In keeping with directives from the European Union and from the UK Government, universities are required to put in place ethics procedures and guidelines for research. In addition, research councils including EPSRC are now asking for formal ethics approval of proposals in some of their funded programmes.

Heriot-Watt University has established a University Ethics Committee to guide schools, monitor procedures and ensure appropriate ethical issues are being considered. The committee has asked schools to submit ethical approval procedures relevant to their research activities. As a consequence, a MACS ethics committee has been formed. Its scope includes research and student projects.

This note outlines the context and provides a standard protocol for ethics approval for research projects.

**General Ethical Principles**

- No field of human activity can be considered exempt from ethical concerns. Increased accountability means that all research projects are open to public scrutiny and must be seen to be subject to the highest ethical standards.

- Projects should conform to generally accepted moral and scientific principles. There are:
  1. Obligations to society:- for example, conforming with responsible, moral and legal practice; maintenance of high scientific standards and impartial assessment and dissemination of findings.
  2. Obligations to colleagues:- the maintenance of standards and appropriate professional behaviour with methods, procedures and findings open to review.
     - Breaches of these principles include areas of research misconduct such as fabrication, falsification and plagiarism.
     - The well-being of all involved in research is of central concern in ethical considerations. All staff are therefore obliged to comply with health and safety guidelines and to carry out a risk assessment of the research whatever its nature (for example, laboratory work, field work, testing of subjects).

**Ethical Principles for Research Involving Human Subjects**

One major obligation on the part of researchers which is not included in the above list is to the subjects who are involved in research. Social researchers must strive to protect subjects from undue harm arising as a consequence of their participation in research. This requires that subjects’ participation should be voluntary, and as fully informed as possible. At the same time, no group should be disadvantaged by routinely being excluded from consideration. Subjects should also be aware of their
entitlement to refuse to participate at any stage for whatever reason, and to withdraw data just supplied. Special considerations should be given to studies requiring informed consent from vulnerable participants. Such groups include children, those with an intellectual disability and those in a dependent relationship to the researcher or commissioning body (for example, students in the University or patients in a hospital).

Most research projects in MACS will have no human subjects and hence need no ethical approval. These projects should need only a declaration that no human subjects or data is involved.

Many others will only have human subjects as a minor part of evaluating the usability of interfaces or similar nonthreatening procedures. These projects should have a declaration that they conform to the general principles above, and that they only use willing subjects drawn from the students and staff of the University. All subjects must sign a consent form and the completed forms must be retained with the master copy of the project report. All data must be anonymised so that no subject can be identified. Standard consent forms will be provided.

Other projects have a major focus on user evaluation or psychological aspects; these projects will need a full ethical approval, similar to research projects. This should also be the case if subjects from outside the University are to be used.

For all projects, it is possible that the need for ethical issues may change during the course of a project. It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that if ethical approval is required, it is sought as soon as it is obvious that it will be needed.

**School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences**

**Ethics Approval**

**Research Projects**

1. **Title of project:**

   __________________________________________________________

   __________________________________________________________

2. **Supervisor:**

   __________________________________________________________

3. **Purpose of study:**

   __________________________________________________________

   __________________________________________________________

4. **Are human subjects or personal data identifiable with living people involved?**

   Yes

   No

*If NO sign and date the form, otherwise answer the following questions.*
5. Is the project mainly concerned with other matters and the only ethical consideration is the use of human subjects in interface evaluation?

Yes
No

*If YES and the subjects are staff of students of Heriot-Watt University, no ethical approval is required, except for the requirement for subjects to sign the standard consent forms and to store these consent forms. Data must be anonymised.*

*If NO, then you must complete the full research proposal ethical approval form.*

Please sign the following:

I, the student undertaking the research project, certify that this is a true reflection of the intended study, and that I will seek the necessary approval if the nature of the project changes.

Name (please print): ________________________________
Signature: ________________________________________
Date: ____________________________________________

I (as the project student's supervisor) have checked the above for accuracy and am satisfied the information provided is a true reflection of the intended study.

Name (please print): ________________________________
Signature: ________________________________________
Date: ____________________________________________

I am satisfied that the researcher has properly considered the ethical implications of the intended study and has taken appropriate action.

(Director of Research) ________________________________
Date: ____________________________________________
**Human Subject Consent**

Name: ____________________________________________

Project Title: ____________________________________________

I have been asked to participate as a subject in this project. The nature of the tasks I will be asked to perform have been explained to me in writing (if possible print the explanation at the foot of this form).

I understand that I can withdraw my participation at any stage without prejudice.

I understand that all data collected will be anonymised before any publication, unless my prior consent is sought.

Signed: ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________