



Ethics approval guidance for staff and students in the School of Anthropology (SAME)

Why do we need ethics approval?

- To protect the dignity, rights and welfare of all those involved in the research (participants, researchers, third parties)
- To ensure all research involving human participants or personal data at the university is ethically sound
- To demonstrate that research at the University is conducted according to the highest ethical standards
- It is increasingly required by funders
- It may be required for publication in journals in the future (and is already in Australia, for example)
- Reputational issues – unethical research may have repercussions for all of us
- For DPhil students, it is required for transfer and confirmation of status
- Finally: as a result of all of the above, it is a university requirement

Ethics approval in Oxford

University policies on ethics are established by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/>.

SAME has its own departmental research ethics committee (the SAME DREC) which scrutinises ethics applications from staff and students. All ethics applications from staff and students should be lodged with the SAME DREC secretary, Kate Atherton (kate.atherton@anthro.ox.ac.uk).

Anyone wishing to conduct fieldwork must ensure they have ethics approval *before* starting: ethics clearance once fieldwork is underway or completed is meaningless, and cannot be granted.

Normally a CUREC1A checklist is sufficient for social anthropological research; this is a simple checklist that allows researchers to assess the ethical dimensions of their research. In the vast majority of cases completing the checklist shows that no additional ethical scrutiny is required and, once this has been confirmed by the SAME DREC – a process which usually takes 2-3 weeks – the research can proceed. However, if the research subjects are children (defined as those under 18), or are vulnerable, e.g. asylum seekers, persecuted groups, people with mental health or weight/body image issues, or are otherwise unable to give meaningful consent, a full ethics approval process is normally needed. This requires a CUREC2 form to be

completed and assessed (the CUREC1A checklist will indicate if CUREC2 assessment is required).

CUREC2 applications are reviewed by the SSH IDREC (Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional research ethics committee) http://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/Research/Research_Ethics, and should reach the SSH IDREC secretariat at least 60 days before fieldwork commences. *In case a CUREC2 is needed, the CUREC/1A form must therefore be sent to the SAME DREC well ahead of the planned start date for fieldwork.*

CUREC recognizes that different disciplines have developed ethical standards and practices that correspond to the epistemology and contexts of the discipline's research methods. It would normally be expected that anthropology staff and students follow the ethics guidelines of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth (ASA): <http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.htm>, but other professional associations' guidelines may also be appropriate – e.g. the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct: www.bps.org.uk/what-wedo/ethics-standards/ethics-standards or the British Sociological Association statement of ethical practice: <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx>.

For frequently asked questions and a flow chart, see <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/>

For exemplars of good practice, please see http://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/information_for_internal_users/research/ssh_idrec_exemplars

[The ESRC Framework for research ethics is another helpful resource with best practice case studies and discussion of ethics dilemmas. Please see http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/framework-for-research-ethics/index.aspx](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/framework-for-research-ethics/index.aspx) The SSH IDREC secretariat is available to give advice to students or supervisors (ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk, tel. (6)14871)

Advice on filling in the CUREC/1A form

- Read the appropriate guidelines, most often those of the ASA: <http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml>
- Fill in the form carefully; it will be read by six academics, including the Head of School
- Explain the project in lay terms, including how participants are to be recruited and inclusion/exclusion criteria; there is no need to justify or describe the project as though to colleagues in the discipline
- Tick boxes of all the methods to be used and make sure these correspond to the research description
- Be consistent (including where, how, and with whom research will take place)
- Data Protection: It is expected that researchers tick 'yes' to question 2, Section E, on the CUREC1A, i.e. that researchers will keep research materials in compliance with the Data Protection Act. For advice, see:

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/curec/documents/Data Protection and Research 17 01 2012.pdf>

- Students and post-doctoral researchers should discuss the checklist with their supervisor or mentor as they are required to sign off on the process
- If you use external researchers and translators, please outline in the CUREC form details about their training. You must also ask them to sign a confidentiality form.

Approval by the SAME DREC normally takes approximately 3 weeks, but may take longer. Forms and checklists should therefore be submitted **at least** 1 month in advance of research starting. Remember: the SAME DREC *cannot* grant approval retrospectively. In some cases researchers have been required to destroy – and not refer to – research material that was gathered without ethical approval.

Common problems

- Incorrect checklist: use CUREC1A for social science research (not CUREC1, which is the checklist for bio-science and medical research)
- Poor description of methods and recruitment of participants
- Inconsistencies and contradictions in the form
- Participant information sheet is too complex and technical
- Consent form given to participants does not give adequate information, for example, a project description accessible to lay persons, procedures for withdrawal, complaints, and so forth

In your Participation information sheet, please ensure that you refer to the correct Ethics Committee. Your CUREC1A has been reviewed by the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography Departmental Research Ethics Committee (SAME DREC), Chaired by Professor Marcus Banks.

To submit the checklist / form

Send the form including all supporting documents in a single file to Kate Atherton (kate.atherton@anthro.ox.ac.uk). NB for students: Please ask your supervisors to send Kate an e-mail to confirm they have seen and support your application.

Make sure the checklist is submitted *at least* 1 month before research starts (bearing in mind that CUREC2 approval, if needed, normally takes about 60 days).

CUREC2 – SSH IDREC

CUREC2 is the full ethics approval form, and is needed for projects that involve:

- children or vulnerable adults
- deception of participants

- exposing participants to criminal prosecution (e.g. for drug abuse or child abuse)
- but check if there is a protocol that obviates a CUREC2: http://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/information_for_internal_users/research/ssh_idrec_full_guidance_index

Send the form including all supporting documents in a single file to Kate Atherton (kate.atherton@anthro.ox.ac.uk). CUREC2 applications must be approved first by the School's DREC before being submitted to the SSH IDREC.

CUREC2 applications may take up to 60 days to be dealt with; as with the CUREC1a checklist, approval *cannot* be granted retrospectively.

SAME DREC, February 2015 (revised March 2018)

Some notes on good practice guidance on informed consent

Mette Berg, ISCA and COMPAS

January 2013

Anthropologists often conduct research in contexts or among people for whom written informed consent is not appropriate. If that is the case for you, the advice below on alternative ways of obtaining informed consent may be helpful.

You will need to think about how you will obtain consent in ways that are ethically sound and in accordance with good anthropological practice (see <http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml>).

In many cases of participant-observation ('classic') ethnographic fieldwork one meets people casually over a period and develops an intimacy over time, which involves an involvement in people's lives that extends far beyond a formal interview situation. In these situations, informed consent is more processual than in interview- or survey-based research. In such cases, consent should be sought in a more informal form over the duration of the fieldwork; the researcher can then keep a note that they are confident that their research participants remain aware of being research subjects. However, even with such 'hanging out' fieldwork, researchers normally sit down with informants at some point for a more structured discussion (for example, to take down genealogical details, or to record an employment history) in which case the steps described below can be condensed into a short statement that assures the researcher that the research participants understand the implications of being a research subject and either formally sign a consent form, or acknowledge that their consent has been sought.

Seeking oral consent when interviewing

If written consent is not appropriate, you could add a pro forma at the top of your interview sheet, to be filled in by you, containing the following information:

Name; has information been read out or explained? [tick box]; has information been understood?; has agreement been shown?; does the person consent to be recorded? [if yes, you might then, if appropriate, ask for agreement to be recorded].

You could fill this pro forma in after following the consent guidelines suggested here:

Greetings and introduction

Explain to your interviewee during introduction that you are a student or researcher at the University of Oxford conducting a research project [briefly explain your research topic].

Present each individual with your University business card containing contact information, as well as the address of ISCA.

Following this introduction, you might want to give some background to your research project to enable your informant to make an informed decision on whether they would like to participate or not. Here is an example of how you could do it:

Background information

The purpose of this research is to [brief explanation of aims of research]. The reason I would like to speak with you specifically is e.g. [a) due to your role within the community; local government; NGO, etc.; or b) that you were referred to me by x (with x's consent); or c) I am seeking the opinions of residents in this area, etc.]

If you are willing to participate then I would ask you some questions. The interview should last approximately [estimated length of interview].

Risks and benefits

There are no benefits to participating in this study other than contributing to developing a broader understanding of [research topic].

Compensation

If you do choose to participate, I cannot offer any material compensation. Or:

If you do choose to participate, I will offer you x as compensation.

NB: You should not use financial incentives to make informants consent to interviews, but you may decide that a small remuneration or gifts in kind would be appropriate depending on the circumstances.

Confidentiality

If you do choose to participate, the records of this research will be kept private. In any publications based on this and other interviews that I may publish in the future, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify any participants. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and only I will have access [and my research assistants].

Participation is voluntary

If you do agree to participate in this research, your participation is completely voluntary. I want to assure you that if you decide not to answer a particular question or wish to discontinue the interview altogether at any point then that is completely fine. If at a later stage, you decide to withdraw, that is also fine, please just let me know, using the contact details on my card.

Questions and contacts

Do you have any questions about what I have mentioned thus far?

If you have any questions about the study in the future, following the interview, please feel free to contact me. All of my information is on the card I have given you.

Do you agree to participate?

If the participant agrees: Would you mind if I record our conversation? Again any information recorded would be kept entirely confidential. You may want to add: I would like to offer you a printed transcript of the interview when I have it ready. The transcript is for you to keep.