Ethics Policy

MLA College Research Ethics Policy
Sponsor: Vice-Rector (Academic)
Version 5.2 (August 2026)
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Version	Date Approved	Author / Owner Approving Authority	Summary of Changes	Next Review Date
1.0	August 2022	Vice-Rector	Initial release	August 2023
2.0	August 2022	Vice-Rector	No changes	August 2023
3.0	August 2023	Vice-Rector	Update to governance terminology in Section 6.1 from "Academic Board" to "College Academic Board"	August 2024
4.0	August 2024	Vice-Rector (Academic)	Change in sponsor Title.	August 2025
5.0	Sept 2025	Vice-Rector (Academic)	No changes	August 2026
5.1	August 2025	Vice-Rector (Academic)	Contents & Version control added.	Sept 2026
5.2	August 2026	Vice-Rector (Academic)	Policy updated to reflect corporate templates. Ethics Approval Form – link to the VLE provided for ease of student access. Annex 7, para 7 updated	August 2027

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1. Introduction

1.1 The underpinning principle for any ethical review should be to ensure that in undertaking research, consultancy and enterprise activities or projects, MLA College strives to do positive good and avoids causing harm.

1.2 Activities which involve research/studies on human participants, their tissues or data and on animals will always require formal ethical consideration. However, MLA College believes ethical issues should be interpreted broadly and that review might also be needed for research, consultancy and enterprise where other factors could be present including:

- a risk of damage to the environment
- political or social sensitivity
- impact on culture and cultural heritage

1.3 It is MLA College's expectation that staff, students and visitors should be aware of ethical considerations, ensure that they act in an ethical manner when engaged on MLA College business, and conduct their projects and studies to the highest ethical standards.

2. Ethics Policy Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this Policy is to:

a. Set out the principles applicable to all research, enterprise, consultancy projects and studies conducted at, by or in the name of the College;

b. Provide members of the College with a clear understanding of the ethical review process operated by the College; and

c. Support a culture of academic freedom and excellence by providing a framework for review which subjects research proposals and other studies to a level of scrutiny that is in proportion to the risk of harm or adverse effect to participants, researchers, the College and to society as a whole and in line with UK Higher Education standards and practice for such activities.

3. Scope

3.1 This Policy applies to all staff and students of MLA College engaged in studies or research.

3.2 This policy is not intended to apply to operational decisions or actions taken by MLA College, e.g. financial, estates and facilities, procurement or human resource matters as these are subject to different review procedures.

4. Principles of Ethical Research

4.1 MLA Colleges principles of ethical research are:

a. Studies and research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality and transparency.

b. Participants must be fully informed about the research or study they are invited to participate in and their consent to take part must be made voluntarily, freely and without any coercion.

Consents should be recorded in writing in accordance with the standards of any professional body.

c. Risks should be managed so that harm and/or damage arising from the research is avoided or minimised wherever possible and measures should be put in place to ensure that the benefits of research/study outweigh any potential harm or damage caused.

d. The independence of the research/study must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit.

e. The same high ethical standards shall apply wherever in the world the study/research is undertaken.

4.2 MLA College meets these principles by communicating its standards and policies to staff through education and training, publication of this and related policies.

5. Ethical Review Process

5.1 MLA College is committed to providing a competent, rigorous and independent process of ethical review for the research and studies undertaken proportionate to the risk involved.

5.2 The MLA College Ethics Committee (CEC) has overall responsibility for the ethical review process including granting approval for individual projects and studies. All studies involving human participants must be approved by the CEC. It shall be the responsibility of the CEC to decide the most appropriate method and system for the ethical review of non-human participant studies and research.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 The CEC is chaired by a Senior Academic as appointed by the College Academic Board, and is responsible for developing, reviewing and monitoring the MLA College Research Ethics Policy, and for sustaining a College-wide awareness of research governance, ethical and related issues. The CEC also comprises the Student Support Officer (SSO), who represents the student community, and a permanent member of Academic staff.

6.2 The role of the CEC is to ensure the research and studies undertaken in MLA College obtain the appropriate ethical review in accordance with this policy. Further, to ensure through its review process that all such projects adhere to applicable MLA College policies, relevant legislation, professional guidelines and best practice. The CEC meets at least once every term.

6.3 In order to manage workloads and ensure the timely ethical review of studies, the CEC may also develop delegation strategies for the appropriate review of studies including by sub-committee(s), a subset of CEC members, and single sign off in the case of low-risk work (e.g. where the focus of the research is on minimally sensitive topics; entails minimal intrusion or disruption to others; and involves individuals not considered to be vulnerable in the context of the research) and/or for an expedited review. Any matter delegated may be elevated for full CEC review should any of the reviewers consider it appropriate.

7. Researchers

7.1 The College expects all researchers (whether staff, visitors or students) to take personal responsibility for familiarising themselves with this Ethics Policy, specific policies and guidance and with the procedures they need to follow for the research or studies they undertake.

7.2 In the case of projects involving staff, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator for any research/study to ensure that all their colleagues involved in that research/study are aware of and comply with the policies of the College and with the contents of the approved ethics application for the research/study.

7.3 Notwithstanding any ethical approval that may be obtained, researchers are still required to ensure that their research or other studies are conducted in accordance with the ethical requirements of their funding body and/or any professional bodies or associations relevant to their discipline (if applicable) as well as comply with health and safety requirements.

8. Appeals

8.1 Where a researcher has a concern about the decision of the CEC to withhold, suspend or withdraw ethical approval of research/study they should attempt to resolve the matter with the CEC.

8.2 In the first instance they should contact the Chair who may decide to convene a different panel from its members to review the application, seek additional guidance and/or, invite the researcher to resubmit his/her application or confirm the original decision. Researchers may not question the judgement of the CEC and will note that any final decision rests with the Chair.

9. Sanctions

9.1 Any deliberate or negligent breach of the MLA College Ethics Policy will be taken seriously and may result in disciplinary action including proceedings for gross misconduct where the breach is committed by a member of staff, or formal disciplinary proceedings under the relevant MLA College procedures where it is committed by a student. Visitors breaching this policy may have their visitor status reviewed or withdrawn.

Annex A to MLA College Research Ethics Policy

Research Ethics Approval Process

1. It is the duty of all researchers to consider the ethical implications of their work. Often, there are none, but it is still important that you engage with your supervisor/line manager to talk through your method, and attempt to discover whether further scrutiny is required, through a process called Ethical Approval.

2. As a rule, any research that involves testing, observing, asking questions of, and collecting personal information about human participants (that might be you, work colleagues, individuals within your and other sectors) will require ethical approval. Approval is often granted; however, common examples of projects that may not receive approval include those that intend to work with vulnerable adults or minors, or projects where the student cannot clearly demonstrate that no harm will occur to participants of the study, or their wider protection cannot be guaranteed. As an example, the act of asking people about their mental health status may seem an innocent question, but by doing so you may find yourself compromised and the participant significantly upset by the line of questioning. To be clear, this does not mean such tasks cannot be achieved, just that full ethical approval will be required (which will include you outlining your safeguarding measures), and the MLA College Ethics Committee reserve the right to refuse your research on these grounds.

3. Examples of areas where ethical issues can arise include any research:

    a. undertaken in a medical setting even where this does not include reference to patients. In such cases the student should forward the approval of the institution and confirmation that it has either been ethically approved or does not require such approval;

    b. undertaken in a setting where the researcher is in a position of authority or influence over participants;

    c. involving vulnerable groups;

    d. involving individuals who might be deemed incapable of making an informed decision to participate within the terms of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. In such cases advice and, where necessary, approval will be sought from an NHS Research Ethics Committee or the Social Care Research Ethics Committee;

    e. involving prisoners;

    f. involving children under 16 years of age;

    g. where participant's may be under duress or coercion to participate e.g. where a gatekeeper only allows certain people to be approached; or

    h. where gatekeepers insist on being present in interviews.

4. Examples of topics of research which can be considered sensitive are:

    a. sexual behaviour or orientation;

    b. illegal or political behaviour;

c. research that involves subjecting the participants to higher risks than they would experience in everyday life (such as higher levels of psychological stress, anxiety, humiliation or more than minimal pain);

d. research involving deliberate deception or that conducted without the participants full and informed consent;

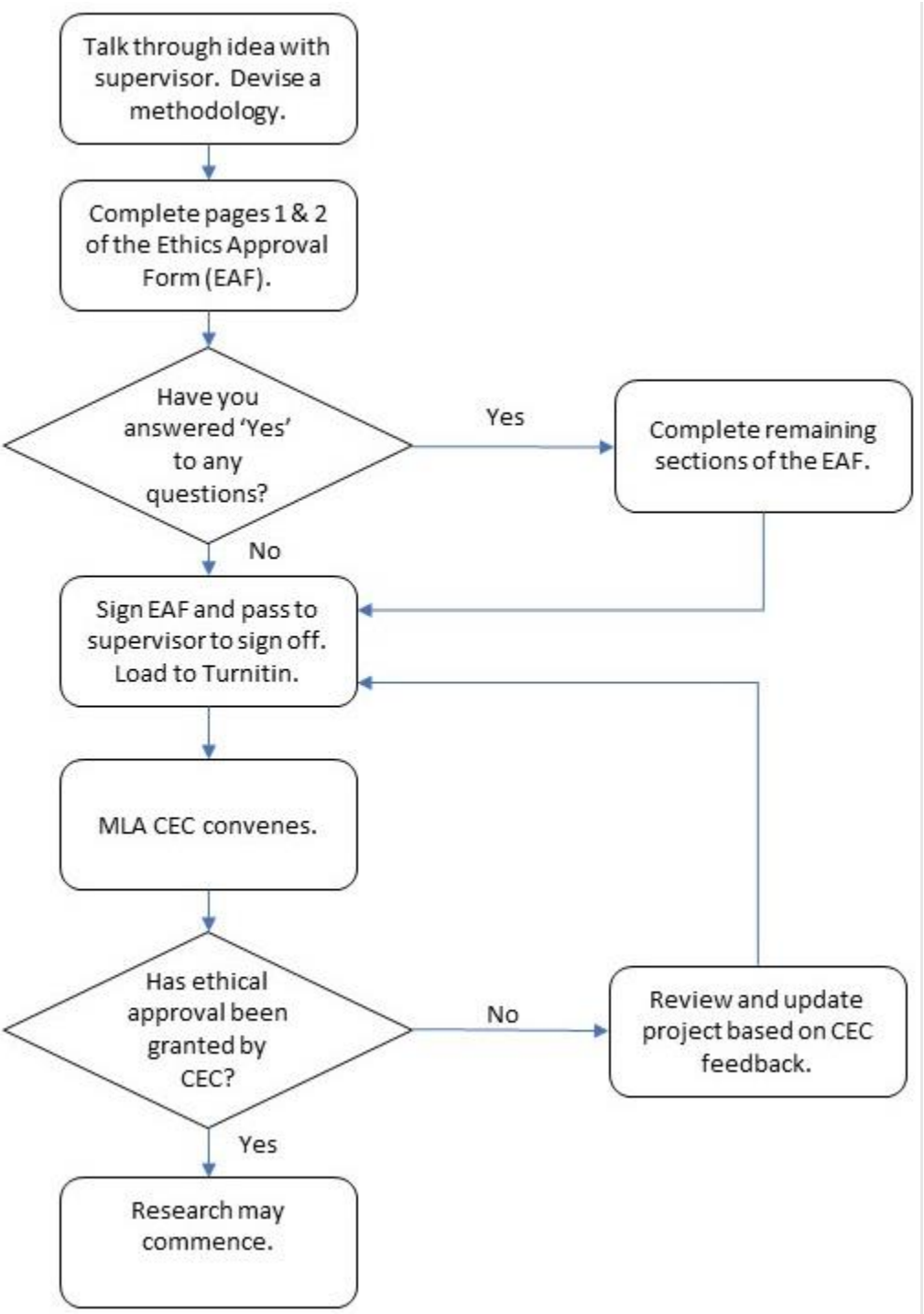
e. research involving intrusive interventions – e.g. administration of drugs, substances;

f. vigorous physical exercise, hypnotherapy etc; research that has the potential to invoke legal action against the researcher or MLA College; or

g. research that involves offering participants incentives to take part that exceed reimbursement of basic costs of participation i.e. travel costs and any out-of-pocket Expenses.

5. Undertaking your project without considering the ethical implications of your work, not seeking ethical approval where it is required, or continuing to work without or beyond the conditions of approval is unethical. **We cannot accept such work for assessment and ignorance is not a defence.** Therefore, it is crucial that you engage with this issue before you start any research work and await any decisions that may be forthcoming before continuing with your Project/Thesis. Postdating ethical approval or arranging ethics agreements after the work has been completed is not permissible. In other words, not producing evidence that you have thought about ethics, and agreed your conclusions with a supervisor, is an automatic failure of the module.

6. Ethical approval forms can be found on the VLE [insert link]. The form contains a declaration asking you to confirm you have read the MLA College Ethics Policy and requires you to state whether your research project will include aspects likely to require ethical approval. This form should be reviewed carefully and completed as instructed. Your supervisor will be able to guide you as necessary. Completed forms must be submitted to the MLA College Ethics Committee as soon as possible (via the class area on Turnitin, see below), but by no later than the end of Week 8.

7. For project and dissertation assessments information on Ethics and Risk Assessment will be provided to students via their supervisor in line with MLA College's Ethics Policy.

Research Ethics Approval Flowchart