

Policy Title: Policy on Research Using Human Tissue

Decision: Screen out

Contact: Julie McCarroll

Date of Completion: 11 June 2025

Part 1: Policy Scoping

Information about the policy

Name of the Policy

Policy on Research Using Human Tissue

Is this an existing, revised, or new policy?

Existing revised

What is it trying to achieve? (For example, intended aims and outcomes)

The policy sets out the University's position on the use of human cellular material in research and guides researchers and associated staff on the requirements of the Human Tissue Act 2004 and the University's procedures.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the policy? If so, explain how below.

Note: The Section 75 categories are:

- religious belief
- political opinion
- racial group
- age
- marital status
- sexual orientation
- sex (men and women generally)
- disability
- dependants

No. This policy is a technical document to ensure compliance with the University's Human Tissue Act licence to store human samples for research purposes. There is therefore no direct benefit to Section 75 categories. However, the research projects carried out may produce findings which are of benefit to some of the categories, such as age or intellectual disability. The University has a robust ethical review process which embeds principles of fairness, equitable treatment and equality and justification for any inclusions and exclusions based on risk of harms and scientific rigour. The University Research Ethics Committee comprises academics from a wide range of disciplines as well as external members (for example, from the charity sector).

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The Head of Research Governance initiated the review of the policy.

Who owns and implements the policy?

The Head of Research Governance and Integrity owns the policy. The policy is implemented by staff, students and associates who might be involved in research using human tissue.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to or weaken the intended aim or outcome of the policy?

Yes

If yes, are they financial, legislative or other?

Financial: there are local cost implications associated with adhering to the requirements of the policy (sample tracking, freezer maintenance etcetera).

Legislative: Changes to the Human Tissue Act 2004; this underpins the policy.

Other: Renewal of the Human Tissue Authority licence granted to the University, allowing it to hold relevant material as outlined in the Human Tissue Act 2004.

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon?

- Staff
- Students
- Other service users (for example: prospective students or conference delegates)
- Other public sector organisations
- Voluntary sector organisations
- Community organisations

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

What are they and who owns them?

Policy: Policy for the Governance and Research Involving Human Participants

Policy owner: Head of Research Governance and Integrity

Policy: Ulster University General Data Protection Regulation Policy

Policy owner: University Secretary

Policy: Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policies and Procedures

Policy owner: Chief People Officer

Policy: Code of Practice for Professional Integrity in the Conduct of Research

Policy owner: PVC Research

Available evidence

What evidence or information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Please specify details for each of the Section 75 categories below.

Note: Evidence can come from many sources. Examples include the University's management information systems, internal or external research, surveys or consultation exercises. The Equality Commission has produced a guide to [signpost to S75 data](#). Anecdotal evidence, such as feedback from service users may also be used.

Religious Belief

The University's EO data were reviewed. On 6 February 2024, our staff profile was 52.0% Catholic and 48.0% Protestant. Compared with 6 February 2019, this indicates a 2.9% increase in Catholic staff.

In the Academic Year (AY) 2023 - 2024, 58.3% of our students identified as Christian and 11.1% identified as having 'No Religion'. Compared with AY 2018-2019, this indicates an 18.2% decrease in students who identified as Christian and a 2.5% decrease in students who identified as having 'No Religion'.

Political Opinion

The University does not collect information on Political Opinion or make assumptions regarding Political Opinion based on Community Background.

Racial Group

The University's EO data were reviewed. On 6 February 2024, our staff profile was 92.8% White and 7.2% Black and Minority Ethnic (BME). This indicates a 1.8% increase in BME staff compared with 2019.

In AY 2023 - 2024, 9.9% of students identified as BME. This indicates a 4.9% increase in BME students compared with AY 2018 - 2019.

Our BME profile suggests that we are twice as diverse as the local population, as the Northern Ireland Census 2021 suggests that 3.4% of the NI population is BME.

Age

The University's EO data were reviewed. On 6 February 2024, 31.1% of our staff were in the 46-55 age band and 25.8% of staff were in the 36-45 age band. 26.2% of staff were aged '56 and above', which represents a 3.8% increase compared to 2019.

In AY 2023 - 2024, the majority of students (67.0%) were aged '21 and under 40'. This indicates a 5.6% increase in students within this age band compared with AY 2018 - 2019.

Marital Status

The University's EO data were reviewed. In February 2024, 56.0% of staff were 'Married or in a Civil Partnership', a decrease of 6.0% compared to 2019.

In AY 2023 - 2024, 63.8% of students were 'Single', a 14.6% decrease compared with AY 2018 - 2019.

Sexual Orientation

The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2024, 74.0% of staff were 'Heterosexual'; 4.3% were 'LGBT+' and 21.4% were 'Not Known'.

Although we collect student data on sexual orientation, this is not considered to be reliable.

Men and Women generally

The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2024, 58.0% of staff were 'Female'. This indicates a 2.0% increase in female staff compared with 2019.

In AY 2023 - 2024, 61.2% of students were 'Female', a 4.3% increase compared with AY 2018 - 2019.

Disability

The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2024, 6.0% of staff declared a disability, an increase of 1.2% compared with 2019.

In AY 2023 - 2024, 8.4% of students declared a disability, an decrease of 2.0% compared with AY 2018 - 2019.

Our disability declaration rate is lower than expected, compared with the local population. The NI Census (2021) found that 24% of the NI population stated that their day-to-day activities were limited because of a long-standing health problem or disability.

Dependants

The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2024, 43.8% of staff had dependants. This indicates a decrease of 3.9% compared with 2019.

In AY 2023 - 2024, 11.4% of students declared they had dependants, a decrease of 4.6% compared to AY 2018 - 2019.

Needs, experience and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy or decision?

Religious Belief

The Medical Research Council Principles require that: Samples of human biological material should be treated as donations* and research involving these samples should be conducted with respect and transparency. The human body and its parts should be treated with respect, and before approaching potential donors, researchers should be aware there may be individual, cultural or religious differences in the meaning and significance attached to the body or specific parts of it.

Political Opinion

None identified. The Human Tissue Act upholds the rights of individuals who submit human tissue for research, irrespective of any Section 75 characteristics. Consent is required for the procurement of relevant material from living volunteers which may be specific to some of the Section 75 characteristics however every study must be ethically considered.

Racial Group

The Medical Research Council Principles require that: Samples of human biological material should be treated as donations* and research involving these samples should be conducted with respect and transparency. The human body and its parts should be treated with respect, and before approaching potential donors, researchers should be aware there may be individual, cultural or religious differences in the meaning and significance attached to the body or specific parts of it.

Age

This policy will have no effect on university staff or students aged over 18. Any students aged under 18 might need to receive parental consent to participate in human tissue studies. In the wider community, obtaining consent from those under 18 or those who have cognitive impairment due to age or other factors will need consideration.

The policy specifies that different procedures apply in respect of obtaining consent from adults (particularly vulnerable adults), children, and people with learning disabilities. Studies that involve researchers working alone with vulnerable adults or

children require the individual researchers to be assessed under the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003.

Marital Status

None identified

Sexual Orientation

None identified

Men and Women generally

None identified

Disability

Disability is not relevant to this policy in most circumstances, although there will be cases when staff and students working with human material will require access arrangements to be made. In terms of research participants, the policy does not differentiate, but access arrangements might be required in terms of consent, sampling and other processes.

The policy specifies that different procedures apply in respect of obtaining consent from adults (particularly vulnerable adults), children, and people with learning disabilities. Studies that involve researchers working alone with vulnerable adults or children require the individual researchers to be assessed under the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003.

Dependants

The policy specifies that different procedures apply in respect of obtaining consent from adults (particularly vulnerable adults), children, and people with learning disabilities. Studies that involve researchers working alone with vulnerable adults or children require the individual researchers to be assessed under the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003.

Consultation

Consultation with relevant groups, organisations or individuals about the policy can provide useful information about issues or opportunities which are specifically related to them (that is evidence to inform the policy).

Please indicate whether you carried out or intend to carry out any consultation exercises prior to equality screening?

Yes. The following were consulted in the review of this policy:

- Human Tissue Act Working Group
- University Research Ethics Committee
- Research and Innovation Committee
- Senate

Part 2: Screening questions

Introduction

The answers to the following screening questions will assist the University in making a decision whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment on the policy. The following information is provided to help you to identify and comment on the level of likely impact of the policy in question 1 to 4.

Select 'major' impact if:

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there are insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

Select 'minor' impact if:

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunities for particular groups of disadvantaged people;

- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations;
- e) Differential impact observed and opportunities exist to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Select 'none' if:

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations;
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations.

Taking into account the evidence presented in Part 1, please complete the screening questions (Question 1 to 4).

Screening questions

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 categories?

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious Belief**

The policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this category; it is purely technical in nature.

What is the level of impact?

None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**

The policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this category; it is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact

None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**

The policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this category; it is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact

None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age**

The policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this category; it is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact

None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status**

The policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this category; it is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact
None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation**

The policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this category; it is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact
None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women generally**

The policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this category; it is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact
None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability**

The policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this category; it is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact
None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants**

The policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this category; it is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact
None

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories?

Religious Belief

No. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity.

Political Opinion

No. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity.

Racial Group

No. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity.

Age

No. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity.

Marital Status

No. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity.

Sexual Orientation

No. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity.

Men and Women generally

No. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity.

Disability

No. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity.

Dependants

No. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity.

3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Religious Belief

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious Belief**

This policy is unlikely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief. The policy is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact

None

Political Opinion

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**

This policy is unlikely to impact on good relations between people of different political opinion. The policy is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact

None

Racial Group

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**

This policy is unlikely to impact on good relations between people of different racial groups. The policy is purely technical in nature.

Level of impact

None

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Religious Belief

No, the policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on good relations.

Political Opinion

No, the policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on good relations.

Racial Group

No, the policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on good relations.

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

5. Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy or decision on people with multiple identities? (For example, disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men, and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

No

Please specify the relevant Section 75 categories concerned below.
Provide details of the policy impact and data which describes the policy impact.

The Human Tissue Act upholds the rights of individuals who submit human tissue for research, irrespective of any Section 75 characteristics. Some research may have evidence of higher or lower participation or uptake by Section 75 characteristics, however every study must be ethically considered.

Disability Duties

6. Does the policy provide an opportunity to encourage disabled people to participate in University life?

No. This policy is a technical document to ensure compliance with the University's Human Tissue Act licence to store human samples for research purposes.

7. Does the policy provide an opportunity to promote attitudes towards disabled people?

No. This policy is a technical document to ensure compliance with the University's Human Tissue Act licence to store human samples for research purposes.

Part 3: Screening decision

Based on the evidence considered and outlined in Part 1 and the responses to the screening questions (Part 2), please indicate the screening decision for this policy.

Note: The University should take particular care not to screen out policies that have a procurement aspect if there is potential to promote equality of opportunity through the procurement of services.

- ☐ **Screen in** the policy (that is, subject to an Equality Impact Assessment). The likely impact is **major** in respect of one, or more of the equality of opportunity or good relations categories.
- ☒ **Screen out** the policy without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted (that is, **no** Equality Impact Assessment). The likely impact is **none** in respect of all of equality of opportunity or good relations categories.
- ☐ **Screen out** the policy and **mitigate the impacts on equality by amending or changing the policy**, or by **developing an alternative policy or action** (that is, **no** Equality Impact Assessment). The likely impact is **minor** in respect of one or more of the equality of opportunity or good relations categories.

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment (that is, 'screen in' the policy), please provide details of the reasons.

Not applicable

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment (that is, 'screen out' the policy), please provide details for the reasons.

This policy is a technical document to ensure compliance the University's Human Tissue Act licence to store human samples for research purposes.

In line with the University Policy Framework, this Policy will be formally reviewed in a maximum of five years, but may require revision sooner should any changes in legislation be implemented.

Impact on equality of opportunity and good relations will be reviewed two years after the policy is implemented, in line with the University's Equality Scheme.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment (that is, 'screen out' the policy), and mitigate the impacts on equality of opportunity by amending or changing the policy, or by developing an alternative policy or action, please provide reasons to support your decision, together with the proposed changes, amendments or alternative policy.

Not applicable

Timetabling and prioritising

If the policy had been '**screened in**' for an equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority rating for timetabling the equality impact assessment in terms of effect on equality of opportunity and good relations:

Not applicable

Priority rating for timetabling the equality impact assessment in terms of social need

Not applicable

Priority rating for timetabling the equality impact assessment in terms of effect on people's daily lives

Not applicable

Priority rating for timetabling the equality impact assessment in terms of relevance to the University's functions

Not applicable

Note: The Total Rating Score will be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the University in timetabling. Details of the University's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable will be included in its quarterly Screening Reports.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

Not applicable

If yes, please provide details.

Please insert text below

Approval and authorisation

Screened by: 
Position or Job Title: PVC Research
Date screened: 4 June 2025

Approved by: 
Position or Job Title: Chief People Officer
Date approved: 11 June 2025

Review

This policy is due for review (in terms of its impact on equality of opportunity and good relations) by the policy owner on: 11 June 2027