DCU
Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

School of Computing
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FORM FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF A RESEARCH PROJECT INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS WHICH IS IN THE CATEGORY OF NOTIFICATION ONLY

There are 3 generally accepted levels of ethical review for projects carried out in a University or similar setting. These are notification only, expediated and full committee.

This notification only level of review is to approve relatively low-risk research involving human participants, primarily using social science methodologies in which any personal information collected is not of a sensitive nature. The School of Computing Research Ethics Committee has been delegated responsibility by the University to approve ethics submissions from undergraduate and taught Masters projects only, which are in the category of notification only.

Examples of projects in this category include:

- Anonymous surveys in which the topic itself is not likely to elicit significant difficulties for the participants, such as: anonymous internet surveys (e.g. Survey Monkey), street questioning.
- Observation (without audio or visual recording) of public settings where privacy would not normally be expected, such as observing people on streets or at sports events.
- Research carrying no risks beyond those of everyday life (as experienced by the intended participant population), such as asking people's opinions about products or services; asking students about educational experiences; monitoring the impact of daily activities.
- Interviews with public figures, professionals or others in their professional capacity regarding their professional activities.
- Analysis of data (e.g. health records) which have had all identifying information removed by the data holder and been provided to the researcher in accordance with data protection legislation.
- Collection of biological samples which are anonymised and do not require invasive techniques (e.g. hair, nails).

If your project is using data from a public repository like Kaggle or is not generating or using any form of personal data then you do not need research ethics approval, you do not need to complete and to submit this form and your project supervisor should indicate this on the project dashboard.

If your project involves collecting or processing personal data which is of a personal nature, you must first complete the DCU online Data Protection training course and review the "Data Protection – Key Points for DCU Researchers" guidance from the Data Protection Unit to assist you in meeting your legal obligations under GDPR and associated Irish law.

Once you have completed this form (if you need to) you should save it as a PDF file, not WORD, and upload it to the your project dashboard before you start gathering data. It will then be read and assessed by two members of the committee and once two members of the committee approve your submission you will be automatically notified by email and your project can start data gathering.

There are strict deadlines for submitting this form for each class group, undergraduate and taught Masters by which your submission must be made and you will be informed of these deadlines by your course board chair or project co-ordinator. If you do not submit by these deadlines then the research ethics committee is not obliged to approve your submission and when that happens and your project is assessed and graded at the end of the year, you will be awarded 0 for that component of your project.

SECTION 1 – GENERAL DETAILS

1.1 Project Title

Noted

1.2 Applicant Details

Name	Student or Supervisor	E-mail
Kaushal Sambhe	Student	kaushal.sambhe2@mail.dcu.ie
Ali Ahmad	Student	ali.ahmad5@mail.dcu.ie
Stephen Blott	Supervisor	stephen.blott@dcu.ie

Other Investigators: *Including any external to DCU*

Name	School/Unit/External Institution	E-mail

1.3 Key Project Dates

Proposed start date for data collection	Proposed end date for data collection	Proposed project completion date
05/02/2025	12/02/2025	21/02/2025

1.4 Please indicate which academic award

Undergraduate ☑	Taught Masters ☐

1.5 Please confirm the location(s) where the research will be carried out

If research will be carried out abroad, you will need to address the ethical challenges raised by this in Section 3 of your application - consult the Conducting Research Abroad document in the Ethics Resources and Guidelines section of the DCU Research Ethics webpage).

Research will be carried out in Glasnevin Campus, Dublin City University

1.6 Please state what additional permissions may be required to access participants.

Specify from whom the permission is required (e.g. a school Board of Management), and when their written approval will be obtained

N/A

SECTION 2 – PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Overview - Please respect the indicated word counts in the following sections and explain all acronyms in full text the first time they appear.

2.1 Provide a brief description of the research (max 250 words):
Please use lay language, include the scientific/theoretical background of study and a justification as to why this research project should proceed in that context

We are creating a note-taking application called *Noted*, offering both a web interface and a command-line interface (CLI). The platform supports Markdown formatting, includes version control for tracking changes, and uses end-to-end encryption to protect sensitive data.

Our study will involve user testing to evaluate *Noted*'s usability, security, and overall effectiveness. Participants from different technical backgrounds will test both the web interface and the CLI, providing feedback through questionnaires or interviews. This feedback will guide improvements to the platform, ensuring it remains accessible to beginners while still meeting the needs of advanced users.

2.2 Please state the aims and objectives of the project (max 200 words)

The aim of the Noted project is to create a note-taking application that seamlessly works across both a web interface and a command-line interface (CLI). By providing a single platform for organizing notes, it addresses the needs of users who prefer terminal-based workflows as well as those who want a more visual, web-based interface. Users will be able to track changes and revert to previous versions of their notes, inspired by the functionality of Git. Notes will be protected with end-to-end encryption, maintaining privacy and preventing unauthorized access. They will also be able to upload images regardless of platform and be able to preview how their markdown note looks like.

2.3 Please confirm your methods of data collection:
Tick all relevant check boxes and provide details for each one, including any devices used to collect data, and whether the data will be anonymous, potentially identifiable or identifiable <u>at point of collection</u>

Method	Describe briefly
☐ Interviews or focus groups	
☑ Surveys/questionnaires	Anonymous online survey to gather user feedback. Data wil be collected on phone
☐ Audio/video recordings	
☐ Public observations	
☐ Persons in public office	
☐ Using existing data (incl. secondary data)	
☐ Using human derived material (biological samples)	
☐ Standard tests (educational/personality etc.)	

☐ Standard educational practices	
☐ Other (please specify)	

2.4 Please confirm who the participants on this study will be, including group size and composition:
Include associated demographic characteristics, and state how your proposed sample size was determined (e.g. power analysis)

We plan to recruit a group of 5–7 participants who are all over the age of 18, from DCU. They will test both the web interface and the command-line interface (CLI). By involving participants with varying levels of technical experience, we will monitor how inexperienced individuals react to operating a CLI, while still collecting feedback from those who may already be comfortable with command-line tools. This group size is small enough to manage within our resources and time but large enough to generate useful information.

2.5 Please outline your recruitment process, including where you are sourcing participants from and your criteria for inclusion/exclusion:
Where gatekeepers are involved, outline the procedures relating to their involvement

We will recruit participants in person on campus by approaching DCU students over the age of 18 and inviting them to take part in the study. They must be willing to provide feedback.

2.6 Addressing participant vulnerability – if your participants fall into any of the following categories, please check the relevant tick box/boxes and state below what special arrangements will be made to protect them:
If your participants are not in any of these categories, tick N/A

☑ N/A
☐ Children under 18 years of age
☐ Persons in unequal relationships with the researcher *(e.g. lecturer-student, therapist-client, employer-employee)*
☐ People with a recognised or diagnosed intellectual, physical or mental impairment
☐ People confined to institutions *(e.g. prisoners, residents in 24 hr nursing facilities)*
☐ People who have undergone traumatic or adverse emotional events
☐ People with diminished cognitive ability
☐ Marginalised sections of society
☐ Other (please specify)
Special arrangements:

2.7 Involvement of children under 18 years of age – if your participants are in this category, please confirm compliance with the following:
If your participants are not in this category, tick N/A

☑ N/A
☐ We confirm that we have read and agree to act in accordance with the DCU Child Protection policy and procedures (*as per the DCU Child Protection Unit webpage*)
☐ We confirm that we have put in place safeguards for the children participating in the research
☐ We confirm that we have supports in place for children who may disclose current or historical abuse (whether or not this is the focus of the research)
☐ We confirm that all requirements will be met prior to commencing the research *(e.g. TUSLA Children First Training completed, Garda Vetting in place)*

2.8 Please confirm how the results of the research will be disseminated:
Include a statement on whether the participants will be provided with any information as to the findings or outcomes of the project

The findings will be included in our final documentation. The findings may also be used in improving Noted. The participants will not be provided with any information as to the findings and outcomes of the project.

SECTION 3 – ETHICAL ISSUES AND RISK MANAGEMENT

3.1 Please identify all issues including ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research. What are the potential risks to participants, and how will those risks be addressed or minimised?
Potential risks can be physical, psychological, social, legal, etc. Please include details of any additional support being provided for participants during/after the study

N/A

3.2 Please identify the potential benefits (direct and/or indirect) to those participating in this research:
Potential benefits should outweigh the potential risks to participants

Users will be introduced to a user-friendly Markdown-based note-taking app for both terminal and web usage. They will also benefit by helping shape Noted to better suit their needs.

3.3 Please describe what measures/protocols you have put in place in the event that there are any unexpected outcomes or adverse effects to participants arising from involvement in the research:

If participants experience difficulties, the researchers will be contactable at all times.

3.4 Do you intend to provide payment or incentives to participants?

Yes ☐	No ☑

If Yes, please consult the REC Guidelines on the Use of Compensation and Incentives (in the Ethics Resources and Guidelines section of the DCU Research Ethics webpage) before providing additional details below

3.5 Does this research raise any potential risks for the researchers themselves?
Please consider the location/environment where the research is being conducted, exposure to distressing data content etc.

Yes ☐	No ☑

If Yes, please describe further and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place to minimise these risks to researchers:

3.6 Does this research raise any potential conflict of interest?
Please consider any potential real or perceived conflicts of interest that might influence the integrity of the research, or give rise to bias in conducting and reporting the research, or affecting publication (consult the DCU Conflict of Interest Policy for assistance)

Yes ☐	No ☑

If Yes, please identify and explain the steps being taken to address that conflict:

3.7 Please describe how the conduct of the research will be monitored:
Regular oversight by the PI is required to ensure the project conforms to the procedures set out in this application (especially where several people are involved in carrying out the research procedures)

Kaushal Sambhe and Ali Ahmad will regularly update their supervisor on their progress and ensure that the project aligns with the procedures outlined in this application. Any challenges or necessary adjustments will be discussed with him as needed.

SECTION 4 – CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA MANAGEMENT

4.1 Considering your previous response in section 2.3 of the form on data collection, please confirm whether you are collecting or processing personal data in this research project:
Personal data is any information about a living person, where that person is either identified, or could be identified from the data itself, or when it is combined with other data. This includes paper based, electronic and biological samples data. If your data is fully and completely anonymous, it is not personal data.

Yes ☐	No ☑

If Yes, please confirm your compliance with the following by ticking the checkboxes:

☐ We confirm that we have completed the DCU Data Protection training module on Loop.
☐ We confirm that we have read the "Data Protection – Key Points for DCU Researchers" guidance on the DCU Data Protection Unit (DPU) website and agree to protect and manage our data in accordance with same.
☐ We have assessed the degree of risk inherent in the personal data being used in the research project, and confirm that all DPU GDPR requirements have been met prior to submitting this application *(e.g. completion of Data Protection questionnaire, confirmation that any survey tool being used is GDPR compliant, that required Data Processing or Sharing Agreements will be in place, etc.)*

4.2 Data access – please confirm whether access to participant data is confined to the investigators named on this application:

Yes ☑	No ☐

If No, please name who the other individuals are and why they need access. Any proposed transfer of data (including outside of the EU) should be detailed here.

4.3 Data storage – please confirm compliance with the following:

☑ Data collected on mobile devices will be protected with a strong password/passphrase at a minimum, and/or encrypted if the device supports it
☑ Data will be removed from mobile devices as soon as is practicable and stored in a secured location in DCU (on server or institutional Google Drive)
☑ Paper based data will be held securely in locked cabinets in DCU, with access restricted to the named researchers
Specific arrangements in relation to biological samples should be stated here:
Any exemptions to the above compliance statements should be justified here:

4.4 Please confirm who will be responsible for the secure storage of data generated by the research:

Name the relevant DCU investigator/s

Both Kaushal Sambhe and Ali Ahmad will be responsible for the secure storage of data generated by our research

4.5 Please confirm how long the data will be held for:

For personal data, consult section 15: Retention of Personal Data in the "Data Protection – Key Points for DCU Researchers" guidance on the DCU Data Protection Unit (DPU) website

The data will be held until March 1st 2025

4.6 Please confirm what will happen to the data collected at the end of the study:

Please tick the relevant checkbox and complete the associated follow-up section for that category

Archived ☐	Destroyed ☑	Other ☐

4.6.1 Archived data

Please provide the following details:

Name the DCU staff member responsible for archival and future use of data	
Confirm whether the data will be made available to other researchers, and if so, how?	
Confirm how the data will be prepared for archive (e.g. will datasets be anonymised)	
Confirm where the data will be archived and who will be allowed to access it	

4.6.2 Destroyed data

Please provide the following details – Note: for student projects, the supervisor must take responsibility for data destruction if there is no guarantee the student will have access to the data at the time of destruction

Please justify why the data will be destroyed	*Kaushal Sambhe and Ali Ahmad will have no further use of the data*
Name the DCU researcher responsible for destruction of data	*Kaushal Sambhe*
Confirm when the data will be destroyed (specify date)	*1/03/2025*
Confirm compliance with the following destruction methods (tick relevant boxes)	☑ Electronic data will be overwritten/securely deleted ☑ Paper based data will be confidentially shredded ☑ Medical samples will be disposed in accordance with the relevant DCU approved SOP

4.6.2 Other - Please explain what will happen to the data if not being archived or destroyed:

SECTION 5 – PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT PROCEDURES

In addition to completing this form you are required to attach, within the single PDF that you submit, a copy of (1) the Participation Information Sheet which you share with your participants and (2) a copy of the Informed Consent Form which your participants sign.

5.1 Please confirm that the following items have been addressed in your Participant Information Sheet which should be shared with all participants whether it involves online or in-person data gathering:

The items below should be used as headings in your information sheet. Note the language used under each item must reflect the participant age group and corresponding comprehension level– if your participants have different comprehension levels (e.g. both adult and child participants) then separate sheets must be prepared for each set. Templates are available via the REC Forms - Applications, Templates and Amendments section of the Research Ethics website.

Checklist – tick the relevant check box for each item	Yes	No
Introductory Statement (Researcher names and titles, school, title of the research study)	☑	☐
What is this research about?	☑	☐
Why is this research being conducted?	☑	☐
Why have you been invited to take part?	☑	☐
What will happen if you decide to take part in this research study?	☑	☐
How will your data be used?	☑	☐
How will your privacy be protected (including any legal limits to confidentiality)?	☑	☐
What are the benefits of taking part in this research study?	☑	☐
What are the risks of taking part in this research study?	☑	☐
Can you change your mind at any stage and withdraw from this study?	☑	☐
How will you find out what happens with this project?	☑	☐
Contact details for further information	☑	☐

If you marked any item as No, please explain and justify why:

5.2 Informed Consent Procedures – please confirm whether written consent is to be obtained:

Please tick the relevant checkbox

Yes ☑	No ☐

If Yes, describe the procedures by which written consent will be obtained. If you are involving child participants, you will also need to obtain their written assent. Templates are available via the REC Forms - Applications, Templates and Amendments section of the Research Ethics website.

Consent will be collected through a digital informed consent form.

If No, describe the procedures regarding how consent/assent will be obtained:

If you are gathering data from an online process such as Google Form or SurveyMonkey then you should use a page such as the one below, to capture participants' informed consent and your data gathering should not proceed until participants have completed this form with the appropriate answers.

Participant – please complete the following (by clicking Yes/No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me) *

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

I understand the information provided *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

I understand the information provided in relation to data protection *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

I understand I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

I have read and understand the arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

I have read and understand confirmations relating to any other relevant information as indicated in the PLS *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

I consent to participate in this research study *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

SECTION 6 – SUBMISSION CHECKLIST AND RESEARCHER DECLARATION

6.1 Please confirm all required supplementary documentation to be included in this application within Section 7:

Checklist – tick the relevant check box for each item	Yes	N/A
Participant Information Sheet/s	☑	
Informed Consent Form/s	☑	☐
Informed Assent Form/s	☐	☑
Recruitment Advertisement	☐	☑
Questionnaire/Survey	☑	☐
Interview/Focus Group Questions	☐	☑
Debriefing Material	☐	☑
Bibliography	☐	☑
Approval from another Research Ethics Committee	☐	☑
Evidence of other external approvals (e.g. Board of Management letter)	☐	☑
Evidence of internal approvals (e.g. BSC approval review letter)	☐	☑
Other – provide details here:	☐	☑

6.2 Signed Declaration

By submitting this form, the applicant (and supervisor) agree to the following:

The information contained herein is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate. I have read the University's current research ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures set out in the attached application in accordance with the form guidelines, the REC guidance and resources, the University's Conflict of Interest Policy, its Code of Good Research Practice and any other condition laid down by the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants.

I also acknowledge my requirement to be informed as to other duties and legal obligations applying to my research, and to comply with these duties and obligations – this includes being informed about DCU Data Protection guidelines for researchers, DCU Child Protection policy and procedures (where relevant) and DCU Insurance requirements.

I and my co-investigators and/or supporting staff have the appropriate qualifications, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in the attached application and to deal with any emergencies and contingencies related to the research that may arise. Research will not commence until required consents and approvals are in place.

Electronic Signature(s):

Supervisor: **Stephen Blott**

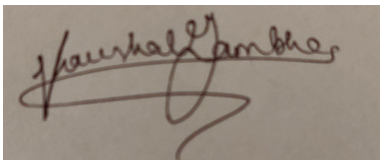
Print Name here: **PP Stephen Blott (w/permission)**

Date: 13/02/2025

Student(s) signature(s): 

Print Name(s) here: Ali Ahmad

Date: 12/02/2025

Student(s)signature(s): 

Print Name(s) here: Kaushal Sambhe

Date: 12/02/2025

SECTION 7 – SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTATION

Please attach all required documentation as confirmed by you in the previous section. The application should then be saved as one file in PDF format before submission via the project dashboard.

Informed Consent Form for Participation in the Noted Research Study

Title of Study: Noted - A Secure Markdown-Based Note-Taking Application

Researcher(s):
Ali Ahmad
Kaushal Sambhe

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1. Purpose of the Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study about the Noted application, a tool designed to improve the way people manage and organize their notes. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the functionality and performance of the app, with a focus on its features such as version control, and end-to-end encryption.

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2. What Will Happen if You Take Part in This Study?

By agreeing to participate, you will be using the Noted application to manage and organize your notes for a set period. We will observe how the app works and ensure that its features, such as version control function as expected. You will be asked to provide feedback via a questionnaire, and your usage of the app will help us assess its effectiveness.

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3. Risks and Benefits

- **Risks:** There are no significant risks associated with participating in this study. We will use end-to-end encryption to protect your notes and personal details. We will never have access or be able to see the contents of your notes.
- **Benefits:** While you may not directly benefit from participating in this study, your use of the app will contribute to the improvement of the Noted application.

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4. Confidentiality

All data collected during this study will remain confidential. Your personal information will be protected by encryption, and any notes or data you input into the app will not be shared without your consent. Data will be used solely for research purposes.

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5. Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be deleted.

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6. Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the researchers:

- **Ali Ahmad:** ali.ahmad5@mail.dcu.ie
- **Kaushal Sambhe:** kaushal.sambhe2@mail.dcu.ie

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7. Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you understand the information provided above and that you agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name: _____
Signature: _____
Date: _____

Participant Information Sheet for Noted Project

Researcher Names and Titles:

- **Ali Ahmad** – Project Developer
- **Kaushal Sambhe** – Project Developer
- **Title of Research Study:** Noted – A Markdown-Based Note-Taking Application

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What is this research about?

This research involves developing and testing an application called Noted, designed to help people manage their notes in a Markdown format. The project is focused on creating an application that can be used both in the terminal and through a web interface.

Why is this research being conducted?

We are conducting this research to build a secure, efficient, and user-friendly note-taking available on the web and in the terminal through a Command Line Interface (CLI). The aim is to improve the way people manage and organize their notes, combining the simplicity of Markdown with advanced features like version control. Additionally, we are implementing end-to-end encryption to ensure the security and privacy of user notes and details, keeping sensitive data protected at all stages.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to participate because you are a potential user of the Noted application. We would like you to use the app so we can observe how its features work in practice and assess its functionality and use your feedback.

What will happen if you decide to take part in this research study?

If you choose to participate, you will use the Noted application either through the terminal or the web interface, depending on your preference. You may be asked to complete certain tasks using the application and provide feedback on its usability and features.

How will your data be used?

The data collected during this research will be used solely to improve the functionality and usability of the Noted application. This may include your feedback, any issues encountered while using the application, and your overall experience

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How will your privacy be protected (including any legal limits to confidentiality)?

Your privacy will be fully protected. Any data you provide will be kept anonymous and confidential. We will not collect personal information beyond what is required for using the application. No personal data will be shared with third parties, and all data will be stored securely.

What are the benefits of taking part in this research study?

By participating in this study, you will contribute to the development of a tool that may benefit other peoples in managing their notes more effectively. Your feedback will directly influence the improvement of the application.

What are the risks of taking part in this research study?

There are no significant risks associated with participating in this study. As the application is being tested in a controlled environment, any potential issues or bugs will be addressed promptly. However, participants should be aware that they may encounter occasional application errors.

Can you change your mind at any stage and withdraw from this study?

Yes, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. If you decide to stop participating, simply inform the researchers, and no further data will be collected.

How will you find out what happens with this project?

You will not be informed of any major updates to the project. However you will contribute to the development of a tool that will benefit others.

Contact details for further information:

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact us:

- **Ali Ahmad**: ali.ahmad5@mail.dcu.ie
- **Kaushal Sambhe**: kaushal.sambhe2@mail.dcu.ie

Link to Questionnaire
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScp-NAzmw_-hpYfGyZdij98w-KpshJfXKfiTCslPo31m9k4Fw/viewform?usp=header