

St Mellitus Research Ethics Policy

Research Ethics Policy and Guidance

Please note this policy can be subject to change.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the [Common Awards policy on Academic Misconduct: Research Ethics](#), 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.

SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

This policy applies to all students enrolled on Common Awards programmes delivered by the St Mellitus College from September 2026. It specifically applies to **all students who are undertaking independent learning projects, dissertations and other modules involving research with human participants. It also applies to students submitting work for placement-based modules.**

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 the use 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.

St Mellitus College is committed to treating all human beings with respect, and expects the highest standards of integrity in those who are its students. The well-being of participants in 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 the TEI annually, or earlier if a serious concern is raised in the Common Awards Management Committee.

SECTION 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 are 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. 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. Students without placement supervisors (e.g. independent students) will need to gain the consent of the organisation in question, using the forms supplied by the College.

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 and locations that appear in experience-based reflections, or in evidence provided as appendices to assignments. General details should be used to contextualise the work rather than naming the location.

- When referring to evidence of the nature of the context, students are expected to exercise discretion and sensitivity. For example, parish demographics developed by the Church of England statistics department can be referred to, but it is expected that students render their citations general, referring to the page and publication year, but not the specific parish.
- 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 have been 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 St Mellitus College.

SECTION B: RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

Ethical 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 their Director of Studies or 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 (e.g., for interviews or focus groups), consent should be in writing.
- If participants self-select and participate in the research anonymously (as is usually the case for survey / questionnaire-based research) the consent can be given via a tick box confirming that participant information has been read and understood.
- All research 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. Please note however that in the case of anonymous survey-based research this will likely not be possible.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

- The confidentiality of participants must be respected, particularly with regards 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 expressed 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 and GDPR legislation. 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 St Mellitus College.
- 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. Informed consent must be obtained by participants when any personal data is to be held about them.

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 audio and/or video 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.
- In the case of focus groups (i.e. group interviews) explain clearly the need for confidentiality from participants following the interview.

SECTION C: ETHICS APPROVAL PROCESS FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

Ethics approval is sought using the Ethics Approval Form (see links via Research Ethics section of Moodle). 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 Independent Learning Module Proposal form, Learning Project form or Dissertation 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 they are in a position to give informed consent (template available via research Ethics section of Moodle).
 - Clear procedure for securing informed consent. This, for instance, includes a consent form for use by interview participants. It will also specifically include permission to record any interview or observations if relevant and detail the opportunity to withdraw (template available via research Ethics section of Moodle) or details of the 'tick box' consent for surveys / questionnaires.
- A draft of any survey / 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 are reviewed by the St Mellitus College Research Ethics Committee. 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 Research Ethics Committee.

Where high risk proposals are made (for example dealing with vulnerable groups and/or addressing sensitive issues) TEIs will ensure they draw on appropriate expertise to make the

decision, which may need to be from beyond the TEI. The TEI 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 St Mellitus College Research Ethics Panel reports to the TEI Common Awards Management Committee. It is responsible for reviewing and approving research activity involving human participants, and ensuring that the TEI follows best practice.

For the 2026-27 academic year the St Mellitus College Research Ethics Committee consists of Dr Mark Scanlan, Revd Dr Jack Driver-Szekely and Dr Jamie Dunn.

APPENDIX - Academic Misconduct: Research Ethics Policy

This policy is 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.

Each TEI's Research Ethics Policy sets out the kinds of approval and informed consent required for different kinds of work. In particular, such policies typically set out different expectations for formal research involving human participants and for placement- or experience-based reflections. The rules below should be read in the light of those policies. They are not intended to impose extra constraints on students, but to explain how TEIs should handle breaches of existing constraints.

It covers the following forms of misconduct:

- failure to obtain appropriate informed consent, to preserve confidentiality and anonymity, or to observe data protection regulations set out in TEI Research Ethics policies; and
- failure to follow the ethical approval process for research involving human participants set out in those policies, or failure to observe the limits of the approval granted through that process.

It covers such misconduct in the context of formative or summative assessments, whether in the form of placement- and experience-based reflections, or independent learning projects and/or dissertations that include research with human participants.

It covers the academic consequences of such misconduct – that is, the impact on the student's marks and academic progression. It does not cover the disciplinary consequences that might be appropriate in serious cases.

It does not cover safeguarding. If any safeguarding concerns arise in consideration of possible cases of research ethics, those must be handled immediately, by invoking the TEI's

safeguarding procedures, and, where necessary, in correspondence with the College safeguarding officer.

This document, and the Common Awards Research Ethics policy, are themselves governed by the University's Research Integrity Policy.

Categories of offence

There are two categories of offence: 'minor infringements', and 'more significant offences'.

When *all* of the following conditions are met, a student is deemed to have committed a **minor infringement**:

1. either the work involved was not formal research involving human subjects, as defined in the TEI Research Ethics Policy or, if it was, ethical approval was sought in advance.
2. in the judgment of the Chair of the TEI's Board of Examiners
 - a. no harm to any of the people involved has been caused or made possible.
 - b. there would be no reasonable cause for offence or upset should the existence and nature of the breach become known by the persons or in the location named.
 - c. there is no reason to suspect that the subjects of the student's research were misled about the nature of their engagement with the student, and the student's intentions in relation to that engagement.
3. no safeguarding issues are raised (i.e., the failures do not relate to children or vulnerable adults); and
4. it is possible for the offence to be rectified by the student.

All other offences will be considered as **more significant offences**.

In many cases, the relevant marker, moderator and external examiner will be the only potential audience for the work in question. That fact by itself does not make an offence a minor infringement. If, for instance, sensitive personal information has been revealed even to that limited audience, this counts as a 'more significant offence'.

Process

If a marker, moderator, or external examiner suspects that a student has breached the policy or is informed by others of such a potential breach, she or he should
1 communicate this to the Chair of the TEI's Board of Examiners immediately.

If the potential breach is noticed before work is marked, the work should not be marked until the process set out here has been followed. If the potential breach is noticed after

marking has taken place but before the mark has been returned to the student, the process set out here should be followed before the mark is returned. If the potential breach is noticed after the mark has been returned, the process set out here should still be followed, even though it could lead to that mark being withdrawn.

This process should be followed even if the potential breach is noticed before work is submitted.

While a TEI's Research Ethics Panel is responsible for ethical approvals for research activity, it is the Board of Examiners that considers academic consequences of breaching the policy.

The Chair of the TEI's Board of Examiners should determine whether there is *prima facie* evidence of an offence, and whether (in line with the definitions offered above) it is minor infringement or a more significant offence.

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If the Chair judges that the case raises any questions in relation to **safeguarding**, to **fitness to practice** policies where they exist, or to **discipline**, they should ensure that the appropriate TEI procedures are triggered.

In cases of a suspected **minor infringement**, the student should be asked to rectify the error – for example, by amending the piece of work, so as to ensure that it is appropriately anonymised and resubmitting it. Where rectification does involve resubmission, the student should be instructed not to make any changes to the work other than those needed to rectify the breach, and the infringing version should be kept on file long enough to allow that to be checked. Once the rectified version has been

3 received and checked, however, the infringing version of the work should be deleted.

The Chair may require that the student receives advice or undergoes training to help them understand the problem and what is needed to rectify it, and to help prevent future instances.

In such cases, no marking penalty should be imposed.

Where there is *prima facie* evidence that a **more significant offence** may have taken place, a sub-group panel of the TEI's Board of Examiners, appointed by the Chair, shall be formed comprising the Chair and two other members of the Board, to consider the case.

4 Wherever possible, the panel should not include any reporting examiner, or anybody closely involved with the work in question (such as a dissertation or project supervisor). TEIs should give careful consideration to the diversity of the panel's membership, including by ensuring wherever possible that the panellists are not all of one gender.

The student(s) concerned should be invited to meet the panel together with the reporting examiner(s). The student should normally receive at least 5 working days' notice of the date of the meeting and should be told of its purpose. They should be

5 offered the opportunity to be accompanied at the panel by a member of staff from the TEI (for example, the student's personal tutor or equivalent). The student may also be accompanied by a non-staff member for the purpose of providing support to the student, at the discretion of the panel Chair.

The purpose of the panel is twofold:

- i. to ascertain, as far as possible, the facts of the case – e.g., what approval was sought, whether, when, and how informed consent was obtained.
- ii. to agree one of the outcomes set out below.

The first of these will normally take place with the student present, and the second once the student has left.

In the case of final year students where the reported breach is brought to light at the end of the degree programme it may be necessary to hold a meeting without the 5 days' notice, provided that the student concerned agrees in writing to this procedure. This course of action may be necessary in order to permit the TEI's Board of Examiners the opportunity of considering the case without necessarily causing any delay to the normal process of consideration for the award of a degree to the student concerned.

Following the meeting, a written record of the meeting must be made immediately. **The report must be sent electronically to the Common Awards Team as soon as possible.** The Common Awards Team will forward the report to the relevant University Liaison Officer and will use the report to monitor practice within and across the TEIs.

Deciding factors

At the end of the meeting, the panel – excluding the reporting examiner(s) – must decide upon how serious the infringement of the research ethics policy has been. This should take into account:

- a. the extensiveness of the breach.
- b. the sensitivity of the information involved.
- c. the account given by the student including any mitigation offered.

Based on this decision, the panel must agree on the appropriate action to be taken.

Possible outcomes

- 1 That no further action be taken, because, on the balance of probabilities, **an offence has not taken place.**
- 2 that, whilst there is clear evidence of an offence, **due to exceptional mitigating factors** a penalty is inappropriate;
that there is **clear evidence of an offence** and that the Board apply one of the following penalties:
 - a) **Require that the student rectify the offence**, by amending the assignment in question and/or by seeking missing permissions but impose no further penalty. (This will only be appropriate where the sensitivity of the breach is very low, and where it is a first offence, or a first-year student; or the TEI's Board accepts the student's mitigation).
 - b) **Award a mark of 0 for the work**, require that the student rectify the offence, and permit the student to resit/resubmit the piece of work with a mark capped at the pass
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mark (within the resit limitations set out in the Core Regulations for the Common Awards programmes). This may be appropriate where the offence is more extensive or more sensitive, or where it is a repeat offence.

c) Award a mark of 0 for the entire module in which the offence occurred. The student will be required to rectify the offence, and to resit the entire module with a mark capped at the pass mark (within the resit limitations set out in the Core Regulations for the Common Awards programmes). In the case of students in Level 6 of the BA programme, at which level resits are not permitted, this may result in the student failing their programme. This is the most severe penalty open to the TEI's Board of Examiners and should be used only in the most serious cases.

d) Where the level of academic misconduct goes beyond the examples cited in A–C and, therefore, it should be **referred to the University as a possible major offence** under the University's discipline regulations. In this case, the panel should choose a provisional academic outcome from A–C (above) and should contact the Common Awards Team as soon as possible to receive advice on progressing the case under the University's discipline regulations.

The panel should also give consideration as to whether the case raises any questions in relation to **safeguarding**, to **fitness to practice** policies where they exist, or to **discipline**, and ensure if so that the appropriate TEI procedures are triggered.

Where one of the above recommendations is applied, a written report specifying the nature of the offence committed, the student's explanation, and the Panel's recommendation should be presented to a meeting of the TEI's Board of Examiners for consideration. The Board should consult the external examiner(s) before making a decision about cases involving work submitted for final honours. **The report should also be sent electronically to the Common Awards Team as soon as possible; the report will be forwarded to the relevant University Liaison Officer for review.**

In all cases in which the student is not in the final Level of their programme of study or has other summatively assessed work to complete, an appropriate member of teaching staff in the TEI must arrange a meeting, preferably in person, to counsel the student on how to avoid infringing the research ethics policy in future. A note of the date and time of the meeting is to be kept in the student's file.

Document Information

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