Applying for Ethics Approval (Guidance: Ethics Proposal Form)

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The following slides will detail guidance on how to fill in the ethics proposal form, to be submitted as part of an ethics review application. Any examples provided have been taken from an accepted ethics application The guidance will be tailored to humanities PGRs but is also applicable to social sciences' students doing qualitative research.

Fill in the following details according to the specifications of your project.

Title of Project
Click or tap here to enter text.

REC Reference Please leave blank

Name of Applicant

Click or tap here to enter text.

Email Address

Click or tap here to enter text.

Type of applicant (please tick one box)

☐ Undergraduate ☐ Taught Postgraduate (PGT) ☐ Research Postgrad (inc Doctoral Students)

☐ Academic Staff ☐ Professional Staff ☐ External Researcher (from another institution)

Student ID Number Click or tap here to enter text. **Course / Module** Click or tap here to enter text.

Declaration

☐ I confirm that have read the University of Exeter's Research Ethics and Governance Codes and Policies including the Research Ethics Framework and Code of Good Practice in Research and Misconduct in Research Process.

Name of Student Supervisor or Project PI

Click or tap here to enter text.

Names of other Researchers, Collaborators or Co-Investigators

Click or tap here to enter text.

Insert tentative submission, start and end dates for your PhD thesis here

Dates

*Please note that all ethics proposals are **prospective** in nature. **No retrospective study will be granted ethics review.** Please ensure that the start date is at least one month from the submission date to give time for review. Extensions can be applied for later if needed. If this is an urgent review please contact your supervisor or the Humanities REC for further guidance.*

Submission Date	Start Date	End Date
Click or tap to enter a date.	Click or tap to enter a date.	Click or tap to enter a date.

Have you received any training or briefing on research ethics or research integrity?

Choose an item. Date of training course Click or tap to enter a date.

Please provide a brief description below of training undertaken and by whom

Click or tap here to enter text.

If you have attended any relevant training programs, list them here. A recommended workshop is on oral history, conducted by the History dept.

Lay Summary of Project

The proposal form indicates that you should "Provide a brief summary of the project outlining the broad aims, background, key questions, research design/approach, the participants in the study and what they will be asked to do, and the importance or relevance of the project. This description should be in everyday language, free from jargon, technical terms or discipline-specific phrases."

- Use your PhD abstract to outline a brief summary, research questions as well as research approach, focusing on a broad overview "free from jargon, technical terms or discipline-specific phrases."
- Focus on the kinds of people you would like to engage with through your qualitative research methodology. At this stage, this summary can be very brief – you will be asked to go into detail at a later stage.
- It is not necessary to specifically identify the names of your participants at this stage, although it is always advisable to be as thorough as possible while filling out an ethics review form so the committee can have as clear a picture as possible of the risks associated with your project.

Lay Summary of Project

For example: if you are an English PGR and would like to interview the descendants of the writers you are focusing on in your thesis, here is a possible outline of what you might write in your ethics application after you outline your basic abstract/summary.

"Potential interviewees for the project will include the descendants of [name of writers] and other writers and activists engaging in the work that [name of writer] did during the time they were active. Participants will be asked questions pertaining to the impact [name of writers] have had on their work (if any), and the nature of the literary landscape in which they are operating currently."

Research Methodology

The proposal form indicates that you should "explain how data will be collected (e.g. via interview, observation, questionnaires, creative activities). Please give as much information as possible about the kind of data you wish to collect (e.g. what kinds of questions will be asked in an interview or survey) and how this relates to the overall research project."

- The most important point at this stage is to correctly identify your data collection method. For humanities PGRs, interviews and creative activities will be the most common; however, inter-disciplinary researchers may also find that questionnaires are useful, particularly if you plan to collect data from a large group of people.
- This section requires more detail, building upon the summary provided in the previous section.
- While it is not necessary to provide a list of your potential questions, it is nevertheless important to provide as much detail as possible about the nature of your questions: who are you interviewing; what will you ask them; and how are these questions important to your project?

Research Methodology

Using the same example: an English PGR conducting personal interviews of the descendants of the writers they are focusing on may include the following details in their methodology.

"Data will be collected via personal interviews. Questions will vary depending on the relationship of the interviewee with either the [name of writer] or [main theme of thesis] an. In cases where they knew the writer personally, questions pertaining to their relationships with other important names from literature and texts being used in this thesis will be asked.

These interviews will serve as a background for the thesis in order to understand the context that writers were writing in at the time they were active."

Research Methods Used (tick as many as apply)

☐ In person Interviews ☐ Online Interviews ☐ Online Surveys ☐ Secondary Data ☐ Ethnography

☐ Auto-ethnography ☐ Social Media 'scraping' ☐ Social Media interaction ☐ Other (below)

(Delete this text once read then type in text: Please describe any method of research not listed above.)

Applications used in research

☐ Teams ☐ Zoom ☐ Microsoft Forms ☐ Other (detail below – also see University Guidance for Online Research)

(Delete this text once read, then type in new text: Please describe any method of research not listed above.)

If applicable, please read the guidance document available on this link providing details regarding online research methodologies and the university's policy on engaging with such research methods. The most important aspects are regarding informed consent (see files on consent forms and participant information sheets for more).

Please ensure you indicate whether you will be conducting in-person research, or solely online research. If your research method is not listed, be sure to discuss its feasibility with the ethics committee before submitting this application.

Researcher Statement and Experience

The proposal form indicates that you should "provide a summary of the ethical considerations raised by the data collection, analysis and dissemination and explain how you intend to deal with them. You may also include an account of your prior experience of work in this area (e.g. previous ethics training or experience in working with participants)."

- It is important to explicitly state and reiterate your commitment as a researcher to respect the consent of your participants.
- An important ethical consideration here may be to mention the feasibility of anonymising or pseudonymising your participants to further protect their privacy and identity, if possible. Anonymisation should always be the default – if not, be sure to state why their identity is necessary to your research.
- If you have any previous experience regarding your methodology, such as conducting interviews or designing surveys, this is the appropriate place to mention it. Examples include previously conducting such qualitative research for academic purposes, or other relevant experiences outside of academia, such as conducting interviews for press publications etc.

Researcher Statement and Experience

Using the same example: an English PGR conducting personal interviews of the descendants of the writers they are focusing on who has some experience may include the following details.

"None of the data and information gathered will be used without the participant's explicit consent, and I will strive to fully explain the nature of my research to whomever consents to speak with me. In certain cases, participants will be offered pseudonyms in order for the qualitative interviews to make sense within the context of the research i.e. while their real names and roles within the private sphere may not be mentioned, allusions to their connections with prominent writers or the reasons for them being chosen as interviewees may be discussed. I have previously interviewed two survivors of the 1947 migration across borders at the time of the partition of India and Pakistan and thus have experience dealing with personal family histories and delicate subject matter."

Location

The proposal form indicates that you should "state where data collection will take place. If the project takes place outside of the UK, please explain how you will take into account possible cultural differences regarding ethical protocols and conventions. Please state whether the information sheet and consent form will be translated (if applicable)."

- It is important to be as specific as possible if your research is taking you abroad, so the committee can determine what risk assessment needs to be conducted, both regarding your travel as well as the risks associated with including participants based outside of the UK in your research.

Location

Using the same example: an English PGR conducting personal interviews of the descendants of the writers they are focusing on who has some experience and will be conducting interviews both online and in-person across borders may include the following details.

"Most of the data collection will be in Pakistan, as that is where a number of descendants and activists are based, though I will strive to make connections with those in the diaspora in the UK as well. Due to the current security situation, it is difficult to say whether any research can be done physically in India, but interviews over Skype etc. may be arranged. Being from Pakistan myself and having many close friends and family resident in India, I do not foresee any problems of cultural differences interfering with my research. If necessary, the information sheet and consent form can be translated into Urdu (which I can do myself)."

Please answer the following as appropriate and refer to the ethics committee for details on how to navigate researching with specified participants.

Participants

Please tick below if participants will be recruited from:

☐ NHS or NHS Funded Care Sectors ☐ UK Armed Forces ☐ HM Prisons and Probation Service ☐ N/A

Please refer to Appendix C of the University Research Ethics Framework then answer the following questions:

1. Do any of the participants require flagging from List 1? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please provide details below:

(Delete this text once read, then type in new text: Please describe types of participant listed)

2. Should any of the participants be flagged as potentially 'high risk' as described in List 2? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Delete this text once read, then type in new text: Please describe any potentially high risk participants below, explaining if necessary why they might be high risk.)

Will any of the following recruitment methods be used? Please tick below

☐ Higher value payments to participants as an inducement to participate (not low value token payments)

☐ Access to participants via a 'gatekeeper', without whom the researcher could not conduct research

☐ 'Snowball' recruitment of further participants from existing participants

(Delete this text once read, then type in new text or clear box: Please elaborate on such methods of recruitment below if you tick any of the boxes above.)

Definition of Participants and Recruitment

The proposal form indicates that you should "outline your recruitment methods and explain how you will ensure that participation is voluntary and free from coercion. You should also comment on financial inducements (if applicable). Please also include a consideration of the potential benefits of the research for participants and plans for feedback."

The proposal form indicates that "if you intend to include participants who are under 18, or people with learning or communication difficulties, NHS patients, individuals at risk of psychological distress or people who are otherwise vulnerable, participants in custody, or people involved in illegal activity, please indicate why this is necessary for your research, and outline the steps you will take to ensure informed consent can be obtained."

Definition of Participants and Recruitment

"I have narrowed down a number of potential participants in [location], primarily [insert specific names], all of whom are direct descendants of [names of writers used in thesis]. I will be able to gain access to them via family connections and through non-governmental organisations, such as [insert names and examples of possible/identified means of contact here]. All participants are 18+ and there is no risk of coercion since they will have every right to refuse once the request is made, though according to other research projects done by both academics and journalists, participants have in the past been very willing to speak to researchers. In addition, questions will focus on the role of literature in expressions of dissent that these people have taken part in, such as protest marchers, journalistic endeavours, etc. None of the potential interviewees have been arrested and/or detained to point towards this point of discussion."

"Due to Covid-19 restrictions, currently the aim is to reach out to participants and set up interviews over Zoom using institutional login. However, I would like to make a case before the Research Restart Committee to be allowed to conduct interviews in person in Pakistan, since the Covid-19 regulations relating to in-person contact within the country allow for such meetings. If in-person contact is permitted, interviews will be carried out in people's homes and I can confirm I will follow the guidelines for carrying out research in non-public spaces. It is possible for a third person to be present when carrying out the interviews, and it will probably be someone that the interviewee nominates personally. I will be transcribing the recordings personally and have completed a data management plan to this effect in order to ensure all recordings can be stored on OneDrive securely."

The 3Rs were first defined by Russell and Burch in their book ***The Principles of Humane Experimental Technique*** . The NC3Rs has updated the definitions in line with common scientific parlance to highlight the importance of the 3Rs to modern research practices.

	Basic	Updated
Replacement	Avoiding or replacing the use of animals in areas where they otherwise would have been used.	Accelerating the development and use of predictive and robust models and tools, based on the latest science and technologies, to address important scientific questions without the use of animals.
Reduction	Minimising the number of animals used consistent with scientific aims.	Appropriately designed and analysed animal experiments that are robust and reproducible, and truly add to the knowledge base.
Refinement	Minimising the pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm that research animals might experience.	Advancing research animal welfare by exploiting the latest *in vivo* technologies and by improving understanding of the impact of welfare on scientific outcomes.

Does your research involve animals that may also require ethics review? ☐ Yes ☐ No

(Delete this text once read, then type in new text or clear text box: Please describe any research involving animals and include a short statement on how your research will adhere to principles of the 3Rs. https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/the-3rs)

Declaration of any conflicts of interest

The proposal form indicates that "A conflict of interest in research exists where an individual may preference, or be perceived to preference, their own interests or obligations over their duties and responsibilities as a researcher. Conflicts of interest may be actual, potential or perceived and involve financial and non-financial benefits. Conflicts of interest may affect, or be perceived to affect, a researcher's impartiality and judgement, which can erode confidence in the research. Please reflect on whether you, any co-investigator, collaborator, funder or agent may have a conflict of interest. If so, please describe below and propose mitigations if necessary."

- It is important to identify if you have any conflicts of interest rather than attempt to deny them – approval from the committee may be denied if a conflict is perceived and not acknowledged.
- Examples of conflicts may specifically be related to financial compensation (if any) involved with the project having a specific outcome, although this is rare in humanities PhDs.

Protected Characteristics Exclusion Criteria

Please specify and justify the use of any exclusion criteria to be applied to the recruitment of participants, where exclusion may be applied on the basis of a 'protected characteristic' as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

(Delete this text once read, then type in text or clear text box: Please reflect on whether you, any co-investigator, collaborator, funder or agent may have a conflict of interest. If so, please describe below and propose mitigations if necessary.)

Funding Sources

(Delete this text once read, then type in text or clear text box: Please specify any sources of funding and outline any conditions attached to the funding which would have an impact on the application.)

State your sources of funding (AHRC, DTP etc.) and if there are any conditions attached that may hinder your application, such as a conflict of interest within your funding body.

What are protected characteristics?

It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

These are called protected characteristics.

It is important to explicitly state why, if any, exclusion criteria are necessary for your research (e.g. people above/below a certain age; people of a certain race or religion) to ensure that this is important for your thesis and not a case of discrimination.

Participant confidentiality

Research participant data should be fully anonymous by default. By default, there should be no means of identifying or re-identifying the participant in the data collected by the researcher. *Participants may be invited, by the process of informed consent, to be more identifiable with the research data and outputs. This is often necessary and possibly desirable from the participant's perspective.*

Please specify whether and how identifiable participant data will be collected with informed consent.

☐ No identifiable data will be collected from participants. There will be no later means of identifying participants
☐ Participant identities will be pseudo-anonymised, with a re-identification key stored to re-identify participant data
☐ Participants will be fully identifiable

Please specify if identifiable data will later be fully anonymised, or whether it will be archived or deleted upon completion of the study.

☐ Identifiable data will be archived ☐ Re-identification keys will be deleted making re-identifiable data fully anonymous.

☐ All participant data will be deleted ☐ Other (explain below)

(Delete this text once read, then type in new text: Please provide justification for the retention of identifiable data and how the data will be handled upon completion of the study.)

Anonymity is the default when conducting research with human participants; if you require participants to be identifiable, please justify the need for this here. Possible explanations include the identity of the participant as being integral to your project, for example, if the participant is the person you are researching (a public figure, etc.)

It is advisable to state that data will be preserved/archived only if necessary (for example, to be available for research after the completion of your PhD). If data is to be archived, please also state the form in which it will be archived (audio recordings; transcripts [anonymised] etc.)

Informed Consent of Research Participants

It is a prerequisite for researchers that they must obtain the informed consent of participants to engage with research. Ensuring that participants are able to consent is essential. It is the duty of the researcher to safeguard the research participant's interests. The researcher must engage with the participant in a manner suitable to the participant's capacity to comprehend what is proposed and then fully consent to take part.

Please specify methods of Informed Consent

☐ Paper Information and Consent Form (please attach) ☐ Online Interview Consent Form (attach PDF version of form)

☐ Online Survey Information and Consent form including debrief section (please attach)

☐ Verbal Informed Consent script with specified method recording oral consent (please attach)

Will participants require translations from English to assist with full comprehension and consent?

Choose an item. Please specify languages used in consent Click or tap here to enter text.

Will young persons under the age of 16, or others lacking the capacity to consent themselves, take part in the research?

Choose an item.

If so please describe procedures for assent and accompanying consent from parents or guardians

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please see the guidance on preparing consent forms and participation information sheets for this section and fill in as required.

Description of consent processes

The proposal states that you should "explain how you will provide participants with information about the project and how informed consent will be obtained (e.g. via signing and returning a consent form; verbal agreement; recorded agreement for interview; returning an anonymous survey; via third person with lawful authority to consent). If you are working with people unable to offer informed consent (e.g. children), please explain how assent will be obtained."

- If working with people able to offer consent: "Participants will be given a consent form to sign and effort will be made to ensure all potential interviewees have the ability to offer informed consent."
- If working with people unable to offer consent, please ask the ethics committee for advice. In cases of participants under the age of 18, permission may be sought from legal guardians.

It is advisable to use the University OneDrive for data storage since it does not require an individual risk assessment – if other methods are necessary, however, please make sure you justify them.

Data Protection and Storage

Data must be stored in such a manner as to safeguard against loss and to protect the confidentiality of research participants. *The University of Exeter provides safe, accessible and governance compliant means of storing and archiving data. Researchers should use these facilities and not rely on third party methods or hardware to store data, unless there are extenuating circumstances for short periods when access to University data storage is not available. Advice on storage of data is available online.*

Data Management

The following data storage methods will be used (please tick all that apply through the life of the study)

☐ University OneDrive ☐ University Sharepoint ☐ Research Data Storage ☐ Secure Data Research Hub

☐ Other (please detail and justify below)

(Delete this text once read, then type in new text: Please describe any methods used to store data 'at rest' which is not provided by the University of Exeter and explain why this is necessary. Please clarify how long data will be stored 'at rest' by other means, what steps will be taken to safeguard data and when data will be removed from these methods then placed into University provided data storage.)

Will research data be shared with any party outside the University?

☐ Translator ☐ Transcriber ☐ External research collaborator or co-investigator ☐ Other (specify below) ☐ None

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please clarify any agreements for sharing of data

☐ Non Disclosure Agreement (NDA) ☐ External Partner Collaboration Agreement ☐ Other (describe below) ☐ None

Click or tap here to enter text.

GDPR Declaration

☐ I confirm that the research study is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 and that necessary arrangements have been made with regard to the storage and processing of participants' personal information and generally to ensure confidentiality of such data supplied and generated in the course of the research.

More information on GDPR for researchers.

For more on GDPR:

- GDPR Principles
- GDPR for Researchers

Your responsibilities as a researcher

- All researchers are responsible for processing personal data gathered for research purposes in compliance with the Regulation
- The data protection principles under the GDPR can be found at http://www.exeter.ac.uk/gdpr/principles/. All researchers must be aware of the principles which can be found at http://www.exeter.ac.uk/gdpr/principles/ and everyone is responsible for raising awareness of data protection within their teams.
- Principal Investigators and Supervisors should ensure that all members of their teams have completed Information Governance training before collecting any personal data for research purposes. Completion of the University's online Information Governance training is mandatory for all staff and postgraduate researchers http://www.exeter.ac.uk/ig/informationsecuritytraining/
- All incidents and breaches involving personal data must be reported as quickly as possible, and always within 72 hours, by calling SID **0300 555 0444**, see http://www.exeter.ac.uk/gdpr/breach/. Reporting an incident quickly may mean that remedial action can be taken to prevent escalation into a data breach.
- Researchers must ensure that appropriate data sharing agreements or contracts are in place when sharing personal data with third parties such as collaborators, other research teams or transcription services. Please contact legalservices@exeter.ac.uk for advice.
- You can also contact the Research Ethics and Governance team with queries about data protection in relation to research, or the Information Governance team for general queries

Good Luck!