



MSc Computing Project Research Proposal and Ethical Approval Guidance Document

As a requirement of this module, you need to complete your research proposal and ethical approval application. Both of these elements are submitted together, using the template form provided. To complete your research proposal and ethical approval application, please follow use the online form link available in the ***Research Proposal and Ethical Approval Submission*** unit of the module.

Please note that you cannot save the online form and will need to complete it in one sitting. You will only be provided with feedback on this submission element.

Your project proposal and ethical approval application will be considered by your supervisors. Should your proposal be rejected, and you need to make amendments to your proposal and application, you will be provided with feedback.

Please note that the word count for the full proposal including the ethical approval section is 4,000 words. The sections below will vary in the number of words depending on the nature of the proposed study. It is advised that you give sufficient detail of your methodological and ethical choices to give a clear picture of how you propose to conduct your study.

Section 1 Research Proposal

You may choose to breakdown the requirements of this section into key parts as described below. This section has a maximum word count of 2000 words.

1. Research Summary

Please provide a brief description of your proposed project and discuss your aims and objectives.



You will need to discuss your rationale for the project and its importance, focusing on your research question(s):

- What have you chosen to research?
- Why did you choose to research this topic (your rationale), why is it important?

Please note that research questions are not the same as your topic. The research question(s) should be specific and focussed on specific context, and your research questions will be answered by the analysis of the data you will collect in your dissertation. Remember to provide context to frame each question and demonstrate their relevance.

When identifying a research question, keep in mind the issues of access and confidentiality. Can you access the data sources you need to provide the information you require?

Please make sure that you number each research question consecutively.

Cyber Security programme: Please indicate the CyBOK category and associated Knowledge Area on which your research is based.

2. Methodology

- What research methods and procedures do you intend to use and why?
- How do your methods and procedures address your research questions?
- Do you foresee any problems, issues or limitations with your data collection or scope of study?

You need to justify your decisions and your approach and demonstrate that it is the most appropriate way to address your research questions. How will you collect your data and carry out your research or execute your project? What analysis are you intending to do with the data? Will you use quantitative or qualitative methods or both? Will there be any issues or challenges with your data collection methods or project execution?



3. Key literature

- Discuss some of the key literature you are intending to use. Include some of the key literature you have considered so far.
- The aim is not to include a complete reference list at this point, only a selection of key references at this point in time which you feel are relevant to the topic you will be researching.
- As part of your dissertation, you will write a wider literature review where you will expand on the selection of key and other texts, critically analysing the literature.
- Remember to use UoEO Harvard referencing throughout.

4. Human Participants

- Discuss how you intend to choose your participants.
- Where is the research going to take place?
- The purpose of this section is to outline your proposed sample group(s) and where the research is taking place (school, institution, online etc.) You should also describe how the sample group is selected or formulated, and why you are using this specific sample.

5. Timeline

A breakdown of your project into work packages is required. You should also include a Gantt chart or similar to show you plan to proceed with your project. Ensure you also include a description of the artefact(s) that will be produced by the end of the project.



Section 2 Ethical Approval

Use the following headings to describe and discuss how you intend to deal with ethical issues in relation to your research. You should consult the [university's ethical approval policy](#), the [university's ethics guidelines](#), and project module content to help you to do this. Acknowledge how you propose to address each issue if all or part of your research is going to take place online.

Please note that if your research involves another organisation (including a partner University), you will be required to produce a copy of permission to conduct your study within that organisation. You can use the consent form template provided in Appendix B. Please note that this consent must be provided on a letter headed paper, and clearly signed and dated by the person giving consent for the study to take place in the organisation. Their position in the organisation (job title) must also be present.

This section has a maximum word count of 2000 words.

1. Consent

- How do you intend to seek informed consent from participants?
- Please include within this a description of any information with which you intend to provide the subjects and a copy of a consent form used. You will find a sample information sheet and consent form in Appendix.

2. Right to withdraw

How do you intend to inform participants of their right to withdraw? How will you monitor if such requests are made?

3. Confidentiality

How do you intend to maintain confidentiality including how you propose to store data? Describe the procedures you intend to follow in order to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the subjects.



4. Harm

How do you intend to protect participants from harm? What are the potential risks to subjects? How do you propose to minimise any potential harm to subjects?

5. Data access, storage and security

What arrangements have you made to ensure that all personal data are stored and processed in compliance with GDPR?

6. Other issues

Identify any specific ethical issues relating to your research, for example if your research involves vulnerable groups like young children, or pupils who have SEND (special educational needs/disability).

Section 3 Risk Assessment

1. Ensure you have abided by any risk assessment procedures for the place where your research is going to take place including any health and safety inductions. Provide evidence in your application.
2. Note that some schools (especially in the UK) will not allow you to do research without DBS clearance (disclosure and barring service).
3. You will also need to provide additional permission if it involves children under the age of 18, vulnerable groups such as young adults, or 'participants whose capacity, age or other vulnerable circumstance may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to participate...' (BERA, 2018:15).

Section 4 Confirmation Statements



1. Acknowledge all statements.
2. Sign and date the form.

Attachments

You are required to attach the following documents to the online form:

1. An example of your participant information sheet and consent form, if applicable.
2. Consent document from the organisation your research is taking place, if applicable.



Appendix A: Sample Participant Information Sheet

7. Research project title

One consistent title should appear on all your research documents and be self-explanatory. All acronyms need to be written out in full.

8. Invitation

You need to explain why you are inviting your participant to take part in your research.

For example: You are being invited to take part in this research project. You have been chosen because you have a unique insight into the members of staff working for the University of Essex Online. Before you take part, it is important to ensure that you fully understand why the research is being undertaken and what is involved. Please take the time to read through the following information and ask any questions that you may have. Take time to decide if you would like to take part in this study.

9. What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of the study is very important. The purpose outlines and allows the participants to understand why the research is being undertaken. In the case of the dissertation, it may be that the primary purpose is educational, to fulfil the requirements of a degree. You may also like to inform the participant if your research is aiming to fill a knowledge gap in a certain topic area or to find out information that will help to design an intervention or develop a service.

10. Where and when will the research take place?

In this section you need to outline any information the participant may need to know about where and when they are expected to take part in the research. To answer this question, you will need to consider the following questions:

- How long will the participants be involved in the research?
- How often will they need to attend?
- How long will the questionnaire/interview take?



11. What will I have to do?

It is important that all participants understand what they are expected to do during your research. Put yourself in the shoes of the participants: what would you like to know? You could use a flow chart to demonstrate participant involvement and outline any specific requirements. If the study will involve participants being audio recorded/videoed/photographed, it is important to ensure that they are aware of this and that you cover any confidentiality issues.

You should set out simply the research methods you are using to undertake your research.

12. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Provide a clear outline of any benefits to the participants. If there are no direct or indirect benefits to the participant, you may wish to outline the intended benefits of the research.

13. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Outline any risks, discomforts or inconveniences to the participant in this section. For example, this section may include an outline of potential distress associated with research exploration of sensitive topics. Outline how you will provide support to participants with any regard to the risks e.g., debrief sheet including relevant support services.

14. Do I have to take part?

You should explain that the research is voluntary and that the participant can withdraw from the research at any time. Include information on how they would withdraw. If there is an option to skip any questions, they don't want to answer this should be included as well.

15. How will my personal data be kept confidential?

You should explain how participant's data will be safeguarded throughout and after the research has been completed. When writing this section, you may wish to consider:

- How the participants' data will be collected?
- How the data will be stored & protected?
- How the data will be used?
- Who will have access to the data?
- How long will the personal data be retained?



16. Will I receive a payment for taking part?

If payment, reimbursements, gifts or voucher are being provided to participants, please outline these.

17. What will happen if I do not want to continue with the study?

Please outline what will happen if the participant withdraws from the study. For example: If you withdraw from the study all of the information and data collected from you, to date, will be destroyed and your name removed from all the study files.

18. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

Provide an outline of any ethical permission that have been sought and approved for this project.

19. What will happen to the results of the research project?

Participants often want to know the results of the research they have been involved in. You should let the participants know what will happen to the results, where will they be published and how the results will be made available to them.

20. Further information and contact details

This section may include details of:

- General or specific information about the research (e.g., website address, contact details of the researcher & supervisor).
- Who the participants should approach if they are unhappy with the study (complaints procedure if not listed earlier).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.



Appendix B: Example consent form

When you have carefully considered how you propose to select your participants you will need to produce a

general letter of consent. It is advisable that you have considered the rights of the participants and the responsibilities of the researcher before starting to write the consent form, which may include the following:

- An opening paragraph to introduce the researcher and invite the participant to take part.
- A brief description of what the research is about.
- What the participant will be asked to do and the process of the research, including how the data is going to be collected.
- The time commitment for the participant.
- Details about any benefit to the participant in taking part.
- Details of what will happen to all personal data collected on the participant and reassurances of confidentiality and anonymity.
- A reminder to the participant of the researcher's responsibility to behave ethically at all times.
- What happens should a participant drop out of the research at any point – then they will be able to request the destruction of any data given by them up to that point.
- What the prospective participant needs to do next, for example the return of the form should they decide to participate.
- Include a form of consent information which can be signed by the participant(s).

An example of an outline of a consent form can be found below. You can use this as a template to gain consent from the persons in your study. You can also use this to gain consent from the organisation you work for or where the research is taking place in which case it must be produced on a letter headed paper and clearly signed and dated by the relevant person.



CONSENT INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PROJECT/DISSERTATION...:

I understand that this is a project... *(include a very brief description of the project)*.

There is no compulsion for me/my institution to take part in the research. If I chose not to take part, I will not be prejudiced in any way *(alter wording depending on the circumstances of the research)*.

If I do choose to take part, I may at any stage withdraw my involvement. If I choose to withdraw, this will not affect... *(adapt to particular research)*.

Any information given by me will be used solely for the purposes of this research, which may include publications. No individuals will be identified in the final publication.

Confidentiality will be respected by the researcher in relation to the information which I give.

I have read and understood the nature of my involvement in the project and agree to take part in it.

Signed: Print name:

Thank you.