THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Academic

Informed Consent

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This guidance should be read in conjunction with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and Procedures[1]

[1] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/resEthPolPro.pdf

1. Introduction

Informed consent is widely accepted as the cornerstone of ethical practice in research that involves human participants or personal data. It entails providing participants with clear information about the purpose of the study, what their participation will involve and how their data will be stored and used in the short and longer-term. The informed consent process should stress that participation is voluntary and can be ended at any point during the research.
There may be some circumstances where gaining informed consent is not possible - for instance, in the case of fieldwork or ethnography in some public or online spaces, or where the use of deception has been justified (see §10 below) - but in these cases the lack of informed consent should be specially argued.

2. Written or Verbal consent?

Written consent should be sought wherever possible, provided it is both appropriate and safe in the context in which the research is being conducted. Aside from generally being a better guarantee that participants have indeed given their consent, written consent also provides an auditable record that will prove useful in the event of a dispute or questions arising later regarding the use or storage of data. Research that proposes to use only verbal consent will need to justify why written consent is not appropriate for the study (see 'Verbal consent' below). Written consent does not necessarily require a hard copy or electronic signature - typed confirmation, e.g. in an email, is acceptable as constituting written consent.

For ***online surveys*** or other digital data collection, appropriate ways should be sought to ensure that participants *explicitly* signal their consent, usually by ticking an "I agree" box, or indicating Yes/No. (This is also a data protection requirement, and only where the participant has confirmed they agree should they be able to proceed to the survey.)

Researchers involved in collecting data from **social media** platforms or other internet-based sources should refer to appropriate guidance, for example our guidance **Using data from the internet and social media in research: ethics & consent**[2] and the LSE Social Media, Personal Data and Research Guidance[3]. Other suggested guidance includes the Association of Internet Researchers' ethics guidance[4], and the UKRIO resources on the ethics of social media research[5].

Verbal consent may be preferable where participants are not fully literate, or due to cultural norms around the signing of forms, and in some other specific circumstances (for example in the case of telephone surveys). It may (possibly) also be appropriate where the researcher has established close and continuing personal relationships with participants over long periods of time. Where participant observation is the primary method, researchers should carefully consider how they will present themselves and their research to potential study participants. In the case of interviews, the researcher should prepare for themseves a verbal consent script to ensure that the information regarding consent that they discuss with each participant is consistent. (A copy of the verbal consent script should be attached to the ethics review form. See the Appendix for an example template.) Wherever possible an

[2] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/research-and-innovation/research/Assets/Documents/PDF/ethics-Using-internet-and-Social-media-data-v8.pdf
[3] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Social-media-personal-data-and-research-guidance-v.1.pdf
[4] https://aoir.org/ethics/
[5] https://ukrio.org/ukrio-resources/ethical-issues-in-research-using-social-media/

audio recording of the verbal consent should normally be made (with the permission of the participant).

Whichever method is adopted, researchers must make every effort to ensure that participants are *genuinely* informed about the study and that they have freely consented to take part. Consideration should be given to the ways in which procedures for securing consent might need to be adapted over the course of the research, based on the needs and desires of study participants.

Participant information sheets and consent forms The usual method in the case of written consent is that a relatively (but not overly) detailed information sheet is given to participants along with a briefer consent form. On both, researchers should ***avoid jargon*** and use language that is appropriate for the intended participants. Please see below and the example templates in the Appendix.

3. The information sheet and consent form

Except in exceptional circumstances (which will require special justification) the information sheet should cover the following topics:

- The researcher's name(s), institution (and where relevant, degree progarmme)
- name of the project and purpose of the research
- where approrpiate, the funding source of the study
- what participation will involve (e.g. if interviews are proposed, how many and how long they will be and where they will be held)
- if any compensation or incentive is to be provided this should be noted[6]
- any risks to participants and any wider benefits to participants and others
- that participants are free to withdraw at any time[7] without prejudice and without providing a reason
- that if the participant withdraws, they should be given the option to have any information they have provided thus far removed from the study
- what usage will be made of the data: during the research itself (where data will be stored, who will have access to it), after the research (if/how the data will be published); whether the (anonymised) data will be used in possible future research or archived to meet funder requirements, and/or how and when the data will be destroyed. If Generative AI tools will be used this may need to be explained - please see §8 below;
- strategies for maintaining confidentiality and anonymity
- contact details of the researcher(s) and who to contact should participants have a complaint (namely, research.ethics@lse.ac.uk)
- A link to the LSE Research Privacy Policy.

A **consent form** should accompany (or be attached to) the Information sheet. The consent form sets out the explicit points the participant is asked to give their consent to, including that they have read and understood the information about the study and what is involved.

Example participant Information Sheet/consent form templates are attached in the appendix to this document; we recommend that the first, simpler, version be used for MSc or UG studies provided these

[6] Please refer to our guidance Payments and benefits to research participants: https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/research-and-innovation/research/Assets/Documents/PDF/ethics-incentives-reimbursement-etc-v5.pdf

[7] A time limit may need to be given, as it is not usually possible to withdraw data once results have been analysed/aggregated and published. Where a participant does request withdrawal after research results have been published, the publication does not need to be changed (assuming they had consented to publication); however, the data should not be used for any further research or publications.

do not involve sensitive or complex issues. The second, more detailed, example may be used for any large study or sensitive/complex research. There is also a suggested template for online surveys, and a sample script for cases where verbal, rather than written, consent will be obtained. Word versions of these templates can be found here. Researchers should ensure they tailor these templates to the particular research context and participant groups involved in their research project (for instance, for research involving children further adaptations may be required to ensure any documents are age-appropriate). Other templates may be used provided they contain the information outlined above. Where researchers will be working with children we recommend they look at the resources of the Global Kids online study[8] (see also section 6 below). Further examples and useful guidance (for example around special considerations) can be found on the UK Data Service webpage[9]. For some larger studies researchers may like to produce the information in the form of a leaflet.

The information sheet/consent form that the researcher proposes to use should be attached to the ethics review application form for the project, and researchers should await approval of the ethics review before recruiting any participants.[10]

It is important that arrangements are made for researchers to carefully talk through the information sheet and consent form with participants before they are asked to sign/return the consent form, and that appropriate time should be allowed in order for participants to make this decision.

4. Opt in/Opt Out

An 'opt-out' consent procedure (i.e. where participants are assumed to have consented because they have not explicitly opted out of a study) is generally recognized to be very unsatisfactory. The General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018 states that "Silence, pre-ticked boxes or inactivity is presumed inadequate to signal consent." The default assumption is, therefore, that all research carried out at LSE involves an 'opt in' consent procedure. There may, however, be special circumstances in which 'opt out' may arguably be the only pragmatically feasible option (e.g. for large studies conducted in schools). Any such proposals should be submitted to the LSE Research Ethics Review Board (RERB) and will be subject to special scrutiny.

5. Sensitive issues

Where the research involves the discussion of topics that participants may find sensitive (for instance, topics of a personal nature, that may be a cultural taboo, that may be controversial or contentious politically, or concern illegal behaviour), then special attention should clearly be paid to ensuring that the participants are fully informed well in advance of the nature of the research and are given ample time to think before deciding whether or not to become involved. They should also be reminded during the study that they are free to discontinue their participation at any point. Particular attention also needs to be paid to the confidentiality and data management[11] of such data.

In the case of very sensitive research we recommend the researcher refers to the book 'Undertaking

[8] http://globalkidsonline.net/tools/qualitative/
[9] https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/learning-hub/research-data-management/ethical-issues/consent-for-data-sharing/
[10] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/research-and-innovation/research/research-ethics/Research-Ethics-Submission-System
[11] See guidance and the Research Data Toolkit here: https://www.lse.ac.uk/library/research-support/research-data-management-and-open-data

Sensitive Research in the Health and Social Sciences'[12]. Further, if the researcher plans to conduct interviews where the topic is very sensitive but they do not have any prior experience of conducting such research, the Research Ethics Review Board may ask that the researcher undertakes some training and/or practice interviews before commencing the study.

6. Participants with diminished capacity to give informed consent

Some participants may have a diminished capacity to give informed consent. For example (but not limited to), young children, the elderly, those in long-term care, those with learning disabilities. Other vulnerabilities may also affect the ability of a participant to give full/freely given consent.

Research in these circumstances raises complex ethical issues for which it is difficult to formulate generally applicable rules around how consent should be handled. Consent may need to be obtained from family or care-givers, or in some cases through the use of pictures rather than written text. In the case of longitudinal studies, researchers should be alert to the fact that capacity to consent may have diminished over time (or, in the case of studies where participants were children at initial stages but are now older, their capacity to consent may be less diminished than previously), and thus the method of obtaining consent may need to be re-appraised. Researchers should consult relevant guidance and discuss their proposals with those with experience in conducting such research. Researchers should also refer to the LSE guidance on *Research with children and other vulnerable groups*[13]. Where working with participants with diminished capacity to consent the researcher should also ensure they are familiar with the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (England and Wales).[14]

Any research involving participants with diminished capacity to consent will require review/approval by the Research Ethics Review Board who will give special scrutiny to the proposed procedures for informed consent in such cases.

7. Students as research participants[15]

Involving students in research can raise unique ethical challenges due to the inherent power imbalances between teacher and student and potential conflicts of interest. Thus, researchers should not recruit students they currently teach or assess, except where there is a strong scientific or pedagogical rationale

[12] Dickson-Swift, Virginia, Erica. James, and Pranee Liamputtong, 2008. Available online and in hard copy from the LSE Library at https://librarysearch.lse.ac.uk/permalink/44LSE_INST/1f110cn/alma99149133205902021

[13] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/research-and-innovation/research/Assets/Documents/PDF/ethics-working-with-children-and-vulnerable-groups-v1.pdf

[14] A useful explanation is given here: https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/mental-capacity-act/

[15] This section draws on the following two papers which may be consulted for further recommendations:
Ferguson, L. M., Yonge, O., & Myrick, F. (2004). Students' involvement in faculty research: Ethical and methodological issues. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(4), pp. 56-68. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300405
Leentjens, A. F. G., & Levenson, J. L. (2013). Ethical issues concerning the recruitment of university students as research subjects. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 75(4), pp. 394–398. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2013.03.007

for doing so. Where student involvement is essential, only those over whom the researcher has no direct evaluative or supervisory responsibility should be recruited.

The following considerations / recommendations should be borne in mind:

Voluntary and Informed Consent: Students' ability to give truly voluntary consent may be compromised by perceived pressure. Researchers must ensure that participation is genuinely voluntary, with no penalties for non-participation or withdrawal, and no academic incentives that could create undue influence. Students should feel confident that refusal will not affect grades, progression, access to learning opportunities, or relationships with staff.

Recruitment: Recruitment should ideally occur anonymously (e.g. via a confidential online platform or via intermediaries) and outside of class time to avoid peer pressure. Researchers should strive to avoid (and/or risk assess) knowing which students have agreed to participate.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Studies should be designed so as to minimise the collection of personal or sensitive data. Where sensitive data may be collected, this must be made clear in advance as part of the informed consent information, and students must be allowed to decline without repercussions, and without any breach of confidentiality. In the case of focus groups, the informed consent must acknowledge that full anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

8. Data Protection and information security

An important part of informed consent is that participants should be aware of what will happen to the data that is collected during the study, what arrangements will be made to keep participants' identities secret and the data confidential. If it is proposed to share data with other researchers or bodies (or even if this is a possibility), participants must be fully informed as part of the consent process.

Researchers must also ensure that they comply with the UK Data Protection Act (the Act allows special provisions for research) regardless of where in the world the research will be conducted. The legal basis used to process personal data will be "Public Task" in the case of research conducted by staff or "Legitimate interests" for that conducted by students. The legal basis used to process special category personal data (e.g., data that reveals racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, health, sex life or sexual orientation, genetic or biometric data) will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes. Researchers should note which legal basis they are using in case research participants ask for this information.

Researchers should consult the LSE guidance on Data Protection and Research[16] and consider writing a Data Managemnt Plan. Researchers should also consult the School's policies and guidance on Information Security, including encryption and audio and video recording[17].

9. Use of AI in research

The use of generative AI tools in research can give rise to data protection/privacy issues. Please refer to the LSE *Guidance on the use of Generative AI for research*[18]. Furthermore, some participants may feel uncomfortable with the thought that the information they provide will be fed into AI tools. If you plan

[16] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/datProRes.pdf
[17] These are available at: https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/dts/about/policies
[18] https://www.lse.ac.uk/DSI/Assets/documents/LSE-Guidance-on-the-use-of-Generative-AI-for-research-2024-09-26.pdf Further guidance on the use of generative AI to support research are available at: https://www.lse.ac.uk/DSI/AI/AI-Research

to use any personal data in a Generative AI tool and/or the data will be shared with third parties via the tool or used to train models, this should be explained in the Participant Information Sheet and consent obtained.

10. Naming of participants and organisations

It is always recommended that participants' details are anonymised at the earliest opportunity and that no names or identifiable information is presented in any research reports or publications. However, in some instances the naming of participants may be justified – for instance in the case of elite or expert interviews, in certain kinds of oral history, or where participants are activists who are keen for their voices to be heard. There are also some cases where it may be impossible to guarantee that participants will not be identifiable from the information provided. In such instances the researcher must discuss any possible risks with participants and ensure they give their consent to be named and agree exactly how their data will be presented, and whether or not they will be given the opportunity to check transcripts of their interviews.

Researchers should be aware that the naming of participants in elite interviews can raise a number of issues – see, for instance, Lancaster 2016[19]

Regarding the naming of organisations in your research outputs: there may be some organisations who you wish to name in your research. They may have been involved in the research in some way (e.g. as a partner, a service provider, gatekeeper, etc.), or they may the organisation(s) for whom your participants work or are involved with in some way. Is consent required in order for you to name them in your research outputs? This will very much depend on the nature of their involvement and/or the context, and thus needs to be considered on a case by case basis. If, for instance, you interview someone and wish to name the organisation they work for, you should normally discuss this with the participant and check that it does not raise any risks for them. In some cases you may need to add this to the consent form.

11. Limits to Confidentiality (disclosure of harm)

Confidentiality may need to be re-considered in cases where a participant discloses something in an interview that suggests that they or someone they mention is at serious risk of harm and unable to act for themselves. In such circumstances this may need to be reported to the relevant authorities – however the researcher should always first discuss this with their supervisor and/or line manager, and any breaking of confidentiality will need to be discussed with the participant.[20]

12. Deception

Certain kinds of social research – particularly in experimental designs, psychology or the behavioural sciences – would be rendered pointless if participants were fully informed in advance of the details of that research. Where an element of deception is involved in a study, or the withholding of full information as to its true purpose, the Research Ethics Review Board will want to feel assured that:

(a) there is no other non-deceptive way of investigating the research problem; and that the case can be made that the study's prospective scientific (or applied) value outweighs the disvalue of the

[19] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13645579.2015.1123555?src=recsys
[20] If in any doubt, please refer to the Research Ethics Review Board for guidance, via research.ethics@lse.ac.uk

deception involved;

(b) before data collection begins, participants are informed about the nature of the study as fully as is consistent with the scientific aims of the study;

(c) that the deception will be explained to the participants as early as possible – preferably at the conclusion of their participation, and certainly no later than the conclusion of the overall study's data collection; to this end participants should at that point be provided with a **'de-brief'** that explicitly informs them of the true purpose of the study and that gives them the opportunity to withdraw their data should they wish;

(d) that the study does not involve the possibility of participants suffering any degree of pain or substantial emotional distress.

Researchers should refer to the sections on deception and debriefing in the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics.[21]

A de-brief sheet should also be provided in cases where participants have been assigned to different treatment groups.

13. Further information

This guidance document cannot cover every type of research context. Where there is any uncertainty, please contact the research ethics team via research.ethics@lse.ac.uk. Please also refer to the School's Research Ethics Policy and guidance.

[21] https://www.bps.org.uk/guideline/bps-code-human-research-ethics

Appendix: Sample Informed consent templates

Example 1: template for MSc/UG/small projects where the research is not overly sensitive or complex (template combines the information sheet/consent form in one)

Example 2: template recommended for larger studies or complex/sensitive research (information sheet + consent form)

Example 3: template for verbal consent script

Example 4: template for online surveys and experiments

Word versions of these templates can be found here.

Adapting the templates – please note:

1. Text in black are standard elements which we recommend you include
2. Text in square brackets/highlighted in yellow: please insert your specific information]
3. Notes in the grey boxes or highligted in grey: these provide guidance only and are to be removed from the final version

Accessibility

Please ensure that the information sheet/consent form is provided in a format accessible to your intended participants. For instance:

- if providing a hard copy you may need to increase the font size;
- if your participants are not fluent in English you must provide them with a copy that has been translated as appropriate (but please attach an English version to your ethics form).

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Example 1: Template for MSc/UG/small projects where the research is not sensitive or complex

This template combines information sheet and consent form in one

Dear [……..],

My name is [……..] and I am a [student/researcher/academic] at the London School of Economics. Thank you for your interest in this project. In this [email], I give you information about the project and ask for your consent to participate. If you agree, please reply to this [email], stating your name and that you agree to the statements in the table below to give your consent.

What is the study about?

Briefly explain what the study is about in simple/accessible language that will be understood by your participants. If the study is funded, state who the funder is.

What will my involvement be?

Briefly explain what their involvement will comprise. For example, if you plan to conduct interviews, state how long you expect these to take and where they would take place (and whether online or in person). If you plan to conduct focus groups, explain what other type of participants you are inviting to join the group.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is **voluntary.** There are no negative consequences for you if you choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part but then later on you change your mind and wish to withdraw your data, you can let me know by [DATE*] - you will not have to give any explanation why. It is also absolutely fine if you don't want to answer any specific questions – you can just tell me, and we will move on.

*This should usually be a date before you will begin analysis of the data. Ideally allow participants at least 2 weeks from after the date of the interview/focus group/survey

What will my information be used for?

State whether the data is to be used in e.g. a Masters' dissertation or some other kind of output. If you want the option to use the data in future research or publications you must state so here.

If you plan to use any personal data in a Generative AI tool and/or the data will be shared with third parties via the tool or used to train models, then this should be explained here and consent obtained

Will my information be anonymous?

Your participation will be anonymous - your name will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study.

If you agree to take part in the research, please complete the section below.
Participant's name: [Participant to type first name and surname here]

Please read these three statements. If you agree with them, put a X in the boxes below	
I have read this message and had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I agree to participate in the [e.g. interview / survey / focus group]	

I understand that my responses will be kept as confidential as possible, that my name will not be included in any reports or publications, and that my personal information will be kept securely and destroyed at the end of the study. [If relevant, add additional statements, such as the use of personal data in Generative AI tools]	

Once completed please email this back to me. Thank you!

Researcher name: Email address:

Any concerns or complaints about this study should be addressed to research.ethics@lse.ac.uk

The LSE Research Privacy Policy can be found here: https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.2.pdf[22]
The legal basis used to process any personal data is "Legitimate interests" for student and commercially funded research and "Public Task" for staff research.

[22] For health-related research projects, please replace the above link with the following one: https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-Health-v1.3-002.pdf

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Example 2: Template recommended for larger studies or complex/sensitive research

Template comprises separate information sheet + consent form

[Title of research study]

[Name of researcher]

[Degree programme/Department/Centre, LSE]

Information for participants

Thank you for considering participating in this study which will take place [insert approximate dates]. This information sheet outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant, if you agree to take part.

1. What is the research about?

Briefly explain what the study is about in simple/accessible language that will be understood by your participants. If the study is funded, state who the funder is.

2. Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do decide to take part [I/we] will ask you to indicate your consent in the form (below) which you can return to [me/us] in advance of the [interview/focus group meeting/survey] or at the start of the [interview/focus group meeting/survey].

3. What will my involvement be?

Briefly explain what their involvement will comprise. For example, if you plan to conduct interviews, state how long you expect these to take and where they would take place (and whether online or in person). If you plan to conduct focus groups, explain what other type of participants you are inviting to join the group.

4. How do I withdraw from the study?

You can withdraw from the study at any point until [insert date*], without having to give a reason. If any questions during the [interview/focus group/survey] make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. Withdrawing from the study will have no effect on you. If you withdraw from the study, I will not retain the information you have already given, unless you are happy for me to do so.

*This should usually be a date before you will begin analysis of the data. Ideally allow participants at least 2 weeks from after the date of the interview/focus group/survey

5. What will my information be used for?

State whether the data is to be used in e.g. a Masters' dissertation, research project, academic paper, or some other kind of output. If you want the option to use the data in future research or publications you must state so here.
If you plan to use any personal data in a Generative AI tool and/or the data will be shared with third parties via the tool or used to train models, then this should be explained here and consent obtained.

6. Will my taking part and my data be kept confidential? Will it be anonymised?

The data [I/we] collect will be kept as confidential as possible. Only [my supervisor and I] will have access to any files that contain your personal data. Your data will be anonymised – your name and anything else that could identify you will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All data

(your personal data and the information you provide) will be securely stored in keeping with LSE data management policies and the LSE Research Privacy Policy[23].

Naming participants (e.g. in the case of interviews with experts, activists, etc.): There are some circumstances in which you may – with their explicit consent – name your participants in your research; in this case you need to amend the wording in the section above accordingly. However, caution should be exercised, and you are advised to discuss this with either your supervisor or the RERB via research.ethics@lse.ac.uk

Limits to confidentiality: Where applicable (e.g. in the case of research on very sensitive topics) add the following proviso: "Confidentiality will be maintained as far as it is possible, unless you tell [me/us] something which implies that you or someone you mention might be in significant danger of harm and unable to act for themselves; in this case, we may have to inform the relevant agencies of this, but we would discuss this with you first."

7. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has undergone ethics review in accordance with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and Procedure.

You must obtain approval of your research ethics review before you undertake any data collection or recruit participants. Details of the Research Ethics Policy and Procedure can be found at: http://www.lse.ac.uk/research-ethics

8. What if I have a question or complaint?

If you have any questions regarding this study please contact the researcher, [Researcher's name], on [email address].
If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of this research, please contact the LSE research ethics managers via research.ethics@lse.ac.uk.

If you are happy to take part in this study, please complete the consent sheet attached/below.

[23] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.2.pdf?from_serp=1 The legal basis used to process any personal data is "Legitimate interests" for student and commercially funded research and "Public Task" for staff research. For health-related research projects, please replace the above link with the following one: https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-Health-v1.3-002.pdf

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CONSENT FORM

This form is to be completed by the participant. They should be given a copy of this and the information sheet to keep.
Please ensure you adapt the text highlighted below as appropriate to your study

[Title of research study]

[Name of researcher]

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

I have read and understood the study information dated [DD/MM/YY], or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	YES / NO
I consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I understand that I can refuse to answer questions and that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until [date], without having to give a reason.	YES / NO
I agree to the [interview/focus group] being [audio and video*] recorded. I understand that the researcher will securely delete the [audio and video] recordings as soon as notes/transcripts have been made.	YES / NO
[For focus groups add] I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the focus group discussions.	YES / NO
[If relevant, add additional statements, e.g. for taking videos, photographs, use of diaries, etc. You should add a statement such as "I agree to joint copyright of the [specify the data] to [name of researcher]. Please also ensure that use of photographs, video, diaries, etc has been explained in the information sheet]	YES / NO
[If relevant, add additional statements, such as the use of personal data in Generative AI tools]	YES/NO
I understand that the information I provide will be used for [Researcher name]'s [dissertation, thesis, research publication, etc.].	YES / NO
I understand that any personal information that can identify me will be kept as confidential as possible and will not be shared with anyone other than [researcher name] [and supervisor name].	YES / NO
I agree that my anonymised information can be quoted in research outputs. Our recommendation is that all participants are anonymised unless there is good reason to do so (e.g. interviews with experts). Where naming participants can be justified, please add the following optional clause to this section: *OR (delete as appropriate)* I agree that my real name can be used for quotes in research outputs.	YES / NO
I give permission for the anonymised information I provide to be deposited in a data archive so that it may be used for future research. For some funders it is a requirement to ask participants this. UG/MSc students, however, should only include this clause if it is something they really intend to do this.	YES / NO

*You should only video record interviews/focus groups where absolutely necessary – for instance if conducting these online and it's not possible to turn the video off feature and still see participants

Please retain a copy of this consent form.

January 2026

Participant name:

Signature: _____ Date _____

Signature does not need to be in hard copy where, for instance, arrangements are made over email or other electronic form

Interviewer name:

Signature: _____ Date _____

For information please contact: [name and email address of researcher]

Example 3: Template for verbal consent

Verbal consent should only be used in cases where written consent is not appropriate, for instance due to literacy levels, cultural norms, or where a written record may heighten risks to the participant. Please see §2 of the Informed Consent guidance. The use of verbal consent usually requires review/approval by the Research Ethics Review Board.

[Title of your study]
[Researcher name]
[Degree programme, Department, LSE]

Pre-interview

Hi, my name is [……], and I'm a [student/researcher] at the London School of Economics.

[show School ID/business card]

[As explained in the information sheet I sent/gave you,] I am researching […add brief details of what the study is about and what their involvement will include – e.g. if you would like to interview them, roughly how long that would take, etc.]

Before I ask for your agreement to participate, I'd like to tell you more about how your information will be used. Is it ok with you if I record this?

[wait for acknowledgement]

First, this study has undergone ethics review in accordance with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and Procedure. The information you provide will be anonymized and confidential, which means your name and any identifiable details will **not** be used in my [dissertation/publication]. You can retract any information you provide up to [insert date*] without any reason. And during the interview, if any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them.

*This should usually be a date before you will begin analysis of the data. Ideally allow participants at least 2 weeks from after the date of the interview/focus group/survey

If you plan to use any personal data in a Generative AI tool and/or the data will be shared with third parties via the tool or used to train models, then this should be explained here and consent obtained.

If that's all clear and alright with you, are you happy to proceed with [the interview]?

[wait for acknowledgement]

And is it ok for me to audio record the interview? This is only to help me write notes/transcribe afterwards. I will then delete the recording.

[wait for acknowledgement]

Do you have any questions before we begin?

[potential interviewee responds]

Post-interview

Thank you so much for your answers. To confirm, are you happy for me to use this information you provided for my [dissertation / publication] with the terms outlined before? I'm also happy to go through them again.

[interviewee reconfirms/asks for details of the study or how data will be used to be repeated]

Thank you so much for your time!

Example 4: Template for online surveys/experiments

This should be presented on the first screen of the survey/experiment; participants should only be able to proceed if they answer Yes to the consent questions at the end

[Title of your study]
[Researcher name]
[Degree programme, Department, LSE]

Thank you for your interest in this study. The study is about [briefly describe the study].

What will my involvement be?
If you agree to take part you will be asked to [briefly explain what will be required].
[The survey/task] should take approximately [X minutes/hours] of your time.
Participation is voluntary. You do not need to answer any questions you don't want to, and you can stop completing the [survey/task] at any point if you wish to. If you take part but then later on you wish to retract the information you have provided, you can let me know via email [your email address] by [DATE] - you will not have to give any explanation why.

If the data collection will be entirely anonymous and you will not have any contact details of the participants, replace the above text with, e.g. "Since the data collection is anonymous, it will not be possible to withdraw the information you have provided once you have completed and submitted the [survey/ questionnaire.]"

Will I be compensated for taking part?

Researchers should reflect on whether participants should be compensated for their time (or, e.g. entered in a lottery prize). Please refer to our guidance here. If participants will be compensated for their time, provide a clear statement of what this will be and ensure you have thought through how to arrange payment

What will my information be used for?
Your responses will be used in my [Masters' dissertation/PhD thesis/publications/future research/other].
[If relevant] Your personal information will be kept securely and destroyed at the end of the study.
[If relevant] Your IP address will not be collected during this survey/task.[24]
Your participation will be anonymous - your name will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. The LSE Research Privacy Policy[25] can be found online.

If you plan to use any personal data in a Generative AI tool and/or the data will be shared with third parties via the tool or used to train models, then this should be explained here and consent obtained.

Please read and select the following statements if you agree with them:
- I have read and understood the explanations above YES/NO
- I am 18 or over YES/NO
- I agree to take part YES/NO

[24] Qualtrics/IP addresses: By default, surveys using Qualtrics collect IP addresses; if you do not need to collect IP addresses, you must turn this off in the settings.
[25] For health-related research projects, please replace the above link with the following one: https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-Health-v1.3-002.pdf

Review schedule

Review interval	Next review due by	Next review start
3 years	AY 2027-28	November 2027

Version history

Version	Date	Approved by	Notes
2	1/11/2017	Research Committee	
2.1	25/6/2018	Lyn Grove	p.2: Insertion of 'and Data Protection Act 2018' and removal of 'coming into force May 2018'
2.2	26/09/2018	RC Chair's action	Further minor revisions to ensure compliance with DPA/GDPR 2018 plus Research Council requirements vis a vis archiving of data
2.3	09/04/19	RC, 27/03/19	Minor revisions, including addition of limits to confidentiality
2.4	04.11.2019	RC Chair, 4.11.19	Minor revisions to the sample template only
2.5	25.01.2021	Research Governance Manager (Lyn Grove)	Minor corrections to links, and numbering
2.6	27.08.2021	Research Governance Manager (Lyn Grove)	Inclusion of an additional/simpler sample information sheet/consent form
2.7	18.07.2023	Research Ethics Officer (Myriam Fellous-Sigrist)	Addition of a verbal consent script template
2.8	26.09.2023	Research Governance Manager (Lyn Grove)	Addition of link to LSE REC guidance on research with vulnerable groups
2.9	02.12.2024	REC	Following full review of guidance (and including re use of GenerativeAI)
3	05.09.2025	SREM (Lyn Grove)	Additional clarity re DPA/legal basis; change of REC to Research Ethics Review Board
4	07.01.2026	Research Ethics Review Board	Addition of section on Students as research participants

Links

Reference	Link
Research Ethics Policy and guidance	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/resEthPolPro.pdf

Contacts

Position	Name	Email	Notes
Senior Research Ethics Manager	Lyn Grove	l.grove@lse.ac.uk	Co-author (with RERB)

Communications and Training

Will this document be publicised through Internal Communications?	**Yes**
Will training needs arise from this policy	**Yes/ No**
If Yes, please give details Staff/students should refer to the Research Ethics Policy and guidance at: http://www.lse.ac.uk/research-ethics	