# Participant Information Sheets, Consent Forms and the ethics review process

## Participant Information Sheet

The Participant Information Sheet contains all the information anyone taking part in your research may need. It is important as it provides participants with the information, they may need in the event they have any issues or questions relating to your project.

All University of Surrey research uses the Participant Information Sheet template provided at https://my.surrey.ac.uk/research/ethics. This allows UoS to ensure that accurate and relevant information is provided to participants and is all the same standard and presentation.

## What do I need to do?

Work your way through the Participant Information Sheet template and adapt it to your research project. You can delete the sections/information that are not relevant to your research as you go, but you should keep the headings as they are currently.

Remember that the information sheet it written for the public and no other researchers, so must have participant -facing language, and be understandable and clear to those without knowledge of the area so try to use non-academic language and spell out any acronyms if you use them.

## When might a Participant Information Sheet not be appropriate?

It may be the case that your research involves a participant group who may be at risk from holding physical copies of information that relate to your research (such as those in precarious employment, economic migrants or those experiencing domestic violence) or your research might involve participants who may not understand fully or engage with this document. In such cases researchers often consider other ways to relay this information to their participants such as a webpage or audio recording of the information. There are specific groups that may need adaptation of information sheet or

consent form (e.g. children, clinical groups) to make them more understandable and easier to access.

If you are considering another method of relaying the participant information you will need to ensure that all the information in the template is covered and state clearly in your ethics application why you have chosen, this approach.

## Consent Form

Informed consent is one of the founding principles of research ethics so that human participants can enter research freely and voluntarily with full information about what it means for them to take part. A fundamental principle of ethical research is the expectation that participants can give consent after fully understanding risks, inconvenience, or the possibility of any harm. Great care is needed in ensuring consent from a participant regarded as 'vulnerable' is clearly informed. In some instances, achieving this may need the assistance of a parent, guardian, or carer.

Consent should be obtained before the participant enters the research.

**The minimum requirements for consent to be informed, is that the participant understands what the research is about and what they are consenting to.**

## What do I need to do?

Firstly, decide how you are going to gain this consent. A typical option is a formal consent form, with boxes to tick, which is then dated and either signed by participant with name or using participant ID and no signature. This form can be done on paper, or online / digitally (where signature can also be taken). How this is enacted depends on your study design and the needs of the type or research and participants (e.g. do you need to evidence signature and consent to each point in form in paper). For anonymous studies, it could be that digital/online consent linked to a survey will best work.
Another option is verbal consent, where information is read out by you……"

Whichever option you choose, this will need to be justified as to the usage and whether this collects the level of consent required & practical for the study.

The templates for these documents can be found at https://my.surrey.ac.uk/research/ethics and you should adapt these according to your

research, making sure you remove any information that is not relevant to your research (video recording, photographs etc).

Whichever way you obtain consent from a participant; you need to store this data securely. Paper copies of Consent Forms (scanned) and Verbal Consent recordings should be stored in your UoS OneDrive (away from your research data) as soon as you have them and deleted from any other location. “If paper copies do need to be retained due to procedures used or guidelines from grant body, then these need to be stored in secure locked location

Remember that participants should understand and know how to withdraw from your research at any time during their participation. This could be by speaking to you directly or via email. You should also provide participants with a specific date/time by which they can no longer request withdrawal from the research (such as a week after an interview has taken place etc). This prevents the possibility of a participant withdrawing from your research during your writing-up process. It is also possible that participant may not be able to withdraw data (e.g. in cases the data is anonymous), in which case this needs to be explicitly stated in the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.

Please check that the information in your consent form matches that in your information sheet. For example, the withdrawal options, but also if you e.g. state in consent form that you will be processing special category data “for purposes described in information sheet,” then the information sheet must describe this. The same is true for any data usage & sharing (e.g. keeping email for future studies, sharing anonymous data).