, personal stories, evaluation by others of a specific activity with which the student was recently involved, and similar sources, rather than people's personal details. They are less likely to involve what are clearly research methods such as questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or formal observation of individuals. When they do include such methods, or if there are other reasons to judge that a formal research project is being undertaken, the guidance in Section B and the ethics approval process in Section C must be followed.

Safeguarding

- Though most students will have already obtained DBS disclosure, it is the responsibility of the receiving placement organisation to assure themselves that necessary DBS or other safeguarding and health and safety checks are in place. Students are expected to follow the safeguarding policies and procedures of the host organisation.
- In order to engage in pastoral work, theological students must be under supervision and need to be assessed. Such supervision and assessment is carried out through conversation and through written work. Subject to safeguarding guidelines, any personal details discussed in supervision are confidential to the supervision process; personal details recorded in written work are also confidential to the assessment process.

Informed Consent

- In the case of reflection on a student's observation of a group activity involving adults (e.g. worship)where direct contact with those individuals is not involved, the consent of the organisation (e.g. incumbent, supervisor, PCC) will be sufficient. Information packs for supervisors should advise that congregations/church groups be informed of the kind of reflections that students will be required to write as part of their placement submissions. Forms which allow members of a placement church congregation to evaluate student activity should make clear the way these will subsequently be used. The use of video recording needs specific consent from any identifiable subjects.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

- Placement submissions in Common Awards programmes require the student to reflect on context as a relevant aspect of ministerial practice. This does not remove the expectation of anonymising persons that appear in experience-based reflections, or in evidence provided as appendices to assignments.
- When referring to evidence of the nature of the context, students are expected to exercise discretion and sensitivity. This means sensitivity to the people involved, including parish leaders and other church members. Discretion should be used in describing the context for purposes of parish profiles and the implications for mission and ministry in the context.
- Written work remains the intellectual property of the student and will not be shared by the supervisor or examiners with others, except those bound by the confidentiality of the assessment process. Supervisors or examiners who wish to cite students' work in any context should seek the permission of the student and ascertain that if any personal stories are retold, the appropriate written permissions have been obtained. Students who subsequently wish to make available their writing or reflections to a wider audience should seek the written permission of those whose stories they wish to tell – even if names havebeen altered – in order to preserve confidentiality and confidence.

Data Protection

- Information held on computer relating to an identifiable subject falls within the

scope of the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. It is the responsibility of the student to work within these and the data protection policies and procedures of LCT.

B. Research Involving Human Participants

Ethics approval must be sought for any research involving human participants. If there is any doubt about whether ethics approval is necessary, students should seek the guidance of the Director of Studies or their supervisor.

Safeguarding

- Where research includes the participation of children or vulnerable adults, researchers must have received an enhanced disclosure by the Disclosure and Barring Service. This is a key requirement. Normally, students who are preparing for recognised ministry will have obtained such disclosure at the beginning of their programme. Other students will need to undergo checking before commencing research.
- Interviews with children, young people under the age of 18, or vulnerable adults, whether individually or in a group must never be conducted by the interviewer alone. A responsible adult such as a parent, carer or teacher must be present. It is the responsibility of students to ascertain and adhere to the safeguarding guidelines of the church or other context in which research is conducted. Any commitment to confidentiality made to participants does not obviate the need to follow safeguarding guidelines.

Informed Consent

- All participants in research must give their informed consent to participate. Where specific individuals are invited, consent should be in writing. Participants must have been informed, in writing, of the nature of the research and their participation in it, of any risks, and of the intended use for any information they give. In this way their consent will be informed, valid, and freely given. The extent of the readership of the final project should also make clear: whether it will be read only by examiners, available to library users, or be published more widely.

- In addition, permission for the proposed research must also be sought from any institution, school or church, where the research takes place.
- Where participants are recruited from clients of a particular service-provider, whether public or private, written permission must be sought from that provider, e.g. NHS, Social Services etc.
- Where participants under the age of 16 are involved in any research, informed consent must be obtained in writing from their parents or legal guardians.
- Specific consent must be obtained where interviews or observations are going to be audio or video recorded.
- The right for a participant to withdraw from the research and withdraw their consent at any time during the phase of the research in which the student is gathering data must be made clear and the mechanism to do so communicated to the participant.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

- The confidentiality of participants must be respected, particularly with respect to any personal information obtained from them. Participants must be informed, in writing, of how this will be secured.
- Normally, information used in final forms of assessment must be anonymised, along with the details of other identifying information (the names of local churches or projects, etc). Descriptions of the location of research should be general rather than specific (e.g. referring to 'a church in an industrial district of a large urban city, with very high proportion of racial and religious diversity' rather than 'St Peter's, Moss Side).
- Remember that people may be easily identifiable from their role or details of context. If such factors mean that anonymity cannot be guaranteed, this must be made clear at the point at which consent is obtained.
- Only where express permission has been given by an individual in writing to the use of personally identifiable information being used may it be so.
- If it seems necessary to include in the supporting documentation something such as a church newsletter that will identify the place where the research was undertaken and it is not possible to remove or obscure such details, permission must be obtained from a recognised authoritative body e.g. PCC or incumbent, and from

anyone whose character, opinions, etc., feature in the assignment and who can be identified by means of the material in the supporting documentation.

- Assessors of submitted work are bound by the same expectations of confidentiality.
- The submission of work for assessment is distinct from work that will be published. The former has a confidential system of assessment, the latter has a wider public audience. If there is the possibility of publication, participants must be made aware of this in advance of the research beginning and this possibility must form an explicit part of the consent obtained. If publication becomes a possibility after consents have been obtained, new written consent must be gained.

Data Protection

- All research must be carried out within the bounds of the Data Protection Act. This includes requirements for secure data storage and destruction of data. It is the responsibility of the student to inform themselves of these parameters, and to work within the Data Protection policies and procedures of LCT.
- Informed consent must be obtained by participants when any personal data is to be held about them. Informed consent means that participants must be clear about what data will be stored, why, how, and for how long.

The Conduct of Interviews

- Act politely and courteously at all times.
- Explain to the interviewee(s) the nature and purpose of your project.
- Explain how the interview is to be used.
- Obtain permission for the interview to be recorded, if this will be necessary.
- Clearly set out the scope of confidentiality within the interview.
- Make it clear that the participant can terminate the interview at any time.
- Obtain any consents in writing.

C. Ethics Approval Process for Research Involving Human Participants

Ethics approval is sought by the student using the Ethics Approval Form (Research Ethics Approval Form found in Appendix C). This requires an outline of the nature and purpose of the research and the completion of a checklist that identifies ethical issues and subsequent comment to assess the risk involved. This form must be submitted along with the relevant

module Proposal Form in use for the programme. Along with the form, any of the following that are relevant to the research must be submitted for approval:

- A participant information sheet that clearly explains the study such that the participants are in a position to give informed consent (a template may be found in Appendix A).
- A consent form for use by participants which will also specifically include permission to record any interview or observations, if relevant, and detail the opportunity to withdraw (a template may be found in Appendix B).
- Any questionnaires that will be used.
- In the case of a structured, or semi-structured interview, an account of the questions and/or areas that are to be discussed.

Ethics approval forms (available in Appendix C) are reviewed by the LCT Research Ethics Panel. The Panel may require alterations to the documentation or to the research design itself and in these cases all documents must be resubmitted. No data collection should begin until the researcher has received written approval from the LCT Research Ethics Panel.

Where high risk proposals are made (for example dealing with vulnerable groups and/or addressing sensitive issues) LCT will ensure that it draws on appropriate expertise to make the decision, which may need to be from beyond LCT. The LCT University Liaison officer and/or External Examiner may be asked to advise either on the proposal or on where such expertise may be found.

Research Ethics Panel

The LCT Research Ethics Panel reports to the LCT Board of Studies. It is responsible for reviewing and approving research activity involving human participants and ensuring that the LCT follows best practice.

VERSION CONTROL:		
Version Number	**Date approved: TEI**	**Date approved: Durham University**
1	11/06/2025	
2	17/06/2026	18/09/2026

Contact details

Director of Studies

Dr Melody Briggs

Church House, St John's Terrace, North Shields, NE29 6HS

07879 453517

melody.briggs@lindisfarnect.org

Research Ethics Policy Appendix A

Guidelines for Participant Information Sheet

Potential participants in your research should be given sufficient information to allow them to decide whether or not they wish to take part. The information you give should be written in clear, non-technical language that is easy to understand. You should include the following information:

1. Study Title.

Give the title of your study. If it contains technical terms or is not self-explanatory to a lay person, you should include a brief explanation.

2. Invite Participation.

A brief paragraph inviting the person to take part. For example:

> You are being invited to take part in a research study. In order to help you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. You may wish to discuss it with others. For any further information or questions about my research, please contact me on: XXXX

3. Provide brief information on the aims and purpose of the project.

4. Explain why the person has been chosen and who else will take part.

5. Informed consent.

The potential participant should be told that participation is entirely voluntary. For example:

> You are free to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you do wish to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. It is usually not practical to withdraw after the research project has been written up. If you take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form, and you will be given a copy of it to keep.

6. Information about what the research will involve.

Clear description of what the participant will be asked to do, giving an idea of how much time it will take. You should give information about your research method, for example interview or focus group.

7. Information about any risks or benefits for the participant.

Risks – for example if your interview addresses potentially painful personal issues which may affect the participant's well-being, you should alert them to this possibility, and provide information about who they should contact for support if this happens.

Benefits – for example your research might provide an opportunity to contribute to our understanding of some issue. Do not exaggerate the benefits if none are obvious.

8. Confidentiality.

You should provide information about the limits of confidentiality and the security of information. Provide specific details of how confidentiality will be maintained and who is likely to have access to personal information and data; for example supervisors, internal and external examiners. Do not provide promises of absolute confidentiality as a few staff members may have limited access to data in order to mark the project, but state that every effort will be made to provide as much confidentiality as possible. Under normal circumstances no-one else should have access to the participant's details or data. Confidentiality includes the fact of the person's participation as well as their data. Only in exceptional circumstances might personal details or raw data need to be examined by staff or examiners.

9. Data.

Provide information about what will happen to the information you collect and any participant details; how and where it will be presented, who is likely to read it and whether surveys or interviews will be destroyed after the assessment has been marked. Inform the participant of the extent to which they may or may not be identifiable. If data is to be retained after the end of the project, you must give clear information about how and why this will happen.

10. Further information.

Provide the contact details for yourself and your LCT supervisor for the potential participant to contact if they require further information and would like to take part. Refer the potential participant to the LCT Research Ethics Policy and tell them where this can be viewed.

Thank the potential participant for considering taking part. Participants must be given a copy of the information sheet and a copy of the signed, dated consent form. The original signed consent form will be kept by the student.

Research Ethics Policy Appendix B

Example Consent Form

Participant identification code:

Title of project:

Student name:

Supervisor's name:

Please read and sign:

(Additional information should be included as appropriate, e.g. 'I agree to the interview being audio recorded)

I confirm at I have read and understand the information sheet about the above-named project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time prior to the research project being written up, without giving a reason.

I agree to take part in this project.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature of participant:

Name of student:

Date:

Signature of student:

Participants will be given a copy of this signed, dated consent form. The original signed consent form will be kept by the student.

Research Ethics Policy Appendix C



Research Ethics Approval Form

Introduction

Research Ethics Approval must be sought for any research involving human participants carried out by a student enrolled in the BATMM programme. If there is any doubt about whether Ethics Approval is necessary, the student should seek the guidance of the Director of Studies.

In order to receive Research Ethics Approval, please complete all sections of this form and submit it to the Director of Studies. If there are any matters relevant to this application which are not covered by this Research Ethics Approval form, please use a separate sheet.

This form covers research involving human participants through the use of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, or observations of activity. Separate advice and permission must be sought for any research activity not covered under these headings.

Along with this form, you should also submit a copy of the **consent form** you will be asking participants to sign and the **information sheet** (written in layperson's language) you will give to participants (The term 'participant' is used to cover any volunteers involved in the project, with the exclusion of the researcher and their supervisor). Guidelines for the information sheet are provided in Appendix A and should be followed as closely as possible. An example consent form is included in Appendix B, and this should also be followed as closely as possible.

If you plan to use a **questionnaire or interview script**, this will also need to be approved. The questionnaire or interview script should be submitted with this form. You should construct the questionnaire or interview script in consultation with your supervisor.
After receiving this form, the Dissertation Tutor will take it to the LCT Research Ethics Panel

for approval.

Copies of this Research Ethics Approval form are available for download from Moodle.

SECTION A

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name:
Tel. No.:
Email:
TEI/Formational Centre:
Module name and code
Assignment title

SECTION B

INITIAL DECLARATION

This investigation will include research involving children or young people under 16	No/Yes
This investigation will include research involving young people aged 16-18	No/Yes
This investigation will include research involving adults	No/Yes
This investigation will include research involving vulnerable adults	No/Yes

NB This form covers research involving human participants through the use of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or observations of activity. Separate advice and permission must be sought for any research activity not covered under these headings.

All students must complete all sections of this form. You should include with your application a copy of your proposed Consent Form and Information Sheet for participants. Completed applications should be submitted to XXXXXXXXXX

SECTION C

Please answer all the following questions.

Where Yes/No is requested, give details if answering Yes (or if necessary to explain No)

1. What are the aims of this study/project?
2. How will the study be carried out? (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, observation) *Please include copies of any questionnaires with your application*
3. How many participants will be recruited, and by what criteria will they be selected?

SAFEGUARDING	
4. Does the study involve participants who are under 18 or particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent?	No/Yes
5. Have any safeguarding issues have you identified? If yes, provide details of the arrangements you will make to ensure safeguarding good practice.	No/Yes
6. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics not usually addressed in your placement work?	No/Yes
7. Could the study induce psychological stress, anxiety, or cause harm or negative consequences to the participants beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	No/Yes
8. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses) be offered to participants?	No/Yes
9. Do you foresee any other particular ethical issues?	

INFORMED CONSENT	
10. Will you ensure informed consent from individual participants? *(please include a copy of your information sheet and consent form with your application)*	No/Yes
11. Do you need to seek permission from any institution or service-providers?	No/Yes
12. Will any interviews be audio or video recorded?	No/Yes

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY
12. How will confidentiality of individual participants be maintained?
13. How will the confidentiality of the placement or context be maintained?
14. Who will have access to the data gathered?
15. Who will have access to the final piece of work?

DATA PROTECTION
16.How will data be collected (e.g. recording, written notes)
17. How, and for how long will the data be stored?
18. I confirm that data for this project will be handled in accord with the TEI Data Protection Policy and IT Acceptable Use Policy.

SECTION D

SUPERVISOR(S)

Placement Supervisor (where applicable)
Name:
Address:
Tel:
Email:
I have read this form and support the student in their proposed study Signature:

Module Supervisor
Name:
Address:
Tel:
Email:.
I have read this form and support the student in their proposed study Signature:

SECTION E

I agree to conduct this study in line with the ethical guidelines laid down in the document 'Common Awards Research Ethics Policy'.

Signature of student .....

Date: .....

SECTION F

ETHICAL APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED/REJECTED

COMMENTS:

CONDITIONS (if any):

Signed:

Name:

Role in TEI:

Date: