

Some points to help fill in the Ethics Forms

Use the Correct Form:

- Use ethics form as provided or linked by the tutor.

Detailed Role Definitions

Supervisor Responsibilities:

- To approve the overall research approach and methodology
- **NOT responsible for:** Line-by-line copy-editing of student attachments
- To focus on methodological soundness, not grammatical perfection
- To confirm the alignment between the research question and proposed methods

Collaborative Project Evidence Requirements:

- **Its only needed** when there is a formal collaboration needed with external organisations (rare)
- **If above is true, the evidence types** needed could be an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding), official emails, ethics letters from partner organization
- **The Cross-referencing requirement** means it must reference this evidence specifically in Section D
- **A common mistake** is students claim “collaboration” when it's just “data access” they need

Section-by-Section Guidance:

Sections A-C (=Administrative)

- **A-B:** Programme details (pre-filled in the template)
- **C:** Student **must** confirm they've read ALL the guidance documents listed
- **Red flag:** If student hasn't actually read the guidance – this may be evident in poor quality completion of the form.

Section D (=Collaborative Activity, as already discussed above)

- **Default:** Mark N/A for most MSc projects
- **Only complete if:** Genuine formal partnership exists
- **Evidence requirement:** Must attach and reference supporting documentation
- **Common error:** Students confuse data access with collaboration

Date Planning

- **Start date for project:** Must be realistic - not before ethics approval received
- **End date:** Within current academic year boundaries, in line with submission date.
- **Data collection alignment:** Dates must match proposed data collection timeline, you always need that prior to analysis
- **Buffer time:** Build in some contingency for delays

Purpose/Question/Aims/Objectives (Sections 3-6)

- **Some overlap acceptable:** Some repetition between sections is normal
- **Be internally consistent:** All sections must align logically
- **Method alignment:** Objectives must be achievable with your proposed methods
- **Do a scope check:** Ensure your objectives are realistic for an MSc project timeframe. Familiarise yourself with what time will be available.

Methods vs Tools (this is a critical distinction)

Methods (=what you're doing) *examples:*

Data collection:

- Survey
- Observation
- Interview
- Focus group
- Data extract

Data analysis:

- Descriptive statistics
- T-tests, correlation analysis
- Thematic analysis
- Framework analysis
- Content analysis

Tools (what you're using) – these are NOT methods:

- SPSS, Excel, R, NVivo
- Survey platforms (Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey)
- Interview recording software

A common error is: Students list "Excel analysis" as methodology

- **Sample size:** Do a pragmatic estimate appropriate for MSc level: Formal calculation not mandatory, but if doing a survey we would expect students to at least attempt the standard formula (the cited paper has a table so you don't

even need to work it out: <https://www.opalco.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Reading-Sample-Size1.pdf>)

- **Sampling strategy:** This must match your chosen methodology (purposive for qualitative, random for quantitative)
- **Recruitment:** Have a clear explanation of how participants will be identified and approached

Participant Information/Consent

- **Voluntary participation:** Must be explicitly stated and ensured
- **Written consent scenarios:** Required for interviews, focus groups, identifiable surveys
- **Implied consent:** Acceptable for anonymous surveys, secondary data analysis
- **Verbal consent:** Acceptable for phone interviews (with recording permission)
- **Secondary/anonymized data:** Mark N/A but explain data source and anonymization

Organizational Data (Item 10) - Detailed Process

When required: Student using non-public data from their workplace

Manager email must include:

- Permission to use organisational data approval
- **Form referencing:** Must cite this email specifically in relevant form sections

Common issues:

- Generic emails without specific permission
- Emails from colleagues without authority
- Missing confidentiality confirmations

Risk Assessment - Expanded Framework

Ww never Accept "None" - here's Why

- All research involves some risk, even minimal
- Ethical committees expect realistic risk acknowledgment
- "None" suggests poor understanding of research ethics

Minimal Risk Categories with Mitigations

Time Burden:

- Risk: Participants spending time on surveys/interviews
- Mitigation: Flexible scheduling, clear time estimates upfront, right to withdraw

Minor Psychological Stress:

- Risk: Uncomfortable questions about work practices, personal experiences
- Mitigation: Right to skip questions, debrief information provided, support contacts

End-of-Shift Fatigue:

- Risk: Healthcare workers interviewed after long shifts
- Mitigation: Flexible timing, option to reschedule, brief interviews

Interview Discomfort:

- Risk: Anxiety about being recorded, saying wrong thing
- Mitigation: Anonymization assurance, right to review transcripts, withdrawal option

Data Breach Risk:

- Risk: Accidental disclosure of participant information
- Mitigation: Secure storage, access controls, anonymization protocols

GDPR/Data Protection - Comprehensive Guide

GENERALLY SPEAKING WE AVOID ALL USE OF PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE DATA – IT NEEDS TO BE MADE VERY CLEAR YOU WILL NOT USE ANY IN YOUR ANALYSIS

Personal Data Recognition**This is always personal data:**

- Email addresses (even work emails)
- Names, job titles with small organizations
- IP addresses from online surveys
- Voice recordings

This is sometimes personal data:

- Job roles in large organizations (may be anonymous)
- Demographic combinations that could identify individuals

Specify your storage requirements to preserve any confidentiality:

Secure cloud options: OneDrive, SharePoint, Google Drive (with institutional accounts)

Avoid: Personal cloud accounts, USB drives, unencrypted local storage

Access controls: Password protection, limited sharing permissions

Backup procedures: Automatic cloud backup preferred

Anonymization vs Pseudonymization

Anonymization: Complete removal of identifying information (irreversible)

Pseudonymization: Replacement with codes/numbers (reversible with key)

When to use each: Anonymization for low-risk studies, pseudonymization when follow-up might be needed

Retention/Deletion Timelines**Standard MSc timeline:**

- Raw data: Delete within 6 months of graduation
- Anonymized results: May be retained longer for publication
- Audio recordings: Delete immediately after transcription

Documentation: Must specify exact deletion dates and methods

End-of-Form Checklist - Detailed Expectations**"Read Guidance" Tick**

- Student must actually read all referenced guidance documents
- Evidence: Proper form completion demonstrates understanding
- **Don't accept:** Boxes ticked without evidence of reading

"Relevant Sections Completed"

- All applicable sections must be thoroughly completed
- **Check for:** N/A explanations where sections don't apply
- **Red flags:** Blank sections without explanation

"Approval in Principle"

We put "NO" if a student has concerns and wants discussion before proceeding. Approval in principle does not include passing BMDS7010 – it means from some other research governance body, e.g. a Health Board / an NHS Trust R&D department (its N/A for the ethics form in 7010 assessment itself).

"External Organization Approval"

- **Only tick if:** Using data not ordinarily accessible to student
- **Must attach:** Proof of permission (manager email, ethics letter)
- **Don't tick for:** Publicly available data, student's own workplace data with permission

"Full Institutional Risk Assessment"

No. We do not allow “Studies involving children, patients, sensitive personal data” so we never need a full risk assessment.

NHS Staff Surveys:

- Requires line manager approval

Student Workplace Data:

- Manager permission essential
- Anonymization critical to protect colleagues
- Potential conflict of interest considerations

Multi-site Studies:

- Each site may need separate permissions
- Consistent ethics approach across sites
- Coordination challenges with different approval timelines

Supervisor Guidance Philosophy - Detailed Approach**Reducing Student Anxiety**

Keep methods specific: Vague methodologies create uncertainty and revision cycles

Realistic scope: Better to do small study well than large study poorly

Proportionate responses: MSc-level expectations, not PhD-level rigor

Common Student Anxieties and Responses

"Is my sample size big enough?":

- MSc studies: Pragmatic estimates acceptable
- Focus on methodology appropriateness, not statistical power

"Do I need complex statistics?":

- Descriptive analysis often sufficient
- Clear presentation more important than sophisticated analysis

"What if I can't get enough participants?":

- Build flexibility into design
- Have backup plans (secondary data, different recruitment)

Red Flags Requiring Intervention

- Overly ambitious scope for timeframe
- Methodological mismatch (qualitative questions, quantitative methods)
- Unrealistic participant recruitment plans

- Missing risk assessments or GDPR considerations
- Commercial platform naming (new university policy)

This expanded framework should help ensure consistent, thorough ethics form reviews while supporting both student success and ethical research standards.