Online surveys, questionnaires and the ethics review process

A survey or questionnaire is one of the most popular ways of collecting data from participants. If you are thinking of using this method, please consider the points below in your ethics application.

Why can I only use UoS approved platforms for my survey?

You should only use UoS approved platforms (such as your UoS MS Forms account, UoS Qualtrics, JISC) for your survey/questionnaire (platforms such as Google forms, SurveyMonkey etc should not be used without prior agreement) as these platforms are University supported and GDPR compliant.

UoS MS Forms allows you to create surveys/questionnaires which allow everyone who takes part to do so anonymously as long as you ensure that this functionality is selected when you create the survey

You already have a UoS MS Forms account which you can log into using your UoS email and password, and used creatively, the platform can provide you with detailed and interesting data. This platform can provide you with a link to your survey which you can then share directly to participants or gatekeepers to share on your behalf. You then wait for participants to respond to your survey/questionnaire and UoS MS Forms will tell you when participants have responded.

Your School/Department may also have access to other survey platforms such as Qualtrics or JISC Please check with your supervisor or School/Department for more information.

Do I still need to submit an ethics application?

Yes - If this is a method you want to use for your research, you must complete an ethics application on Ethics RM (even if you are using a Standard Study Protocol (SSP), please check with your supervisor to see if this an option available to you). You cannot collect any data from human participants without having received approval through this process beforehand.

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What do I put in my ethics application?

In your ethics application, tell us what your research is about, why it needs to be done, who your participants will be and how you will recruit them. This is done in your Study Protocol.

There are certain sections in addition to the online Ethics RM form that need to be submitted.

The Study Protocol needs to tell reviewers what your research is about, why it needs to be done, who your participants will be, how you will recruit them, how informed consent and withdrawal will be achieved, any risks in the research or ethical considerations, and how the data will be handled with enough detail for them to understand what is being carried out and why.

You can submit separate documents for risk assessment, recruitment and data management if needed, but this is not necessary if covered in your protocol. Recruitment materials may detail the information given to participants at recruitment (email, social media, poster etc... see how to on....) You should also submit a document (or documents) detailing the survey/questionnaire

You should also attach a draft version of your survey/questionnaire. Even if this is not a definitive version, it allows the ethics reviewer to see what your participant will be asked and to see their experience when they take part in your research.

You should also upload a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form with your application which can then be pasted to the front page of your online survey or make the survey with the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form information added and attach a PDF of the completed survey to your ethics application.

The Participant Information Sheet tells a participant what your research is about, who you are, where the data you collect will be stored and who they should contact if they have any issues with your research. Please see 'Participant Information Sheets, Consent Forms and the ethics review process' for more information.

If you are considering offering an incentive for participants to take part with a prize draw or SONA token – Please note that this is often a complex area and needs to be fully considered in your ethics application.

If you are collecting data anonymously and using no other method (e.g. Face to face interviews etc), then provided you have given this information in a

Participant Information Sheet you can include this consent item: 'I understand that the anonymous data I provide in this survey/questionnaire will be used in this research project, and that I will not be able to request the withdrawal of my data after submitting the survey/questionnaire etc' or similar as one of your consent items.

If you are collecting data that is not anonymous, you should include details about how a participant can withdraw from the study and a specific date/time by which this will no longer be possible (such as after the data has been collected etc).

For the Consent Form, you should make sure that participants actively click on a check box to show active consent.

What if I am asking participants personal questions?

If you are asking participants questions which are particularly personal or about potentially distressing experiences, please consider what it means for a participant to consider and respond to such questions. You should also think carefully if an online survey is the most appropriate method for this type of research.

It may be the first time they have ever thought about an experience or even put into words their feelings about it. If your research does cover distressing or sensitive topics, please consider letting participants know the content of your survey/questionnaire beforehand and provide them with the contact details of support organizations after the final question. You should also alert participants to any potential distressing content in the Participant Information Sheet.

You should also think about whether some answers given by participants might require action (e.g. response that indicates potential self-harm or harm to others). It might not be possible to do anything other than signpost to sources of support if the data is anonymous, but any questions that have the potential for answers such as this would need consideration in your ethics application on how you might reduce this risk.

Can I use social media to share my survey/questionnaire?

Researchers wishing to advertise a study on social media should upload a standalone study advert that takes those who may be interested directly to the study information sheet/details or to a dedicated study site created under a university account/e-mail; OR invites them to contact the researcher directly via a University of Surrey e-mail address.

Personal social media

We strongly advise not to use personal social media accounts to recruit for your research to ensure a safe professional distance between your personal online spaces and your research ones.

Where possible use research study specific accounts, one setup with your university email / contact details, ask institution accounts to post information (e.g. @SurreyPsych), or ask the gatekeepers of locked groups to post your recruitment advert (with gatekeeper permission).

Best practise in social media recruitment would be that the post links to a University-specific contact or online survey, and where possible the "reply" function should be disabled with no research discussion to take place in social media spaces.

If personal accounts are required, we strongly advise to contact already existing contacts (inc. personal and professional), networks or friendship groups.

If you wish to use personal accounts for public posting, making new contacts or posting to closed groups, please ensure you have an adverse publicity procedure in place (such as contacting your supervisor or assurance for advice) to ensure your safety online.

The best practise in social media recruitment also applies when reposting a recruitment advert from a dedicated professional research account from your personal account.

Please detail how you will use social media recruitment in the Study Protocol

What do I need to include with my ethics application if my research involves online surveys/questionnaires?

- Final version of survey with questions/participant information at start/active consent and a completed Study Protocol

or

- Participant Information Sheet (which can be copied and pasted to the front of your survey before you distribute it

- Consent Information (state you will use the statement provided above or provide a similar version

- Draft version of the questions you intend to use

- <u>Study Protocol</u>

- Gatekeeper approval letter/statement or email (if appropriate)

- Recruitment materials