

## **IEA Code of Ethics for Members of the Irish Economic Association**

### **Background:**

Donal asked us (Carol, Adele and Orla) to explore the possibility of developing a ‘code of ethics for economists’. We first collated a number of codes of ethics from different disciplines including engineering, psychology, evaluation, and statistics. In searching for an economics specific template, we found that neither the American Economic Association nor the European Economics Association have a code of ethics. This led us to question why and whether the IEA adopt one and why the other main associations in our field have not. To help us address this question we drew up a list of the pros and cons of having a code of ethics for economists.

### **Pros:**

- 1) To facilitate interdisciplinary work – increasing economists are working with professionals from other disciplines such as psychology and medicine who operate under a codes of ethics, so it would be useful to point to our code of ethics when conducting such interdisciplinary research.
- 2) Funding agencies are increasing requesting projects to demonstrate their ethical issues - therefore having a code of ethics to point to would be useful in this regard.
- 3) Impact on society and policy – our research is often used to justify policy decisions. Therefore it is imperative that we ensure our results are correct, and that the level of confidence we have in our results is clearly articulated and understood by the users of our research. Hence, the code of ethics may help to increase transparency about our results.

### **Cons:**

- 1) The prescriptive nature of a code of ethics document. In working through the various code of ethics documents we found, we were struck by their prescriptive nature in many instances. Does the IEA want to be so prescriptive to their members?
- 2) Enforcement of the code of ethics. If a code of ethics is to be worthwhile it has to be enforced, but can the IEA, and the Council in particular, actually enforce the code of ethics? For example, if one of our members falsifies their data yet they have signed up to our code of ethics, can we be held responsible or how would the Council reprimand them?

### **Compromise:**

One potential solution is to develop a ‘Guiding Principles for Members of the Irish Economic Association’ rather than a ‘Code of Ethics’. This guiding principles document would solve any concerns about the prescriptive nature of a code of ethics, while also addressing the enforcement issue (i.e. there would be none), however it would give members a guide which they could use if desired. A draft version of this Guiding Principles document is below for review. Note that it only includes the high level headings at this stage. These will be further developed following consultation with the Council.

# **Guiding Principles for Members of the Irish Economics Association Members<sup>1</sup>**

## **I. Professionalism**

Members shall be guided in all their work by the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Members shall be responsible for seeking and for stating the truth as they see it. To this end, Members shall devote their energies to developing and improving their scholarly competence.

Members shall practice within the limits of their competence and only when qualified by education or experience in the specific technical field involved.

Members shall deplore all types of professional misconduct, not just plagiarism and data fabrication or falsification.

Members shall not be influenced in their professional duties by conflicting interests.

Members shall disclose any material roles or relationships that might pose a real or apparent conflict of interest.

## **II. Responsibilities in Publications**

Members shall be objective and truthful in professional reports, papers, statements, or testimony.

Members shall respect and acknowledge the contributions and intellectual property of others.

Members shall maintain personal responsibility for all work bearing their name; avoid undertaking work or coauthoring publications for which they would not want to acknowledge responsibility. Conversely, accept appropriate authorship or acknowledgment for professional contributions to research and the resulting publications or testimony.

## **III. Responsibilities to Research Participants**

Members shall protect the privacy and confidentiality of research subjects and data concerning them, whether obtained directly from the subjects, other persons, or administrative records. Anticipate secondary and indirect uses of the data when obtaining approvals from research subjects; obtain approvals appropriate for peer review and independent replication of analyses.

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<sup>1</sup> These have been adapted from 'Ethical Guidelines for Statistical Practice' Prepared by the American Statistical Association Committee on Professional Ethics; 'Creating Humble Economists: A code of Ethics for Economists' by David Colander, Middlebury Economics Working Paper 11-03 (2011).

Members shall know about and adhere to appropriate rules for the protection of human subjects, including particularly vulnerable or other special populations that may be subject to special risks or may not be fully able to protect their own interests.

Members shall avoid excessive risk to research subjects and excessive imposition on their time and privacy.

Members shall be aware of legal limitations on privacy and confidentiality assurances.

Members shall before participating in a study involving human beings or organisations, analysing data from such a study, or accepting resulting manuscripts for review, consider whether appropriate research subject approvals were obtained.

#### **IV. Responsibilities to Employers, Colleagues, & Funders**

Members shall have obligations that derive from common membership in the community of scholars.

Members shall be willing to help strengthen the work of others through appropriate peer review.

Members shall, in the exchange of criticism and ideas, show due respect for the opinions of others.

Members shall observe the stated regulations of their institutions, provided the regulations do not contravene academic freedom.

Members shall guard any confidential information of employers or funders.

Members shall fulfil all commitments of funders and accept full responsibility for their professional performance.

Members shall inform colleagues from other disciplines about relevant aspects of ethics within economics.

Members shall respect the ethical obligations of members of other disciplines, as well as their own.

#### **V. Responsibilities to Students**

Members shall instill in students an appreciation for the practical value of the concepts and methods they are learning.

Members shall encourage the free pursuit of learning in their students.

Members shall demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to their proper role as intellectual guides.

Members shall make every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct and to ensure that their evaluations of students reflect each student's true merit.

Members shall respect the confidential nature of the relationship between professor and student.

## **VI. Responsibilities to the Public**

Members shall strive to serve the public interest.

Members are encouraged to extend public knowledge and appreciation of economics and its achievements.

Members shall make new economic knowledge widely available in order to benefit society at large.