

Guidance for research with RCSI students

Points to be addressed within the REC application:

- Prior to completing a REC application for research involving RCSI students it is important to understand / distinguish between the difference types of research and address the issue of whether informed consent is required.
 - The use of routine data for purposes of medical education research. This is already covered by the admissions agreement.
 - The use of routine data for purposes not covered in the admissions agreement. That is, consent is required where the use of the data is not one that the student could reasonably expect, given the information they received.
 - Any study that collects non-routine information requires consent.
- Student research has the potential to make students feel that participation may give them an academic advantage or that non-participation may disadvantage them. For all research studies, participants should never feel coerced to participate and the design must be such that not only is this not the case, but that this is clear to the potential participants.
 - a. In the case where students may feel pressure to participate, a gatekeeper should be used to recruit participants. (Some degree of flexibility is possible with respect to the role of the gatekeeper and this can be addressed on a case by case basis; for example, addressing a class of 350 students looking for participants, could not be construed as individual pressure).
 - b. Potential pressures to participate should also be addressed within the proposal, by requiring an evaluation from the applicant of:
 - i. How likely it is to occur; and
 - ii. What steps will be taken to eliminate it.
 - c. Incentives for RCSI students can be included (within reason) – for example entry into a competition for a prize or a small cash incentives (e.g. for time consuming imaging procedures or experiments). Such incentive schemes should be clearly justified in the ethics application.
- Students should be informed at the beginning of the term that a research study will be taking place. Consent to take part in the research study should be obtained at this point (where possible). Informing the students and obtaining consent at this point would be considered best practice (and not obligatory) as the REC appreciates that in certain circumstances this would not be possible and could render several research proposals unachievable.

- Regarding the collection of personal data of students and students under 18 the student agreement from Admissions, which new students are required to sign, states

“I understand that the College routinely collects data which include student feedback and examination results for internal quality assurances purposes. These data are used to inform the continuing development and improvement of the student experience. These aggregated and anonymised data can occasionally reveal information that is of value to the research community, particularly with regard to the education of healthcare professionals and may be submitted for publication (subject to relevant ethical approval). The College may also participate in or facilitate research that requires data collection via surveys and/or focus groups. Relevant student groups may be invited to participate in such research on the understanding that participation is voluntary and the data will always be anonymised.”

The student signs this and where students are under 18 their parents/legal guardian will also sign the agreement. This ensures that the students (both over and under the age of 18) have given adequate consent.

- Participation in the research and course marks should be clearly separated. This may be by timing the research so that it occurs after exams have been marked, or by some other means, such as having research data collated and anonymised by someone who is not connected with course assessments.
- Participant protection should be addressed and also the fair distribution of benefits. Participating in research is an excellent way for students to learn about the conduct of research from College researchers.
- Researchers who carry out research on students should provide an opportunity for students to learn from the experience – for example a debriefing and/ or question-and-answer session. However, different research projects may have different potential benefits to participants, and it should be up to the researcher to identify the best way of maximising the learning opportunity for the students. Finally, such sessions should be open to all eligible students, not just those being studied.
- Research studies concerning RCSI students should include the following where applicable:
 - a. An opt-out mechanism on each survey or a short disclaimer stating that they do not have to take part.
 - b. A short disclaimer should be provided where the students are reassured that this survey will not impact in any way on their individual marks/assessments
 - c. Where sensitive personal data (race, ethnic origin, political opinion, religious or philosophical beliefs; trade union membership; physical mental health, sexual life; commission of an offence) are being collected the researcher must provide evidence of explicit consent received from the students to do so.