

Conducting research in Victorian government schools and early childhood settings

Guidelines for research applications

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Research involving schools and early childhood settings is required to adhere to all relevant regulations and laws, including but not limited to:

- the [Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 \(Victoria\)](#)
- the [Health Records Act 2001 \(Victoria\)](#)
- the [Child Safe Standards \(Ministerial Order No. 1359\)](#)
- the [department's policy on visitors to schools](#)
- [Working With Children Check, Victoria](#)
- the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2023\)](#)
- any requirements of a HREC where applicable.



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Conducting research in Victorian government schools and early childhood settings

High-quality research evidence is essential to help deliver Victoria's vision for the Education State. A wide range of research is conducted in partnership with the Department of Education, and within Victorian government schools and early childhood settings.

The Research in Schools and Early Childhood Settings (RISEC) approval process ensures that all research conducted in Department of Education contexts:

- is aligned to education system goals and priorities
- upholds the department's duty of care for students and staff
- minimises burden on participants.

RISEC approval is required:

- To conduct research involving Victorian government schools or early childhood settings.
- To use Victorian government schools or early childhood settings to recruit participants for research projects, for example by advertising research projects in school or site newsletters.
- Regardless of whether research and evaluation projects are commissioned by the department or initiated externally.

The RISEC process is not an ethics review and is not a substitute for review by a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The Department of Education does not have a formally constituted HREC.

Key points:

- RISEC approval allows researchers to invite school and early childhood settings to participate in research; however, participation in research is at the discretion of the setting and the individual.
- RISEC approval is required for both department-commissioned or led and externally initiated research and evaluation activities.

Who needs RISEC approval?

RISEC approval is required for both research and evaluation activities, including activities undertaken for undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate study (e.g. Masters or PhD). This includes research and evaluation activities undertaken by, or commissioned by, the Department of Education itself.

You **must** have RISEC approval if research and evaluation activities:

- will be conducted in Victorian government schools and/or any early childhood settings in Victoria
- will recruit some or all participants (e.g. students, children and young people, families, or school or centre staff) through Victorian government schools and/or any early childhood settings in Victoria.

The only exception to the above is if the research or evaluation is:

- conducted by undergraduate, post-graduate diploma, or Masters students **and** the study is confined to one site **and** the findings will not be published
- the research is being conducted by practitioners enrolled in the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership courses **and** the research findings will not be published
- the research is being conducted by primary and secondary students within their own or neighbouring schools (Note: there is a requirement for the principal of each school to provide approval).

In these circumstances the researcher will need to apply directly to the principal of the Government school or early childhood site operator.

Research and evaluation projects which will not be approved

The department is responsible for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students and teachers in government schools and early childhood settings. The department upholds this duty of care by ensuring research is appropriate, relevant, and does not place undue burden on school communities.

We will not approve research that:

- uses significantly invasive techniques
- is undertaken for commercial or material gain, including market research
- can be undertaken outside of a school or early childhood setting (i.e. there are alternative pathways to recruit participants and/or conduct the research)
- overlaps with existing or planned department research or evaluation.

Opt-out consent and incentivised participation

Research that uses opt-out approaches for participant recruitment or incentivised participation is subject to additional layers of review, with increased processing time, and is unlikely to be approved. For further information, please contact research@education.vic.gov.au

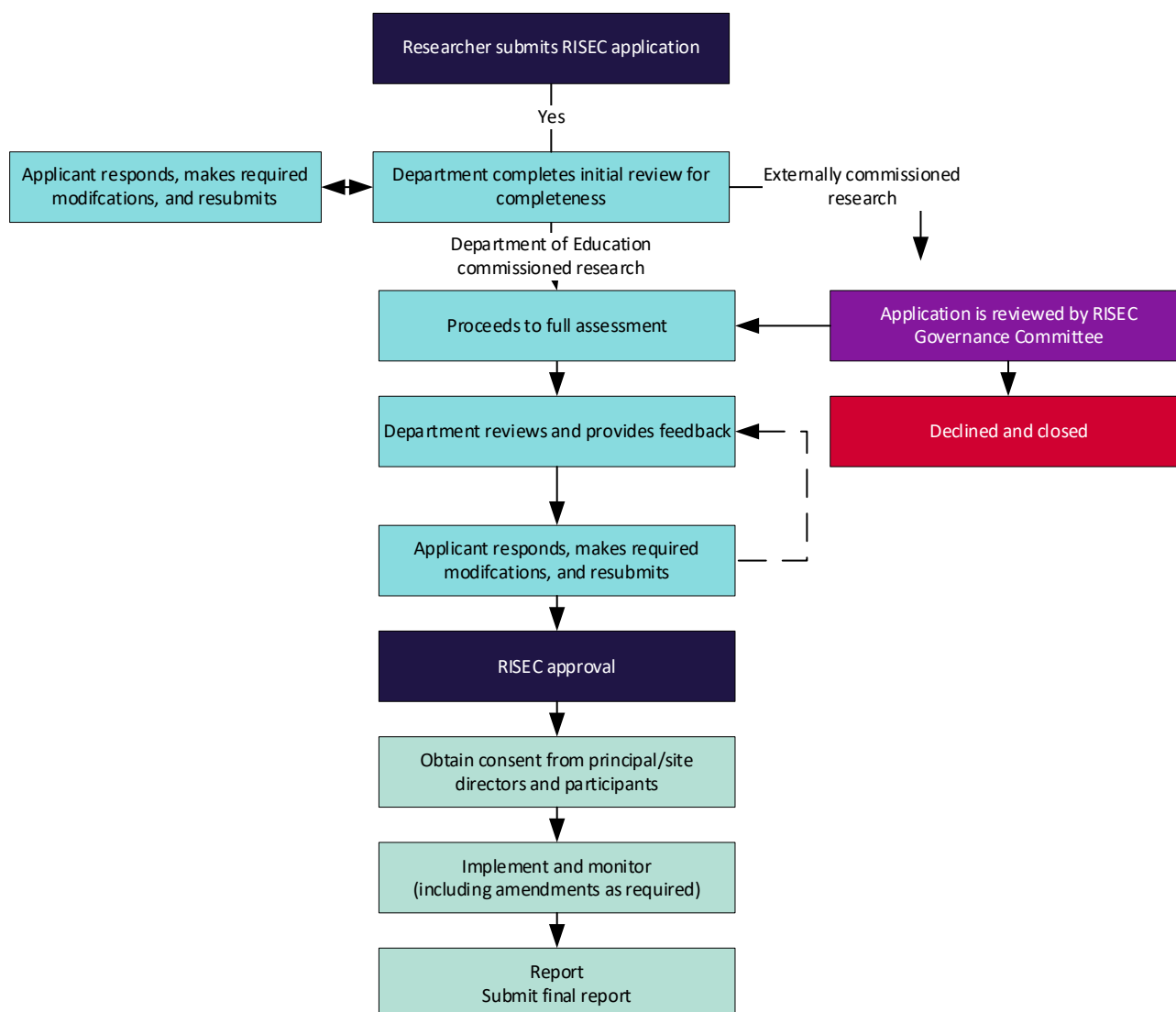
Furthermore, research will not be approved where:

- research involves contact with children or visiting school grounds and evidence of a current Working with Children Check is not provided
- there is a lack of clarity or alignment between the strategic value of the research, and the research goals, methodology, research instruments, or attachments (e.g. consent forms).
- participation places an unnecessary burden on schools/early childhood settings.

Completing and submitting a RISEC application

Applications are submitted via the department's online E-RISEC system. E-RISEC is used for:

- submitting and processing new RISEC applications, including managing rounds of feedback provided by the department
- recording RISEC approval
- submitting amendments to RISEC approvals (for example, where changes to the research team have occurred)
- submitting research findings following the completion of the research.



Registering for E-RISEC

Registering for E-RISEC is a two-step process. Applicants must:

1. Create and EduPass account with E-RISEC access
2. Log into E-RISEC

Information on how to complete this two-step process is contained in the E-RISEC Researcher Guidelines, available on the [Conduct research with the Department of Education](#) site.

Completing an application

An overview of the E-RISEC application form is outlined on the next page, with a detailed checklist at Appendix B.

Tips:

- **Be clear about the purpose of the research, and how it will be undertaken.** Be clear and concise and provide sufficient information for the department to understand the proposed research. It is particularly important to ensure there are direct links between the research question(s), the methodology, instruments, attachments (including Plain Language Statements and consent forms) and the purpose of the research.
- **Use plain English.** Avoid overly technical language and use consistent terminology. If technical language is needed, consider providing a brief definition.
- **Don't skip fields.** If you do not complete fields, this is likely to cause delays in processing and may result in your application being rejected.
- **Check you have uploaded all required supporting documents.** A checklist is provided in Appendix B.
- **Ensure Plain Language Statements and consent forms are on the letterhead of the lead university or research organisation.**

Section	Key information
Personnel information	Identifies principal researcher and any additional personnel Confirm whether evidence of Working With Children Check(s) has been provided via email to research@education.vic.gov.au
Research location	Identify jurisdictions in which research is being undertaken Provide a National Application Form if required
Funding	Identify whether research is commissioned by state or commonwealth governments, including the Department of Education Victoria Identify funding source(s)
Research Scope and relevance	Research title, timing, focus, and alignment to the department's research priorities
Research aims and methodology	Research aims and questions, sampling strategy (including the number of sites and types and number of participants), list of data collection instruments
Burden and impact	For each type of participant, detail the activities. Provide an estimate of the total hours of research activities per site, and detail mitigations to manage burden and impact on sites.
Recruitment process	Confirm whether research will involve passive or opt-out approaches and/or incentivised or compensated participation
Ethics and risk mitigation	Provide details on HREC approval and the relative risk of the research, including risk mitigation strategies Provide details on data storage for attributable personal or sensitive information.
Research outputs and reporting	Identify the anticipated research outputs and detail benefits to the Victorian education system.
Application tier	Identify the application tier based on the number of schools, research content and methodology, and data storage.
Supporting documentation	For example: National Application Form (if required); proposed site contact list; Working with Children Checks (if required, provided via email); Plain Language Statements for principals or site directors; participant groups; Consent forms for each participant group; Research instruments (e.g. questionnaires, surveys, interview schedules, assessment tools); Copy of HREC approval or evidence of an application for HREC) if required

Assessment and processing of RISEC applications

Stage 1: Initial assessment

All RISEC applications undergo an initial assessment. The first stage:

- reviews key information, including proposed start date
- validates completeness of the application
- checks all supporting documentation has been included.

Applications which are incomplete or have not met submission timelines will be returned to the researcher for action.

Stage 2: RISEC Governance Committee assessment

RISEC applications for externally initiated research are assessed by the RISEC Governance Committee (note: research and evaluation activities commissioned by the Department of Education Victoria progress do not require Committee assessment and progress directly to Stage 3).

The committee members include senior representatives from across the department's policy and implementation areas and support the Evaluation and Research Team to assess:

- The relevance of the research to the department's priorities, including the 2025 Schools research areas of interest and current early childhood reforms
- The likelihood that the research design and methods will deliver insights
- Overlap with existing or prior research and evaluation projects
- The time and effort required by school/early childhood centre staff, students, families, and other participants to support the research
- The ethical conduct of the research
- Potential risks and how they are mitigated.

Research applications which represent high-quality and high-relevance research and are approved in-principle will then progress through the full RISEC approval process.

Researchers will be notified of Committee's decision within 5 working days of a Committee meeting. Applications which receive in-principle approval will progress through the full approval process. Usually this means that the department's Research team will work with the researcher to resolve any technical issues and, once resolved, the application will receive full RISEC approval. **Researchers must not approach schools or early childhood settings until full RISEC approval has been received.**

Applications that are not approved by the Committee will be closed. The researcher may seek feedback from the Committee Chair within 5 days of being notified of the Committee decision.

Stage 3: Full review and approval process

During Stage 3 the Research team will undertake an in-depth review of the RISEC application, including review of

- the feasibility of research design, including clarity and alignment of research aims with the research methodology and instruments
- the burden and impact on for schools and early childhood centres, including opportunities to reduce these

- approaches to managing risk and ensure ethical research principles are upheld, including HREC and Victorian Working with Children Checks (WWCC)
- clarity and accuracy of consent processes to ensure active informed consent for all participants
- approaches to protect participant privacy and confidentiality
- benefit of the proposed research on balance with potential risk.

Stage 4: Final outcome

Approval

Researchers will receive an email from the E-RISEC system once full approval has been granted. Full approval:

- provides researchers with permission to approach principals and/or early childhood centre directors to invite them to participate in research using the communications materials approved as part of the RISEC process. The RISEC reference number must be included as part of communications with the principal/early childhood centre director.
- does not oblige principals/early childhood centre directors to participate in the approved research or evaluation. Site participation is entirely voluntary at the discretion of the principal/early childhood centre director.
- does not signify endorsement of the research or evaluation project by the Department of Education. It does not imply that the department endorses or supports the research or evaluation, or the subject or the research or evaluation.
- is valid for a maximum of 3 years, or for the length of HREC approval (whichever is sooner)

Note that research must commence within 12 months of RISEC approval.

Not approved and closed

The department reserves the right to decline applications for any reason. Common reasons for applications not being approved include:

- excessive burden on schools/early childhood centres
- overlap with existing or previous research or evaluation
- use of schools/early childhood centres primarily for convenient recruitment
- lack of alignment to departmental research priorities
- is undertaken for commercial or material gain, including market research
- incomplete or unclear applications
- significant delays in responding to departmental feedback.

Researchers whose applications which are not approved or withdrawn must not invite schools or early childhood centres to participate in research.

Requirements for approved research

Researchers must maintain communication with the department throughout the timeline of the research project.

Confirmation of participating schools / early childhood setting sites

Researchers must provide a list of confirmed participating sites within 2 months of receiving RISEC approval. The list of participating sites should be provided via email to research@education.vic.gov.au. If recruitment remains ongoing or needs to extend beyond the 2-month period, researchers must update the RISEC team at 2 months after approval, and subsequently as new schools are recruited.

Modifying RISEC-approved projects via amendments

Modifications of previously approved research or evaluation projects require a RISEC amendment – typically a straightforward process.

This includes changes to:

- project personnel, including WWCC details
- timelines
- research design
- plain language statements, consent forms and other communication materials
- data collection activities
- changes to participating sites.

Submitting an amendment

RISEC applications submitted after March 2023 (i.e. via the E-RISEC platform): amendments must also be submitted via E-RISEC. Please refer to the E-RISEC Researcher Guidelines on the [Conduct research with the Department of Education](#) site.

RISEC applications submitted prior to March 2023 (i.e. before E-RISEC was in use):

- complete the amendment form available at [Conduct research with the Department of Education](#) site
- email the completed form to research@education.vic.gov.au

Submitting research findings

It is a condition of receiving RISEC approval that the lead researcher provide the department with a summary of the research's findings. This must be completed prior to the RISEC approval expiring.

Researchers provide this information via the Completion Report function on E-RISEC. For further information please refer to Section 4 of the E-RISEC Researcher Guidelines on the [Conduct research with the Department of Education](#) site.

Appendix A: E-RISEC checklist

Personnel information

Have you:

- ✓ Provided details for *all* research personnel?
- ✓ Emailed evidence of current Working With Children Checks for *all* research personnel to research@education.vic.gov.au

Research location

Have you:

- ✓ Uploaded a National Application Form (if applicable)?

Funding source

Have you:

- ✓ Specified the funding source?

Note: if there is no specified funding for the project, or if this is student research, then please indicate 'in-kind' and include your university or research organisation

Research scope and relevance

If your research is *not* commissioned by the Department of Education:

- ✓ Does the proposed start date of your project align with RISEC Governance Committee timelines?
- ✓ Have you provided sufficient specificity about how the project relates to the Research Priorities?
Generic statements are unlikely to meet the needs of the RISEC Governance Committee.

Research aims and methodology

Have you:

- ✓ Used plain English?
- ✓ Clearly stated the aim(s) of the research
- ✓ Clearly identified and provided rationale for site selection processes (e.g. random sampling, convenience sampling, etc.) including the number of sites you wish to approach?
- ✓ Identified the number of sites to be *selected* (which may be less than the number approached)
- ✓ Provided clear and unambiguous figures for the number of participants?
 - Question 5a should be a numeric response – e.g. 50 participants per site
 - Question 5b should be a list of numeric response, e.g. 300 students; 30 teachers; 45 parents; 6 principals
- ✓ For Question 6, added each type of participant separately
- ✓ For Question 7, *listed* each instrument and used plain English to *briefly describe* it

Burden and impact

Have you

- ✓ Responded to Question 1 by completing the table, adding a new row for each participant, and each research and administrative activity (example provided below). Please ensure your Term of data collection aligns with RISEC application quarterly review cycles.

Example:

Teachers/school staff	Informed consent process	15 min	Term 1	15 min
Teachers/school staff	Interview	1 hr	Term 2, outside class time (online or in-person)	1 hr
Teachers/school staff	Survey	20 min (3 x)	Term 1, 2 and 4, outside class time	1 hr

- ✓ Provided a clear response for Question 3, for example:
 - Explaining how you have minimised paperwork or administration in your research approach
 - Describing how the approach to data collection is the minimum viable for the study (e.g. shortening of surveys, use of pre-existing data, etc.)
 - Detailing any additional approaches to managing burden and impact, for example, reimbursement for Casual Relief Teachers

Ethics and risk mitigation

Have you:

- ✓ Provided proof of HREC submission or approval, if applicable?
- ✓ Clearly describe the role of schools/early childhood settings in your response to Question 4a. For example: will the school be required to distribute recruitment materials to teachers or parents? Is a room required for the research to be conducted? Will the school need to implement or maintain a program or physical installation?
- ✓ Clearly describe how schools/early childhood settings will be contacted (in-person visit; phone call; email to publicly available email address; etc.) and how initial 'site-level' consent will be obtained from principals/site directors in your response to Question 4b?
- ✓ Clearly addressed data and information privacy, including retention and destruction of data.

Research outputs and reporting

Have you:

- ✓ Clearly listed *any and all* planned outputs?
- ✓ Described the system, site, and participant benefits of the research?

Supporting documentation

Have you:

- ✓ Emailed evidence of current Working With Children Checks for *all* research personnel to research@education.vic.gov.au

And uploaded:

- ✓ A National Application Form (if research is being undertaken across multiple Australian jurisdictions)?
- ✓ Copies of all research instruments for each participant group, e.g.:
 - Surveys/questionnaires
 - Interview guides
 - Observation templates
- ✓ Copy of HREC submission and/or approval
- ✓ A copy of the Proposed Site Contact List?

Are each of the following documents 1) provided on the letterhead of the lead university or research organisation; and 2) written in plain English? *Note: please ensure PLS statements are not above Grade 8 reading level. There are a number of online tools that can do this for you, e.g. Hemingwayapp.com*

- ✓ Letter/consent form to be sent to principals or early childhood site directors seeking site-level consent
- ✓ Invitation/Plain language statement to each participant group (e.g. teachers; parents/guardians; principals)
- ✓ Consent form for each participant group