

## **Should data collection tools be submitted as part of an ethics application?**

Data collection tools are the instruments or devices used to collect data, such as questionnaires/surveys or interview schedules. Being able to consider the proposed data collection tool(s) as part of an ethics application can be very helpful to the ethics reviewers in assessing potential risk of harm to participants, and helping them to make an informed ethics review decision.

Wherever possible, therefore, it is recommended that the proposed final version of such tools be submitted as part of an ethics application, particularly when the research involves potentially particularly vulnerable participants, or potentially highly sensitive topics (as defined in section 3.1.4 of the University's [Research Ethics Approval Procedure](#)). Some departments make this a specific requirement for some or all applications from their staff or students.

Where specific final versions of data collection tools have been approved as part of an ethics application, any changes that the researcher subsequently wishes to make to them should be put forward for approval as an amendment to the original application, before the data collection goes ahead.

To arrange for an amendment to be considered, the researcher should email the details to the departmental Ethics Administrator. Where the changes are very minor (e.g. updating researcher contact details) then the revised version can just be uploaded to the original application in the Ethics Application System by the Ethics Administrator. For more significant changes which may have an impact on the safety or wellbeing of the participants, the amendment will be submitted to the original Lead Reviewer for consideration.

Notwithstanding the above, it is recognised that in some cases, it may not be possible to provide a proposed final version of the data collection tool(s). This may be due to the need to seek ethics approval before the data collection tool(s) can be developed (e.g. in co-produced/participatory research). In addition, there are some forms of research which require a more flexible approach to data collection. These may include exploratory methodologies where the research begins with no pre-formed questions or ideas, and/or research in which researchers need to have the leeway to adapt the questions they ask of participants as part of a free-flowing discussion.

In such cases, it is recommended that the researcher aims to provide either:

- (i) a draft version of the data collection tool(s) (clearly indicating the draft status of the document(s)); and/or
- (ii) an indication of the kinds of questions or topics that are likely to be covered in their interactions with participants. This should be as detailed as possible, whilst allowing the flexibility required to achieve the research aims.

It should be noted that further detail/information may be requested at the discretion of the ethics reviewers tasked with considering the application, particularly in cases where there are potentially higher levels of risk to participant safety or wellbeing.

If, after ethics approval has been granted, a final version of a data collection tool is agreed, or a specific data collection tool is developed (e.g. as part of a co-produced project), it is recommended that this is submitted for consideration as an amendment to the original ethics application (following the process outlined earlier in this document).

This is particularly important where the research involves potentially particularly vulnerable participants or potentially highly sensitive topics. However, it is recognised that this may not be possible in all cases (e.g. due to time constraints). If formal ethics approval is not sought for data collection tools (or final versions of tools), then the researcher must take extra care to ensure that the research is carried out in line with the University's [Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data or Human Tissue](#).