

University of Westminster
University Research Ethics Committee

Application for Research Ethics

PART A

Section 1 – PROJECT AND APPLICANT DETAILS

1.1 **Project Title:** Requirement based academic matchmaking platform for academic institutes

1.2 Applicant Details

Name: TMTCB Thennakoon

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Faculty: IIT School of Computing

Please check the relevant box:

Undergraduate ☐

Postgraduate ☒

MPhil/PhD Student ☐

Staff ☐

I confirm I have read the *University's Code of Practice
Governing the Ethical Conduct of Research*

YES ☒

NO ☐

1.3 Supervisor/Dean of Faculty/Faculty Research Director details

Please note that all applicants with a supervisor(s) must ensure that the supervisor signs the declaration at the bottom of this page if completing Part A only or in **Section 10.3** if completing Part B

All **staff** must ensure that their Dean of Faculty, or Faculty Research Director (or nominee), as appropriate, signs the declaration at the bottom of this page if completing Part A only or in **Section 10.3** if completing Part B

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PART A (Continued)

Section 2 – Project Details

2.1 Please provide a description of the background with references to relevant literature (250 words maximum):

The academic sector in Sri Lanka includes both public and private universities, which together cater to a diverse student population. Public universities, predominantly funded by the government, are known for their rigorous admission processes and are highly competitive, admitting only the top-scoring students from national examinations. These universities hold high prestige, particularly in fields such as engineering, medicine, and law, and tend to focus on research and theory-based learning. However, their limited capacity means many qualified students cannot gain admission, leading them to private universities, which are gaining popularity for their accessibility and focus on fields like business and information technology. Private institutions, some of which are affiliated with international universities, offer alternative pathways for higher education but vary significantly in quality. Although some maintain robust academic standards, others struggle to deliver high-quality education consistently due to factors like resource limitations and regulatory challenges.

This project aims to bridge the gap between academic institutions and qualified lecturers by providing a specialized platform for efficient lecturer matching. Thereby, addressing recruitment challenges, improving teaching quality, and ensuring access to skilled professionals for enhanced education delivery.

2.2. Please provide a brief description and the aims of your study (250 words maximum):

Aim of this project is to research, design, develop, test and evaluate a platform that connects private academic institutions with qualified lecturing professionals from both academia and industry, with the goal of enhancing educational quality and reducing the workload on full-time lecturers in resource-constrained environments.

By creating a platform that connects institutions with skilled lecturers from both academia and industry, the research seeks to address these challenges by providing institutions with access to a broader network of qualified professionals. This platform has the potential to improve the delivery of course content, reduce the strain on full-time staff, and ultimately raise the standard of education. The research is motivated by the potential impact of such a tool in bridging the gap between academia and industry expertise, creating a more dynamic, sustainable, and effective educational ecosystem. Mentioned below are objectives.

- To identify the key qualities and competencies that academic institutions seek in lecturing professionals, including both academic and industry expertise.
- To analyze the current challenges faced by private academic institutions in sourcing and retaining qualified lecturers
- To incorporate features that address the needs of both academic institutions and qualified lecturing professionals.
- To design a platform that facilitates the connection between academic institutions and qualified lecturing professionals.
- To implement the platform with a robust subject to lecturer match making algorithm
- To test and de-bug the software platform to make it robust
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the developed platform in improving educational standards, reducing full-time-staff workload, and enhancing student satisfaction in academic institutions.

2.3. Please outline the design and methodology of your study (include details of the selection and recruitment of participants (if any) and details of any invasive (e.g. blood samples, inhalation/ingestion of food and/or non-food products (in abnormally higher or lower levels than normal or a different form), or intrusive (e.g. questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, etc.) procedures [attach extra information as necessary] (400 words maximum in total):

Questionnaires will be used in this project to gather detailed requirements from both academic institutions and lecturers. They allow for standardized data collection, providing insights into

the needs, challenges, and expectations of both parties. By capturing a wide range of responses, questionnaires will help in designing a platform that addresses the core issues faced by both groups. Here are five key points to include:

- **Lecturer Availability and Expertise:** Questions will focus on the types of subjects lecturers are available to teach, their qualifications, professional experience, and preferred working hours. This helps identify the pool of qualified professionals available for different academic disciplines.
- **Recruitment Challenges for Institutions:** Institutions will be asked about the difficulties they face in sourcing qualified lecturers, such as lack of expertise in specific subjects, limited availability, and the challenge of balancing full-time staff with industry-experienced professionals.
- **Platform Feature Expectations:** Both lecturers and institutions will be asked about their expectations from a platform, such as ease of use, filtering, searching, validating and payment methods.
- **Impact on Teaching Quality:** Questions will explore how lecturer workload and qualifications influence educational outcomes, and how a platform might help improve teaching quality.
- **Technological and Adoption Barriers:** The questionnaire will investigate potential obstacles in adopting the platform, such as technological limitations, concerns over usability, or reluctance from institutions or lecturers to engage with new systems.

Formal interviews will be an essential tool for gathering in-depth qualitative insights from both academic institutions and lecturers, providing a more nuanced understanding of their needs, challenges, and expectations. While questionnaires collect broad data, interviews offer the opportunity for open-ended discussions that can reveal complex issues and provide detailed context. Here are three key points to include in the interviews:

- **In-depth Challenges in Lecturer Recruitment:** Interviews with institutional administrators will explore the specific challenges they face in recruiting qualified lecturers, such as difficulty finding professionals with both academic credentials and industry experience.
- **Lecturer Workload and Impact on Quality:** Interviews with lecturers will focus on understanding their workload, including how overutilization affects their teaching quality and job satisfaction. This allows for identifying pain points that the platform can address, such as providing more flexible working arrangements or helping them balance teaching with industry commitments.
- **Platform Usability and Features:** Both lecturers and institutions will be asked about their expectations for the platform, delving into desired features like ease of scheduling, payment systems, communication tools, and customization options.

2.4. Timescales

Start Date (DD/MM/YY): 24/10/2024

Estimated duration of work: 6 months

Section 3 - RISK OF HARM				
<p>NOTE 1: Where indicated below applicants should check if the research will require ethical approval from a National Research Ethics Committee via the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) - nres.queries@nhs.net - http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/</p> <p>NOTE 2: The University of Westminster holds a Human Tissue Authority Licence – This licence is specifically for tissue stored at 115 New Cavendish Street in accordance with the terms of the licence – Advice must be obtained from the University Human Tissue Designated Individual (N.Presneau@westminster.ac.uk)</p>				
RISK OF HARM (to self, colleagues, participants, environment or animals)		Yes	No	N/A
1	Will any pain or more than mild discomfort result from the study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Could the study induce any psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive physical or psychological testing of human participants that may put someone at risk, e.g. use of treadmill?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Will the study involve raising sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, revelation of medical history, bereavement, illegal activities, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Does your work involve any "relevant material" containing human cells (e.g. blood, urine, saliva, body tissues but NOT established cell-lines) from living or deceased persons (Such work must take account of the Human Tissue Act)? – See Note 1 and 2 above.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Will DNA samples be taken from human participants (Such work must take account of the Human Tissue Act)? – See Note 1 and 2 above.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Does your study raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers or participants involved in the project (Especially relevant if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Does your study involve deliberately misleading the participants (e.g. deception, covert observation)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Does your work involve administration of a food or non-food substance of a different type from or in abnormally higher or lower amounts than normal or one that is known to cause allergic reaction(s) or potential psychological stress?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Does your study involve issues relating to personal and/or sensitive data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PARTICIPANTS (and/or their records/associated data)		Yes	No	N/A
Does your work involve any of the following:				
11	Human participants in a health and/or social care setting (e.g. patients, those attending day centres, community care, rehabilitation centres, etc., including in the NHS, other public, private and/or voluntary sectors)? – See Note 1 above.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Human participants who may be deemed vulnerable (e.g. children, people in poverty and/or with physiological or psychological impairments, persons attending rehabilitation centres, persons in easily identifiable positions that could be subject to victimisation, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Expectant or new mothers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Refugees/Asylum seekers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Minors (under the age of 18 years old)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	Participants in custody (e.g. prisoners or arrestees)? – See Note 1 above.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Participants with impaired mental capacity (e.g. severe mental illness, brain damage, sectioned under Mental Health Act, lowered or reduced sense of consciousness)? – See Note 1 above.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	Animals (or animal tissue).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS		Yes	No	N/A
19	Will you provide participants with a Participant Information Sheet prior to obtaining informed consent which can be taken away by the participant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Will you describe the procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	Will you obtain informed consent for participation (normally written)? OR in the case of using personal data previously acquired was consent given for the reuse of the data for other research purposes?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason without any impact on their care, service provision etc.?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	Will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated as confidential and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	Will you offer feedback to participants at the end of their participation, upon request (e.g. give them a brief explanation of the study and its outcomes)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	Has external funding or collaboration been applied for/received, which requires	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	institutional ethical consideration or approval?			
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Useful links:

- <http://www.screc.org.uk/> - Social Care Research Ethics Committee
- <http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/> - Human Research Authority decision tool to identify if research needs National Research Ethics Committee approval
- <http://www.nres.nhs.uk/applications/guidance/governance-and-directives/?entryid62=131341> – Governance Arrangements for Research Ethics Committees
- <http://www.nres.nhs.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allid=134016> - NRES algorithm “Does my project require review by a Research Ethics Committee”?
- <http://www.hta.gov.uk/policiesandcodesofpractice/codesofpractice.cfm> - Human Tissue Authority Code of Practice
- <http://www.hta.gov.uk> – Human Tissue Authority website
- http://www.rsclearn.mrc.ac.uk/MRC_HumanTissueAct/player.html - Medical Research Council online training course for Human Tissue Act.

What to do next:

- **If you have answered NO to questions 1-18 (inclusive) and YES to questions 19-25 (inclusive),** you do not need to complete the Full Research Ethics Approval Form (Part B). Please keep this form for your records, and do not submit to **Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC)** unless you require ethical consideration of your study, regardless of ethical implications, by an external body (question 26 has been answered YES). **A list of Faculty contacts is below.**
- **If you have answered YES to any of the questions 1-18 (inclusive) or NO to any of the questions 19-25** the Full Research Ethics Approval Form (Part B) **MUST** be submitted including Cover Sheet, Part A and Part B of the application form plus any required supplementary documents to the Secretary of the relevant Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC). **A list of Faculty contacts is below.**
- If you are applying for external Ethical Approval, please send a *copy* of the Conditions/Approvals letters to the **University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)** Secretary (this may include the original ethical application(s)). Where the external ethics committee/body has equal standing or primary jurisdiction, e.g. another University Research Ethics Committee or a National Research Ethics Committee, any approval will normally be received and noted by the University of Westminster Research Ethics Committee and further consideration may not be required. Where the external committee does not have equal or higher standing than the University Committee then the full ethical approval process at the university may still be required. Additional institutional compliance issues may need consideration by UREC.
- All Applications (dated, signed and authorised) and supplementary information or External Approvals should be sent to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) Secretary in *electronic format with a version number, document name and date and the Principal Investigator (or Undergraduate/Postgraduate Taught Student) name.* On receipt your application will be issued a unique reference number
- All new Applications should be submitted to a Research Ethics Committee (FREC or UREC) Secretary a minimum of 10 working days in advance of the Committee meeting date (earlier submission is recommended so that applications can be pre-vetted and obvious issues addressed before the application is considered by the Committee).

Contact details:

<u>Faculty</u>	<u>Chair</u>	<u>Secretary</u>
<u>Architecture and the Built Environment</u>	<u>Professor Nick Bailey</u>	<u>Colette Davis</u>
<u>Media Arts and Design</u>	<u>Dr Anthony McNicholas</u>	<u>Fauzia Ahmad</u>

<u>Faculty</u>	<u>Chair</u>	<u>Secretary</u>
<u>Science and Technology</u>	<u>Dr John Colwell</u>	<u>Mandy Walton</u>
<u>Science and Technology Psychology Department Sub Committee</u>	<u>Dr Laura Boubert</u>	<u>TBC</u>
<u>Social Sciences and Humanity</u>	<u>Professor Marco Roscini</u>	<u>Victoria Grey- Edwards</u>
<u>Westminster Business School</u>	<u>Petar Sudar</u>	<u>Haydn Worley</u>
<u>University Research Ethics Committee</u>	<u>Professor Graham Megson</u>	<u>Huzma Kelly</u>

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