

Guidelines for working in schools

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (previously CRB checks)

All students planning to collect data in schools must have a current and valid DBS certificate. To apply for DBS, collect a form from Keron Harris in the Faculty administration office. The application process can take quite a few weeks so make sure you do this in good time.

Rewards & recognition

When planning research in schools consider what funding is available to provide small gifts/vouchers to thank the school for taking part and also to provide children with a token of thanks (e.g. certificate/sticker). There is no OBU funding for this for Undergraduate or MSc students. Carefully consider whether this is appropriate and whether it might affect children not taking part in the research. It is also a good idea to give a thank you card/small gift to the teacher(s) of the year group(s) you have been testing.

Supervision

Students must discuss with their supervisor the details of their plans for recruitment of schools for their individual research project and keep them informed of progress and participation. Students should not contact schools without their supervisor's knowledge and their supervisor should know which schools they intend to contact. Schools in and around Oxford are heavily used for research, so you might find it easier to recruit schools outside the local area.

Use of the Psychology 'school activity list'

This list is only available to academic and research staff – contact Holly Joseph for access. Alongside their supervisor, students must check the Psychology School Activity List to see if the school they are considering approaching has recently accommodated research. A school should not be contacted if it has previously been involved in research within the last 6 months or if indicated on the spreadsheet. Some schools might be happy to continue to accommodate new projects, others not. Each time a school is contacted, a new record must be created in the database. Update the database to indicate the date of first contact, school response and dates of data collection. Students must remember to let their supervisor know when they hear back from schools, and when they have completed data collection so that the list can be updated.

Contacting schools

First contact the head teacher of the school by email or letter, clearly outlining the purpose of the work and what it will involve from staff and pupils. If they are willing to give their permission for the school to be involved this will need to be confirmed in writing on school headed paper. The Head Teacher will need to agree the procedures for obtaining informed consent from children and parents as appropriate. It is usually necessary to follow up initial contact with a phone call. The student researcher must establish the most appropriate person in the school to make the necessary arrangements for collecting data (e.g. administrator, member of staff). A good way of doing this is to call and ask when to call back to speak to the Head Teacher. It can sometimes be difficult to get a response from a school, and while it is appropriate to make more than one phone call in order to speak to the relevant person (usually the head teacher), do not expect a school to contact you – they are usually too busy to respond to you by phone or letter. If you repeat a call and find the head teacher is never available when the school administrator said they would be, this might suggest it is better to thank them, acknowledge that you know they are busy and focus your attention on another school. If the school does not respond to a number of calls, it can be assumed that they do not want to take part.

Phoning a school between 3 and 4pm, at lunch time, or just before 9am are usually sensible times if you need to speak to a teacher. As a rough guide, it is appropriate to contact five schools at a time. If all five say no, then a further five can be contacted. It is important that students do not contact a large number of schools at the same time (they should ask their supervisor about this). It would be very discourteous to find yourself unable to use a school that had offered its cooperation and it might make it more difficult for future researchers to be taken seriously in that school.

Conduct

The researcher must at all times be polite and respectful to staff and students in the school.

Remember that your relationship with the school and the students is a professional one and should be conducted with the appropriate formality. You need to fit your research around the timetable of the school, not the other way round. It is not appropriate to run experiments during break time or lunch time, and it may be necessary to delay testing in the mornings during assemblies. Be aware that rooms you are given for testing may be needed at short notice (e.g., medical room, SENCO room). Bringing a box of chocolates for the staff room on your first day of testing usually goes down well!

When taking children out of their classroom for one-to-one testing, be aware that this can be scary, especially for younger children. Researchers need to take time to put the child at ease and explain very clearly what they will be asked to do. It is important to emphasize that they do not have to take part if they do not want to. For children aged ten years and older, it is appropriate to have a 'mini consent form' so that they can explicitly agree to take part. Never try to persuade or bribe a child to continue with an experiment if they have said they want to stop or if their non-verbal behaviour makes this clear. Younger children should be escorted back to their classroom when testing has finished.

Complaints

If a staff member, child or parent/caregiver complains to you about the research, give them a chance to explain their problem and assure them that you will need to discuss it with your supervisor. Make good notes of the complaint and then do exactly what you promised – discuss it with your supervisor who will advise you on any further action. While complaints are rare, when they occur they are distressing and take up a lot of time. They are usually the result of someone having incomplete or inadequate information; another reason for ensuring that consent from child, parent and school is always appropriately 'informed'.

Dissemination of findings

Be clear about how schools, parents and participants can find out about the findings of your study. This could include offering a short summary and you might also consider offering to talk to parent or teacher groups about the outcome of the research. Students should discuss with their supervisor what is considered most appropriate.

Further information

Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) project

<http://childethics.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ERIC-compendium-Ethical-Guidance-Informed-consent-section-only.pdf>