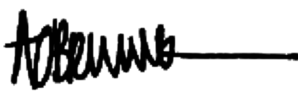# RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

Version003_May_2023

Owner	Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Research
Governance structure	The Research Ethics Sub-Committee reports to the Institutional Research Committee and provides feedback to the Postgraduate Studies Committee with a reporting structure into the Academic Executive Committee and Academic Board.
Relevant to	Staff and students involved in research
Approved by	Academic Board
Date approved	April 2018
Approval date of revision	
Next revision date	May 2027
Signed: Chair of Academic Board	
Date signed	
Related IMM Graduate School policies and documents	**Related Policies:** Application, Admission and Registration Policy Assessment Policy eLibrary and Knowledge Centre Policy Learning and Teaching Policy Programme Development and Reaccreditation Policy Programme Review Policy Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy **Related Documents:** Procedure for Postgraduate Development Procedure for Research Procedure for Programme Development and Reaccreditation

	Procedure for Ethical Clearance
Related regulatory framework documents	Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education (CHE, 2013) Policy and Procedures for Measurement of Research Output of Public Higher Education Institutions (DHET, 2023) A Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education in South Africa (CHE, 2021) Criteria for Programme Accreditation (CHE, 2004) Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education (CHE, 2013) Framework for Institutional Audits (CHE, 2021) Higher Education Act of 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997) Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (CHE, 2013) Level Descriptors for the South African National Qualifications Framework (SAQA, 2012)

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1.   **RATIONALE FOR POLICY**

The rationale for the research ethics policy is to give research involving humans a solid foundation for ethical behaviour that is both discipline and contextually relevant. This policy defines the formal steps for endorsing human subjects' research initiatives at, or in partnership with, the IMM Graduate School.

This policy does not absolve a professional or other association member or associate of any liabilities they may have accrued as a result of participation.

Therefore, this policy ensures an ethical and scientific intellectual culture predominates among the IMM Graduate School's staff and students and is observed in research practice. Human participants' rights and interests, as well as those of institutions and communities, are safeguarded. This is crucial in situations where the information gathered could jeopardise the participants' and third parties' privacy and dignity and where participants and third parties are at risk due to their youth, disability, gender, age, poverty, illness, ignorance or helplessness. This policy ensures all research activities are carried out in accordance with the highest standards of academic quality, social responsibility and ethical conduct. Also, to maintain the integrity of the research's ethical and scientific foundations.

2.   **ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Refer to Addendum A: Abbreviations and glossary of terms.

3.   **PURPOSE OF THE POLICY**

3.1   The IMM Graduate School remains fully committed to supporting and promoting high-quality academic research undertaken by employees and students. When this research is such that it involves human respondents and/or their personal data, it needs to be undertaken in a way which safeguards the inherent dignity, basic human rights, safety, health and the privacy of those involved in the process. This commitment includes the rights of participants, researchers, students and third parties.

3.2 The IMM Graduate School expects its employees, students or any other parties researching on its premises or electronic platforms, to abide by the expected and normal expectations of good research practice and to take all reasonable steps to ensure ethical conduct of any research involving human participants and their data to be observed at all times. This includes any research undertaken outside the IMM Graduate School, including in other countries where its students may be based, or where such students may be temporarily based as visitors or tourists.

To give effect to this, the IMM Graduate School will do the following:

a) Foster a research culture which adheres, in its practice, to the commonly accepted principles of dignity, human rights, safety and privacy of all those who are involved in it.

b) Make available, in an accessible and responsive manner, guidance on the best possible ethical practice and regulatory documented requirements commonly accepted and normally practiced.

c) Offer support and guidance to staff, students and other parties engaged in research projects linked to the IMM Graduate School, to maintain awareness and practice of the highest ethical standards.

d) Maintain a review process, through the Institutional Research Committee and the Research Ethics Sub-Committee to enable research projects to be available for scrutiny, which is in proportion to the ethical risk inherent in them.

e) Maintain management oversight over the policies of the faculty, programmes, modules and Research Ethics Sub-Committee, and to institute appropriate action where this is necessary and where it is evident that due processes are not being followed.

4. RESEARCH ETHICS AND INTEGRITY: CONTEXT AND CONCEPTS

4.1 Research Context

While integrity is a broader term connected to the researcher's conduct while conducting the research, ethics deal with the interaction between the researcher

and the people, and the environment in which they operate. The expectation is always that research associated with the IMM Graduate School is ethical and conducted with integrity because these are intricately linked.

Research ethics expectations are framed at the IMM Graduate School by

- the Belmont Report,
- the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity,
- the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC).

4.2 Belmont Report

The following three essential rules, which are based on the Belmont report, govern ethical research:

4.2.1 **Respect for individuals**, which states that people should be viewed as autonomous agents capable of thought and decision making, and that people who have less agency should be protected. This has the following practical implications: Participants must consent in full knowledge, and those unable to do so should be excluded or specifically protected.

4.2.2 **Beneficence** requires that researchers do no harm, maximise any potential benefits, and minimise any potential harm.

4.2.3 **Justice**, meaning the researcher must be able to identify the individuals that stand to gain and lose from the investigation. It is expected that the researcher will be able to guarantee that research benefits will not just go to people who already have privilege in the field and that the burden (for example, inclusion in samples) will not fall disproportionately on those who are unable to exclude themselves or refuse.

4.3 Singapore Statement on Research Integrity

4.3.1 The key principles of the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity are

- accountability in the conduct of research,
- professional courtesy and fairness in working with others,
- good stewardship of research on behalf of others.

4.3.2 The responsibilities that arise from this are as follows:

- **Integrity** – taking responsibility for the trustworthiness of the research.

- **Adherence to regulations** – be aware of and adhere to regulations and policies.

- **Research methods** – employ appropriate research methods, base conclusions on critical analysis of the evidence and then report findings and interpretations fully and objectively.

- **Research records** – keep clear and accurate records that will allow verification and replication and do so in a manner that protects privacy.

- **Research findings** – share data and findings openly and promptly.

- **Authorship** – acknowledge all contributors and only contributors.

- **Publication acknowledgement** – acknowledge those that contributed but were not authors.

- **Peer review** – provide fair, prompt, rigorous evaluations and respect confidentiality when reviewing others and subject own work to peer review.

- **Conflict of interest** – avoid conflict of interest and disclose any relationship, association, or other interests that may impact trustworthiness.

- **Public communication** – limit comments to fields of expertise and distinguish professional from personal comments.

- **Report irresponsible research** – report to the appropriate authorities any lack of integrity or misconduct or irresponsible research practices.

- **Respond to irresponsible research** – have a mechanism for dealing with reports of irresponsible research.

- **Research environments** – create and sustain environments that encourage integrity.

- **Societal considerations** – fulfil ethical obligation to weigh societal benefits against risks inherent in the work.

4.4 **Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Codes of Ethics**

The HSRC codes cover similar concepts, namely:

4.4.1 **respect and protection** which argues that research should ideally be done with and not on communities and that participants and their autonomy should be protected,

4.4.2 **transparency** which includes ensuring that participants fully understand the aims and implications of research,

4.4.3 **scientific and academic professionalism** which includes following required codes and norms,

4.4.4 **accountability** meaning that the mandate to carry out the research is explicit and documented.

5. **THE IMM GRADUATE SCHOOL CODE OF ETHICS**

a) The IMM Graduate School commits to ensuring that research adheres to the standards of contributing to the well-being of humanity and society (justice), promotes the interests of a constitutional democracy (justice) and does no harm (beneficence).

b) All research is thus required to explicitly give attention to the ways in which

- scholarly standards and integrity are upheld, and the researcher is held accountable for the standard of the research from conceptualisation to dissemination;

- social responsibility and sensitivity are advanced, including protection of the rights and dignity of participants and society at large;

- the research extends the capacity of individuals to conduct meaningful, valid and reliable investigations into the needs and challenges of society;

- findings and conclusions are communicated to benefit more than the researcher.

The following criteria will be implemented to ensure the code of ethics is maintained and upheld:

5.1 **Criterion 1: Compliance and legality**

a) The established legal and regulatory framework, which expresses South Africa as a constitutional democracy built on ingrained rights and obligations, must be followed by all research.

b) The collection, analysis, storage and reporting of data and findings must adhere to privacy regulations.

c) The legal standards relating to privacy and personal information (POPI) necessitate special consideration.

5.2 **Criterion 2: Collaboration and professional competence**

a) In order to protect participants, all research must be carried out according to the researcher's abilities and expertise.

b) At NQF Level 8 and lower, no student may perform sensitive research involving any human subjects.

c) Until the necessary research methodology skills have been properly and appropriately mastered, the IMM Graduate School requires its new researchers (such as those at the honours level) to avoid topics that pose any kind of risk for subjects (regardless of how small that risk may be in terms of both likelihood and impact).

d) Due to the researchers' inescapable errors and lack of knowledge, judgement and experience, the onus of learning cannot be placed on the research subjects.

e) The researcher may only use procedures and methods that will support all these conditions, are transparently revealed, and that they are competent to carry out. Any features of the project that might have impacted the reliability of the data or findings must be disclosed by the researchers.

f) Where the primary goal of the research is the improvement of the researcher's skills, human (or other sentient beings) participation is restricted to low-impact, low-stress methods like surveys and only after ethical clearance has been obtained. Absolute transparency regarding the goal of the research is also necessary, as well as informed consent procedures.

g) Researchers must look for ways to develop the skills of other researchers and opportunities for official or informal collaboration and mentoring.

h) Officially appointed Supervisors of student research must understand that their job is to help the student, which may occasionally entail giving instructions and guidance. It is the Supervisor's responsibility to recognise the processes and difficulties that students face and to give them access to the necessary help. The highest professional standards and boundaries must be upheld throughout this procedure.

5.3 Criteria 3: Freedom, boundaries and obligations in research

a) While it is true that researchers have the freedom to pursue methods for advancing knowledge, they are only permitted to do so when doing so upholds respect, beneficence and justice and only after receiving ethical approval. There are limitations on the right to freedom.

b) The researcher is in charge of seeing that the ethical and technical guidelines assigned to him or her are followed, which includes bearing accountability for the work produced by collaborators.

c) Workplace safety and health regulations, as well as national, sectoral and institutional labour and working conditions, must be followed, including the implementation of safe working practices.

d) Research must purposefully and openly respect participants' rights to privacy and autonomy by having strict policies in place for obtaining their full consent and protecting their safety, dignity and interests while carrying out the study.

5.4 **Criterion 4: Data, intellectual integrity, intellectual property rights, publication and dissemination**

a) The IMM Graduate School respects intellectual property rights, which include, but are not limited to, upholding standards for intellectual honesty, paying close attention to publishing and data ownership rights, and refraining from commercialising supervisees' work. All sources, copyrights, intellectual property, authorship and contributions must be properly cited and acknowledged.

b) Data security must be offered to guarantee that information cannot be altered, fabricated, misrepresented or faked.

c) Researchers must be able to defend their study and findings by making original data and their analysis procedures available as needed. In order to assess any potential challenges to the study's findings or methods, primary data must be safely stored for five years by the researcher while paying careful regard to privacy regulations. Any researcher who is unable to meet this retention requirement must turn over his or her data to the institution for storage.

d) Researchers are required to report their findings and, where appropriate, to take advantage of them. Planning for research must include strategies for effectively communicating the findings in a way that broadens understanding and acknowledges the limitations of findings and conclusions.

e) Any contractual agreements that would call for a publication embargo period, such as those imposed by a funder or a place of employment, must thus be revealed and settled before the research is conducted.

f) If an embargo is deemed inappropriate, the IMM Graduate School, through the Programme Coordinator and the Registrar, maintains the authority to refuse to permit the research for qualification or other purposes.

Participants' anonymity and confidentiality must always be protected, and no findings should ever be published or distributed in a way that would put them in danger.

The traditions of publication must be followed in communication and distribution, including submitting material to only one publisher at a time, always identifying previous uses of papers and discoveries, and avoiding publication in predatory journals.

g) The following criteria must be met before any work is published:

- No student's work may be published without the student listed as the principal author.

- The establishment needs to be acknowledged.

- The institution's reputation must be preserved, which entails making wise decisions about where work is released. Publishing in predatory journals that assert intellectual property rights over work is specifically prohibited.

5.6 Studying Vulnerable Populations

a) Only master's-level students and experienced researchers who are not engaged on research for qualification purposes will be granted consent to do studies with vulnerable populations.

b) No under-age respondent groups are to be utilised to collect data, or if so, only with specialist arrangements

c) The concepts of goodness, fairness and respect for people are relevant.

d) Any group that

- is unable to provide fully informed, voluntary consent for any reason, including social vulnerability;

- is currently experiencing or has previously experienced stress or harm as a result of any social or other condition;

- has a power position socially or systemically different from the researcher; and

- is over-researched due to their availability (such as those in institutions) are considered vulnerable groups.

- When a topic involves a vulnerable group, consideration must be given to how the rights and interests will be safeguarded during the clearance procedure.

6. ETHICS REVIEW AND PROPOSAL

6.1 Finalising and Submitting the Proposal

a) The student puts together the proposal in accordance with the guidelines provided on how to compile a research proposal.

b) The student then receives feedback to revise the proposal at a program-wide academic session attended by other students and programme Supervisors.

c) The student revises the proposal by considering the comments and submits it by the deadline in order to satisfy the Postgraduate Studies Committee's standards.

d) The Supervisor certifies that the plan satisfies the necessary requirements or provides written justifications for doing so.

e) The Supervisor receives feedback in the proper format from two internal readers (ideally, other Supervisors on the same project).

f) Before the relevant Postgraduate Studies Committee meeting, the Programme Coordinator presents the following:

The following items are required:

- the research proposal;

- the reviews and recommendations of the two examiners;

- the report from the similarity detection software that highlights similarity;

- the supervisor's and student's signatures on the Certificate of Release, or justifications for not doing so;

- the research instrument and participant consent form, as applicable; and

- the Ethics Research application form.

6.2 **Approval of the Proposal and Clearance for Ethics**

a) In accordance with its procedures, the Research Ethics Sub-Committee analyses the plan and the request for an ethics clearance at its meeting.

b) Within five working days of the meeting, the Chair will inform the student, Supervisor, and Coordinator of the Research Ethics Sub-Committee's decision, which will be one of the following:

   i) The study can move forward if:

- it is approved;

- it is accepted with conditions that must be satisfied by the Supervisor or by the Supervisor and Coordinator before the study can start.

   ii) The study needs to be revised and resubmitted:

- Students are allowed two attempts to revise and resubmit for Ethical Clearance.

7. **PROCEDURES FOR ETHICS**

7.1 The IMM Graduate School is committed to providing a rigorous and independent overview of the ethical review processes, which it routinely undertakes, and will do so in a way that is proportionate to the risk implied in the project.

7.2 The IMM Graduate School also recognises the fact that there would be minimal or no need for the Research Ethics Sub-Committee to become involved in most cases. Despite this, it expects all researchers who are embarking on their projects, which involve human participation or the use of personal data, to consider the risk of the possible impact of their projects and to, in the case of doubt, seek

guidance from their Supervisor, the faculty or members of the Research Committee.

7.3   Projects which, at the outset, display clear signs of the need for ethical review should be referred to the Research Ethics Sub-Committee of the Institutional Research Committee.

7.4   Research requiring review by an external body, such as SAMRA, should be referred to the body as early as possible in the process. The IMM Graduate School will provide guidance on this.

7.5   In most instances, the Research Ethics Sub-Committee may appraise, approve and provide ethical clearance to projects on the 'light-touch', basis which is required. Ethical reviews need not be exhaustive but rather reasonable and proportionate to the perceived risk implied in the focus and conduct of the project.

7.6   As implied by the commonly held understanding associated with good practice principles, the Research Ethics Sub-Committee should refer projects which are deemed to be beyond its level of expertise to appropriate ethical review groups or individuals.

7.7   Failure to comply with the due process involving the Research Ethics Sub-Committee will be dealt with in a way which is in line with the IMM Graduate School's Code of Conduct.

8.   **AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR ETHICAL REVIEW**

8.1   The responsibility for ensuring ethical conduct in the research process lies with the researcher as well as the IMM Graduate School.

8.2   There is a fundamental requirement for individual researchers to accept responsibility on a personal level for their research projects and the way in which these are conducted. Researchers conducting research requiring human respondents and the use of their data, may not initiate the projects without explicit approval granted by the Research Ethics Sub-Committee. When the researcher is in any doubt at all, advice must be sought.

8.3	Supervisors should ensure that they sensitise their students to the existence of this protocol and the document in which it is set out.

8.4	It is the responsibility of Heads of Department to ensure that Academics/ Head Lecturers, Lecturers, Tutors and Supervisors are familiar with this policy and to assist in the process underlying the observance of due process for ethics clearance.

8.5	The Research Ethics Sub-Committee is expected to scrutinise proposals submitted for approval for implied ethical issues even if there are no obvious issues apparent but also when these issues are implied.

8.6	The IMM Graduate School's Institutional Research Committee has overall responsibility for the administration and implementation of this policy. It will seek out opportunities to dispense advice on best practice to ensure ethical research practices.

9.	**IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY**

The reviewed policy will be implemented from the date that the Academic Board approves the document.

10.   DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version history and updates:

Date	Responsible person	Description
April 2018	H Potgieter	New policy
April 2018	H Potgieter / Prof G Bick	Approval
May 2018	H Potgieter / Prof G Bick	Change name to Research Ethics Policy
May 2023	Head: Quality Assurance	Reviewed the Policy
August 2023	Head: Internal Quality Assurance	Amended the following points according to the Academic Board feedback: 5.6 (b) Removed sensitive topics in Research 6.1 (f) bullet point 3 updated 6.2 (ii) and bullet point updated Glossary of terms: Experienced supervisor

ADDENDUM A: ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abbreviations:

NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAMRA	South African Marketing Research Association

Glossary of Terms:

Article	It is a primary or secondary research-based article prepared to the standard for submission for publication in terms of the specifications of the academic journal concerned
Authorship	The writings produced by a particular author
Dissertation	The output from a master's degree by research
Experienced Supervisor	A researcher who has supervised and successfully delivered several postgraduate students at the level appropriate for their qualifications
Qualification	Formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by an accredited institution
Research Ethics Sub-Committee	The committee responsible for institutional research ethics; a subcommittee of the Postgraduate Studies Committee
Research proposal	A component that must be completed by master's dissertation students prior to their registration which culminates in the Proposal being reviewed and approved/ declined by the Postgraduate Studies Committee
Research report	A report on a research project that is not a mini-dissertation or a dissertation. Normally the output of an honours degree student
Supervisor	An academic responsible for supervising the research done by a student that will normally result in a research

	report, academic article, mini-dissertation or a dissertation