

## EXPEDITED ETHICAL REVIEW PROCESS FOR CERTAIN NON-MEDICAL AND MINIMAL RISK UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECTS

### 1. SCOPE

This procedure is intended to cover certain low-risk undergraduate research projects (typically associated with an undergraduate essay or thesis – see section 1.1) involving human participants and personal data that would otherwise be eligible for review by the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee (SSH IDREC) or a Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC)

To qualify for expedited review without additional consideration and approval either by a DREC or the SSH IDREC, the project must meet the following criteria:

#### 1.1 Course level

- All undergraduate students must be based, and have supervisors based, at the University of Oxford, in the Social Sciences Division, Humanities Division or in the Department of Computer Sciences (whose DREC reports to the SSH IDREC).
- Applicants from the Medical Sciences or MPLS Divisions are not able to follow this process (with the exception of the Department of Computer Sciences).
- The supervisor of the student will act as Principal Investigator for the project and will take responsibility for the ethics and integrity of the project in question.

#### 1.2 Training

- The undergraduate student researcher and their supervisor must all have had appropriate research ethics training (either via their department/ faculty, the [online integrity course](#) or the [face-to-face ethics termly training sessions](#)), should have appropriate [health and safety awareness](#) and, if required, take out University travel insurance (after completing a travel risk assessment).
- Relevant [CUREC Best Practice Guidance documents](#) must be consulted prior to the start of the project where relevant (for example, internet-based research (e.g., for online surveys or online recruitment); researcher safety; elite and expert interviewing; work in archives; data collection and management; ethical review of social science-based research overseas).
- The supervisor will provide research conduct instructions to the undergraduate students that will include the following:
  - recruitment methods and permitted participant types
  - guidelines on interaction with participants
  - guidance on informed consent processes (adapting the [CUREC informed consent templates](#) as appropriate)
  - information on maintaining confidentiality of data and data storage.

#### 1.3 Project

- No part of the undergraduate research project (including recruitment of potential participants) may start until both student and supervisor have signed the CUREC 1A documents as set out in section 7 below.
- The research project must **not** trigger the requirement for a CUREC 2 application to be

submitted (see Section A of the CUREC 1A form).

- The research project must not trigger the need for any other [CUREC Approved Procedure](#) to be used (i.e. the research must not use deception, or work with children or other “at risk” / potentially vulnerable participants; and must not fall within the scope of the ‘Prevent’ duty);
- The research project must not involve any more than minimal risk to both researcher and participants (i.e. no more risk than everyday life), and must not induce any psychological stress or anxiety;
- Fieldwork countries are limited to the UK and Europe only. Online surveys may recruit worldwide.
- The research project must not involve any medical interventions or scans (e.g. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)), and must not fall under the remit of the [Medical Sciences IDREC](#) or [OxTREC](#).

Any unexpected changes to the project or any issues will need to be flagged up to the supervisor as soon as possible, who should alert the relevant departmental research ethics committee ([DREC](#)), if applicable, the Director of Undergraduate Studies, and/ or the [SSH IDREC](#) if there are serious concerns.

#### 1.4 Participants

- Participants must be adults who are able to fully understand the project and freely volunteer to take part.
- Interviews with elites/ experts may be included **only** if the CUREC Best Practice Guidance on Elites/ Experts is followed and the CUREC informed consent templates are used/ adapted and checked by the student and supervisor.
- No more than 10 participants per student can be recruited.
- Recruitment is only allowed via publicly available contact details. If mailing lists are used, individual ethics review by the relevant DREC or SSH IDREC is required instead.
- Informed consent must always be in place **before** the project starts. The [informed consent templates](#) on the CUREC website must be adapted and used for recruitment, participant information, and consent (written or oral). **Please note that reference to formal CUREC review will need to be removed from the recruitment adverts/ posters, information sheets and consent form.**
- All participants must be given sufficient time to read and fully understand information about the project before they consent (ideally, at least a day).
- No NHS patients/ staff/ facilities/ data may be involved in the project.
- Students must respect participants’ right to withdraw themselves and their data from the study, either during or after participation without having to provide a reason. Withdrawal should be facilitated up until the point that it is no longer practically possible and participants should be informed at the information-providing stage of a deadline by which they can withdraw their data.

#### 1.5 Project results and data

- Interview questions must **not** ask for sensitive (‘[special category](#)’) information or tackle sensitive issues, such as sexual attitudes or behaviours, illegal behaviours, and/ or the use of alcohol or drugs.
- All data used in undergraduate coursework or undergraduate theses must have been fully anonymised or pseudonymised by the student, with the exception of elite/ expert interviews, provided elites/ experts have given prior explicit consent to be named.

- Students must be aware of the difference between pseudonymising and anonymising<sup>1</sup>, and inform participants in the information sheet/ oral consent script how they will be de-identified.
- Any audio recordings must be transcribed by the student as soon as possible and then safely destroyed. Photographs or video recordings are not normally allowed, unless there is a strong case for permitting these that the supervisor would need to make to the relevant DREC or, if there is no DREC, the SSH IDREC. If photographs/ videos are part of the data, they will need to be pixelated as soon as possible, if necessary.
- The results and data can be used for the student's undergraduate coursework and/ or the undergraduate thesis/ dissertation **only**. The results and data must **not** be presented, posted, or published outside the classroom setting, nor be used in any presentation, conference, publication, thesis, dissertation, or report outside of the course for which it is assigned.<sup>2</sup>
- Students must process and store any personal data collected to comply with [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#) requirements, encrypt (or at least password-protect) any files containing personal/ sensitive data and should encrypt (or at least password-protect) any electronic storage devices (please see the [research data website](#) for guidance).
- The research project must not trigger the requirement for a [Data Protection Impact Assessment](#) (DPIA) to be submitted;
- To ensure confidentiality, all transcriptions and translations of any gathered material must be undertaken solely by the student.
- Audio recording devices should be PIN-protected or encrypted if possible. If mobile phones are used to record, the student must ensure that any audio recordings are not automatically saved on the cloud but just on the device (until safe transfer and transcription).

All data and records should be kept safely and securely by the student or supervisor, for 3 years after completion of the assignment/ thesis.

## 2. IF THE ABOVE REQUIREMENTS **CANNOT BE MET**

If any of the above criteria in points 1.1 to 1.5 **cannot** be met for individual undergraduate student projects, then a [CUREC 1A](#) or [CUREC 2](#) application must be submitted following the [usual ethics applicati process](#).

## 3. SIGN-OFF PROCEDURE FOR INDIVIDUAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT MEET THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTIONS 1.1 – 1.5 ABOVE

It is the responsibility of the undergraduate student **and** their supervisor to determine the suitability of the student's project for this minimal risk expedited ethics review procedure, while **strictly** adhering to criteria given in points 1.1 to 1.5 above.

The undergraduate student must download and complete the [latest version of the CUREC 1A form](#) and submit this to their supervisor, along with the relevant supporting documents that are

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### <sup>1</sup> Example:

-Identifiable/ personal data: "Mary, 35, 2 children, Brighton"

-Pseudonymised data: "Ruth (i.e. false name), aged 35, 2 children, Brighton"

-Anonymised data: "Ruth (i.e. false name), aged 38 (false age), 3 children (false number), Sussex (i.e. generalised location)" or e.g. "a parent of three children".

<sup>2</sup> If students should want to publish research findings externally in any way (e.g. in a future DPhil thesis), this approved procedure does **not** apply. A **prospective** CUREC application will need to be submitted to the DREC or SSH IDREC **before** the original research project starts.

to be provided to potential participants (e.g. adapted information sheet or oral information template, consent template, recruitment advert/ email/ letter, interview/ survey questions).

It is important that all sections of the CUREC 1A form are completed. **Having checked that all criteria set out in sections 1.1 – 1.5 have been met** and that all questions asked in the CUREC 1A have been fully answered, both student **and** supervisor will need to sign the CUREC 1A form. One copy of the finalised signed CUREC 1A form and the final supporting documents will be kept by the student and will be appended to the student's coursework/ thesis. The original finalised, signed CUREC 1A form **and** the final supporting documents should be sent **by the supervisor** to the relevant DREC, or if no DREC exists, to the SSH IDREC Secretariat for safe record keeping. **The supervisor must make it clear in the accompanying email that the application has been reviewed and approved following this process**, otherwise the application may be treated like a normal application to the SSH IDREC and reviewed accordingly.

The DREC or SSH IDREC will **not** review these documents but securely save them in their electronic filing storage system for at least 7 years. For reporting purposes, the DREC or SSH IDREC should log the following information:

- Name of undergraduate student
- Name of supervisor
- Title of project
- Start and end date of the project

Random audits of all submitted undergraduate projects should be conducted by the relevant DREC or, if no DREC exists in a particular department/ faculty, by the SSH IDREC each year. If the DREC or SSH IDREC find that supervisors and students have not adhered to the criteria set out in this document, the Undergraduate Office and the relevant Head of Department or Faculty will be informed.

**If students or supervisors fail to follow the full procedure set out above, the DRECs and SSH IDREC reserve the right to withdraw permission for the use of this expedited sign-off procedure for undergraduate students for the whole department or faculty.**

This expedited ethics approval is granted up to the end of each student's undergraduate course.

#### **4. AMENDMENTS PROCEDURE**

Any amendments to the undergraduate research project will need to be highlighted in the CUREC application documents and submitted to the supervisor for review. Having checked that all criteria set out in sections 1.1 to 1.5 are still fully met, both student **and** supervisor will need to finalise and sign the amended CUREC 1A form and the supporting documents again. Please then follow the guidelines for record keeping as set out in section 3 above.

#### **5. FURTHER INFORMATION**

Please contact the SSH IDREC Secretariat (via [their email address](#)) or your local Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC).

#### **6. CHANGE HISTORY**

<b>Version No.</b>	<b>Significant Changes</b>	<b>Previous version</b>	<b>Date</b>
1.0	This is the first version of this Approved Procedure	N/A	N/A
1.1	Revised to make accessible	1.0	Sept 2020
1.2	Addition of Ethics/Integrity training requirements Clarification of section 3 regarding content of email from supervisor	1.1	Aug 2021
1.3	References to CUREC 1A checklist has been removed.	1.2	June 2023
1.4	Administrative changes	1.3	July 2023