

What is a participant information sheet?

The information sheet is an integral part of recruiting research participants in an ethical and professional manner. It ensures that the potential participants (and, where appropriate, their legal guardians), have sufficient information to make an **informed decision** about whether to take part in your research or not.

However you approach participants (for example by email, in person, or through posters and advertisements) they should always be given an information sheet. The information sheet typically takes the form of a written document that is physically given to participants to take away, or an electronic document they can download or print. The information sheet allows participants to consider their participation without pressure and should contain all the information they need to give informed consent.

NB It may be helpful to produce distinct information sheets for different participant groups (for example children, parents/guardians, adult participants). When involving children with a wide age range, it might be appropriate to provide separate PI Sheets for different age groups. Always tailor your PI Sheet to the participant.

What should an information sheet contain?

The information sheet should give a brief summary of the research project and its aims, outlining the entire research process in **clear and concise language (and accessible format)** appropriate to the potential research participants. **Try to avoid using technical language and/or jargon.**

It should outline what participation means in practice (to the participants); how long participation takes, where it takes place and what it involves. The following list is not exhaustive but gives an idea of the main topics to be covered

- Explain that participation **is always voluntary**
- Explain **when and how** participants can withdraw from the activity
- Explain **when and if** a participant can request to withdraw their data (personal information)
- Clearly outline the **nature and aims of the research**
- Explain exactly what participation means in practice (**when, where, who, what**)
- Outline clearly the **inclusion and exclusion criteria** for the study
- Outline any **risks, inconvenience or discomfort** (physical and psychological) that could reasonably be expected to result from the study
- Describe the *benefits for participants*, including the importance of the research and the potential wider intended impact

- Explain how your participant's **information will be kept**; will privacy and confidentiality be maintained. **Remember you must obtain explicit consent to use the participant's identifiable data.**
- Provide details of who the participant can **contact for further information** about the study
- Provide details of who the participant should contact **in case of a complaint**. This is normally a senior independent member of staff and the University recommends the Deputy Dean of Research and Professional Practice (DDRPP) for your Faculty (or Executive Dean).

We have provided a [Participant Information Sheet template](#) (PI Sheet) and you should use this as a basis for your Information Sheet; keeping to the structure (sub-headings) and sample wording where possible. An explanation for each sub-heading/question is provided below:

The title of your research project

If the academic research title could be difficult to understand then it **should be simplified** and explained in lay terms (**the same title must appear on the participant agreement form**).

Invitation paragraph

Explain that the prospective participant is being asked to take part in a research project.

Explain who the researcher/team member is in terms of professional capacity/capability (for example, lecturer, professor, nurse, midwife, student, volunteer, etc.). This will better inform the potential participant, so that they (and, where this applies, their carers) understand who they will be meeting. It might also be beneficial to include the team photos, particularly helpful for studies involving children, young people or adults with reduced cognitive capacity).

Who is organising/funding the research? (If applicable)

You should state the organisation or company that is sponsoring or funding the research. In case of match-funded studentships (PhD), please refer to your Research Letter before completing this section.

What is the purpose of the project?

The background, aim (why you are undertaking this research, why is it important) and duration of the project should be given here.

Why have I have been chosen?

You should explain how and why the participant was chosen and say how many other participants will be recruited. Is there an inclusion/exclusion criterion e.g. age restriction/health condition. If yes, this needs to be explained in this section.

Do I have to take part?

You should explain that taking part in the research is entirely voluntary and that refusal to agree to participate will involve no penalty or loss to the individual; be specific to their circumstances – for example, reassuring a contained group such as care-home residents that no element of their ongoing care will be impacted whether they participate or not.

Can I change my mind about taking part?

Reassurance your participants that they can stop participating in your activities at any time and they don't have to provide a reason for doing so.

If I change my mind, what happens to my information?

During the task, intervention or experiment, a participant may withdraw at any time. If a participant completes the 'task' and the data has been analysed and anonymised, at this point we recommend that a participant can 'withdraw up to the point of anonymisation'.

After the task. In relation to personal information collected which relates to an individual, a participant's right to access, change or move that information is limited and this needs to be explained. You should know what you are doing with the data and how you intend to manage and store before you've got to this point (recruitment). It is a matter of explaining your research data management plan to your research participant simply so that they can fully understand what will happen to their data **before they consent** to take part in your research.

What would taking part involve?

You should state how long the participant will be involved in the data collection activity, how long the data collection will last (if this is different), how often they will need to participate (will they need to come back and see you after a period time) and for how long each time. You should explain if travel expenses are available.

You should explain what exactly will happen (e.g. blood tests, interviews, experimental set up) and **include** a photograph of any device(s) used and room set up.

Where a participant is to be interviewed, it might be helpful to explain the questioning style (e.g. focus groups or individual interviews).

You should explain the participant's responsibilities, setting down clearly what you expect of them.

You should, in simple terms, set out the research methods you intend to use.

State if there are any lifestyle restrictions as a result of participating* or any information that may need to be collated by participants in advance.

* for example, do participants need to refrain from drinking coffee before and during an experiment they may be participating in?

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

You must ensure that potential participants are fully informed of any reasonably foreseeable discomforts (physical and psychological), disadvantages and risks, however minimal they may be.

Any benefits to the participants that can reasonably be expected should be stated. However, where there is no intended benefit to the participant from taking part in the project this should be stated clearly. It is important not to exaggerate the possible benefits to the particular participant during the course of the project to avoid coercion.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

Include details of the information the participant is expected to provide and why this is important to the research and relevant for achieving your objectives.

Remember that if you intend to collect Special Category information you **must inform** your research participants that you will be collecting this information about them and this applies even if **you do not collect their name**. *The following information is classed as Special Category Information:*

Race; ethnic origin; politics; religion; trade union membership; genetics; biometrics; health; sex life or sexual orientation

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

You need to obtain the participant's permission to record their activities on audio or video media. You must ensure that there is a clear understanding as to how these recorded media will be used. For instance, if you record a music or theatre performance, you must not publish or broadcast the recording, show it in public, or deposit it in an archive without the performer's permission. Storage (and eventual disposal) of interview recordings which contain sensitive material can also be an issue to address.

If you plan to use the recording in a publication or broadcast or deposit it in an archive, it is often better to prepare and sign a separate release form for each item used. BU have release form templates available to use – [adults only](#) and [involving children](#)

How will my information be managed?

You need to obtain the participant's permission to allow restricted access to information collected about them in the course of the project. You should state that all information collected about them will be kept strictly in accordance with current Data Protection Regulations and explain how this will be achieved.

Under Data Protection Regulations, we need to explain how long BU is going to keep the personal data. Personal data means information which enables the participant to be identified* as the subject

matter of the data by reference to that data or in conjunction with other data held by BU. Personal data must be kept in accordance with current Data Protection Regulations.

Data Protection Regulations do not set specific timeframes for how long personal data can be kept for, however, it does stipulate that personal data **shall not be kept for longer than is necessary** for the purpose or purposes for which it is held.

Research Councils***, charities and other funding bodies may have their own specific requirements for data retention that need to be complied with. It is important for you to find out how long the funder requires you to keep the data for, what data you are required to share with them or others and in what form (for example, whether anonymised data would suffice). This will ensure you can accurately explain to participants who will need access to the personal data and enable you to securely dispose of personal data when it is no longer required and retain only anonymised data when there is no longer any need to be able to identify the participant.

In the absence of any specific funder or regulatory requirement, BU does not prescribe how long you need to retain personal information as it depends on your research. See [Research Ethics Code of Practice](#) (Appendix 1) which explains retention in more detail.

Depending on the nature of your proposed project, you may need to include a statement indicating that the data collected during the course of the project might be used for additional or subsequent research. If this is the case, then this should be explicit on the participant information sheet and participant agreement form.

You should also be able to tell the participants what will happen to the results of the research (e.g. when the results are likely to be published, whether they can obtain a copy of the published results), and add that they will not be identified in any report or publication without their specific consent.

*A person's voice is seen as possibly personally identifiable, so best practice would be to retain voice recordings purely for the purpose of transcription; the audio files would then be destroyed once transcribed (the transcriptions are then genuinely anonymous data). This mechanism for anonymization needs to be communicated on the PI Sheet. (If the intention is to keep original audio recordings for other purposes, then this needs to be clearly explained in the ethics checklist.)

** With the exception of audio recordings which are normally deleted once transcribed (or for students until examination of degree e.g. Viva (PhD)).

*** Making research data available to users is a core part of the Research Council's remit and therefore BU aims to make our research data openly accessible as possible. If you intend make anonymised research data available via BORDaR (BU's Data Repository), this should be explained to Participants. *Please note for UG/PGT students, storing research data on BORDaR does not apply.*

Contact for further Information

You should give the participant a contact point for further information.

This can be your name, address, and BU telephone number, or that of another researcher in the project (if this is a *supervised student project*, the address and telephone number of the student's supervisor should be included). **Do not provide personal mobile phone numbers.** Any email addresses given must be Bournemouth University email addresses rather than personal ones.

In case of complaints

You should inform the participant to whom complaints can be made and this should be the Deputy Dean of Research and Professional Practice of your Faculty. (In the absence of a DDRPP, please include the Executive Dean). The University has a generic email which should be included for complaints - researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk (rather than the DDRPP's BU email address).

Finally

The information sheet should state that the participant will be given a copy of the information sheet and, if appropriate, a separate signed **participant agreement form** to keep.

DO REMEMBER there are PI Sheet and Participant Agreement Forms available to download from the research ethics blog.