



Policy on Ethical Conduct of Research

Approved in 2012

Revised Date: 19th March 2017

Revision Effective from: 16th July 2017

1. Policy Statement

The Maldives National University (MNU) will uphold the highest standards of ethical practice in research involving human participation and personal data. All staff and students including third parties are required to ensure that all their research activities safeguard the dignity, rights, health, safety and privacy of those involved. Further, the University expects all staff, students, third parties and those who conduct research within the university premises to adhere to the principles of ethical research outlined in this policy.

2. Principles of Ethical Research

- 2.1. The Maldives National University adopts the principles of ethical research as espoused by the Economic and Social Research Council of UK. They are as follows:
 - 2.1.1. Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality.
 - 2.1.2. Research staff and subjects must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved. Some variation is allowed in very specific and exceptional research.
 - 2.1.3. The confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected.
 - 2.1.4. Research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion
 - 2.1.5. Harm to research participants must be avoided.
 - 2.1.6. The independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit.

The University upholds these principles by (a) educating staff and students on this policy, and (b) requiring all staff and students who conduct research involving human participants to maintain an ethical review process proportionate to the risks involved.

3. Ethical Review Process

3.1 General Procedures Regarding Applications

3.1.1 All members of the university intending to undertake a research or teaching activity involving human participants should apply for ethics approval from the MNU Research Ethics Committee (MNUREC). MNUREC only accepts applications for ethics review by:

3.1.1.1 Academic staff of the university;

3.1.1.2 Visiting academic staff;

3.1.1.3 Research Associates of MNU as endorsed by an academic staff member;

3.1.1.4 Students who are enrolled in a course of study at MNU, and who will carry out research under the supervision, or in collaboration with an academic staff member of the university.

3.1.2 Your research project would be either be;

3.1.2.1 exempt from ethics review (section 3.2)

3.1.2.2 receive a blanket approval (section 3.3)

3.1.2.3 considered a low risk project (section 3.4)

3.1.2.4 Require a full ethics review (section 3.5)

3.1.3 If researchers seeking ethics approval are in doubt of the level of ethical approval they need, they should consult with the MNU Research Centre (RC).

3.1.4 A full human ethics review and approval will be undertaken except for the following:

3.1.4.1 Projects for which blanket approval has been given (section 3.3)

3.1.4.2 Projects which are deemed to meet low risk criteria (section 3.4)

3.1.4.3 Projects which are exempt from ethics review (section 3.5)

All necessary application forms can be downloaded from the MNU website (www.mnu.edu.mv). Data gathering for a research project should not commence until formal notification of ethics review decision is received. If there is deviation from the application and approval conditions, any ethics approval given may be withdrawn.

3.2 Exempt from ethics approval

- 3.2.1 The following activities are not deemed research oriented and hence are exempt from ethics approval
 - 3.2.1.1 Evaluation of services provided by the university in order to improve the level of services provided. For example, student satisfaction of study skills workshops run by Student Support. If the collected data are to be later used for a research purpose a separate application for ethics approval must be made.
 - 3.2.1.2 Performance evaluations of staff at MNU
 - 3.2.1.3 Evaluation of lecturers' teaching conducted in the university.
 - 3.2.1.4 Research that rely exclusively on data that is available in the public domain and legally accessible to the public. For example, national census statistics, Statistical Yearbooks produced by the government
 - 3.2.1.5 Research that rely exclusively on information in newspapers, official publications or media releases. In such cases please note the information may be subject to copyright and or intellectual property rights restrictions.

3.3 Blanket approval

- 3.3.1 A blanket approval allows research activities to be carried out without further approvals for each act.
- 3.3.2 Blanket approval may be sought for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate research projects/modules with less than 60 credit points and are related to specific courses and/or field trips, which pose no threat to the well-being of the participants and where the methodology and its ethical implications is similar for all projects.
- 3.3.3 The responsible staff must submit a form for Application for Blanket Approval (Appendix A) to the MNUREC.
- 3.3.4 The responsible staff may seek approval for the whole class based on a single application to the MNUREC in the first year of the course.
- 3.3.5 This approval will be valid for 5 years if there is no substantial change in the project during this period.
- 3.3.6 The responsible staff must sign a declaration that the students:
 - 3.3.6.1 are being made fully aware of the need for requirement of seeking approval from the MNUREC for all research involving human participants.
 - 3.3.6.2 would be informed and asked to follow the ethical considerations required in the involvement of human subjects.

- 3.3.6.3 would be asked to document all ethics procedures followed in the submission of their assessed work. E.g. providing information sheets and consent form samples used if any.
- 3.3.7 Courses which involve students undertaking individual research projects more than or equal to **60 credit points** are not eligible for blanket approval.
- 3.3.8 Blanket approval applications should be made directly to the MNUREC.
- 3.3.9 The applications would be sent to the MNUREC members.
- 3.3.10 Ethics secretary collates the individual responses from the members and the applicant would receive a decision response within FIVE DAYS for blanket approval.

3.4 Low risk projects

- 3.4.1 Applications that are low risk involve the same risk as might be encountered in daily life which include Undergraduate and Postgraduate level supervised projects as well as other research projects that do not raise any issue of deception, threat, invasion of privacy, emotional, physical or cultural risk or stress, and do not involve gathering personal information of sensitive nature from individuals.
- 3.4.2 All student and staff researchers should individually submit an Application for Low Risk form (Appendix A) to MNUREC.
- 3.4.3 All student applications must be accompanied by a signed declaration from the supervisor.
- 3.4.4 Low risk projects will be circulated among the MNUREC members.
- 3.4.5 Individual members should review and send feedback to the Ethics secretary within one week of receiving applications.
- 3.4.6 Ethics secretary collates the individual responses from the members and the applicant should receive a decision response within 10 days to 2 weeks of submitting a completed application.
- 3.4.7 If further information is required from the applicant, a response is sent to the applicant via email.
- 3.4.8 The applicant will be given ONE week to respond to the queries of the MNUREC members.
- 3.4.9 The applicant must send a reply via email to the Ethics secretary.
- 3.4.10 The MNUREC attempts to have all low risk applications approved within **10 DAYS TO TWO WEEKS**, unless applications require further clarifications and revision.

3.5 Full Ethics Review

- 3.5.1 Projects that are not exempt or do not qualify for low risk or blanket approval will be subjected to a full ethics review by the MNUREC.
- 3.5.2 Researchers need to submit a form for an Application for Full Ethics Approval (Appendix A) to the MNUREC.
- 3.5.3 All student applications must be accompanied by a signed declaration from the supervisor.
- 3.5.4 The applications will be circulated among the MNUREC members.
- 3.5.5 Individual members should review and bring feedback to the MNUREC meeting
- 3.5.6 The Chair of the MNUREC will convene a committee meeting to make a decision on the application within one to two weeks of application.
- 3.5.7 Ethics secretary collates the individual responses from the members and the applicant should receive a decision response within 3 weeks of submitting a completed application.
- 3.5.8 If further information is required from the applicant, a response is sent to the applicant via email.
- 3.5.9 The applicant will be given ONE week to respond to the queries of the MNUREC members.
- 3.5.10 The applicant must send a reply via email to the Ethics secretary.
- 3.5.11 The MNUREC attempts to have all full review applications approved within **THREE WEEKS**, unless applications require further clarifications and revision.

3.6 Reconsideration of the Committee decision

- 3.6.1 An applicant who is dissatisfied with the committee's decision may request the MNUREC in writing to reconsider the decision. In reconsidering the decision, additional information may be requested.

3.7 Research Ethics Committee

3.7.1 Title of Committee

- 3.7.1.1 The MNU Research Ethics Committee (MNUREC)

3.7.2 Policy Reference and Rationale

- 3.7.2.1 The MNU Research Ethics Committee has been established in accordance with the decision made by the Academic Senate February 2017.
- 3.7.2.2 Any research by staff or students of the MNU, unless otherwise exempt, should be conducted with prior approval of the MNUREC.

3.7.2.3 The primary role of the committee is to provide protection for all participants in the research activity, including researches themselves.

3.7.2.4 The Committee must ensure all researches are aware of and seek guidance about the principles and values of ethical research.

3.7.3 **Committee Functions**

3.7.3.1 The MNU Research Ethics Committee shall evaluate applications submitted for ethics approval by researchers outlined in Approval Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Research. In the evaluation of the applications the Committee must consider the following:

3.7.3.1.1 Evaluate the need and worth of the research in relations to its ethical implications

3.7.3.1.2 assess the validity of the design, procedures, methodology to be adopted in relations to its ethical implications

3.7.3.1.3 consider ethical implications of proposed human research projects and determine whether or not they are acceptable on ethical grounds;

3.7.3.1.4 ensure the protection of human rights and cultural values of the participants. This include obtaining of informed consent and recognition of their right to decline

3.7.3.1.5 evaluate the ownership and use of findings, and procedures to protect personal and confidential information

3.7.3.1.6 consider any legal issues which may arise

3.7.3.1.7 evaluate the procedures for the effective monitoring of research

3.7.3.1.8 review any proposed minor or major amendments to approved projects

3.7.3.2 The MNUREC should maintain a record of all research projects that are considered.

3.7.3.3 The committee should ensure that policies and procedures regarding ethical research are in place at the MNU.

3.7.4 **Membership**

3.7.4.1 Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) - Chair

3.7.4.2 Dean of Research

3.7.4.3 Two Deans/Heads from faculties/centres

3.7.4.4 Two academic staff with research experience

3.7.4.5 One academic staff with expertise in psychology and research involving children or young people

3.7.4.6 One academic staff with research expertise in health sciences

3.7.4.7 Two external members

3.7.4.7.1 Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) shall send the nominations of the Deans to the Academic Senate for endorsement.

3.7.4.7.2 Deans/Heads shall send the nominations of the academic staff to the Academic Senate for endorsement.

3.7.4.7.3 Research Centre shall send the nominations of the external members to the Academic Senate for endorsement.

3.7.4.7.4 The Committee should comprise of members from diverse backgrounds and fields.

3.7.4.7.5 The Committee shall have the authority to co-opt up to three further members to deliberate on specific matters relevant to the nature of the application under review.

3.7.4.7.6 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) shall appoint an Ethics Secretary to provide administrative support to the Committee

3.7.4.7.7 No member of the MNUREC shall take part in the decision-making process of an application in which that member has any conflict of interest including any personal involvement or participation in the research, any financial interest in the outcome or any involvement in competing research.

3.7.5 Duration

3.7.5.1 The membership of the appointed members will be two years.

3.7.6 Quorum

3.7.6.1 The quorum for a meeting shall be a majority of the membership of the Committee. In the absence of the Chair a member elected by the members present shall preside.

3.7.7 Meetings and Review

3.7.7.1 The Committee shall meet as required, normally monthly from January to November.

3.7.7.2 The Ethics Secretary will in accordance with procedures outlined in the administration section, forward all materials relevant to application(s) under review to the committee members.

- 3.7.7.3 Agendas for meetings listing matters to be discussed and with supporting documents shall be distributed, to be received by members at least three days in advance of the meeting date.
- 3.7.7.4 The Committee should strive to reach decisions by general agreement; this need not involve unanimity.
- 3.7.7.5 The Ethics Secretary shall record minutes of all meetings and these shall be confirmed at the subsequent meeting.
- 3.7.7.6 The contents of research protocols and Committee proceedings shall be confidential although the Committee may choose to release its minutes to nominated people.
- 3.7.7.7 Records of all decisions shall be maintained by the Ethics Secretary
- 3.7.7.8 Absent members of the Committee may be represented by a proxy, advised in writing to the Ethics Secretary no later than the time of commencement of the meeting. A member may not be represented by a proxy at more than three meetings in any calendar year. A proxy may not be a current member of the Committee.

3.7.8 **Administration**

- 3.7.8.1 The Ethics Secretary will provide administrative support to the Committee.
- 3.7.8.2 All applications for ethics review should be sent to the Ethics Secretary.
- 3.7.8.3 The Ethics Secretary should ensure applicants have provided all necessary documents.
- 3.7.8.4 One hard copy and electronic copy of complete applications shall be sent to all MNUREC members within two days of receiving the complete application.
- 3.7.8.5 The Ethics Secretary shall communicate, via email, with the applicant if further information or clarifications are required by the Committee members. The applicant will be given ONE week to provide additional information.
- 3.7.8.6 A meeting of the MNUREC shall be held once the feedback from members and, if necessary, the additional information from the participant is received.
- 3.7.8.7 The collated feedback and additional information should be sent to the Committee members along with the agenda and announcement of the next committee meeting. These should be sent at least three days before the meeting date.

- 3.7.8.8 The Ethics Secretary shall communicate to the applicant the decision of the committee regarding the application for ethics review.
- 3.7.8.9 All records of applications reviewed and minutes of meetings will be kept by the Ethics Secretary.