1. Competent youths are aged 16 to 17. They technically hold the legal status of children but in certain research projects are considered to have sufficient understanding of the project and its implications for them that they can make up their own minds about taking part, and have that opinion honoured. However, this class of “competent youth” is not automatic and must be decided on a *per project* and (as appropriate) *per individual* basis. See also FAQ C12.

2. Youths cannot usually be classed as “competent youths” if outside the EU. This is because expectations of parental authority and young people’s autonomy, and the areas of life in which these apply, can vary considerably between cultures. Even if the project is located in the EU outside of the UK, researchers should be mindful of the different legislation and standards that might apply:
   
   I. In considering whether the class applies to youths outside the EU, e.g. in North America, researchers should be guided by cultural expectation plus any relevant legislation and (regulatory) standards.
   II. The class could also apply to youths outside the EU who are enrolled at a university (where greater autonomy is likely).

3. If the research is “unproblematic” in ethical terms, then it is likely the class of competent youth applies. However, if in the context of the research project overall anything looks to be of significant ethical concern e.g. the project design, area of enquiry, research procedures, then the class may not apply.

4. If the research involves procedures which would require parent / legal guardian consent outside of a research setting, then the class would not apply.

5. Projects fitting under one of CUREC’s protocols concerning children (see Protocols) would normally support the use of the class.

6. The language of information given to participants and consent forms (if used) should be appropriate to the 16-17 year old age group.

7. If planning research interviews of competent youths consider the following:
   
   I. As with the topic of the research, interview questions asked should also be unproblematic. This extends to the phrasing of interview questions and the researcher should provide a copy of the proposed questions for review when submitting the checklist to the relevant IDREC.
   II. The researcher should take into account practical or cultural considerations, such as whether it would be appropriate or necessary to have a third party attend face-to-face interviews, in addition to the researcher conducting the interview and the participant
8. Examples of research where the class of “competent youths” would generally apply:

   I. Questionnaire/interviews on attitudes to science or mathematics
   II. Questionnaire/interviews on use of the internet to support study at school
   III. Questionnaire/interviews on use of public transport
   IV. Questionnaire/interviews on food preference
   V. Studies of memory, perceptual discrimination, response times, problem-solving or decision-making that do not involve potentially distressing stimuli
   VI. Studies of social perception and interaction with peers that do not involve any risk of inducing distress or revealing sensitive information about the participant
   VII. Studies of musical preferences or judgments
   VIII. Studies of language use, perception or production
   IX. Study involving word association
   X. Questionnaire/interviews on life choices/education after 18

9. Examples of research where the class of “competent youths” would generally not apply:

   I. Any research involving participants located outside of the EU (given the considerations in point 2).
   II. Studies targeted on cultural minority groups in which expectations of young people’s autonomy differs substantially from the norms of the wider society in the country in which the research is being conducted
   III. Questionnaire/interviews on truancy
   IV. Questionnaire/interviews about self-image
   V. Questionnaire/interviews about sexual behaviour or identity
   VI. Adolescents with sub-clinical indications of depression or anxiety as participants
   VII. Participants who have no person to give consent on their behalf but are potentially vulnerable (e.g. street children, children who are sole heads of their households)
   VIII. Participants who have been, or are currently within social care systems where the consent of their parent or legal guardian must be sought.
   IX. Studies in which seeking parental consent might not be in the young person’s interest (for example, if it involved enquiries about abuse, or if it revealed information about sexual behaviour or orientation which the young person could properly expect to remain private). Such cases may well justify seeking consent from the young
participants rather than their parents, but this question should be reviewed by the committee through a CUREC/2 submission.

10. If the class “does not apply”, or does not wholly apply to all participants under 18 in the project, a full CUREC/2 application would be required. Parental consent may be required depending on the project.

11. It is also important to appreciate that the ethical review process, as well as protecting the interests of participants, is intended to avoid any potential reputational risk to the University through public concern or objection that might arise in connection with a research project.