The Research Ethics Review: Process, Procedures & Documents

Guidelines Faculty of Education

2nd Edition January 2019
Guidelines compiled by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (FREC, Education)

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1 Introduction

This document outlines procedures for obtaining research ethics clearance within the Faculty of Education, University of Malta (UM). This document includes an elaboration of the procedures explained in the document entitled “University of Malta Research Ethics Review Procedures”, which can be found on the webpage of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC): https://www.um.edu.mt/urec.

These Guidelines include instructions for completing the required Ethics Application Form. Examples of documentation such as Information Letters and Consent Forms are also included in the Appendices for reference.

2 Key terms and abbreviations

The following terms are used throughout this document without further explanation:

**University of Malta Research Ethics Committee (UREC)** – an over-arching committee that oversees the Ethics Review process of all University of Malta research

**Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC)** – every Faculty has a ‘FREC’ whose role is to manage the Ethics Review process for the respective Faculty

**Principal Investigator (PI)** - The primary individual (‘researcher’) responsible for the preparation, conduct, and administration of a research project. In the case of student projects, the PI is the student, duly guided by an academic supervisor. Where two or more students are working on a dissertation together, all will be considered as PIs.

**Research Ethics and Data Protection Self-Assessment Form (“Form A”)** – a self-administered form (in questionnaire style) to be filled in by the PI. Following completion of Form A, a PI may be directed to complete Form B (see below)

**Full Research Ethics Proposal Form (“Form B”)** – a more detailed application for a full ethics review, to be completed if directed in Form A

**Natural person** - an individual human being, as opposed to a ‘legal person’ which may be a private or public organisation.

**Personal data** - data can be attributed to an identifiable natural person

**Special Categories of Personal Data** – personal data that reveals race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, membership of a trade union, health, sex life, sexual orientation, genetic data or biometric data. This data is also sometimes referred to as “special categories of data” or “sensitive personal data”.
3 Prior to commencing research

Prior to embarking on a project, the PI should become familiar with the University of Malta (UM) “Research Code of Practice” which may be found on the webpage of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC):

https://www.um.edu.mt/urec

This Code of Practice provides guiding principles and standards of good practice in research across all subject disciplines and areas of study in the University. Thus, all research at the UM is required to comply with this Code.

The PI is also referred to the FAQs, notes on data protection, other information and guidance prepared by UREC prior to commencing research (see webpage).
4 The Ethics Review Process

Brief Overview of the Process

ALL research requires the filling in of an ethics Form. As stipulated in the UM Senate approved document, *Research Ethics Review Procedures*, a student is expected to be guided by his/her supervisor in the compilation of the Research Ethics Form and documents.

The online form may be found on the UREC webpages of the UM website [https://www.um.edu.mt/urec](https://www.um.edu.mt/urec). Once submitted, and endorsed by the supervisor, the Form is processed by FREC (Education). The Online Form is divided into FOUR parts.

- Part 1: Applicant and Project Details
- Part 2: Self-Assessment
- Part 3: Detailed Assessment
- Part 4: Submission

If no potential issues have been reported in Part 2 of the Form (‘Self-Assessment’ section), the Form and supporting documents (Information Letters, Consent Forms, etc.) are sent to FREC “for FREC records”. The applicant will receive an acknowledgement from FREC to confirm that the e-mail has been received. In the case of students, the supervisor must endorse the Form and documents by sending a “Reply All” e-mail. Until FREC receives this endorsement, FREC cannot process (in this case, File) the application.

On the other hand, if potential issues have been reported in Parts 2 and 3 of the Form, the Form and documents should be sent “For FREC review”. The applicant will receive an acknowledgement from FREC to confirm that the e-mail has been received. In the case of students, the supervisor must endorse the Form and documents by sending a “Reply All” e-mail. Until FREC receives this endorsement, FREC cannot process (in this case, Review) the application. Following evaluation, FREC may request some amendments if necessary, and once these have been adequately effected, FREC will communicate with the PI that it finds no ethical or data protection issues in the research as proposed, and hence the application is ‘conditionally approved’. FREC will inform the PI that s/he may now proceed to get institutional and gatekeeper permission (e.g. permission from the Directorate for Curriculum, Research, Innovation and Lifelong Learning, or from the Secretariat for Catholic Education; permission from Heads of School, etc.). When the PI has the necessary permissions in hand, s/he should submit these to FREC. Once the permissions have been checked, the PI will receive an official communication from FREC that her/his application has been approved and, and that s/he may begin data collection.

**Note:** For those studies that require full review by FREC, collecting data prior to receiving the official ‘go ahead’ amounts to a breach of UM ethics Code of Practice and the PI may be subject to disciplinary action.
Although the submission of the application and the supporting documents is done electronically, **FREC (Education) also requires a hard copy of those applications that require full FREC review and approval.** The hard copies are required for ease of processing. Soft copies should be e-mailed to Ms Isabelle Warrington on e-mail research-ethics.educ@um.edu.mt, while hard copies should be submitted in person at Ms Warrington’s office: Room 311, Faculty of Media & Knowledge Sciences Building. When submitting the hard copy, students are required to sign a **hard copy declaration**, which should be submitted together with the hard copy. By means of this declaration, the student confirms that the hard and soft copies submitted are identical.

The process is summarised in Figure 1. A fuller explanation of this process is explained in Section 5.

![Figure 1. The Review Process](image)

**Correspondence with FREC (Education)**

While ethics applications should be sent by e-mail to the address research-ethics.educ@um.edu.mt (see above), **all other correspondence should be sent to the secretary of FREC (Education) on the e-mail address**

isabelle.warrington@um.edu.mt

**Reviews by UREC**

While most applications will be processed and approved only by FREC, UREC will be involved in the following two instances:

- Applications relating to studies that include the collection of **Special categories of personal data (see definition)**. Such an application will first be reviewed by FREC, then forwarded by FREC to UREC- Data Protection (UREC-DP) for review, since it is UREC-
DP that is authorised by the Information and Data Protection Commissioner to make recommendations to the Commissioner for approval for these types of applications;

- Applications which include a point/s of disagreement between FREC and the PI, and which cannot be resolved through dialogue. FREC will forward such applications to UREC.

**Periodic Audits**

Periodic audits will be carried out by both FREC and UREC. The purpose of the audit is to ensure that the UM Research Code of Practice and the UM Research Ethics Review Procedures are being complied with.
5 Completing the On-line Application Form

Introduction
Every PI must complete and submit the online Application Form; **students are to fill in the Form with the guidance of their supervisors.** Since the application is a 'Google Form', drafts cannot be saved. However, on the UREC web page, one can find a **Replica of the Form**, which is a Word Document that should be used for works-in-progress. **Once all details are finalised in the Replica Form, these points may be copied into the Online Form.**

**NOTE:** **Students working in pairs must submit separate Applications, which should be identical.** They should cross-reference their partner in the Application Part 4, Question 3 ("Cover note to FREC") – see Part 4 below.

The four parts of the Online Form are explained in more detail below.

Part 1: Applicant and Project details
This section requests the applicant’s name, title of project and brief, but clear, notes on the nature of the study. Some points are given below with regard to some of the Questions in this section.

- **Question 7:** 'Study-unit code' refers to the Dissertation code (where applicable)
- **Question 8:** Student number refers to the student’s ID card number
- **Question 12:** Here the applicant must give all the details as prompted by the points given in the Form.
- **(a) The salient characteristics of the participants** *(min-max number, age, sex, etc. and other). For example:*
  - all first year MTL students registered with the Faculty of Education (approximately 150 students);
  - 250-300 secondary school students (3 Church secondary school);
  - All the NQTs specialised in secondary English (approximately NUMBER);
  - 20 Year 5 students (10 boys and 10 girls, aged 9-10), attending primary State schools, (three schools in Malta and one school in Gozo);
  - Six post-secondary school teachers of Mathematics, male/female, any number of years of experience AND two Education Officers for secondary Mathematics;
  - 80 Year 9 students of Italian and 80 parents of Year 9 students of Italian, males/females, ages 13 – 14 year olds, 6 Church schools;
  - All girls attending four football nurseries, ages 5 – 11

The schools or organisations should not be mentioned by name in the application, in order to respect anonymity. The PI should, however, state what type of place it is (e.g. a school
or a football club nursery). The PI should always meet children in places that are protected by institutional norms. (See Part 6 about Information Letters for more information about this point)

■ (b) How they will be recruited. A brief explanation of how the PI gains access to potential informants.

- First, it should be stated whether the sampling is purposeful (e.g. all teachers in one inner-harbour school), or random (e.g. the students studying French in a Church school which is chosen by putting names in a hat and drawing up the name of one school), or convenience (e.g. a French teacher is approached since she is an acquaintance of the researcher) or whatever method is being used to select the potential participants.

- Second, it should be explained whether Information Letters are needed and for whom, and how these are to be distributed (e.g. the Head of school acts as an intermediary to distribute the letters to all teachers of Years 1 and 2). The applicant should avoid using the passive voice (“The letters are distributed”), since this hides agency; rather s/he should use the active voice in order to show specifically WHO will be distributing (“The PI will ask the Head of School to kindly distribute the Information letters to teachers” OR “The teacher will distribute the Information letters to students, and ask the students to pass on Information Letters to their parents”). In the case of very young children, a verbal explanation may be more appropriate than a letter.

- Third, the PI should ensure that recruitment is ethical and that it conforms to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and implementing national legislation. For example, requesting personal e-mails of potential participants from an institutional or administrative data controller goes against the GDPR and implementing national legislation. E-mails should only be sent through an intermediary who has access to the e-mail addresses (for example, the Registrar of UM for University students, a Head of School for teacher or parental e-mails, etc.). When planning the recruitment process, the PI should also ensure that no undue pressure is exerted by an intermediary (e.g. gatekeeper) in selecting participants.

- Finally, it should be stated how Consent/Assent Forms are distributed, and how they are to be returned to the PI.

■ (c) & (d) What they will be required to do and duration. For example:
Each teacher will participate in a 30 minute audio-recorded interview focusing on their views on Inquiry-Based Learning. The interview will be carried out on school premises.

The University students will complete an on-line anonymous 15 minute questionnaire (12 questions about their experiences with Degree-Plus activities).

Each teacher will deliver 2 lessons designed by the PI, and will be observed by the PI. The PI will take down handwritten notes about the strategies used to explain the key concepts; the PI will also consider as data the students’ interactions with the teacher and with each other.

The students will keep a Journal twice a week (approximately 10 minute entries to be done at home) and their writings will be photocopied for analysis. Four of the students will be interviewed (approx. 15 minutes) about their writings. The interviews will be audio-recorded and will be held on school premises at a time recommended by their teacher.

(e) If inducements/rewards/compensation are offered. If no inducements are offered, this could be stated e.g. “No inducements are offered”.

(f) How participants may benefit. The benefits may be direct, for example, if the PI is trying out a new teaching approach which is believed to enhance student participation; the benefit may be indirect, for example, a teacher might have the opportunity to reflect on her own teaching while implementing the lessons prepared by the PI. If no benefits are foreseen, the PI should state this.

**Part 2: Self-Assessment**

In this section, the PI is asked a number of questions which must be answered ‘No’ or ‘Yes/Unsure’. If the answer is No, then the box is NOT ticked. If the answer is Yes/Unsure, then the box should be ticked. The PI must keep track of which questions have been ticked, since in Part 3, s/he will be asked for more details about the point.

Questions 4, 5 and 21 are elaborated upon below.

**Question 4** deals with ‘identifiability’. This refers to whether a person can be identified NOT ONLY in a publication but also in the researcher’s own records. If a person is identifiable, the collected data is legally considered ‘personal’ (See definition on Page 1).

Examples from the many instances when participants are legally identifiable are:

- An online questionnaire returned through a survey tool that collects IP addresses
- An online questionnaire that is returned by e-mail
An online questionnaire that includes questions that reveals information attributable to a particular individual.

Audio / video recordings of lessons, focus groups, interviews, etc. (The voices may be recognised).

Data that includes information such as: “An Education Officer for secondary mathematics education”, “The Principal of a College located in the south of Malta” and so on.

One example of a study where participants are NOT identifiable at the collection stage, and therefore in the PI’s records, is the following: a hard copy questionnaire is distributed to a number of students in various schools (which might be coded for later analysis); the questionnaire is completed by hand at home, sealed in an envelope, and returned to the researcher through a teacher. No names are written on the sheets and the aggregated information collected does NOT lead to the identification of a natural person (one of the respondents).

Another example of a study where participants are NOT identifiable in the records is when interviews are audio-recorded and the recordings are digitally altered for storage so that the voices are not recognisable.

**Question 5** refers to Special categories of personal data (also known as “special categories of data” or “Sensitive personal data”), that is, that can be linked to a particular person (see definition page 1).

**Question 21** asks about a number of things, including conflict of interest of the PI (and/or the PI’s supervisor) and the possibility of a dual role (e.g. when the PI is not only the researcher but also the teacher of the participating students). This question also asks about the need for a licence to carry out published tests. If a licence is needed, then this would need to be attached with the application in the Zipped folder. For more information about Question 21, see Part 3 below.

**Outcome of Self-Assessment.** If NONE of the questions 1 – 21 are marked, that is, the answer for all questions 1 – 21 are ‘No’, then the PI may skip Part 3 of the Form, and proceed to Part 4 “Submission”. The Form is submitted to FREC for records and audit purposes. If potential issues have been marked in Part 2 (Self-Assessment), that is, one or more boxes have been ticked ‘yes/unsure’, then the PI must proceed to Part 3 in order to give a more detailed evaluation of the indicated issues.

See “Part 4 Submission” below for more details re submitting an application.
Part 3: Detailed Evaluation

This section is to be completed in the case that one or more potential issues have been flagged in Part 2 of the Form. It is imperative that for every issue indicated in Part 2, an explanation must be given in Part 3. For example, if Questions 3, 4, 7 and 8 have been ticked in Part 2, then in Section 3 further explanations must be given relating to Questions 3, 4, 7 and 8. The other questions should be left blank.

Each Question in this section includes ‘prompts’ for the more detailed explanation. For example, Question 4 is shown as follows:

“4. Identifiable participants. Please elaborate on: i. the nature of the records, their storage, security, traceability, identifiability of participants and access to research records; ii. how participants will be protected when disseminating results (e.g. pseudonyms, coding, making data attributable with consent); iii. Plans for retention and destruction of the records”.

Researchers are expected to follow the prompts in order to give sufficient information that will enable FREC to fully understand the nature of the study being proposed. The PI should also refer to the FAQs on the UREC webpages, since these provide a detailed discussion of many potential questions /issues that might arise.

Note on Question 17. Question 17 asks for details about how Institutional Permissions will be obtained. Please note the following:

- Research in State schools requires the permission of the Directorate of Curriculum, Research, Innovation and Lifelong Learning (DCRILL);
- Research in Church schools requires the permission from the Secretariat for Catholic Education;
- Examples of other contexts:
  - Research in a privately-run institution requires the permission of the Director (or similar position) of the institution;
  - Research with a Scouts group requires the permission of the Chief Scout or Chief Commissioner, and so on.
  - Research at MCAST requires the permission of the Principal of MCAST (who will consult with the Director of the specific College/Institute within which the research is intended to be carried out).

Following Institutional permission (e.g. DCRILL / Secretariat for Catholic Education), permission will then also need to be sought from the ‘Gatekeeper(s)’. The Gatekeeper is the
person directly responsible for access to the institution premises and contact with the potential participants; e.g. Heads of School, Group Scout Leader, etc. Within the State sector, permissions are generally required from DCRILL and the individual Heads of Schools; the permission of the College Principle is not generally required, but the PI is encouraged to check on a case by case basis.

**Note on Question 21.** If the PI will be using a published test or instrument, it should be explained whether this is freely available for use, or whether the instrument must be used under license and whether such license has been granted by its publishers. It should be made clear that the PI satisfies the criteria for the instrument’s administration and use.

**Part 4: Submission**

As advised earlier in the Introduction to “Completing the Application Form”, the PI should work on his/her application on the Word format ‘Replica Form’, since the actual on-line application cannot be saved as a draft. Once all details are finalised in the Replica Form, these may be copied into the Online Form. Part 4 of the Form requests some final information and declarations. In particular, Question 3 prompts the applicant to add any other pertinent notes for FREC’s consideration. In this section:

- **Students should write down the Programme they are following** e.g. MTL (Early Childhood and Primary Education, MTL, B.Sc. (Sports Science), etc.
- **Students working in pairs should cross-reference their partner.**

The PI is to follow the prompts given in the questions, and to read the declarations (see No.4) carefully. **When writing his/her name (see No.5), the PI is signing the Declarations.** Finally, the applicant is requested to submit the Form.

Approximately 30 seconds after clicking the ‘Submit’ button, the applicant will receive a PDF version of the Form through e-mail. This PDF version of the application will have a unique ID (e.g. 325:18/12/2018-MariaAgius). The PDF application Form and all supporting documents (e.g. approved dissertation proposal, information letters, consent forms, interview questions, etc.) should be filed in a Zipped folder and e-mailed to FREC. The e-mail should be titled using the unique ID and EITHER “For FREC Records”, if no issues have been flagged in the Self-Assessment section, OR “For FREC Review” if further details had been provided in Part 3 of the Form. The Zipped folder should be sent to the following e-mail address:

research-ethics.educ@um.edu.mt

In the case of students, the supervisor must be copied in the e-mail. The supervisor will then "Reply All", confirming that s/he has read and approved the documents that the student is submitting, thus endorsing the Application. Until FREC receives this endorsement, FREC cannot process the application. That is, the Application will neither be filed, nor reviewed.
until the supervisor’s endorsement is received. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that this endorsement is received by FREC. The applicant will receive an acknowledgement from FREC to confirm that the e-mail has been received.

In the case of an Application wherein no issues have been flagged, FREC will file the application and supporting documents. In the case of applications that will require FREC review, a hard copy of the application and supporting documents should also be submitted (filed in a flat file with no staples) IN PERSON to Ms Isabelle Warrington, whose office (Room 311) is located opposite the main door of the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Science (MAKS). The hard copy is required for ease of processing the Application. When submitting the hard copy, students are required to sign a hard copy declaration, which should be handed in together with the hard copy (see Appendix 3). The declaration confirms that the hard copies being submitted are identical to the soft copies of the application and documents that were submitted electronically.

Documents to be submitted with Application
Various documents may need to be attached with the Application Form, depending on the nature of the study. Generally, the documents will include Permission letters, Consent Forms, and any research instruments to be used. Permission Letters and Consent forms have been explained in detail above. The following are brief points about some types of research instruments.

Questionnaires and Interviews Schedules

- Care should be taken to ensure that the Questionnaire questions/statements or Interview questions do not include stigmatization towards persons because of ethnicity, beliefs, disability or learning difficulties, family types, gender, socio-economic categories, etc.
- Prior to appending the documents, they should be checked to ensure that questions:
  - Are not leading (i.e. they do not influence the participant to answer in a certain way)
  - Are not stigmatizing towards any group (see above).
- In the case of teachers and other professionals, an English version of the instrument will suffice; in all other cases, both English and Maltese versions of the texts should be included.

Observation Schedules

Some research studies require a pre-prepared schedule of what the researcher is going to focus on during observations (e.g. class observations). If such a tool is to be used, this should also be appended.
Other Research Instruments

Other research instruments such as Standardised tests, sample Lesson Plans and so on should also be appended.

Order of documents

For ease of processing, documents should be attached in the order given below. Note that for soft copies, a required order can be created by numbering the documents e.g. “01 Approved dissertation proposal”, “02 Permission letter Secretariat for CE” ... “10 Standardised Test”, “11 Interview Questions”, etc. (Otherwise, files will be ordered alphabetically).

The following is an example of the list of documents that an applicant might need to attach:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Approved dissertation Proposal (that is, the document signed by the relevant Board/Committee – this document is compulsory for all students).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Permission letters (Institutional permission – Secretariat for Catholic Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Information Letter (Head of school),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Information letter: teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05a</td>
<td>Information letter: parent/Guardian (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05b</td>
<td>Information letter: parent/guardian (Maltese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06a</td>
<td>Information letter: students (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06b</td>
<td>Information letter: students (Maltese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Consent Form: teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08a</td>
<td>Consent Form: parent/guardian (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08b</td>
<td>Consent Form: parent/guardian (Maltese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09a</td>
<td>Assent Form: students (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09b</td>
<td>Assent Form: students (Maltese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Research instrument 1: questionnaire teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11a</td>
<td>Research instrument 2: Interview questions students (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11b</td>
<td>Research Instrument 2: Interview questions students (Maltese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Other document (if applicable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Other document (if applicable)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All appended documents should be appropriately titled e.g. “Information Letter for parents/guardian - English”, “Assent Form for students - Maltese,” and so on. In the case of
teachers and other professionals, an English version of the instrument will suffice; in all other cases, both English and Maltese versions of the texts should be included.

Resubmissions
If, after having submitted the electronic Application Form, an applicant wishes/needs to make a significant amendment to their original Form, (or is requested to do so by FREC), the applicant is to resubmit a fresh Application, which will then have a different ID. **The applicant should not edit the original PDF application.** Very minor amendments that will have no effect on ethics or Data Protection can be communicated to FREC by e-mail (e.g. to correct a mistake in the title, etc.). **It is at the discretion of FREC to decide whether amendments are to be considered minor nor not.**

Submitting Permissions
When the PI has the necessary permissions in hand, s/he should submit these permissions to FREC as soft copy PDF documents. The files should be named using the number found at the beginning of the Unique Form ID of the Application. For example, if the ID is “325:18/12/2018-MariaAgius”, then the name of the Permission file for the Secretariat for Catholic Education would be “325_2018_Permission Secretariat for CE”. The permissions should be e-mailed to Ms Isabelle Warrington on e-mail

research-ethics.educ@um.edu.mt

Once the permissions have been checked by FREC, the PI will receive an official communication from FREC that her/his application has been approved and, and that s/he may begin data collection.

In the case of applications that will need to be reviewed by UREC, the PI will be informed that his/her application and documents will be referred to UREC. Following feedback from UREC, FREC will communicate with the PI once more.
6 Permission requests and Information Letters

Institutional and gatekeeper permissions

Before research is carried out, permission has to be requested, and gained, to enter the research site and to approach potential participants. Research is often carried out in institutions/organisations such as schools, sports clubs, etc. The first written permissions to be sought are ‘Institutional’ permissions. For example, where research is to be carried out in State schools, an electronic application form which can be found on the Education Directorate’s website should be filled in:


Where research is to be carried out in Church schools, institutional permission should be requested through a letter to the Secretariat for Catholic Education (addressed to the Director for Educational Services in Schools).

The next step is ‘Gatekeeper’ permission. The ‘Gatekeepers’ are the persons directly responsible for granting access to the participants. For example, a Head of School or a Scout Leader is a gatekeeper.

In the case of Independent schools, permission is obtained directly from the Heads of School, so here it is the Head of School that grants the ‘Institutional’ permission. In the case of other entities (e.g. companies, sports clubs, Scout groups etc.), the PI should check to whom it is appropriate to write to request permission. (For example, if the entity is a company producing educational software, it is the owner or Managing Director of the company who should be contacted); in the case of Scouts, the Chief Scout will be the first to grant permission, followed by the Scout Leader of a particular group of Scouts.

Prior to obtaining Ethical approval, the PI may approach gatekeepers INFORMALLY to explore the possibility of conducting their study in the institution/organisation. Copies of letters requesting institutional and gatekeeper permission should be included in the Ethics application. Since Institutional permissions are necessary, then the Application will need to be reviewed by FREC. The PI must wait for clearance prior to sending out any letters requesting permissions. Once FREC has reviewed and accepted the PI’s application, the PI will be informed that s/he may now formally obtain the written permissions. Once the permissions are obtained, they should be submitted to FREC to be checked and added to the PI’s application. FREC will then notify the PI that the application has been accepted and that s/he may collect their data. No data is to be collected until the PI receives this written notification.

Permission Letters should be a polite request to conduct research in a specific organisation, for example, a school. It should include text similar to the following: “I would like to ask your kind permission to …” OR “I would appreciate it if you would allow me to …”
Permission Letters to gatekeepers / Information Letters to potential participants

The first step in data collection that involves human participants is to approach potential participants through ‘Permission’ and ‘Information Letters’. Permission letters are sent to gatekeepers (e.g. Secretariat for Catholic Education, a Head of School), while ‘Information Letters’ are generally sent to potential participants. Permission and Information Letters need to include enough information so as to allow the individual to be able to take an **INFORMED decision** with regard to participation (or in the case of the gatekeeper, to grant permission). Letters should include an introduction, a brief description of the study, information about what participation involves, promises and guarantees, and contact details.

**Introduction of the letter**

This should include:

- The researcher’s name and surname.
- The researcher’s affiliation to the University of Malta; in the case of students the course they are following and their supervisor’s name and surname.
- The title of the project/dissertation
- The aim of the study

**Explaining the study: what participation will involve**

This section details are given about who the participants are expected to be and what participation will involve.

- **In the letter to the gatekeeper**, it must be made clear who the participants will be, how many will be required (e.g. two Grade 5 teachers) what each participant is going to be asked to do as part of the study, and how long this would take (see point below re potential participants). If the Head of School / Director etc. is expected to distribute Information Letters, this should be explicitly stated. The PI should not request information about potential participants (e.g. e-mail addresses) because of data protection issues.

- **In the letter to potential participants** (teachers, students, etc.), all relevant information must be given, for example:
  - Teacher interview: length of interview, when and where it will be held, if it is to be audio recorded, if notes will be taken, etc.
  - Lesson delivery to try out a new approach: how many lessons, duration, who will be planning them, who will be delivering them, whether observation notes will be taken, etc.
  - Questionnaire: approximately how long it will take to fill in, whether online, whether anonymous, etc.
  - Children’s activities: number of activities, duration of each activity, where it will be held, whether audio/video recorded, whether observation notes will be taken, etc.
• If a teacher is expected to distribute Information Letters and Consent/Assent Forms to his/her students, this should be mentioned.

The gatekeeper should be politely asked for permission; other individuals should be politely invited to participate or to give consent for their child to participate. Attention should be drawn to the Consent Form being forwarded with the Information letter and it should be stated how consent for their own or their child’s participation is to be communicated. For example, invited teachers might be asked to return a Consent Form to the researcher through a self-addressed envelope. (see Section on Consent Forms)

Promises and guarantees

The Letters must also include Promises and guarantees as follows:

■ A clear statement that participation is voluntary.
■ The fact that the participant can withdraw at any time and that if they do, there will be no negative consequences for the person and any data collected relating to them will be destroyed.
■ A promise of how the participant/s identity will be protected. For example, in the case of a hard copy Questionnaire, the PI might promise that the school, class and respondent will be coded; in the case of an interview, the PI might promise that the identity of the participant will be anonymised through the use of a fictitious name (or pseudonym). In some cases when there is a possibility that the participant or the institution can be identified, the researcher should make it clear that the data will be attributable to them.
■ A statement that the data will be stored safely.

An explanation of what will be done with the audio recorded data; for example, it might be stated that the audio-recording will be used for transcription purposes, after which it will be destroyed. NOTE: there is no hard-and-fast rule regarding destruction of records and data. As a general rule, records and data should be retained only as long as they are necessary, that is, until their purpose has been fulfilled. (Longer periods apply to studies that deal with sensitive issues, especially if carried out with children). Further guidance on retention and destruction issues may be found in the FAQs prepared by UREC (https://www.um.edu.mt/urec)

The researcher must make sure that any promises and guarantees made, especially promises of anonymity and confidentiality, can be realistically kept.

Ending the letter

■ At the end of the letter, the recipient should be invited to contact the researcher in case of any queries, or should they wish further information or clarification. Thus, the e-mail address of the PI should be given (in the case of a student, the e-mail of both
the student and the supervisor should be given). The PI’s contact telephone number (mobile) should also be given.

- The PI **should not** include personal information such as ID card number, home address, or home telephone number.
- The letter should include a space for the PI’s signature. The signature should be on the same sheet as the text of the letter.

**Letters to parents/guardians of minors**

In the case of letters to parents/guardians of minors:

- Parents/guardians are to be politely invited to allow their child to participate; they are informed that their child is also being given information about the study, and is also being asked to decide whether to participate or not. The child is free to choose whether or not to participate.
- Attention should be drawn to the Consent Form provided with the Information Letter. **Instructions should be given as to how, and by when, the Consent Form should be returned.**

**Information for minors**

In the case of minors (under 18 years of age):

- The information given to students **must be simplified** depending on the students’ age. For younger children, the font used should also be appropriate.
- Attention must be drawn to the Assent Form attached with the Letter, and clear instructions given as to how this is to be returned.
- In the case of young children, **a verbal explanation rather than a written letter may be more appropriate to communicate the information.** This explanation may be given by the PI in the presence of their teacher OR by the teacher. For the purpose of the Ethics Application, the text of the explanation is to be included instead of a letter.

**Further points re content of letters**

**Online questionnaires**

In the case of online questionnaires, the necessary information may be given in an e-mail in which a link to the questionnaire is provided.

**Care re singling out individuals**

When designing a study, and therefore, in the explanation to potential participants, **care needs to be taken in order not to single out particular research subjects or to draw undue**
attention to them (e.g. students with a ‘statementing’ report, students who are helped by an LSA, ethnic groups, etc.). Therefore, in such cases the research should be designed in such a way as to involve the whole class or a wider selection of students. This gives the advantage of allowing observation of the special and the control groups whilst avoiding the singling out of an individual and/or group. The language used in the letters must avoid stigmatization and/or labelling.

‘Deception’

Honesty regarding the research purposes and methods is ethically very important. In most cases no deception whatsoever is resorted to and the PI explains the research study in full. In some cases, knowledge of the focus of the research may influence participants to exhibit unusual actions/ speech, rather than their natural behaviour; which is likely to bias data. In these cases, it may be appropriate to provide general but accurate information to participants in order to avoid the potential for biased results. This is not regarded as deception. For example:

Example 1. Children sitting for a test that assesses the quality of their social interaction with peers. This study might be described to participants and their parents’/guardians as follows: ‘Children will be asked to play a game with some of their friends. Children will then be asked to give reasons as to why they played in the way they did and reasons for choosing their friends...’.

Example 2. A study of teacher use of different languages in the classroom. This study might be described to teachers as follows: ‘The teacher and learners will be observed with regards to discourse dynamics during lessons’.

Example 3. A study about the dynamicity of use of the interactive whiteboard. This study might be described as follows: ‘The study involves observations that focus on the use of the interactive whiteboard within the classroom.’

Benefits of the study

The PI might wish to include in the letter any benefits deriving from participation in the study. Participants themselves may not directly benefit as part of their participation, but the PI might inform them of possible positive outcomes of the study. For example:

Example 1. The results and findings of the study may map out trends and trajectories that are currently unknown. This should go some way in advancing studies in this area (for example, using a particular method of teaching a subject).

Example 2. The teachers will take part in lessons that are innovative in pedagogy; this may engage pupils more during the lessons.

Example 3. Classroom observation of teacher-pupil interaction is an opportunity for subjects to receive feedback about the strategies and methods that they employ, should they wish it.
Furnishing participants with feedback/results of the study

Care must be taken when considering whether to offer feedback about the results to the schools/individuals/ institutions involved in the data gathering. At times this may create difficulties as participants may be identified within the context of where they teach /learn/work. Some might argue that the dissertation will be available at the University of Malta library. However, identification of participants is likely to become more possible when results and findings are taken directly to the source of the information.

The language of Permission / Information Letters

The following should be kept in mind when drafting Information Letters.

- Letters to the Secretariat for Catholic Education, Heads of School, Directors of institutions, teachers, and other professionals are to be written in English;
- Letters to parents and children are to be prepared in both Maltese and English. Letters should always be written in clear, CORRECT language, avoiding technical jargon.
- It should be ensured that Maltese and English versions of the same document correspond.
- Information Letters to children should be written in age-appropriate language in a way that, for example, a 14 year-old, or a 9-year-old, etc. would comprehend. In the case of young children, a simple, verbal explanation will need to be given by the PI in the presence of the teacher OR by the teacher. Visual props are recommended where applicable.
- It is imperative that a potential participant or his or her guardians fully understand the implications of participation in the study, so care needs to be taken in the case of any individuals who are known to be unfamiliar with Maltese or English.

As a general rule, it is advisable that the ‘passive voice’ is avoided in Information letters, since it does not indicate WHO is doing what. Instead, ‘active voice’ should be used. For example, rather than stating “Consent Forms will be collected ...” [BY WHOM?], it is better to state “I will collect Consent Forms from the secretary’s office ...” OR “Your daughter’s class teacher will be collecting the Consent Forms ...” Using the first / third person often helps to give a better explanation of the exact procedure to be carried out.

Submitting Permission and Information Letters to FREC

Sample Information Letters are to be submitted to FREC, whether the application is “for FREC records” or “for FREC Review”. The documents should be titled, e.g. “Permission Letter to
Head of School” and so on; however, the actual names of the Head of School, the schools or entities, etc. should not be indicated, so as to respect anonymity. Documents should be attached in the order given in Section 5 (Part 4) of these Guidelines or as shown on the Check List for Submission. For soft copies, preceding the file name with a number helps to order the documentation (e.g. “1 Permission Letter for SCE”, “2 Permission Letter HoS”, and so on).

7 Voluntary, informed consent

The principle of informed voluntary consent to participate, free from coercion, is central to the ethics of research involving human subjects. Having been informed of what part they are expected to play in the proposed research study, prospective participants must then freely and voluntarily decide whether or not they wish to participate in the study. The consenting participant is then expected to sign a Consent Form explicitly stating what they are consenting to, and return it to the researcher. The overall process is as shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. The Consent Process](image)

This is known as the ‘Opt-in’ method of consent (also known as ‘active consent’) which refers to when participants explicitly have to volunteer to take part in the research, by returning a signed Consent/ Assent Form, in line with the ethical principle of voluntary consent. This method is normally the default ethical position for any research involving human participants.

Consent Forms

Informed consent is specific - it is given by participants for a specific set of actions and a specific set of conditions explicitly listed in a Consent Form. The Consent Form lists what the researcher expects of participants, and what precautions the researcher binds him/herself to take in order to safeguard the interests of the subject.

The Consent Form should be prepared as a separate document to the Information Letter; it should be written from the perspective of the person giving consent, and should include:

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- A declaration by participants that they have read the information about the study (there is no need to repeat all the information that had been given in the Information Letter).

- A statement of what the participants are consenting to. A list with ‘tick boxes’ may be used if the potential participant is required to choose to participate in various parts of the study, OR if they are being given a choice as to whether to be audio-recorded during the interview or not. If no choices are applicable, then ‘tick boxes’ should not be used (the individual either agrees to participate in the study in full, or not participate at all).

- A list of safeguards and precautions the researcher binds him/herself to take.

- A statement that consent is being given voluntarily and that participants are free to withdraw at any time and for whatever (unstated) reason, and that there will no negative consequences for the individual in the case of withdrawal.

Thus, a Consent Form is like a contract between researcher and participant, except that while the researcher binds him/herself to abide by the specified terms, the participant is free to withdraw at any time.

It is to be noted that:

- Consent is only required of participants in the study (or their parent/guardian). Institutional officials such as Heads of school who will simply be giving permission for the research to be carried out in their school, do NOT fill a Consent Form, UNLESS they themselves will be informants (for example, by being interviewed);

- Should there be non-minor changes in the research design after participants have given consent, (for example, the interview questions are changed), then ethical approval must be sought all over again and consent renegotiated with participants.

**Subjects under the age of consent**

When prospective participants are children below the age of legal consent (18 years in Malta), **consent must be sought from the child’s parent, or legal guardian, AND assent must be sought from the child.** The Information Letters and Consent/Assent Forms may be distributed at the same time, since this allows the parent and child to discuss the study and possible participation, and will also allow the parent to look through the Assent form that the child has been given. **Only minors for whom BOTH parental consent and the child’s own assent has been obtained may be included in the study.** The process is as shown in Figure 3.
For children to be in a position to give informed and voluntary assent, the researcher must make sure that the information about the study, which is given in an Information Letter to the child, is phrased in simple terms. Similarly, the Assent Form must be formulated using age-appropriate language. With young children it is usually advisable to have the study explained verbally and to use a pictorial assent form which they can fill in with adult help.

**Questionnaires with Minors aged 16 – 17 years**

If a questionnaire is being proposed for Sixth Form students, who are generally aged 16 – 18 years, the PI should seek advice from FREC with regard to parental Consent.

**When explicit consent is not required**

In certain cases, participants' consent is not required. For example, for archival anonymous data, such as an item analysis of already anonymised examination scripts, there is no need to seek the consent of individuals (who cannot even be identified).

In other cases, participant consent can be given implicitly. For example, if prospective adult participants are invited to complete a Questionnaire, their completing the Questionnaire is in itself a form of consent. No explicit Consent Form is required in this case, as long as the information contained in the Information Letter accompanying the Questionnaire clearly indicates any consequences and implications of participating in the study, what the data will be used for, approximately how long it will take to complete the Questionnaire, whether participants will be identifiable from their responses, etc. Furthermore, at the beginning of the Questionnaire, it should once again be clearly stated that completion of the Questionnaire will be taken as consent to participate. The same procedure holds if the Questionnaire is to be completed online. In this case, the necessary information is given in an e-mail communication through which the potential participant is invited. The e-mail would include a link to the Questionnaire.
The ‘Opt-Out’ method of consent

Although explicit consent or ‘opting-in’ (see above) is the standard, preferred consent/assent method, another method is sometimes used. This is the ‘Opt-out’ method of consent (‘passive consent’) which assumes that participants consent to taking part unless they actively and explicitly decline to do so. The PI sends an Information Letter to the potential participant and towards the end of the letter states that unless the individual returns the attached ‘Opt-Out Form’, the PI will assume that the individual agrees to be part of the study. In the case of minors, the researcher assumes that the child can be included in the study if neither guardian nor child returns the Opt-out Form.

The opting-out process is summarised in Figure 4.

![Diagram of Opting Out process](image)

There is some debate about when and how the Opt-out method should be used instead of the more commonly used ‘Opt-In’). While Opt-Out is considered a less demanding form of consent/assent, it should be used judiciously. An example of when Opt-out may be appropriate is the following:

**Example.** The study is an error-analysis of students’ French literature essays. The essays will be photocopied by the teacher without any names showing, and forwarded to PI for analysis. The PI gives all the necessary information to the students and their guardians. Those not wishing to participate will return the Opt-Out Form. If the PI does not receive the Opt-out Form from either the guardian or the student, then the PI assumes that s/he may use the student’s essay for analysis.

An Opt-out approach will need to be ethically justified by the PI and will be considered by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) on a case-by-case basis. A decision on whether opt-out is really the most ethically sound approach can only be taken once the full details of the study are elaborated.
8 Final points re submitting Ethics Application

- In the case of students, ethical clearance should be sought only after the dissertation proposal has been approved by the relevant Dissertations Board.
- It should be ensured that Maltese and English versions of the same document correspond.
- All Documents should be appropriately titled; they should be presented in the order requested.
- Hard copies of the application + documents should be submitted in a ‘flat file’ – sheets should not be stapled.
- Students should sign the ‘Hard Copy Declaration’ and submit it with the hard copy of the application.

In line with Senate approved procedures, FREC’s remit is to evaluate potential ethical and data-protection issues. It is NOT the role of FREC, nor UREC, to correct spelling and other grammatical mistakes in the submitted documents. It is the PI’s responsibility to ensure that the documents are written using appropriate language and correct English and Maltese. In the case of students, documents should be drafted under the guidance of their supervisor.
9 Appendices

Examples of Permission/Information Letters, and of Consent/Assent forms may be found in Appendices A and B. Examples of Opt-Out Forms may be found in Appendix C. The Hard Copy Declaration to be handed in with the hard copy of the application may be found in Appendix D.

THE EXAMPLES ARE INTENDED SOLELY FOR GUIDANCE. THE EXACT CONTENT AND FORMAT OF THESE DOCUMENTS WILL DEPEND ON THE NATURE OF A STUDY. HENCE THE PI SHOULD ENSURE THAT ANY DOCUMENTS PRODUCED AND SUBMITTED TO FREC FOR REVIEW ARE APPROPRIATE FOR EACH RESPECTIVE STUDY.
Appendix A
Examples of Permission and Information Letters
Permission Letter – Secretariat for Catholic Education

[DATE]

Dear Director,

I am John Borg, a student reading for a [DEGREE TITLE] degree at the University of Malta. As part of this course I will be carrying out research in order to write a dissertation. My dissertation supervisor is [TITLE/NAME/SURNAME].

The title of my dissertation is [“TITLE”]. For this study, I will be investigating [EXPLANATION OF AIM OF STUDY]. I would be grateful if you would give me permission to conduct this research study at School [NAME] and School [NAME].

Should permission be granted, I would like to distribute a written questionnaire to [NUMBER] students in [GRADE LEVEL]. This will contain questions regarding [FOCUS OF QUESTIONS] and will take approximately [NUMBER] minutes to complete.

Participation is voluntary. I will first ask the respective Heads of School for their kind permission to carry out the data collection in their schools, following which I will forward information letters to parents and students. Questionnaires will only be distributed to students whose parents give consent. Students may choose not to complete the questionnaire. Students will be asked not to write their names on the questionnaire. Furthermore, the questionnaires will be coded, so that even the identity of the school will be anonymised. All raw data will be securely stored and the data obtained will be solely used for the compilation of my dissertation.

I would like to assure you that I will abide by all the ethical guidelines issued by the University Research Ethics Committee of the University of Malta throughout the course of my research.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor (please see contact details given below).

Thank you for your kind consideration,

Sincerely,

[NAME]

Mobile number: [NUMBER]
Email address: [ADDRESS]

Supervisor’s Details:

Name: [TITLE AND NAME]
Email address: [ADDRESS]

_____________________________________

Researcher’s Signature
Permission Letter – Head of School

[DATE]

Dear Head of School [OR NAME, if it is known],

I am John Borg, a student reading for a [DEGREE TITLE] degree at the University of Malta. As part of this course I will be carrying out research in order to write a dissertation. My dissertation supervisor is [TITLE /NAME/SURNAME].

The title of my dissertation is [“TITLE”]. For this study, I will be investigating [EXPLANATION OF AIM OF STUDY].

I would be grateful if you would give me permission to conduct my research study at your school.

Should you give me permission, I would like to distribute the attached questionnaire to around [NUMBER] students in [GRADE LEVEL]. The questionnaire will contain questions regarding [FOCUS OF QUESTIONNAIRE] and should take approximately [NUMBER] minutes to complete. I would like the students to fill in the questionnaire at school so I will liaise with the class teacher to identify a convenient time when it can be completed [OR Form teacher / SUBJECT teacher if students are Secondary level students].

Participation in the study is voluntary and participants will suffer no negative consequence should they choose not to submit the questionnaire. Questionnaires will only be distributed to those students whose parents give consent. Students will not be required to write their names and the questionnaires will be coded, so that the identity of your school will be anonymised. All raw data will be securely stored and the data obtained will be solely used for the compilation of my dissertation.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

[NAME]  
Mobile number: [NUMBER]  
Email address: [ADDRESS]  

Supervisor’s Details:

Name: [TITLE AND NAME]  
Email address: [ADDRESS]

____________________________

Researcher’s signature

*NOTES REGARDING QUESTIONNAIRES INTENDED FOR TEACHERS:

(1) If a questionnaire is intended for teachers the researcher should ask the Head of School politely if they would kindly distribute the information letters and questionnaires to all the teachers of the required Year Group/s.

(2) If the questionnaire is to be submitted ONLINE by the targeted teachers, the researcher may ask the Head of School to act as an intermediary to forward the link to his/her staff. The researcher might explain that the survey instrument being used will not collect IP addresses (if this is the case).
Information Letter – Teachers

[DATE]

Dear Teacher,

I am Music trainee-teacher and am currently reading for [NAME OF DEGREE] at the University of Malta. As part of this course, I will be conducting a research study entitled [TITLE] under the supervision of [SUPERVISOR TITLE, NAME AND SURNAME].

In the course of my research, I will be investigating [FOCUS OF STUDY].

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study, which involves two parts. The first part involves the completion of a questionnaire which will take about [NUMBER] minutes to complete. The questionnaire is enclosed with this information letter. Completion of the questionnaire will be taken as consent to participate in this part of the study. You are kindly asked NOT to write your name on the questionnaire.

The second part of my study involves an interview which will take around [NUMBER] minutes. Should you choose to participate in the second part of the study, the interview will be held at a time and place convenient for you. The focus of the interview will be [EXPLAIN FOCUS]. With your signed consent, the interview will be audio recorded as I would need to transcribe your responses in order to analyse them. However, should you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I would take notes instead. I will keep your identity, and that of the school, confidential, and your identity will be anonymised in my write-up through the use of a pseudonym. I would like to interview [NUMBER] of teachers, so should more than [NUMBER] teachers volunteer to participate in the interview, [NUMBER] names will be drawn at random.

Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without suffering any negative consequence. Should you choose to withdraw, your interview data will not be used for the study, and it will be destroyed*. Any notes taken and audio-recorded data will be securely stored and will be accessed only by myself. Recordings will be used for the purpose of transcription; once I have transcribed the interview I will destroy the audio-recording*.

If you agree to participate, kindly complete the enclosed questionnaire and leave it in the sealed box in the School Secretary’s office. I will be collecting the questionnaires on [DATE]. Furthermore, if you agree to participate in the interview, kindly contact me on the e-mail below.

If you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Yours sincerely,

______________________________

[signature]

[Name]

Mobile number: [NUMBER]

Email address: [ADDRESS]

Supervisor’s Name: [TITLE AND NAME]

Supervisor’s e-mail address:

*NOTE: The researcher cannot promise that the teacher’s questionnaire will be discarded if s/he withdraws, since the questionnaire was filled in anonymously. Hence the researcher cannot know which questionnaire was completed by this particular teacher.
Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am full-time Primary School teacher and I am currently reading for a [TITLE OF DEGREE] at the University of Malta. As part of this course, I will be carrying out a research study entitled ['TITLE']. My study will focus on [FOCUS OF THE STUDY]. My dissertation supervisor is [TITLE/NAME/SURNAME].

In order to collect the data I require, I would like to carry out a focus group consisting of [NUMBER] of Year 6 students. The focus group is expected to take [NUMBER] minutes and will be held at a time convenient to the school. The students will be asked questions about [FOCUS OF DISCUSSION]. The focus group will be audio recorded as I would need to transcribe all the discussion in order to analyse the students’ responses.

Every effort will be made so that your son/daughter does not miss out on lessons. Therefore, the focus group discussion will be conducted at a time recommended by his/her class teacher.

All the responses gathered during the focus group will be pseudonymised, that is, fictitious names will be used in the writing of my dissertation. Audio recorded data will be securely stored and will be accessed only by myself. The recordings will be used for the purpose of transcription; once I have transcribed the interview I will destroy the audio-recording.

I would be grateful if you would give consent for your son/daughter to participate in the focus group discussion and to be audio-recorded. Participation is voluntary and your son/daughter may change his/her mind about participating in the focus group without there being any negative consequence. Should s/he wish to withdraw from the study after the focus group discussion has been held, his/her contribution will not be used as part of the study.

Should you wish to give consent for your son/daughter to participate in this research, kindly fill in the attached Consent Form and return it to [NAME OF PERSON E.G. CLASS TEACHER or FORM TEACHER/SUBJECT TEACHER IF STUDENTS ARE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS] in the sealed envelope provided. I will be collecting these forms one week from the date you received this sheet. Please note that your son/daughter has also been given an information sheet and assent form.

If more students agree to participate than is needed for the study, [NUMBER] of names will be drawn up by lot.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

[NAME]

Mobile number: [NUMBER]
Email address: [ADDRESS]

Supervisor’s Details:

Name: [TITLE AND NAME]
Email address: [ADDRESS]

Researcher’s Signature
Information Letter – Parent/Guardian, for Student’s participation (2)

[DATE]

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am full-time Primary School teacher and I am currently reading for a [TITLE OF DEGREE] at the University of Malta. As part of this course, I will be carrying out a research study entitled ['TITLE']. My study will focus on [FOCUS OF THE STUDY]. My dissertation supervisor is [TITLE/NAME/SURNAME].

In order to collect the data I require, I would like to carry out 5 lesson observations in your child’s classroom [IF STUDENTS ARE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS, ‘SON/DAUGHTER’]. During the lessons, I will take down notes about the strategies being used to teach [TOPIC]. The focus of my observations will be [GIVE DETAILS]. Although I will mainly be observing the teacher, I may also need to take down notes regarding the students’ contributions to the lesson. The notes taken will be stored securely and accessed only by myself. In my dissertation, and in any future write-ups, I will use fictitious names so that the school, and the identity of the teacher and students will be anonymised.

Participation is voluntary. Should you not wish your child to be part of my study, he/she will participate in the lessons as usual, but I will not take any notes about them. You and your child may change your minds with regard to his/her participation in the study without there being any negative consequence.

Should you NOT wish me to use your son/daughter’s contributions as part of my study, kindly fill in the ‘Opt-out’ form enclosed with this information letter and return it to [NAME OF PERSON E.G. CLASS TEACHER or FORM TEACHER/SUBJECT TEACHER IF STUDENTS ARE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS] in the sealed envelope provided by [DATE].

Please note that your son/daughter has also been given an information sheet and an Opt-out form.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor (see contact details below).

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

[NAME]

Mobile number: [NUMBER]
Email address: [ADDRESS]

Supervisor’s Details:

Name: [TITLE AND NAME]
Email address: [ADDRESS]

____________________________________
Researcher’s Signature
Information Letter – Pupil

[DATE]

Dear Student,

My name is Mr John Borg. I am a student at the University of Malta, and I am studying to become a teacher.

As part of my course, I am conducting a research study about [TITLE OR SIMPLY WORDED FOCUS OF STUDY]. I would like a number of students to help me.

I am inviting you to take part in my study by filling in a short, [NUMBER]-minute questionnaire, where you will be asked about [FOCUS]. The questionnaire will be filled in at school; your class teacher will collect the questionnaires and I will pick them up from the school secretary.

Please do not write your name on the questionnaire as I would like all the responses gathered during this exercise to be anonymous. I will keep the questionnaires safe at home. When I write about my study, your name will not be used. I will use fictitious names!

You will fill in the questionnaire only if you wish to. You do not have to take part if you do not wish to. If you do decide to take part, you are free to stop whenever you want to.

If you have any questions, please ask! You may e-mail me or speak to me in person when I am at your school. If you prefer, your parents can e-mail or phone me.

Regards

[NAME]

e-mail [ADDRESS]
Information Sheet – Younger Pupils

NOTE: If the children are very young, and/or are unable to read (e.g. 5 years of age), the following information should be explained VERBALLY to the children.

I am a teacher whose favourite subject is Science and I would like to learn more about how you learn Science at school.

I would like to visit your class to sit and watch some Science lessons.

I would also like to use a video camera to record the lessons. You do not have to show up on the video-recording if you do not wish to.

After spending some time with you in class, I would like to speak to four children from your class about [FOCUS OF STUDY]. I would like to record what we say with an audio-recorder. You do not have to talk to me if you do not wish to, I will not be upset. If you do want to talk to me you can stop whenever you like.

When I write about my study, I won’t use your real name.

If you have any questions please ask. Your parent or teacher can ask me too!

Thank you

[NAME AND SIGNATURE]
Appendix B
Examples of Consent and Assent Forms
Consent Form – Teacher

[Title of research study]

I confirm that I have read the attached Participant Information Sheet for this study and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study.

On the basis of the information given, I agree to allow Ms Nadia Borg to:

- observe two of my own lessons to become familiar with the classroom context
- bring some I.T. resources to class for children to engage with during two further lessons, and to interact with the children during the course of the lesson
- take notes about my teaching strategies and use these notes as data for her study.

I give my consent on condition that Ms Nadia will also be obtaining parent/guardians’ consent for the children’s participation and that she will also be obtaining the children’s assent in a manner that is easy for the children to understand.

______________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Teacher’s name                  Teacher’s signature             Teacher’s contact email

Date:

______________________________
Researcher’s Signature

NOTE: In this Consent Form, note that there are no ‘tick boxes’. This is because the teacher EITHER: agrees to participate fully in the study (and therefore signs this Form), OR does not wish to participate (and therefore does not sign this Form).
Consent Form – Parent/Guardian, for Student’s participation

>Title of research study

I have read the attached Parent/Legal Guardian Information Sheet. I give consent for my child [Son/daughter] to participate in Ms Nadia Attard’s study on condition that:

• I am free to withdraw my consent at any time in the course of the study
• My son/daughter gives his/her assent to participate in the study
• The video and audio-recordings will be stored securely and will only be accessible to Ms Nadia. The recordings will be destroyed when Ms Nadia finishes her study.
• The school and the identity of the teacher and the students will be anonymised since Ms Nadia will use fictitious names in her write-up.

(Please tick as applicable)

I give my consent so that:

☐ My son/daughter may be observed and video recorded during some I.T. lessons
☐ Ms Nadia may speak to my son/daughter before and after the lessons about what she has observed
☐ Ms Nadia may audio-record the conversation with my son/daughter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Son/Daughter’s name</th>
<th>Parent / Guardian’s Name</th>
<th>Parent/Guardian’s signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Date: ___________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Researcher’s Signature

NOTE: Here ‘tick boxes’ are provided since a parent might agree to the child being observed and video-recorded but NOT to participate in discussion with Ms Nadia afterward; OR they might agree to the discussion but not to the child being audio-recorded during the conversation.
Participant Assent Form (Secondary Student)

[Title of research study]

I confirm that I have read and understood the attached Participant Information Sheet for this study and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study. On the basis of the information given, I give my consent to Ms Nadia Borg to:

- Observe me during Art lessons
- Take photos of my paintings for the purpose of her dissertation.
- Interview me from time to time about my Art work
- Audio recorded our discussions

I give my consent on condition that:

- The audio recordings will be stored safely and accessed only to Ms Nadia.
- I am free to withdraw at any time without having to explain why.
- The name on my Art work is hidden
- My real name will not be used at any time in write-ups about the study.

___________________  ___________________  ___________________
Student’s name    Student’s signature    Date

______________________
Researcher’s Signature

NOTE: No tick boxes, since the researcher requires that a student agrees to ALL the conditions in order to participate.
Participant Assent Form – Younger student

[Name of the study]

Ms Nadia explained that:

- She will be visiting our class to watch our I.T. lessons
- She would like to video record the lessons
- I can choose if I wish to show up on the video or not
- We will be talking together before and after the lessons.
- I can choose to speak to her or not to speak to her.
- She will not use my name when she writes about our lessons.
- I can change my mind whenever I like

☐ I am happy to show up in the video 😊
☐ I am happy to talk to Ms Nadia about the I.T. lessons 😊

Name _________________________________

____________________________________
 Researcher’s Signature

NOTES: (1) In this assent form, ‘Tick boxes are used here since the child may agree to show up on the Video, BUT does not wish to speak to Ms Nadia afterwards.

(2) Remember! The content of an Assent form should always be explained verbally to students, especially in the case of younger students!
Participants' Assent form – Very Young Pupils

**NOTE:** If the children are very young, and/or are unable to read/write (e.g. 4 or 5 years of age), they may be asked to show their assent or otherwise by colouring in faces as shown below. It may be easier for very young children to understand an explicit choice between yes/no, rather than giving assent through opting-in, or by ‘opting-out’. (Compare to previous consent/assent forms for older students, teachers and parents which are prepared as EITHER an opt-in form OR as an opt-out form).

This form also shows an example of how a researcher might write in pseudonyms or codes immediately they receive the form from a potential participant. Doing this immediately encourages the researcher to switch to using pseudonyms/codes immediately, while storing the original Assent forms safely.

[Title of research study]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Pseudonym/Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Pseudonym/Code</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C
Examples of Opt-Out Forms
Opt-Out Form – Parent/Guardian

[Title of research study]

I have read the attached Parent/Legal Guardian Information Sheet. I understand that:

- Ms Maria Sammut will be observing my son’s / daughter’s mathematics lessons in order to study the strategies the teacher uses when teaching ‘Algebra’.
- Ms Sammut will be writing some notes about the students’ contributions to the lessons.
- Students who do not participate in Ms Sammut study will take part in the mathematics lessons as usual, but their contributions will not be considered as data for Ms Sammut’s study.

I do NOT wish my child to participate in this research project. I therefore do NOT wish Ms Sammut to write down notes about my son’s / daughter’s contributions during the mathematics lessons.

__________________________________________  ____________________________  ______________________________
Son’s / Daughter’s name                  Parent / Guardian’s Name              Parent/Guardian’s signature

Date: ______________________________

__________________________________________
Researcher’s Signature

NOTE: An ‘Opt-out’ method needs to be justified in the Application Form (see Online application Question 8).
Opt-Out Form (Secondary School Student)

[Title of research study]

I confirm that I have read the attached Participant Information Sheet and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I understand that:

- Mr Mark Zammit will be collecting the language copybooks of 50 students of French, in order to photocopy three essays per student.
- Students’ names will not be written on the photocopied essays

I do NOT wish to participate in this research project. I therefore do NOT wish Mr Zammit to collect my French language copybook in order to photocopy my essays.

___________________  __________________________  __________________________
Student’s name  Student’s signature  Date

___________________
Researcher’s Signature

NOTE: An ‘Opt-out’ method needs to be justified in the Application Form (see On-line application Question 8).
Appendix D
Hard Copy Declaration (students only)
(This form is to be completed by students only)

Research Ethics Application – For FREC Review
Hard Copy Declaration

I confirm that the hard copy versions of the Application Form and the supporting documents are identical to the soft copies submitted electronically.

__________________________  __________________________
Researcher’s Name          Unique Form ID

__________________________  __________________________
Signature                  Date of Hard Copy Submission

Paired students only
In the case of students working in pairs, ONE hard copy will suffice, but the second student should also complete the information below. Note that since TWO electronic versions have been submitted (see Guidelines), the second researcher’s Unique Form ID will be different to that of his/her research partner.

__________________________  __________________________
Researcher’s Name          Unique Form ID
(different to research partner’s)

__________________________  __________________________
Signature                  Date of Hard Copy Submission
(same as research partner’s)