



RESEARCH ON TEACHERS AND TEACHING IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

1. SCOPE

This Approved Procedure aims to enable trained researchers to use opt-out procedures for a range of typical classroom research methods, under certain conditions. Researchers in education often study teachers and teaching in mainstream educational settings. All pupils under the age of sixteen years are considered vulnerable because of their age.

This Approved Procedure covers situations in which research focuses on normal mainstream classroom activity. The use of 'normal' in this document is to ensure that, under this Approved Procedure, students are not exposed to, nor asked to do, anything that would not be within the range of usual educational practice for that site. The focus of the research is on the teachers or the teaching rather than on the pupils themselves. This Approved Procedure is not intended to be used for research focusing on the learning, behaviour, or developmental trajectories of individual students.

This Approved Procedure aligns with the [Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research](#), Fifth edition (2024). It also conforms to the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [Children and Young Persons Act \(2008\)](#).

"Researchers also have a responsibility to put in place ways of maximising the benefits and minimising the likelihood of any potential harms to participants, sponsors, the community of educational researchers and educational professionals and the environment more widely. [...] Particular care may be needed when the researcher is also an 'insider'." ([BERA guidelines](#), paragraph 6)

"Researchers should consider the impact of their research on the lives and workloads of participants, particularly when researching vulnerable or over-researched populations." (BERA guidelines, paragraph 37)

Details of the types of research covered by this Approved Procedure is provided in section **12 Further information**.

2. TRAINING OF RESEARCH STAFF

All researchers will have received the training they need to conduct the research ethically and with integrity. Student researchers must have suitable supervision arrangements in place.

Researchers must follow the guidance set out in the University's [Safeguarding 'at risk' adults and children](#). Any member of the University who will be planning activities with children should have completed the e-learning 'Introduction to Safeguarding' training provided by the [Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board](#) and/ or [Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board](#), together with any additional training that may have been identified by the risk assessment

process. The ethics application should include details of how research participants can report concerns about any member of the University with whom they will be interacting.

Researchers are responsible for complying with safeguarding regulations and research practices which relate to the setting(s) (country, institution) of their research. As well as such compliance, researchers should consult guidance from the relevant professional associations. For example, for research settings in the UK, it is likely that researchers will require Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance - detailed guidance on obtaining safeguarding clearance can be found on the [DBS website](#). Note that there are different levels of DBS check – the level you require will depend on the frequency and type of activity carried out.

3. METHODS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

Methods for recruitment/ sampling will depend on the research. Permission to conduct the research must be obtained from the school Head Teacher and the teacher(s) concerned. Usually initial contact is with the teacher with whom the research is to be conducted, a head of department, or a Head Teacher. A formal letter to the Head Teacher should follow, including the information and requirements for the research, and a formal request to host the research. The classes for the research can then be chosen and the procedures for consent agreed with the school. It should be noted that agreement by the University for the opt-out procedure to be used does not commit the school to this, and they may still request opt-in procedures be used.

4. INFORMATION PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS

Participation must be voluntary and informed. There is guidance on the type of information to provide on the [Research Support website](#). Researchers need to ensure that participants, or their parents/ guardians are provided with information about the research in a format that is clear, accessible and easy to understand. If there is not enough information, potential participants might not be able to make an informed decision. On the other hand, if the information sheet is too long or unclear (e.g. through using overly-technical language) participants might not read it properly or it could deter them from taking part. Most word-processing packages provide readability statistics for a document, and one should aim for a 12-year-old (Year 7) reading level for adults.

In addition to obtaining participants' informed consent, researchers must keep a record of details of their consent, eg, whether they agree to quotations being attributed to them.

If pupils will be involved, it is good practice to seek assent from the pupils themselves. Students must be made aware that they are free not to take part even if their parents/ guardians have consented.

Please refer to the [Information Sheet templates](#) associated with this Approved Procedure, and adapt these to your research project and participant group(s).

5. CONSENT OF PARTICIPANTS

“Generally, opt-in procedures for gaining consent are preferred. However, opt-out procedures are acceptable in some circumstances. Researchers have a responsibility to consult local legislation and consider local practice if opt-out procedures are envisaged.” ([BERA guidelines](#), paragraph 26) ‘Opt-out’ means that students may be included unless they, or their parents/ guardians, actively say ‘no’.

Reasonable efforts must have been made to contact parents and ensure they understand the research. The sample should not be skewed towards those from well-organised households who respond readily to messages that go home. Because of confidentiality, [the onus for this rests with the school](#).

Group A activities, which do not alter the students' normal classroom experience and/or which focus solely on the teacher will require permission from the school and a written record of the informed consent of teachers who are involved as research participants. The letter/information to be provided to schools and teachers should be submitted with the ethics application.

Group B activities do not place students at educational risk, do not store images of students, and do not identify or focus on individual students. Students and parents should be fully informed via a parent/ guardian information sheet and a separate information sheet, as appropriate, for the students. In all types of setting, it is recommended to seek at least oral assent from the students themselves. Students must be made aware that they are free not to take part even if their parents/ guardians have provided informed consent. Opt-in consent is generally preferable since opt-out inherently reduces the agency of children and parents. However, in some situations, there may be good reasons to use opt-out consent, for example in order to collect a more representative sample. Opt-out consent may therefore be permitted provided the ethics application explains and justifies the approach with respect to the research aims. Parents/ guardians should be provided with an opt-out form, and can choose to opt-out at any stage. Students who do not take part in the research must have alternative provision of equivalent educational value, or in other cases be placed where they cannot be observed or recorded. All reasonable efforts must be made to contact parents and ensure they understand the information about the study, but confidentiality means that this onus often rests with the teacher or other school staff. In some contexts, such as independent boarding schools, the school itself is *in loco parentis* in this respect. Reasonable time should be allowed for parents to return a signed opt-out form.

The following should be considered by researchers and the schools they work with to ensure information reaches a student's home:

- Physical letters should have names of students written on them, to indicate clearly, which students have been given a letter. If records show that a letter has not been sent, these students must not be included in the research
- Targeted email from the school to parents of the involved classes to inform them about the research, including parent information sheet and opt-out form as attachments
- Targeted text from the school to parents of involved classes to inform them of upcoming research (drawing their attention to typed letter in schoolbags and/ or email as appropriate)
- Possible follow-up text to remind parents of deadline for opt-out return
- Information included in school newsletter

Please refer to the Opt-out Form template associated with this Approved Procedure, and adapt this for the research as appropriate.

Please also see CUREC's [guidance on the informed consent process](#).

6. COMPENSATION

No compensation will be given in exchange for participation in the research.

7. ADDRESSING POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS, RESEARCHERS AND OTHERS

Note in particular the following statements from the BERA guidelines:

“Researchers should take steps to minimise the effects of research designs that advantage or are perceived to advantage one group of participants over others. For example, in an experimental design (including a randomised controlled study), the intervention made available to one group, while being unavailable to the control or comparison group, may be viewed as desirable. In mitigation, for example, an intervention found to be effective can typically be offered to control groups after the end of a trial.” ([BERA guidelines](#), paragraph 35)

“The more vulnerable the participants, for whatever reasons, the greater the responsibilities of the researcher for their protection.” ([BERA guidelines](#), paragraph 34)

Researchers should take advice from the Department and host schools about DBS clearance (see the [Disclosure and Barring Service website](#) for more information). Researchers must be sensitive to child protection issues and not work in situations that could leave them open to accusations of abuse. Researchers must be aware of, and conform to, the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR); the Children and Young Persons Act (2008); and the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2024).

8. MONITORING AND REPORTING OF ADVERSE OR UNFORESEEN EVENTS

The research will take place in the classroom under the supervision of the classroom teacher. Any adverse or unforeseen events will be reported to the Head Teacher.

9. COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

The school should receive a brief report about the research, and parents be informed that this will be available.

In all publications arising from the research, identities of the school, teachers and students will be concealed unless further, specific, informed, opt-in permission is obtained. The school should be informed of any reports of the research that are going to be in the public domain, including published journal articles, even if behind paywalls. It is good practice to make sure the school and those involved in the research understand how identifiable they will be from any publications.

It is usual to give teachers copies of any video and audio material arising from their practice, and copies of any transcripts made.

10. RESPONSIBILITY OF RESEARCHER/ CONFIDENTIALITY

Research under this Approved Procedure must not focus on individual students as participants. It is therefore unlikely that any data would be collected that would give reliable information about individual students that is not already available to the school in other ways. Data about the class that is of direct interest in the study may be kept confidential from the teacher if this is necessary, whilst it would be unethical not to share general matters of concern with the teacher if they are unaware of them (see BERA guidelines paragraphs 27-29). Data collected under an approved research protocol citing this Approved Procedure should not be withheld if it has serious implications for the student and might give access to services that could be of help, but matters of this nature should be discussed with the teacher rather than with parents.

11. DATA MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

The research must be conducted in accordance with the University's [Research Data Policy](#); CUREC's [Best Practice Guidance 09 on Data collection, protection and management](#) and Research Data Oxford's [guidance on keeping data safe](#).

Each student whose words or work is used in the study as an individual is to be given a participant number and the key to these must be kept secure. Written work must have any identifying information removed before being handed to the researcher. Any video or audio material on which students are potentially identifiable (images and/ or voice recordings) must be kept securely in accordance with the University's [information security guidelines](#). The material may not be stored on laptops or websites, or shared with anyone outside the research team. Once apseudonymised transcription has been produced, the original recording should be destroyed, unless retention can be justified.

Opt-out forms

Researchers should consider the pros and cons of having opt-out forms returned to the researcher(s) or to the school. While there may be data protection implications of returning the forms to the researcher(s), these may be outweighed by the benefits of the researchers knowing which children to exclude. Where possible, opt-out forms should be returned directly to the school and the school should then provide the researchers with a list of students that may be included in the study. Where researchers receive opt-out forms directly, these should be taken to the school when the researchers visit, and then be left at the school. It is then up to the school to determine for how long they will retain opt-out forms. Where data has been anonymised (all identifying information removed, including any linkage document), there is no limit as to how long this may be retained by the researchers. However, the period of retention should be stated on participant information.

12. FURTHER INFORMATION

BERA [Ethical guidelines for educational research](#) (fifth edition)
[United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
[Safeguarding 'at risk' adults and children](#)

Group A research activities:

Classroom research typically includes:

- observation of teachers
- audio-recording of the teacher with lapel microphone
- agreed curriculum-related non-invasive normal activities such as paper, verbal, computer tasks set by the teacher as part of the curriculum (excluding sensitive topics sometimes taught during pastoral, social and health education lessons) where the focus is not on individual performance on such tasks but how the tasks relate to the teaching

For this kind of research, opt-in informed consent of the teacher is usually sufficient, but researchers are advised to follow the ethics procedure of the school.

Group B research activities:

Classroom research also typically includes the following methods, in which there may be some focus on students as participants in the classroom:

- observation that includes students in normal classroom behaviour
- audio-recording with microphones which include students' voices in normal classroom interactions

- video-recording focused on teachers
- analysis of written artefacts from the lesson (where identifying information has been removed)
- pedagogic activity, such as researcher teaching the whole class, or having teacher-like conversations with individual or small groups of students in the classroom, within the usual curriculum
- teaching innovations, such as trialling innovative methods in a systematic way

All the above methods are often used in schools for development purposes and internal information purposes. The difference between research activities in Groups A & B is that in Group A there is no need at all to focus on students. In Group B there is the possibility that individual students will be the temporary focus in their normal classroom participation, but the unit of analysis is the teacher and/ or the classroom situation and/ or the lesson, not individual students. This Approved Procedure recognises that opt-out procedures are adequate for these types of research, so long as the research does not:

- a) disrupt the normal range of classroom practices as agreed by the school
- b) identify individual students by name or by video image, but instead uses codes to maintain pseudonymity
- c) focus on individual students' behaviour or learning, nor on named work
- d) place any student at risk educationally or in any other way

and is agreed by the Head Teacher of the school and the relevant teacher(s). Students and parents are fully informed and can opt-out at any stage without educational risk.

Types of research in group B

Observation

Students' real names must not be used, nor obviously identifiable features. Student ID numbers must be created at the start of the research and used throughout observation notes, and the key to these numbers must be kept secure and only accessible to those members of the research team who need to use it. The key must be destroyed as soon as it is no longer needed to link data. Events the researcher sees or hears that are of any concern and might relate to Health & Safety or Child Protection issues must be reported to the school safeguarding lead. No information can be recorded about students whose parents/ guardians completed an opt-out form.

Audio-recording

Normally students will not be identifiable from audio recording due to them not being the focus of the research, and their names not being collected. Identifying sounds can be disguised in any use of the recording outside school and the research team's use. Names uttered in the sound recording should, where practical, be digitally cut or obscured and the original recording destroyed. Transcriptions should be accessible only for research purposes. Data, including recordings, must not be collected from participants who have opted out or whose parents/ guardians have opted them out.

Video

The camera will point at the teacher, and avoid deliberate filming of students' faces or otherwise identifiable images. If a student walks into view, or goes to work in the area at which the camera is directed, the identifiable image will be removed from the electronic record. For example, this can be done *in situ* by covering the lens and recording in sound only, or by taking steps within a reasonable timeframe after recording to edit out the images of students. Images

of students accidentally captured will not be reproduced or used for research purposes in an identifiable way, nor stored electronically in an accessible form. It is not just a matter of obscuring visual images, but of obscuring identity within the clues provided by a familiar context. Researchers should have such procedures in place at the planning stage. Students whose parents/ guardians completed an opt-out form must not be captured on film at all; it is usually possible to seat them somewhere that avoids accidental capture while ensuring that they have their normal educational experience.

Analysis of written artefacts

Research covered by this Approved Procedure does not focus on individual students, so written artefacts are only used to give depth and full information about what was being done in the lesson, not as records of individual learning. The written material being used in this kind of research is that which is produced in the normal work of the lesson and all identifying information must be removed before being handed to the researcher. The researcher must not receive written artefacts of opted-out students. This process must be included in the agreement with the teacher.

Pedagogic intervention

Some classroom research entails the researcher acting as a support teacher, or questioning individual or small groups of students in the classroom in ways typical of teachers and teaching assistants. Many classroom researchers are also qualified teachers so their ability to act appropriately is not an issue. Any pedagogic intervention by the researcher must be agreed with the teacher and must be within the normal practices and curriculum of the classroom, teachers and teaching assistants. Students whose parents/ guardians completed an opt-out form must have alternative educational provision, equivalent to what they would have without the intervention. This Approved Procedure is not appropriate for deliberate non-curriculum innovations.

Teaching innovation

Researchers may agree with teachers a particular way of teaching for a certain period of time, and monitor both the methods and the results. To obtain permission from a school for such a teaching innovation, researchers must produce a full justification for this research and convince the school that what they are going to do will not put students at risk educationally. This process does not therefore have to be repeated with every student and every parent. Instead, the information letter should be from the school and researcher jointly, and the opt-out procedure used. This procedure recognises that educational development is a normal part of school life, and that teachers constantly change the way the curriculum is organised, try new ways to teach, and alter the nature of tasks. Thus, as long as the school supports the research, it can be seen as within normal school practice. Students whose parents/ guardians completed an opt-out form must have alternative educational provision elsewhere that is equivalent to what they would have without the innovation.

13. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- AP15 Information Sheet for Parents/ guardians
- AP15 Information Sheet for students aged 6-10 years
- AP15 Information Sheet for students aged 11-15 years
- AP15 Assent form for under 16s
- AP15 Parent/ guardian opt-out Form
- AP15 Consent form for teachers
- AP15 Letter to Head Teacher

14. CHANGE HISTORY

Version No.	Significant Changes	Previous Version No.
1.0	Incorporates reference to the University Safeguarding Code of Practice and related requirements. Retitled 'Approved Procedure' (previously 'Protocol'). Approved by CUREC, 19 November 2015	N/A
1.1	Updated hyperlinks for new CUREC website	1.0
1.2	Updated for General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	1.1
1.3	Removed reference to sections of the old CUREC 1 checklist	1.2
2.0	<p>Quinquennial Review to ensure continued suitability and accuracy of links</p> <p>Update to section 4 to replace specific list with reference to associated documents</p> <p>Addition of text about seeking assent from students</p> <p>Addition of considerations to ensure information about the research reaches a student's home</p> <p>Revision of section 11 on Data Protection</p> <p>Addition of various template documents</p>	1.3
2.1	Updated to improve accessibility	2.0
2.2	Administrative changes	2.1
3.0	<p>Include references to, and ensure conformity with, BERA Ethical guidelines for educational research (fifth edition)</p> <p>Move some text out of scope into the consent section</p> <p>Updated section 2 on training</p> <p>Revised sections 3 (recruitment) and 4 (information provided) to be more concise</p> <p>Administrative changes</p>	2.2