Conducting research in Victorian government schools and early childhood settings



Guidelines for applicants

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This document is also available on the internet at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/Pages/schoolresearch.aspx>

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# Introduction

The Department of Education and Training (the Department) welcomes high-quality proposals for field research which are designed to contribute to its ‘learning for life’ agenda. It acknowledges the importance of research evidence which supports its priorities and informs policy development and practice regarding the safety, health, development, learning and wellbeing of Victorians from birth to adulthood.

Applicants are encouraged to identify opportunities to link their proposals with the Department’s directions and priorities, which are outlined in key policy documents at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/direction.aspx>

The Department acknowledges the importance of collaborative networks between and among researchers, policy makers, schools and practitioners as a means of building strong evidence‐based policy and practice. It encourages applicants to discuss their proposal with the relevant policy area in the Department *before* submitting an application and to develop a partnership with the setting in which they propose to conduct the study.

The Department reviews research proposals to ensure that they do not breach its duty-of-care obligations or potentially contravene policies and procedures relating to education, the wellbeing of students and staff and the efficient management of schools. The review process also enables the Department to monitor the type and number of research studies taking place and provides a mechanism to access the findings from those studies.

Researchers must consider the wellbeing of all children and young people and protect them from any potential physical and psychological harm. Proposals with the potential to adversely affect educational progress or development or are likely to lead to a breach of the Department’s duty-of-care to protect children and young people from reasonably foreseeable harm will not be approved.

Research proposals must conform to all relevant privacy legislation, including the [*Information Privacy Act 2000*](http://www.privacy.vic.gov.au/domino/privacyvic/web2.nsf/pages/information-privacy-act) (Vic) and the [*Health Records Act 2001*](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc/legislation.htm) (Vic). Where relevant, applicants should demonstrate that they have sought approval for their proposal from their institution's Human Research Ethics Committee.

The aim of these guidelines is to assist researchers to prepare applications to conduct research in Victorian government schools and early childhood settings. The guidelines also relate to research proposals which seek access to Department-owned data but do not involve recruiting participants in schools or early childhood settings.

The intended audience includes tertiary education providers, research organisations, student researchers and their supervisors, independent researchers, departmental project managers, early childhood education and care service providers, schools, and the broader school community.

The guidelines, application form, checklist and suggested report template are available at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/Pages/conducting.aspx>

# Who needs to complete an application?

The following must be submitted to the Department for approval:

* research undertaken for a Master by Research degree or by PhD candidates (including departmental staff)
* research undertaken for an Honours degree, postgraduate diploma or Master degree where scholarly publication of findings is intended
* any proposal where the foreseeable risk to participants is more than ‘low risk’ as defined by the [*National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/ethics/human_research/index.htm)(NHMRC 2007) or which poses any level of risk to the site or to the Department
* studies which investigate sensitive issues, e.g. body image, drugs, suicide ideation, mental health, sexual health, sexual behaviour, and family issues
* evaluation studies commissioned by the Department, other State or Commonwealth Government departments.

If you are uncertain about whether or not you need to submit an application to the Performance and Evaluation Division, please contact: [research@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:research@edumail.vic.gov.au)

# Who does not have to complete an application?

Principals, site managers or regional leaders can directly approve proposals where the research is to be conducted by:

* undergraduate or post-graduate diploma students where the study is confined to one site and the findings will not be published
* students enrolled in a Master by Coursework program which has an education focus, e.g. Master of Teaching, where the project is to take place in one school only
* practitioners enrolled in Bastow Institute leadership courses such as: Masters in School Leadership (Monash); and Master of School Leadership; Master of Numeracy; Master of Literacy (The University of Melbourne)
* studies undertaken by primary and secondary students within their own or neighbouring schools (Note: the principal of each school must provide approval).

Researchers in these categories may find these guidelines helpful in preparing an approval request to principals, site managers or regional leaders. Researchers and approvers are welcome to seek advice from the Department in preparing or reviewing proposals.

Researchers in these categories who are based in tertiary education institutions may need to lodge an application with the Department if their institution’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requires them to provide evidence of organisational approval to conduct the research study.

The Department asks course coordinators to submit an application as a ‘program of research’ where the course involves a number of individuals completing a research component (e.g. an action research project, observation of teaching methods). Students are then encouraged to submit short final reports to the Department on these studies nested in the program. These will be published on the Department’s Research and Evaluation Register as a means of sharing findings and developing networks of learning between practitioners and educationalists.

# Application process

The application must include sufficient information to enable a full understanding of the aims, methodology and procedures of the research. This includes details on the aim of the study; an indication of the proposed sample; resources expected of the site; identification of any potential risks and how they will be managed; and arrangements for maintaining confidentiality and protecting privacy. The application should also include copies of any survey instruments, plain language statements and consent forms.

The application comprises the application form, a signed Research Agreement and relevant supporting documentation. The application is not complete until all documentation is received.

Please note:

* Approval by the Department does not signify endorsement of the project, its outcomes or recommendations.
* Approval provides the researcher with the authority to approach school principals or site managers. The final decision as to whether or not the research proceeds rests with the principal or site manager.
* Successful applicants must provide the principal or site manager with the approved complete application and the Department’s letter of approval.
* Participation in the research study by either the site or individual participants is voluntary.
* The Department does not provide retrospective approval for a research study where the collection of data has commenced or been completed.
* In general, the Department will not approve projects undertaken for commercial or material gain, including those involving primarily marketing activities or market research.

## Research in early childhood settings

The Department is responsible for regulating and licensing early childhood education and care services in Victoria.

Section 26 of the *Children’s Services Act 1996* (Vic) requires services to take every reasonable precaution to protect children not only from any hazard likely to cause injury, but also from harm.

The Performance and Evaluation Division reviews research proposals to ensure they do not have the potential to breach duty-of-care obligations.

The Department advises early childhood education and care services to recommend to researchers who approach them wishing to conduct a research study in their centre, to submit their proposals to the departmental review process.

## Research commissioned by the Department

Projects commissioned by the Department are subject to the same application and review process as projects which are initiated externally. The review process is separate from the process used by business units to develop project proposals or charters.

The reasons for the application requirement include the following:

1. The Department must meet its duty-of-care responsibilities; assess the level of risk posed by a proposal and ensure risk is properly managed; apply standards regarding the quality of the research proposed and ensure proposals reflect principles of ethical design and conduct.
2. The Department is committed to ensuring that a strong evidence base influences its decision making. It meets this commitment by gathering information about research and evaluation activity and sharing knowledge about findings.

## Access to Department-owned data

External researchers who wish to access data sets owned or managed by the Department use the same application process.

The Department collects data to monitor performance across schools and early childhood services. It aims to improve services and outcomes in care, health, education, engagement with the system, and to provide strategies for successful transition into careers and learning for life.

Before completing their application, applicants wishing to access system-level data should discuss their requirements with the Performance and Evaluation Division at: [research@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:research@edumail.vic.gov.au)

The Division does not release **single** school-level data; these requirements need to be discussed with the school principal.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) manages a wide range of research and statistical information regarding the operation and conduct of curriculum and assessment activities in the Victorian education system. For more information visit the VCAA website at: <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>

## Research Agreement

The Research Agreement forms part of the application form. In signing, the applicant agrees to adhere to provisions relating to privacy, insurance, departmental policies and procedures, and reporting requirements.

The Agreement also asks applicants to agree or not agree to the publication of their final project report on the Department’s [Research and Evaluation Register](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/researchregister/default.htm).

## Submitting the application

Before submitting the application, applicants must ensure it is written in plain English and that there are no typographical errors or grammatical mistakes. Documents such as plain language statements and consent forms should be individually and clearly titled and on the letterhead of the university or research organisation.

The researcher will receive email notifications of: 1) registration and Project ID; 2) amendments required during the review process; and 3) the outcome of their application.

Applications can take up to six weeks to process from the date a complete application is received.

Electronic copies of the application (in Word format) are preferred, and can be sent to: [research@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:research@edumail.vic.gov.au)

Alternatively, post a hard copy to:

Performance and Evaluation Division

Department of Education and Training

GPO Box 4367, Melbourne, 3001

**For further information**

Contact the Performance and Evaluation Division at: [research@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:research@edumail.vic.gov.au)

# Review process

The Performance and Evaluation Division ensures that the application is complete before forwarding it to the relevant policy area for review. The reviewing officer recommends whether or not the application can be granted ‘in principle’ approval. This approval provides the researcher with the authority to approach school principals or site managers.

The Department reviews applications according to criteria under the following headings:

* + **benefit** and **value** to the Department, sites and participants
  + **burden** on sites and participants
  + appropriateness of **methodology** for the setting
  + **ethical design** and **conduct**, which includes issues such as **informed consent**, **confidentiality**, **privacy** and **protection from harm**.

## Benefit and value

The applicant should describe how the project will benefit the Department, schools, early childhood settings and participants. The project should have the potential to extend rather than duplicate existing knowledge.

In addition the application should also:

* conform with legislation and support departmental policy and procedures relating to the delivery of educational programs
* be aligned to the Department’s [directions and priorities](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/default.htm)
* contribute new knowledge in the focus area and preferably produce findings which are transferable.

The application should clearly state the background, rationale and objectives of the project and articulate the aim of the project through clearly defined research questions.

The application should demonstrate:

* clear links between the research goals, questions, strategy, methodology, research instruments and the broader purposes to which the research contributes
* attention to detail in planning the resources required to conduct the research
* a partnership approach between the researchers and participating sites that is likely to increase transparency, accessibility and receptiveness to the project
* clear strategies for the dissemination of findings.

Appendix 1 lists some points applicants may wish to consider in developing a quality proposal.

## Burden

The collection of data in many instances can take a considerable amount of time and can divert attention from the core business of schools and early childhood settings. Additionally, the administration of research projects may be burdensome for staff.

The [*National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e35) (NHMRC 2007, p. 56) states that ‘in educational research, discussion with the school community should be built into the research design’. Applicants must clearly describe in the letter to the principal/site manager the time and resources they expect the site to commit. Applicants should consider:

* negotiating the provision of resources in collaboration with the site and providing financial compensation for the use of resources where appropriate
* scheduling research activities at times which suit the site
* not targeting participants or sites which have been overly researched
* the level of disruption the research will cause to the delivery of programs provided by the site
* the burden the activity will impose on staff in providing administrative support
* the risk posed by the proposal to participants, the school or centre, and the Department.

## Methodology

Applicants must ensure the proposal has clearly defined research question/s, is well designed and outlines logical methods of data collection and analysis which are likely to lead to useful findings. For student researchers the responsibility for the quality of the proposal rests with the supervisor. Research and evaluation projects commissioned by the Department must clearly reflect the specifications outlined in the Request for Proposal.

In addition, the methodology must be appropriate for the setting. In order for the principal or site manager to make an informed decision about whether or not the study should proceed, the application should clearly indicate:

* the sample size, Year or age level and sampling procedure
* the time required for each activity
* the development stages with details of how frequently the researcher will need to visit the site
* the timeline for the research with precise commencement and end dates.

### Health-related research

The Department is receiving an increasing number of applications to conduct research which are health-related and may involve the use of medical procedures including the collection, storage and future use of genetic material.

The Performance and Evaluation Division refers these applications to the Department’s Principal Medical Adviser and are considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the existing guidelines. The Department will not approve applications which have the potential to adversely affect educational progress or development, or are likely to lead to a breach of the Department’s duty-of-care to protect children and young people from reasonably foreseeable harm.

## Ethical design and conduct

### Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval

The guidelines for conducting research involving humans are set out in the [*National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/ethics/human_research/index.htm) *(National Statement)* issued by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC 2007). Under these guidelines, all research that involves more than low risk[[1]](#footnote-1) requires review by a formally constituted HREC. Research projects which collect sensitive information (defined under [Information Privacy Principle 10](http://www.privacy.vic.gov.au/privacy/web.nsf/content/information+privacy+principles)) or information about the health (physical, mental or psychological) of an individual must be reviewed by a HREC.

The Department does not have a formally constituted HREC. It requires that all proposals to conduct research in schools or early childhood settings submitted by university-based researchers have the approval of their institution’s ethics committee. The application to the Department may be submitted at the same time as the application to the HREC. Applicants must inform the Department of any changes to the proposal requested by their ethics committee.

Researchers who are not based at a university must justify why a proposal which poses more than low risk to participants has not undergone formal ethics review. Applicants can refer to the Low-risk checklist (Appendix 2) to determine whether or not their application requires review by a formally constituted HREC.

The Department reviews the ethical design and conduct of applications in accordance with the *National Statement*. This review includes consideration of how the proposal provides for **informed consent**, **confidentiality** and **privacy** and **protection from harm or risk**.

### Informed consent

After gaining the approval of the principal/site manager to proceed with the research in their setting, the researcher must gain the ***active****,* informed consent of each individual participant and, for any child under the age of 18, consent from parents/caregivers.

Research participants and parents/caregivers have the right to be fully informed regarding the intent, nature and scope of the research before deciding if they will participate. The researcher must provide sufficient information on the benefits and risks associated with the study to enable informed consent.

The decision to participate in a research study must be clearly established. The consent process may entail a series of communications which lead to understanding, then agreement. For children and young people, consent is indicated by the return of a form signed by parents/caregivers. An ‘opt-out’ or passive consent process is not acceptable to the Department.

Participation must be entirely*voluntary*. People who elect not to participate in a research project need not give any reason for their decision. Participants are also entitled to withdraw from the research at any stage.

Obtaining assent

Obtaining the assent of children and young people demonstrates respect and provides them with the opportunity to withdraw from the study if they want to. Children and young people should be given the option to decline to participate even if their parents/caregivers have provided consent for them to do so. The use of age-appropriate plain language statements also demonstrates respect.

Student consent

Any student aged 18 or over may provide their own consent.

Renegotiating consent

Where projects are complex or long-running, researchers may need to renegotiate consent. For example, a longitudinal study might seek to survey young people every two years throughout their secondary schooling. A young person in Year 12 might feel quite differently about participating in a research activity than they did in Year 7.

Whole class/group participation

Where researchers propose whole-class or group participation, they must arrange alternative activities for non-participating members. In a school setting this must be arranged in advance and in conjunction with the appropriate teacher. These arrangements may also entail alternate supervision for non-participating children and young people. If there are costs to the setting, these can be passed onto the researcher.

Coercion and pressure

Pre-existing relationships between participants and researchers, e.g. teachers and their students, may compromise the voluntary nature of the decision to participate. Tertiary students or teachers conducting research in schools where they teach must ensure their position of authority does not result in children feeling obliged to participate.

Incentives

The *National Statement* advises that ‘decisions about payment or reimbursement in kind, whether to participants or their community, should take into account the customs and practices of the community in which the research is to be conducted’ (NHMRC 2007, p. 20).

The Department does not encourage the offer of incentives to participants in research projects and does not support the use of incentives as a recruitment strategy. Researchers may consider making a contribution of some educational value to the school, for example, vouchers for books or sporting equipment; funding for Casual Relief Teachers (CRT); professional development or briefing sessions on the implications of findings for a particular school. Researchers may also wish to consider providing administrative support and financial assistance to reduce the demands on the site’s resources.

The Department does not generally approve the distribution of cash, movie or shopping vouchers or the inclusion of individual participants in a draw for a prize. The Department encourages researchers to employ strategies, in partnership with the setting, which will increase response rates.

Photographs and filming

Where the proposed research involves videotaping, photographing or filming, the researcher must obtain specific agreement from the participants and, for children and young people, their parents/caregivers. In facilitating agreement, approval to participate could include options to allow for full recognition or pixel obscuring if appearance is captured accidentally. The researcher must make it clear how the photographs or film footage are to be used and if the images will be shown publicly or published in any media, including the internet.

### Researching with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

The Department complies with Commonwealth and State human rights, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation. Information on the Department’s policy and legislative context is available at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/divequity/Pages/culture.aspx>

When conducting research in culturally and linguistically diverse communities researchers should familiarise themselves with the principles of the legislation and Department policy. All researchers should demonstrate respect for cultural, religious and other differences and provide accessible communication of and benefit from research findings. In particular they should consider:

* translating plain language statements and consent forms into the languages spoken at home by parents/guardians
* consulting with community organisations to gain understanding and support for their proposed research
* conducting information sessions and debriefing sessions, using interpreters where necessary.

### Privacy and confidentiality

The researcher must protect the privacy, confidentiality and where possible the anonymity of participants, both in the collection and storage of data. Researchers are required to comply with the provisions of the *Information Privacy Act* *2000* (Vic) and the *Health Records Act 2001* (Vic).

If anonymity is not possible, for example when information is collected by audiotape or videotape or identifying information is needed to track participants in longitudinal studies, the confidentiality of participants must be assured. Persons other than the researcher must not be able to link the information collected to individual participants. Storage procedures must detail the precautions taken to prevent unauthorised access to data. The identity of schools participating in research projects should also remain confidential unless the school explicitly agrees to being identified in published reports.

Data collected should be used only for the purpose for which it was collected.

The application must outline:

* a clear process for ensuring confidentiality in relation to the collection and storage of data and the publication or reporting of findings
* proper processes for the secure storage of and access to data
* justification for any limitations to confidentiality and anonymity.

### Protection from harm

The researchers need to demonstrate that:

* they have the necessary qualifications, competence and experience to manage their research project, including the management of unexpected situations
* they are aware of relevant ethical and legal obligations.

Duty-of-care responsibilities

In addition to their professional obligations, principals, teachers and site managers have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to protect children or students in their charge from risks of harm that are reasonably foreseeable.

Requirements of the duty include providing adequate supervision during research activities. A teacher or other adult with a legal duty-of-care responsibility should always be present during research activities. Direct interaction with an individual child or young person outside the classroom, e.g. a one-on-one interview, must take place in the presence of a teacher or other adult with legal duty-of-care, or in an open space in view of school staff. Researchers should include their understanding of supervision requirements in the letter to the principal/site manager detailing the resources they expect the school or centre to provide for the conduct of the study, and discuss those requirements with the principal/site manager before commencing the study.

Disclosure of abuse or neglect

The teacher’s legal duty is greater than that of the ordinary citizen and may involve disclosing personal or health information to others that the teacher feels is necessary to fulfil his or her duty-of-care.

If during the course of a research study a child or young person makes a disclosure of abuse or neglect or becomes at risk of harm, the researcher has a responsibility to report this to the supervising teacher or principal. In this case the duty-of-care to protect the child outweighs the need to maintain confidentiality.

A mandated professional (e.g. a registered teacher or principal) must make a mandatory report if they have formed a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection because:

* the child is at apparent risk of harm
* a disclosure of abuse or neglect has been made by a child or others
* there is a reasonable belief that a child is being subjected to sexual abuse or physical harm resulting from physical abuse or neglect
* the child’s parents/caregivers cannot or will not protect them from that harm.

## Applications that will not be approved

To ensure that the duty-of-care to protect students is maintained, the Department will not approve the following applications. This list is not exhaustive but includes those that:

* have the potential for a high level of personal intrusion on participants, emotionally, psychologically and/or physically
* involve the administration of medications and/or drugs
* potentially lead participants to unreasonably incriminate themselves, such as in illicit drug taking, stealing or carrying weapons
* focus disproportionately or sensationally on negative behaviour, have the potential to stimulate stress or risk taking behaviour
* have the potential to adversely affect the Department, the school or early childhood setting
* are undertaken for commercial, marketing or journalistic purposes
* do not meet the standards of an applicant’s HREC.

## Granting approval

Contentious or complex proposals may be referred to executive members or committees of the Department which will consider the application from an ethical perspective and with reference to advice from program area experts. Proposals which are health-related may be referred to the Principal Medical Adviser and can take longer to review.

The Department will communicate the reasons for a decision not to approve an application. There is no process for appealing this decision but researchers may amend their application to address the concerns raised.

The processing of applications can take up to six weeks from the time a ***completed*** application is received.

Approval by the central office indicates the project complies with departmental guidelines and does not imply that the Department endorses the research or supports the development or evaluation of a program or intervention as part of the research.

At the completion of the review process the Department advises the researchers by email of the decision.

As a courtesy, once approved by the central office, researchers should inform the relevant Regional Office(s) of their intention to approach schools or managing bodies of early childhood settings.

## Approaching schools or early childhood settings

Approval is granted for the researcher to *approach* principals of schools or site managers of early childhood settings. The final decision as to whether or not the research can proceed in a setting rests with the principal/site manager.

See this site for the Department’s policy on visitors to schools:

[http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/visitorsinschool.aspx/](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/visitorsinschool.aspx)

### Consent from the site

In determining whether to accept a research proposal the principal/site manager will consider the potential benefits to the site and the participants. These benefits will be balanced against the level of intrusion and the commitment of resources. There is no obligation for a principal/site manager to permit the researcher(s) to enter the site.

The most successful applications are likely to be those which have a clear and concise rationale for the involvement of a particular school or early childhood setting, relevance to programs delivered at the setting, straightforward procedures and minimum time demands. The least successful will be those which do not offer specific benefits to the setting and which appear to be focusing on the setting simply as a convenient way of gaining access to a sample of children or young people.

The principal/site manager may require the applicant to meet any costs incurred by the setting associated with the conduct of the research in the setting. The principal/site manager may also ask the researcher to provide evidence of a [Working with Children Check](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/Working+With+Children/Home/Application+Process).

# Reporting requirements

The *National Statement* considers that human participants in research are not subjects or objects. Participants should be involved at all possible levels including being informed about the outcomes of the study.

The application should indicate how the findings of the research are to be used and shared and include a strategy to communicate the findings.

The Department is interested in the findings of research conducted in schools and early childhood settings and it is a condition of approval that the researcher reports to the Department at the conclusion of the study. The application asks the applicant:

* to provide the Department with a concise two to three page summary report and its key findings
* to provide a report to the participating schools/centres in a format agreed to by the principal(s)/site manager(s) of participating schools/sites. The researcher might consider providing an information session or debriefing session with participants.
* to acknowledge the support of the Department in any publications arising from the research.

The reports must not contain data which can identify individuals or participating schools.

The Department has no claim on the intellectual property produced by research it has not commissioned. However, the applicant is asked to provide the Department with the opportunity to review and provide comment on any materials generated from the research prior to scholarly publication. Similarly the Department would appreciate advance notice of any planned media releases regarding the study. It is expected that if there are any differences of opinion between the Department and the researcher related to the research outcomes, that these differences will be acknowledged in any publications, presentations and public forums.

The Department’s online Research and Evaluation Register provides researchers with an avenue to share findings from their studies. Applicants are asked to agree to the publication of the project’s report and to indicate whether or not they consent to it being available to departmental personnel and to the general public. Researchers are welcome to send reports or published articles regarding their project to the Performance and Evaluation Division at: [research@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:research@edumail.vic.gov.au)

# Appendix 1: What does a good proposal look like?

The following is modified from the *Human Research Ethics Handbook – Commentary on the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (NHMRC 2001). The handbook is now rescinded but is still a useful source of information. It is available on the NHMRC website at: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e42>

The project

* Are the aims of the proposal clear?
* Is the research likely to yield new information, enhance understanding or clarify existing uncertainty?
* Has this, or similar, research been carried out before in the same, or similar, contexts?
* Can the research proposal be supported by a systematic review of the literature that demonstrates the importance of the research question and builds upon the results of previous research?
* Have the perspectives of potential participant groups and the wider community been incorporated into the research proposal?

The researchers

* Do the researchers have necessary qualifications, competence and experience?
* Are members of the research team aware of relevant ethical and legal obligations?

The funding

* What is the relationship between the source of funding and the aims of the project?
* Does that relationship have any implications for the ethical conduct of the project, especially the recruitment of participants, the character of information sought or the freedom to publish the results?

Research methodology

* Are all aspects of the research methodology clearly described?
* Is the methodology appropriate to the achievement of the aims of the project?

Recruitment of participants

* Is it clear how participants will be recruited?
* Do the recruitment methods respect participants’ rights to confidentiality?
* Are the proposed participants appropriate in number and kind?

Burdens of research

* Are the burdens and risks of research to participants clearly identified and have appropriate measures been taken to minimise these?
* Is the balance between the burdens and risks to participants and the aims and benefits of the project such as to warrant approval?

Incentives for participation

* Are financial or other rewards proposed to be given to participants?
* Have issues such as coercion been considered?

Consent

* Are the ways in which participants will be approached clearly described?
* Is the information to be provided to potential participants adequate in content and appropriate in form?
* Do the proposed methods of securing consent to participate provide a) sufficient time to consider the decision; b) evidence that participants understood their choices, and c) sufficient opportunities to ask questions and re-consider?

Discontinuing participation

* Are the ways in which participants are advised of their freedom to withdraw sufficient in content and frequency?

Information protection

* Is it clear who will (and who will not) have access to information collected during the project?
* Are the proposed storage and security measures adequate?
* Are participants clearly informed that information they provide will be used only for the project?
* What measures are proposed to protect the confidentiality of information and the privacy of participants, during the study and in resulting publications, and are these adequate to give the degree of protection promised to participants?

Legal issues

* Does the project involve subject matter or conduct which may give rise to legal vulnerability of participants or researchers? Are adequate precautions to be taken?

# Appendix 2: Low-risk checklist

This checklist is to assist applicants to determine the level of risk posed by a proposal and if the proposal requires review by a formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

If your research includes investigation in any of these areas, a HREC needs to review your proposal.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes | No |
| Parenting strategies or children and young people’s attitudes towards parenting strategies |  |  |
| Potentially sensitive or contentious areas, e.g. body image, sexuality, sexual behaviour, eating disorders |  |  |
| Sensitive cultural issues |  |  |
| Grief, death or serious/traumatic loss |  |  |
| Gambling |  |  |
| Topics which involve disclosing information that may be prejudicial to participants (for example, which has the potential to be incriminating), |  |  |
| Illicit drug or alcohol use |  |  |
| Self-report of criminal activity or anti-social behaviour |  |  |
| Recruits from a vulnerable population, for example - intellectually disabled individuals, people who have undergone trauma, or have a mental illness |  |  |
| Any psychological disorder, depression, mood states and/or anxiety |  |  |
| Suicide |  |  |
| Gender identity |  |  |
| Race or ethnic identity |  |  |
| Any disease or health problem |  |  |
| Fertility |  |  |
| Termination of pregnancy |  |  |

1. The *National Statement* defines risk as ‘a potential for harm, discomfort or inconvenience’ (sec. 2). Potential harms may be physical, psychological, social, economic, legal or involve devaluation of personal worth. Less serious than harm is discomfort, which might include, for example, anxiety induced by an interview. Less serious again is inconvenience. Examples of inconvenience may include filling in a form, or giving up time to participate in research.

   ‘Low risk’ research is research in which the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort. Where the risk, even if unlikely, is more serious than discomfort, the research is not low risk. ‘Negligible risk research’ describes research in which there is no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort; and any foreseeable risk is no more than inconvenience. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)