Research Ethics Guidelines for the Staff and Students of the Islamic College[1]

1. General Principles

A. Researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences (including Islamic Studies, which in turn includes Islamic Law) should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities.
B. All research activities in the Humanities and Social Sciences (including IS/IL) should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose.
C. All researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences (including IS/IL) should act with regard to their social responsibilities in conducting and disseminating their research.
D. All research activities in the Humanities and Social Sciences (including IS/IL) should aim to maximise the benefit to society and minimise harm.

E. Researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences (including IS/IL) should fully acknowledge the sources from which they have obtained the required data/information (including their own previously produced works) for their research. Failing to do so amounts to plagiarism.

F. The above general principles plus those identified below, should be observed in working with AI systems:

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[1] The guidelines that follow are based on the following document: British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2018), Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fourth edition, London. https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018. In producing the above guidelines, assistance of AI systems was also sought. What is adopted from the above source in the present document constitutes a basic framework for reasech in the humanities and social sciences, including Islamic Studies. For more complex cases researchers should consult the full document at the above address and/or consult the College's Ethics Committee.

- **Attribution & Authorship:** How to cite AI tools (like ChatGPT) as sources, distinguishing between tool use (like spellcheck) and content generation (plagiarism).
- **Bias & Fairness:** Recognising and mitigating biases in AI models that can affect research outcomes, especially for sensitive topics or demographics.
- **Transparency & Accountability:** Being open about AI involvement in research and taking responsibility for the final work.
- **Data Privacy & Security:** Protecting sensitive research data when using AI tools.
- **Human Agency & Oversight:** The need for human researchers to remain in control, vet AI outputs, and ensure alignment with research goals.
- **Equity & Access:** Addressing disparities in access to advanced AI tools and ensuring fair implementation.

2. Guidelines[2]

Responsibilities to participants

1. Researchers should operate within an ethic of respect for any persons – including themselves – involved in or touched by the research they are undertaking. Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice, in recognition of both their rights and of differences arising from age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant characteristic.

2. Where research draws on social media and online communities, it is important to remember that digital information is generated by individuals. Researchers should not assume that the name given and/or identity presented by participants in online fora or media is a ‘real’ name: it might be an avatar. This avatar could represent a human or a bot, but behind either will be one or more human creators responsible for it, who could therefore be regarded as participants; whether and how these potential participants might be traceable should be considered. Where an organisation shares its data with researchers, those researchers have a responsibility to account for how and with what consent that data was gathered; they must also consider the authorship of that data and, consequently, whether it is necessary to independently approach the relevant individuals for consent concerning its use. Researchers should keep up to date with changes in data use regulations and advice.

3. Researchers have a responsibility to consider what the most relevant and useful ways are of informing participants about the outcomes of the research in which they were or are involved. They could consider whether and how to engage with

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[2] These guidelines are mostly, though not necessarily exclusively, for those types of research in which third parties are involved. Nevertheless, the researchers whose research is library based, i.e. restricted to the study of certain primary and secondary sources, are also strongly advised to read them with care and adopt their relevant parts for their own research.

participants at the conclusion of the research by, for example, debriefing them in an audience-friendly format, or by eliciting feedback on the findings.

Should conflicting interpretations arise, researchers should normally reflect participants’ views when reporting the research. Researchers may wish to offer them copies of any publications arising from projects in which they have participated, or to produce reports specially tailored for the research context, taking into consideration potential subsequent uses of this material, including by the participants’ institutions. Where the scale of the research makes such a consideration impractical, alternative means such as a website could be used to ensure that participants are informed of the outcomes and the ways in which they are able to engage with them.

Consent

4. It is normally expected that participants’ voluntary informed consent to be involved in a study will be obtained at the start of the study, and that researchers will remain sensitive and open to the possibility that participants may wish, for any reason and at any time, to withdraw their consent.

5. Researchers should do everything they can to ensure that all potential participants understand, as well as they can, what is involved in a study. They should be told why their participation is necessary, what they will be asked to do, what will happen to the information they provide, how that information will be used and how and to whom it will be reported. They also should be informed about the retention, sharing and any possible secondary uses of the research data.

6. Participants may be willing to take part in research even though they are unable to be fully informed about the implications of their participation – perhaps due to their unfamiliarity with research, a lack of ability to understand, or their circumstances. In these situations, researchers and participants should negotiate consent within relationships of mutual trust, the credibility of which depends upon the integrity and trustworthiness of the researcher.

7. In many cases the producers of publicly accessible data may not have considered the fact that it might be used for research purposes, and it should not be assumed that such data is available for researchers to use without consent.
Therefore, consent is an issue to be addressed with regard to each and any online data-source, with consideration given to the presumed intent of the creators of online content, the extent to which it identifies individuals or institutions, and the sensitivity of the data.

8. When working with secondary or documentary data, the sensitivity of the data, who created it, the intended audience of its creators, its original purpose and its intended uses in the research are all important considerations. If secondary data concerning participants are to be reused, ownership of the datasets should be determined, and the owners consulted to ascertain whether they can give consent on

behalf of the participants. Sometimes it may be deemed appropriate to accept consent from hosts of the data such as a depository on behalf of contributors.

9. Researchers using auto/biographical approaches and autoethnography need to consider how their work implicates other people, and what the consequences may be for individuals who, although not directly involved in a study, may be identifiable through their relationship with the researcher or other participants; consent may need to be sought from these individuals in some cases.

Transparency

10. Researchers should aim to be open and honest with participants and other stakeholders, avoiding non-disclosure unless their research design specifically requires it in order to ensure that the appropriate data are collected, or that the welfare of the researchers is not put in jeopardy.

11. Principles of consent also apply to possible reuse of data. This covers two different possible future uses: secondary data analysis by the same research team to address new research questions, or the sharing of the dataset for use by other researchers. In both cases, if data are to be reused, this should be made clear as a possibility when gaining initial consent.

Right to Withdraw

12. Researchers should recognise the right of all participants to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time, and participants should be informed of this right.

Incentives

13. Researchers' use of incentives to encourage participation should be commensurate with good sense, such that the level of incentive does not impinge on the free decision to participate.

Harm arising from participation in research

14. Ethical research design and execution aim to both put participants at their ease and avoid making excessive demands on them.

15. Researchers should make known to the participants (or their guardians or responsible others) any predictable disadvantage or harm potentially arising from the process or reporting of the research.

Privacy and data storage

16. The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants’ data is considered the norm for the conduct of research.

17. Researchers must comply with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data as stipulated in the UK by the Data Protection Act (1998).

18. Researchers should ensure that data are kept securely, and that the form of any publication (including those published online) does not directly or indirectly lead to a breach of agreed confidentiality and anonymity.