

RNCM Guidelines on ethical approval for practice-based research involving human participation in the creative arts (updated 25 June 2020)

Please read these guidelines before completing your ethical approval form(s).

All researchers in institutions of higher education are expected to adhere to [Concordat for Research Integrity](#) (2019). Those who are funded by UK grant-giving bodies such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council, whether directly or indirectly, are bound by the [RCUK Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct \(2017\)](#).

The main principles of good research conduct, reflected in the application form for ethical approval, are as follows:

- care and avoidance of harm
- honesty and openness
- accountability and appropriate documentation
- confidentiality
- informed consent
- avoidance of conflicts of interest
- compliance with the law and relevant codes of conduct
- due acknowledgement of collaborators, informants, participants or other contributors to the research.

Practice-based research involving human participation – definitions

For the purposes of these guidelines, practice-based research is defined as an original investigation undertaken to gain new insights by means of practice and/or the outcome of that practice, typically the creation of work in a range of artistic domains. Human participation is defined as people's involvement in creative practice primarily, but not exclusively, as co-creators, performers and audiences. Not all practice-based research involves human participation; for example, a novel has readers but authors are not expected to obtain their informed consent, since readers can choose whether or not to read the novel or, once they have started, to stop reading it.

Aims

The aims of these guidelines are to facilitate practice-based research and to enable creative practitioners to reflect on its ethical implications.

Who are these guidelines for?

The guidelines are provided for everyone undertaking practice-based research involving human participation at RNCM, including postgraduate students on taught courses (e.g. MMus), postgraduate students on research degree programmes (e.g. MPhil, PhD), full-time, part-time and visiting members of staff, and researchers external to RNCM undertaking research with the participation of students and/or staff at those institutions. These include creative practitioners in music (e.g. composers and performers) but also dance (e.g. choreographers and dancers), drama (e.g. actors, directors, producers, writers and those responsible for devising performances), film (e.g. actors, animators, cinematographers and directors), performance art and the visual arts.

Researchers undertaking practice-based research involving human participation fall into two broad categories:

1. Those whose creative practice involves interaction with other people as participants in the research *only* insofar as they are co-creators, performers and/or audiences, e.g. a composer who writes a work for a specific performer; an opera singer who interviews a public figure in preparation for playing a role based on their character.

- In such cases the research aims to inform the creative process and the output is its product, in the form of a work that can be performed or the performance itself.
- 2. Those whose creative practice involves interaction with other people as co-creators, performers and/or audiences *and/or* involvement as participants in their research, as sources of data derived, typically, from interviews, questionnaires, observations or experiments, e.g. a composer-conductor who documents rehearsals of their work-in-progress and the reception of its first performance by members of the audience, via a questionnaire survey.
- In this case the aims of the research are *both* to a) inform the creative process from which the work is one output, and b) find out how the work is received by those present at its first performance. A second research output could be a report of the findings from the analysis of questionnaire data published as a journal article.

What do you have to do?

You should read the examples above and, having discussed them with your research supervisor if you are a student, your line manager or head of department if you are a member of staff, decide which category applies to you.

If you are a Category 1 researcher, you should complete the **RNCM Ethical Approval Form for practice-based research involving human participation in the creative arts**. Please note that you may not be able to answer “yes” or “not applicable” to one or more of the questions in Part 1 of the form. If so, it is perfectly acceptable to answer “no” and provide an explanation. Explanations might include the following:

- Performers booked to give a performance know that their contribution is to perform
- Audiences know that their contribution is to attend a performance
- It is assumed at RNCM, for example, that audiences are aware that all performances are recorded, without exception, and that members of the audience as well as performers may therefore be recorded
- It may not be possible to obtain written consent from every member of a large ensemble or audience to share their contribution with others, although it is courteous to inform them verbally or through a note in the programme that the work being performed, or its performance, forms part of a research project
- Members of audiences can always choose to leave but it would be unreasonable to expect performers to withdraw their services, once booked to rehearse and give a performance.

If you are a Category 2 researcher, you should complete *both* the **RNCM Ethical Approval Form for practice-based research involving human participation in the creative arts** *and either* the **RNCM Ethical Approval Form for non-practice-based research involving human participation** *or* the **RNCM Ethical Approval Form for questionnaire research with adults only**, available [here](#).

Completing and submitting applications for ethical approval

As well as completing the appropriate ethical approval form(s), you should also prepare **participant information sheets** and **consent forms** for participants in *both* your practice-based and non-practice-based research, using the templates provided in the **RNCM Guidance on producing participant information sheets and consent forms for practice-based research** and **RNCM Guidance on producing participant information sheets and consent forms for non-practice-based research**, *unless* you are undertaking questionnaire research, in which case you are required to include participant information and consent as part of your questionnaire and submit the questionnaire itself.

Applications for ethical approval include the ethical approval form(s), participant information sheet(s), consent form(s), interview schedules, additional information if required and questionnaires as appropriate.

When you have completed the application and it has been checked by your research supervisor (if you are a student), line manager or head of department (if you are a member of staff), the ethical approval form should be signed by both parties and the institutional CUK Research Ethics Committee representative. Complete applications should be submitted electronically.

Please note that data can be used only for the project for which ethical approval is sought. It must be stored securely for a specified period of time, during which it can only re-used in subsequent research with the explicit consent of participants, before it is destroyed.