**Guidelines for Completion of Applications  
for Ethical Review of Research Projects**

**Psychology Ethics Committee  
School of Psychology, College of Life Sciences and Medicine  
University of Aberdeen, AB24 3FX**

**Psychology Ethics Committee (PEC)**

**Chair:** Dr Philip Benson (also of Research Governance within Psychology)  
**Committee members:** Drs Judith Hosie, Ben Jones, Jasna Martinovic, David Pearson, Rhona Flin, lay person(s) (Mr Terence Kelly), and one external member (TBA).  
**Secretary:** Dana Ho

PEC members have a broad range of experience and expertise in the areas of modern psychological research. Applications for ethical review are carried out in an independent manner and can involve consultation with experts outwith the committee.

The purpose of the committee is to ensure that all projects conducted in the School have undergone proper ethical review, and to monitor changes to ongoing procedures. PEC also monitors changes to ethical guidelines issued by professional and academic bodies, and offers training and support to students and staff. The following sources inform our local procedures (listed alphabetically, with hyperlinks as available):

[American Psychological Association](http://www.apa.org) (APA)  
[British Psychological Society](http://www.bps.org.uk/) (BPS)  
[Integrated Research Application System](https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/) (IRAS; online application for NHS projects)  
[National Research Ethics Service](http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/) (NRES; NHS staff and patient projects)  
[Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts](http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/)  
[Economic and Social Research Council](http://www.esrc.ac.uk) (ESRC)  
[North of Scotland Research Ethics Service](http://www.nhsgrampian.net/nhsgrampian/gra_display_simple_index.jsp?pElementID=147&pContentID=2988&p_applic=CCC&pMenuID=2&p_service=Content.show&) (NoSRES, our local NHS ethics service)  
[Good Research Practice](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sfre/goodpractice/) (University)  
[Research Governance and Quality Assurance](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/iahs/research/research-governance/) (University)  
[Society for Research in Child Development](http://www.srcd.org/) (SRCD)

A [College Ethics Board](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/clsm/staff/cerb/) handles non-NHS/Psychology applications generated within the College of Life Sciences and Medicine.

As well as reporting to the School Research Committee, PEC is open to monitoring and audit by the University.

**The University considers research malpractice a very serious matter.**

**Background**

All research projects conducted in the School of Psychology will have undergone prior ethical review. PEC has always used a flexible process to cater for project diversity and expeditious review. In response to ESRC and BPS guidelines we introduced further changes in January 2006 which also brings the School’s proforma in line with these and other academic institutions.

Some research projects do not involve human or non-human participants (e.g. meta analysis, computer simulations). For completeness and monitoring/audit purposes such projects are also submitted for review and entered into the research ethics database. The educational value of awareness of ethical issues raised by conducting research must also be catered for.

The variety of ethical issues raised by academic research means that some projects can be processed more quickly than others (‘fast track’ rather than ‘full’ applications). PEC has always aimed for timely review within 10 days (compared with other institutional committees who may only meet monthly or bi-monthly to consider full applications). Projects which do not raise ethical issues can be normally considered within a few days.

Completing the proforma ensures that research conducted in the School satisfies ethical standards set out by the bodies listed above. Ethical review is an essential component of degree course accreditation by the BPS, and a necessary procedure in the completion of applications for, and receipt, of grant funding. Researchers should always check with funding bodies in order to ensure that the appropriate level of ethical review has been obtained. Any work involving drug trials or recruitment of NHS staff or patients also requires completion of the NRES proforma (see below).

By thinking about the ethical issues raised by your proposed research, you will be able to identify and consider particular problems at an early stage in the research process. Give due consideration to the methods you are using to acquire your data, and think about the procedures you plan to use from the perspective of your participants. Researchers envisaging a series of studies using the same research design may seek *generic* approval, to cover all projects using the same methodology. New approval should be obtained if any non-trivial changes in methodology are made. Please consult a member of the committee if in doubt.

Additional local procedures have to be followed. These are necessary because of recruitment procedures (sign-up sheets, posters, Sona PRPS), group participation and practical classes that are features of the Psychology degree programme at the University.

PEC is responsible for considering the ethical issues raised by the conduct of research in the School. PEC does not have a role to play in peer review of the academic merits or demerits of the proposed project, although you should be aware that peer review is undertaken in other departments and schools within the University of Aberdeen and is a mandatory procedure in many other UK institutions. In time, peer review of experiments involving human participants is likely to be part of research in the School of Psychology.

**Always use the latest version of the documents available from the website. Forms are updated to reflect changes in guidance and policy.**

**How to Apply**

Applications to PEC require a completed [proforma](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/research/ethics/researcher/). All applications require the proforma as a minimum; additional sheets should be appended as necessary. PEC can only evaluate the ethical implications of a proposal if all relevant information is included (particularly methodology and procedure) irrespective of responses given in the questionnaire portions of the proforma.

SUBMIT **TWO** COPIES OF THE APPLICATION: (1) a signed paper copy, and (2) an electronic copy of all documents to [psychethics@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:psychethics@abdn.ac.uk). Non-electronic documents and materials submitted with the paper copy will be circulated to the committee members as necessary.

Review outcome will be provided on the notification sheet. Fast track and update applications will be reviewed by one or more members of the committee as appropriate. Full applications will be reviewed by the committee within 10 days of receipt. Applications which raise serious ethical issues will be deferred for consideration at monthly meetings ([see web page for schedule](http://abdn.ac.uk/psychology/research/ethics/)) attended by external member(s) of the committee as necessary.

*Fast Track Applications:* Research that does not raise any or significant ethical issues, including work not involving human or non-human participants. Applications must also include a brief description of the procedures (Box A) intended to serve as a justification for fast track application.

*Full Applications:* A full account of experimental procedures and respective implications for participants (Box B). Applicants are responsible for identifying which aspects of the research raise ethical issues and describing which procedures will be in place to lessen or counter their impact. Reference to a previously agreed application may be helpful, but does not obviate the need to carefully describe measures proposed to deal with adverse responses in participants, whether anticipated or not. See *Section Notes* and *General Notes* below for further guidance. It is expected that most non-undergraduate level submissions will be in the form of full applications so that projects are subjected to an appropriate level of scrutiny.

*Update Applications:* Updates now use the standard proforma. Attach a photocopy of the original application with the original PEC Number completed; do not enter details into Review Status as this refers to the current document. Complete the proforma, attaching relevant supporting documentation. The researcher is responsible for determining whether paradigm alteration will impact significantly on participants and thus raise new ethical issues. Examples include administration of an additional questionnaire, increasing testing time that could cause inconvenience, discomfort or fatigue, re-recruitment or alternative recruitment method.

*Generic Applications:* Fast track or full applications depending on the ethical issues raised. Careful consideration should be given to the course of the study, both anticipated and actual. It is unethical and unprofessional to alter any scientific procedure ad hoc to compensate for substantive unanticipated events or data. Update application(s) are relevant when revisions or paradigm shifts fall outwith the original remit.

*NHS Staff and Patients, Drug Trials:* Work involving pharmacological, psychological, psychiatric, or physiological regimes, or patients for whom specialist referral or assessment is required. You are required to provide National Research Ethics Service ([NRES](http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/)) with detailed information about your study. Plan your work in advance. Be aware of the deadlines for submission and receipt of notification from NRES (North of Scotland Research Ethics Service (NoSRES) in our case). NRES can request evidence of local peer review of research proposals in advance of permission to recruit large samples of the public or to measure ‘baseline’ responses in control group populations. The BPS document ‘Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research’ (July 2004) states ‘*approval by an External Ethics Committee does not remove the need for local ethical approval by either a Departmental Ethics Committee or Institutional Ethics Committee*.’ If adequate information is not provided, or the work is not properly justified, your application may be delayed or rejected. Ethical review committees have the right to request further information in order to clarify the proposed research if they see fit. Such action is only taken in order to protect participants’ interests, to adhere to accredited ethical guidelines (similarly for the BPS), to protect the interests of individuals conducting psychological research, and to adhere to legal requirements of our institution.

Remember to complete the notification sheet (last page on application form).

**Research may not commence until applications have undergone ethical review and have been agreed.**

**Monitoring**

Supervising staff are responsible for routine monitoring of research and identification of adverse events that may necessitate alteration, suspension, or discontinuance of a project. Certain projects may involve procedures for which all ethical issues cannot be ascertained from the outset and thus require frequent monitoring in liaison with a member of the committee. PEC welcomes feedback on procedural aspects of research that may have arisen during review and be of use in future applications.

ESRC guidelines state:

*[If PEC] considers that a study is being conducted in a way which is not in accord with the conditions of its approval or in a way which does not protect the rights, dignity and welfare of research participants, it should consider withdrawal of its approval and require that the research be suspended or discontinued. ESRC must be informed of this decision and reserves the right to recoup its grant funding, pending further investigation, in extreme cases of research misconduct.*

**Complaints procedures concerning academic misconduct**

Complaints concerning research malpractice in the School of Psychology should be referred to the Chair of the ethics committee in the first instance. The Chair may then refer expressions of concern to the Director of Research and/or Head of School as necessary.

**Section Notes for Proforma**

These guidelines provide you with assistance in producing a clear presentation of the ethical issues raised by your experiment. They are not rules. Individual experiments require specific treatment and the way you respond to the questions depends on the nature of the research question you are asking.

The level of detail provided should be as much as is needed for PEC to be able to evaluate foreseeable consequences to participants’ psychological and physical well-being, health, and dignity. PEC is not accountable for ethical elements or dimensions of research protocols that applicants have withheld.

These notes are based on PEC’s previous guidelines, and incorporate important new information. As of January 2006, the major change to our local review procedure involves a shift of onus onto the applicant(s) to clearly identify ethical issues arising, and that the proposed counter measures adequately deal with those issues.

Please enumerate responses on a separate sheet with respect to Parts 1-3 of the proforma, and respond as concisely as possible.

**Applicants**

Projects must be hosted by a tenured member of academic staff ([see list of personnel on web pages](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/people)).

**Part One: Participation in Scientific Experiments**

**1.1 Participant information**

Good practice suggests that participants are aware of what will happen to them or what is required of them in the course of the experiment. If this is not done then informed consent cannot be obtained. Answering NO to this question requires an explanation of why participants will not be fully informed as to the nature of the experiment.

**1.2 Voluntary participation and withdrawal**

It is essential that participants are clear that their involvement in the procedure(s) is voluntary. Financial incentives to participate should not be used as this could be perceived as coercion or inducement, and may have ramifications for those who may feel disadvantaged or advantaged by this. Participants must also be informed that they are free to withdraw themselves or their data from the study at any stage. Participants must not be required to provide a reason for withdrawal and must not be penalised for withdrawing. You must therefore judge the balance between justifying remunerated and voluntary participation, as well as the consequences this may have for data completeness. Answering NO to this question requires an explanation of why participants are not told why or that they can withdraw, and/or why remuneration is necessary for recruitment.

**1.3 Consent**

This question refers to obtaining consent. Informed, written consent is a key aspect of participation in experimental research. Whenever possible participant(s) should agree to the procedures that he or she will undergo by providing a dated signature on an appropriate form. This question includes all aspects of observational research. Consent is essential for work with patient groups, whether obtained from the patient or a designated relative. You must indicate how you will give participants the information they require in order for them to provide you with informed consent. Circumstances may affect the person’s ability to give free informed consent if that person is detained under legislative power.

With regard to the Data Protection Act, *there is a distinction between anonymity and confidentiality*. Data held anonymously cannot be linked to individual participants. Individuals should be informed the data are being treated in this manner. Data cannot be held in this mode if it is possible to refer back to the original consent form.

From ESRC Framework document:

*Ethical review may not be required for anonymised records and data sets that exist in the public domain. This includes, for example, datasets available through the Office for National Statistics or the ESRC Data Archive where appropriate permissions have already been obtained and where it is not possible to identify individuals from the information provided. However, data providers are likely to specify their own restrictions on the access to and use of their data. These must be complied with.*

Data held confidentially are traceable (e.g. used in longitudinal or short-term re-recruitment studies). Participants must be informed that the data are stored in this manner, for how long it will be retained, who will have access to it, and that they have the right to withdrawal. Individuals also have the right to have their data explained to them at any time.

Individuals recruited using the Group Participation Panel often revisit the School for follow-up or additional experiments. Similarly, individuals and patients may return for subsequent monitoring or assessment. Proper informed consent regarding future usage of data or re-usage of data as part of another protocol is essential. Individuals whose personal data may be of subsequent use in academic research must be re-approached in order obtain re-consent.

In Questionnaire studies, return of a completed survey document is taken as an indication of consent to participate. It is, generally, not practical to obtain consent in other ways.

University policy on *Good Research Practice* and *Research Governance* requires particular attention is given to obtaining consent. Two original copies of the consent form should be produced. One is retained by the experimenter, one is retained by the participant. The participant should initial each consent item box on the form, print their name, sign and date the document. The experimenter should only complete *their* name, signature, date and possibly participant ID section on the document. The experimenter should not pre-prepare a consent form by completing the participant’s name or test date. Photocopies of the document are not acceptable. If your research project is audited, the monitoring team will inspect every individual consent document (or a large sample of them) for authenticity.

[The consent proforma is here](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/documents/ethics/PEC4.00_consent_conf.docx).

**Use of data for a purpose other than that designated in the original experiment to which the individual gave their informed consent is unethical.**

See also questions on Confidentiality and Anonymity. Answering NO to this question requires an explanation of why written consent is not to be obtained.

**1.4 Response omission**

Participants should be allowed to pass over questions in a questionnaire or interview. Requirement to complete the protocol could be construed as coercion. You must provide reassurance to volunteers that they are not obliged to divulge answers to personal information. Ideally, non-disclosure should not prejudice participation in the experiment although in some circumstances non-disclosure should be applied as part of the participant screening procedure if experimental variables depend on specific information. Describe how you will assure participants that they are not obliged to respond. Answering NO to this question requires justification.

**1.5 Confidentiality**

In answering NO, a case should be made for disclosure of or potential access to participant’s or participants’ identity.

**1.6 Anonymity**

Justification for answering NO should be given in relation to responses to 1.5 and 1.3.

**1.7 Debriefing information**

If during the experiment you withhold information, you are required to indicate how you will avail participants of the nature of the investigation. In some cases a verbal description is insufficient. For example, if your experiment induced negative mood or encouraged the recall of negative or emotional events, your debriefing procedure may include induction and measurement/verification of a happy mode state before the participant leaves the experimental setting. Full consideration must be given to the elimination of all possible harmful after-effects of your experiment.

[A sample debriefing proforma has been provided](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/documents/ethics/PEC4_debrief.docx). Reasons for providing verbal-only information (as opposed to printed) should be given. Answering NO to this question requires an explanation of why adequate and informative information not be provided upon conclusion of the experimental session(s) as well as mechanisms to ask questions concerning their involvement in the experiment.

Good practice should be observed when debriefing. This is also an important aspect of the Group Participation experience for students. Adequate and accessible information concerning experimental design, experimental manipulations/conditions, and analysis should be given. Bear in mind that most GP participants will be unfamiliar with experimental terminology and concepts.

In order to enhance learning (particularly for experiments involving undergraduate volunteers) the debriefing information should provide information about analysis and interpretation of hypotheses.

**Part Two: Procedure**

**2.1 Observation and covert recording**

This often relates to usage of acquired data or filmed material, for example. Covert recording can be highly problematic and result in objections from ‘participants’ often long after the event. Answering YES to this question will probably require a full application including a detailed explanation of why written consent to participation as an observational subject/cohort cannot be or will not be obtained.

**2.2 Deception**

Some protocols inevitably require withholding of information that could otherwise adversely influence the outcome of the experiment. Deceptive tactics should be minimised and, crucially, resolved at the earliest possible opportunity. The level or degree of deception involved must be entirely commensurate with the experimental hypotheses (and no greater than necessary) and, implicitly, there must be adequate evidence that the experimenters are able to deal with participants’ objections and/or expectations.

Deception may create mistrust between the experimenter and volunteer, and lead to erroneous results; participants may deliberately invoke alternate response strategies, or provide cynical responses under report conditions. Because many psychological processes are modifiable by the experimenter (even something as apparently innocuous as environmental factors), you must indicate that you are aware of potential factors that could influence your results and the steps taken to control for them.

Consideration should be given to the following excerpt from the BPS guidelines: ‘*The Committee noted that there is a distinction between withholding some of the details of the hypothesis under test and deliberately falsely informing the participants of the purpose of the research, especially if the information given implied a more benign topic of study than was in fact the case. [The Committee] concluded that the central principle [of deception] was the reaction of participants when deception was revealed. If this led to discomfort, anger or objections from the participants then the deception was inappropriate.*’ It should be appreciated that use of deception is sometimes necessary in order to conduct experimental research, but the dignity of participants must be protected at all times (see also Debriefing).

Deception or withholding of information requires justification and submission of a full application is expected.

**2.3 Risk and inconvenience**

All procedures should be scrutinised for potential risks or inconvenience, however unlikely or small, volunteers may experience by participating in the experiment. Risk may be characterised by a psychological, emotional, or physical disturbance. Commonly, mood induction experiments, questionnaires, and emotional images can cause anxiety or produce reflections on upsetting personal experiences. Use of certain types of equipment can induce negative physical responses (e.g. administration of some types of food or liquid, skin irritation, headache, fluctuation in blood pressure). Thinking about *What could possibly go wrong?* and looking at *Participation from the volunteer’s perspective* can help identify potential risks.

Provide a description of the potential sources of inconvenience your participants may be subjected to, an indication of the degree of inconvenience and its nature, and what steps you have taken to minimise or eliminate them from the procedure. You must give due consideration to the potential side-effects of experimental procedures from the outset (screening for likelihood of epileptic seizure during visual stimulation, for example) and for alterations in mood caused by discomfort (e.g. environment, stress) or length periods of testing that could influence experimental observations. Financial inducements should not be employed if potential participants are subsequently exposed to risk-taking or deviations from everyday patterns of behaviour (e.g. unnecessary time off work).

Risk-levels must not exceed those experienced by the volunteer in the course of normal every-day life or, in the case of extreme sports activities for example, that which the volunteer would routinely expose themselves to in the pursuit of recreational or professional activity. It is important to explain to participants (or potential volunteers in the case of a recruitment poster) the risks involved. In some cases, potential recruits may be dissuaded from participation by a lack of explanation and clarity about the procedures involved (e.g. ‘*electrodes will be attached to your head…*’).

If the proposed investigation has the potential to interact with pre-existing medical conditions (behavioural or physiological, for example) in a participant, and indicate what pre-emptive measures you will take in order to ascertain the level of risk involved.

Researchers are obliged to monitor ongoing research for adverse effects on participants and to stop the research if there is cause for concern about their health and well-being. Your experiment may also necessitate post-experiment monitoring.

Please also read [BPS guidelines](http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/ethics-standards/ethics-standards) on observational research methods.

**2.4 Sensitive information**

Indicate how you will protect the dignity of participants when experiments involve acquisition of sensitive personal information (e.g. health and sexual information, emotional and experiential responses from questionnaires). You must avoid providing unnecessary feedback during or after an experiment; this applies to verbal, telephone, written, e-mail contact, text messaging, etc. equally. Volunteers must be provided with sufficiently detailed information to inform them that detailed feedback is not customary practice, either on task performance or the grounds for selection in follow-up experiments. In certain cases experiments are designed to screen potential participants on the basis of vulnerability to depression or panic disorder, for example, and such procedures must be fully justified and supervised by a senior researcher. Confidentiality and anonymity issues may also be raised.

Please also read BPS [guidelines](http://www.bps.org.uk/documents/Code.pdf) on problems detected during the normal course of psychological research.

**Part Three: Participants and Funding**

**3.1 Special groups**

Close inspection of applications seeking access to specialist groups is warranted. Certain groups involve additional associated risks for the researcher. Your application should identify those risks and how they will be dealt with.

Consideration needs to be given to the type of environment in which assessment will take place and impact on outcomes.

Work with children, juveniles, individuals with learning or communication difficulties, and the vulnerable (e.g. anxiety disorder, elderly) requires careful planning. Work with young persons (≤16yo) requires Disclosure Scotland (CRB equivalent) screening (also see notes on Internet Mediated Research). Young people 16 years or older will be required to provide consent using procedures for adults. You should be aware of demographic [age] differences in University student populations in Scotland and other countries and how this might affect consent and data collection procedures.

Obtaining consent from individuals with learning or communication difficulties, and those serving custodial sentences may be problematic. You must ensure that you have provided adequate provision to manage distress.

Work with NHS staff or patients requires NRES approval. PEC should be informed of the outcome of NRES review. You must ensure that you have provided adequate provision to manage distress.

*If one of your collaborators is an NHS-paid researcher (even though they may be employed by the University), you must register them with the NHS R&D Office using the Site-Specific Information form (SSI).*

*All projects which involve NHS staff, patients, patient samples, patient records or facilities should be registered with the R&D Office when*

* *Externally funded by Research Councils, Charities, UK Government, Europe or any other international body*
* *Part of a multi-centre trial in which Aberdeen is a collaborator regardless of funding*
* *Supported by NHS Grampian endowment grants, departmental funds, named endowment accounts or discretionary funds*
* *Identified as Grant in Aid - where a contribution is made towards research by a commercial company*
* *Unfunded*

PEC may not be able to review applications for studies involving individuals engaged in certain illegal activities. Advice should be sought from the Committee Chair; you may be referred to the University research committee and/or NRES. However, PEC accepts the routine use of peer-reviewed published questionnaires containing potentially sensitive topics.

Applications seeking access to any volunteer cohort outwith normal adult populations require a full explanation (Box B). See also General Notes on consent and participants

**3.2 Review for funding and collaboration**

If ethical review is part of an external application please specify the funding body. PEC may be required to provide written confirmation of ethical review in support of applications or prior to funding being awarded.

**General Notes**

**Pilot experiments**

If it is necessary to conduct pilot work prior to commencement of your main experiment(s), consideration must be given to the ethical issues. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ascertain whether the conduct of a pilot study raises any ethical issues and, if so, a member of PEC should be approached for clarification and/or an application for ethical approval made using the proforma. For example, a study of emotional responses in adults may require the use of emotion arousing materials. In order to ascertain whether stimuli are effective, a pilot experiment is required in order to assess video materials containing potentially shocking scenes that would be used in the main experiment. In such a case, ethical approval for the pilot stage is necessary since the well-being of participants must be considered during and after the experiment. Another example requiring ethical review might concern the acquisition of pilot data for the purposes of a grant application, in which the investigator must conduct a substantial number of trials in order to demonstrate the validity of the proposed technique as a research tool.

**Equipment allocation and room booking**

Members of staff (i.e. supervisors) can request equipment and room allocation from [Mr](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/people/technical/pbates.shtml) Jim Urquart (Room S16) in advance of data collection in order to set up facilities required for the conduct of experiments and to test the feasibility of test paradigms. Students must be in receipt of the returned signed ethics application indicating ethical agreement if they are to request equipment or room allocation. Transfer the PEC number to the equipment form before submitting your request.

**Investigators**

A permanent member of staff must be associated with the project. The named individual assumes responsibility for the proper ethical conduct of the experiment after project review.

BPS Guidelines state that ‘*Supervisors are also obliged to protect their supervisees [i.e. UG, PG, RA, RF] from possible harm, being mindful of any health, safety and insurance issues that may apply to a given programme of research.*’

**Project description**

Typical details used to describe experimental protocols include:

*Rationale:* A succinct description of the background and aims of the research. The description should be understandable by non-specialist readers and should clearly state why the work is being conducted. Include a copy of an appropriate key reference if necessary.

*Description:* A brief indication of the experimental methods and procedures.

*Design:* describes the paradigm used to acquire data (e.g. reaction time study, structured interview, filmed observation, questionnaire).

*Conditions:* refers to the type of procedure to be used (e.g. randomised block design using 3 conditions, 50 repetitions of each condition with replacement).

*Duration:*  approximates the time taken for a participant to complete the task. You should make it clear if volunteers may be expected to sit in a waiting room and for how long before being brought to the testing facility. If participants are required to attend multiple times, make this clear. You should have some idea of task duration from previous pilot or experimental work.

*Participants:*  should indicate the number and type of volunteers you will recruit (e.g. balanced study of 50 early-diagnosed non-dementia Alzheimer patients, and 50 age- and ability-matched controls). Consideration must be given as to what constitutes an adequate sample size and, if necessary, what statistical measures will be appropriate to ascertain this (e.g. statistical power calculations).

*Unit allocation:*  should indicate the number of credits a Level 1 student will be given for participation in the experiment. Level 1 students are required to participate in 2 group practical classes [[Mrs Caroline Green](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/people/teaching/cgreen.shtml)] in First Half Session and 1 practical in Second Half Session, and accrue 6 credits in each Session by participating in the Individual Research Participation scheme [[Mrs Florence MacKenzie](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/people/teaching/fmackenzie.shtml)]. Thirty minutes’ testing equals one credit.

*Assessment method:* Indicate the mode of assessment you will employ to acquire your data. Experiments commonly use reaction time and accuracy measures, questionnaires, observation and video filming, discourse analysis and subjective rating assessment. Copies of novel questionnaires (in full, or in outline with supporting reference material if questionnaire design is part of the project) and interview schedules must be supplied. It is not necessary to append copies of standard, established questionnaires used in psychological research.

**Recruitment**

Participation in psychological experiments is voluntary. Provide an indication of how you will advertise for volunteers to participate in your experiment(s). You are not allowed to use payment as an incentive to participate. Reimbursement or honoraria can be made for travel to the experiment and loss of time at work. Certain experiments that can involve some degree of discomfort or inconvenience (e.g. use of a bite bar in psychophysics, long scanning times in brain imaging) may provide additional compensation. If a poster advertisement is to be used, it is essential to include a copy with the application. Also bear in mind that LRECs forbid recruitment of patients by direct telephone contact; this method could be interpreted as coercion and put individuals under pressure to comply.

A poster may be used either for direct recruitment (with an accompanying sign-up sheet or other method of time allocation) or as a means to initiate screening procedures in order to select a sample of appropriate volunteers (e.g. telephone or e-mail contact with the investigator in the first instance). Guidelines for poster preparation are [here](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/research/files/pecdoc_poster.doc).

If recruitment is via Sona’s PRPS, then a copy of the relevant [proforma](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/~wmm084/documents/ethics/Checklist.doc) should be attached to the application. Permission to register the experiment on PRPS will not be given without a reviewed Information sheet, PEC number, and matching ethics project and PRPS titles.

Particular attention should be given to the presentation of your research project. Be as professional and courteous as possible. Do not trivialise the work but at the same time you will need to make it appealing; graphical images can work for and against recruitment. Indicate the purpose of the research, where the experiment will be conducted, and how long the session(s) will last. Indicate special requirements. Make it clear if particular types of participants are required, and who is ineligible to participate. Outline what the volunteer will be required to do in the experiment. You may have to consider health issues. Provide the name and contact details of the senior investigator/supervisor from whom further information can be obtained.

**Sign-up method**

Sign-up sheets can be used as a way to fill available time slots, and can be a useful way of gauging the response to recruitment. You must consider whether recruits are penalised in the event that they fail to turn up for the experiment (particularly for undergraduate course requirements). It is not always appropriate to contact a missing volunteer directly, therefore you need to be flexible in your scheduling of experiment slots.

Serious ethical issues arise as a consequence of the type of study being conducted and the method of recruitment. A project designed to look at sexual, emotional, medical, or substance abuse issues, for example, must not put volunteers at risk by use of a sign-up sheet posted in a publicly accessible location. Access to names, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers could be abused by other individuals.

**Location**

Normally, PEC considers applications for routine experimental work conducted within the University of Aberdeen or affiliated institutions (such as local hospitals and clinical practices). You should indicate where you intend to conduct your study, i.e. where you propose to perform the experiment that will result in data created by your participants.

**Research outwith the University**

If data are to be acquired outwith the remit of the University of Aberdeen, you are obliged to satisfy the Committee that all possible steps have been taken to try to ensure that participants involved in your experiment(s) will be treated according to the guidelines against which PEC itself is obliged to evaluate the implications of your project. If your research requires recruitment and study of participants abroad, for example, your application cannot be approved unless you can provide documentation indicating the agreed compliance of either an appropriate local authority body or individual responsible for hosting your programme of work. Compliance with these guidelines is an essential requirement for an undergraduate or postgraduate degree.

PEC understands that in certain circumstances you may be awaiting permission to test participants at an external location. Such permission may be contingent on receiving ethical agreement in the first instance. PEC requires evidence that external permission is being sought, and any relevant documents should be attached to the application.

**Providing information and obtaining informed consent**

You are prohibited from acquiring and reporting data obtained from any volunteer without obtaining their free informed consent. Individuals (whether designated as a ‘patient’ or not) who are not in a position to demonstrate coherent understanding of the experiment and their role in it must not be approached directly. Applications should be directed to the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) using their electronic forms available from the [NRES web site](http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/). If you wish to seek clarification, please contact their representatives. Please note that this local policy overrules BPS Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles & Guidelines section 3.4, page 9.

**As of 1 July 2002, Part 5 of the Adults With Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 requires that all research projects in Scotland involving adults who are unable to provide consent, or likely to be unable to provide consent (e.g. head injury, stroke, dementia sufferers), must be submitted via NRES for ethical approval. This applies regardless of the number of centres involved in the research.**

Article 17 of the Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights in Biomedicine or Biomedical Research states ‘*No research on a person may be carried out without the informed, free, express, specific and documented consent of the person.’* This places a legal obligation on researchers to obtain and record consent from participants or their guardians, on the basis of information that should be given to them before their participation begins.

Although Consent Form(s) may be coupled with Participant Information Sheet, in many cases it is useful to separate these documents. Under specific circumstances it may not be possible to obtain free consent (e.g. mass distribution of questionnaires) in which case it may be argued that completion of a questionnaire is itself an indication of consent. Nevertheless, individuals must be provided with adequate prior information in order to make an informed decision whether or not they wish to further involve themselves in the study, and that non-completion, response omission, or withdrawal will not penalised them in any way.

Study objectives, information about all aspects of the research (so far as is reasonable) that might be reasonably expected to influence willingness to participate should be included. FORMAL contact details for participant queries should be provided (usually the senior/supervising investigator); this information may appear both on the Information Sheet and the Debrief Sheet. Any arrangements that have been made to safeguard both identity and data during and after the study must be made clear (see proformas); this includes studies involving recording or transcription of identified personal records (e.g. medical, academic) and/or use of audio and video media.

Research with children or with participants who have impairments requires appropriate safeguards. For research with **school children** under 18 years, consent must be obtained from parents or guardians. Similarly, if access depends on the consent of a third party (parent/guardian, head teacher, physician, etc.) then you must attach a copy of the information letter sent to this authority with the application. A ‘captive audience’ may not be able to indicate free consent. Exclusion criteria may be important to ensure the safety or comfort of participants (e.g. use of contact lenses or spectacles, anomalous colour vision, asthma, migraine; or descriptions of aversive or noxious stimuli). A letter of permission from the Head of the school should be provided to PEC *before* *testing commences*; the letter may not be available at the time the original ethics application is submitted but should be provided thereafter as soon as possible.

Whenever relevant it should be made clear to potential participants that the study is a supervised student project.

Written consent (signature and date) should be obtained whenever possible. In certain cases (e.g. work with particular patients) it may be a formal requirement of your access that the individual’s name or case number also be recorded on the Consent Form and that this document or a copy of it be lodged with the referring clinical consultant.

**Internet mediated research**

Suggestions for how to implement consent policies in research involving the internet are given in [Hewson C (2003) Conducting research on the internet. *The Psychologist*, 16(6), 290-293](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/documents/ethics/0603hews.pdf). Young people 16 years or older will be required to provide consent using procedures for adults. Responses should not be solicited from persons under the age of 16 years of age without adequate justification. The latest guidance on IMR from the BPS can be found on our ethics web pages [here](http://abdn.ac.uk/psychology/research/ethics/info/).

**Children**

Participants under the age of 16 can only be recruited after consent is obtained from parents or those *in loco parentis*.

**Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG)**

Work with vulnerable groups (including children) may require *Disclosure Scotland* (Criminal Records Bureau equivalent) clearance. Details of the service offered by Disclosure Scotland are given on their [website](http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk/). PEC’s policy is that **ALL** **researchers working in local schools** must undergo *Enhanced Disclosure Scotland* clearance. This document must be countersigned by University of Aberdeen Human Resources. Dr Rebecca Bull is your point-of-contact.

**Payment and risk**

Payment of volunteers must not be used to induce participation that may expose them to risk or harm beyond that which exists in the course of their normal lifestyle.

**Right to withdraw**

Data from participants who indicate withdrawal after the study should be treated in the same way as any other volunteer. It is important to reassure participants, particularly if they feel vulnerable in an unfamiliar experimental environment or suffer from a diagnosed medical condition. Acquiring data from particular groups of individuals can be problematic; for example, schizophrenics, autistics, depressive, paranoid, amnesiacs, and Alzheimer’s sufferers. You are advised to incorporate provisions in your experimental protocol to cater for loss of participant numbers, and identify a replacement strategy if possible (this can affect comparison with normative control data which, ideally, should be acquired after patient data).

**Confidentiality**

How will you ensure that any personal information you receive from participants will be kept confidential? Confidentiality covers information recorded on data sheets as well as on computer media. It is important to acknowledge that it is not always possible to treat data anonymously, however, identifiable personal data should not be stored on computer disks (either on-line or off-line). If you are uncertain as to the issues regarding data disclosure you should seek advice from your Data Protection Officer or refer to the current Data Protection Act (1998) documentation. See also [BPS page](http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/ethics-standards/ethics-standards).

It is normal practice in experiments to treat participants’ data anonymously, often by assigning a numerical reference number to individuals’ data sets. In observational experiments when participants are filmed it is frequently the case that their facial identities will be revealed, in which case it is important that volunteers are made aware of (1) who will view the material, and (2) for how long the data will be stored and where before consent is obtained (i.e. verbally and/or in the printed Participant Information Sheet). You may not publish illustrative material featuring individual participants (e.g. an identifiable photograph) without their express written consent.

The Data Protection Act (1998) was updated under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act (2000). The implication of this was to include personal information stored in written form, i.e. written paper records stored on file in relation to your experiments, including materials that can identify an individual contained in lab books. Click [here](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/all?title=data%20protection%20act) to view some relevant sections of the amendment on the Government’s [web site](http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/). If identifiable personal information is stored in any file or document which also contains identifiable information pertaining to another individual(s), you are not obliged to disclose the document to the requester (since the disclosure could be used to identify other individuals).

**Data storage**

A secure designated area for data storage is necessary in order to protect experimental data. It is also essential when the identity of participants can be recovered from materials. You should indicate where data are to be stored (either on hard disk, CDROM, DVD, tape, printed media, or in another raw form), and who will have access to it. Student investigators should indicate how they will safeguard data kept at home (e.g. during data entry). In certain cases it may be necessary to indicate to participants that their data will be destroyed after a period of months or years or at such times as when the principal investigator is no longer in the employ of the University of Aberdeen.

You are expected to use [encrypted memory sticks](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/dit/staff/pcs/safesticks.php) if your work involves NHS-related protocols, transfer of data between machines, etc.

**Research with children**

Research involving young children can raise numerous ethical problems, including obtaining consensual evidence before the work can commence. You should be aware of the implications of your work. Local Education Authorities may require you to consult with them prior to applying for access to children and to PEC. Police checks on students wishing to conduct research in schools or nurseries are also necessary, and it is important that these are conducted well in advance of the proposed experiment start date (see School handbooks). Access to special needs schools during either during normal term times or outwith normal hours (e.g. weekends) often requires special negotiation and preparation (e.g. access to autistics). Your project will probably involve some level of disruption to teaching, schoolwork or family provisions. Thus, recruitment advertising and assent must be considered from the outset.

Please read the guidance notes for research in schools, which is found in all student handbooks. A [form is available](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/documents/ethics/PECDOC_research_in_schools.doc) which must be completed and signed by the Head Teacher of the school where the study will be conducted. Whenever possible, a copy of the document should be attached with the ethics submission.

**Parental consent**

Children’s parents or guardians must be consulted and their permission obtained. It is expected that you will provide evidence of letters sent to parents, headmasters, etc. as part of your application for ethical approval.

**Supervision of children**

Remember to factor into your proposal that supervision of children may require you to compensate for the presence of other adults during the experiment. Some children may be uncooperative and affect your data and/or participant numbers (and therefore variance in statistical analysis). Children may wish to withdraw from further participation, or be prevented from further participation by their supervising adult. Continuing consent may require consideration of pilot schemes, familiarisation with the experimenter, or the development of alternate experimental strategies.

**Participant exclusion**

Certain participants may not be appropriate for your research. Examples include very young children who have not yet developed complex skills, members of the public or patients either suspected or known to be under the influence of pharmacological agents or alcohol, or individuals with prior knowledge of (or professional experience at a level inappropriate for) the research that could adversely affect experimental outcomes. The scientific rationale for exclusion and inclusion should be made clear.

**Special requirements**

You may require some of your participants abstain from exercise or alter dietary practices prior to assessment, for example. You may wish to conduct experimental work in particular environments (e.g. heat and noise, trial jury mock-ups, observation using one-way mirrors, observation by strangers). The Participant Information Sheet must make this clear in every detail. Special requirements may impact on health issues due to participants’ age, for example, which must be addressed.

**Supplementary measures**

Describe any additional procedure(s) you have introduced to ensure your research complies with the BPS code of conduct and ethical guidelines (confidentiality, moral issues, physical safety, psychological consequences of participation). Attach copies of relevant documents (e.g. Department of Health information leaflets).

**Signatures**

Sign and date the document. Applications that are signed in the absence of or on behalf of the investigator(s) will be returned. Signatures represent a formal acknowledgement of an undertaking of responsibility for the ethical conduct of the research project and adherence to guidelines set out by associated professional bodies.