

University Research Ethics Committee Guidance: Online Data Collection

Online Surveys

When collecting data for research or research-related purposes via an online survey it is important to consider what is the best tool for your project. Furthermore, information security, legal compliance and ethical principles need to be considered.

Platforms

When using online tools or apps to collect research data from participants, you must ensure that the tool you use complies with data protection legislation. This includes ensuring that the data are held on servers within the European Economic Area and restricting who has access to them. Researchers should always check the Privacy Notice of any software that will be used to collect and store research data.

The University recommends, and has site licences, for the following Online survey tools.

JISC Online Survey

JISC Online Surveys is an easy-to-use survey tool, with servers based in the UK. It is free to use for all University staff and students. To access it you must request an account with vle@glyndwr.ac.uk, staff and postgraduate research students are able to request their own access. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students are also able to use Online Surveys, but their accounts must be requested by their project supervisor.

Microsoft Forms

Microsoft Forms is available via the University's access to Microsoft Office 365. You can use Forms to quickly and easily create custom surveys. You do not need to sign up as staff and students already have access to Forms with their usual University username and password. You can collect responses instantly and share the form with others to collaborate provided they have a Microsoft user account.

Informed Consent

When collecting data from research participants via a survey platform please ensure that you include participant information and informed consent materials at the start, using the University templates. You must set up the survey so that it captures a record of the participant's acknowledgement that they provide informed consent to continue. If the measure being used involves sensitive or distressing topics you should consider adding in relevant support signposting at the beginning of the survey and provide a debrief at the end.

Anonymity

If you are collecting fully anonymised survey responses it should be acknowledged in the information sheet that participants will not be able to withdraw data once the survey has been submitted. If you are collecting any identifiable data, you should ensure this is collected and stored separately from the participant's responses. Guidance on how to separate data in JISC can be found on their [Supporting Articles](#) page.

Data Storage

Survey responses should be exported from the survey platform being used and saved to your University OneDrive account or University network drive. Data should be stored securely and only shared with other researchers/supervisors involved in the project and named on the ethical approval. All data from the online platform should be deleted once securely exported.

Online Interviews & Focus Groups

Platforms

The University recommends using Microsoft Teams or Skype for online research interviews and focus groups as they are compliant with Data Protection legislation. All staff and students at Wrexham University have access to Microsoft Teams, which can be downloaded onto computers or it can be accessed via any web browser.

Recording

If you plan to record your online interview/focus group, you must ensure that this has been covered in your ethics application and this information has been provided to participants in any participant-facing documentation. If you are using video so that you and your participant(s) can see each other, **please be aware that Teams will automatically record video at the same time as audio**. It is not possible to only record audio using Teams. You can still use Teams to record your interview, but this should be clearly explained in your participant information and consent materials. Furthermore, if obtaining video recordings, you should provide justification in your ethics application and complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment outlining how the visual data will be stored and destroyed.

Collecting visual data is considered personally identifiable data, therefore the suggested approach is to only **collect audio data** unless the visual data is integral to the research analyse. You can request that participants turn off their cameras during the interview, but you may wish to consider the potential impact of this. Most computers will have recording software installed as standard. The University also subscribes to Adobe Acrobat DC, including Adobe Audition and Panopto, both can be used to capture the audio data from the interview in the background of the Teams interview. Alternatively, there are several reliable, freely available software packages that provide audio recording capabilities (e.g., Audacity, WavePad). Any of these options can be run during an interview for audio capture. Alternatively, researchers can use a Dictaphone to collect audio data, please note, personal mobile devices should not be used to record audio or visual data for research purposes.

Files should be saved directly to a University OneDrive account or as soon as is practicable after the interview.

Transcribing

Microsoft Teams has a transcription feature available, other online transcription tools can be freely downloaded, however, staff and students should ensure they are compliant with data protection legislation. Researchers should be aware that online transcription services may not be entirely accurate, and some words can be misunderstood. If an external transcription service is being used, then a confidentiality agreement must be obtained and included with the other documentation when an ethics application is submitted. Participants must be made aware as part of the informed consent process if any data is being passed on to a third party for transcription purposes.

It is recommended that audio and visual data once transcribed be deleted unless the data is integral to any future analyse.

Confidentiality and Consent

To conduct interviews and focus groups online, you will need to obtain participants' email addresses. These must be stored securely alongside other contact information to protect participants' identifiable data. You should also consider how you name interviews in your Outlook Calendar to protect participants' identities. As you would do in face-to-face data collection, you must ensure the confidentiality of the 'conversation' you will have. Make sure that you are in a place with as little background noise as possible and where you will not be disturbed, and where no one else can see your screen. Consider using headphones and take care in speaking so that no confidential information is verbalised. Make sure that the participant knows exactly how you will conduct the interview/group discussion, and what they have to do to take part. Make sure that the participant is also in an appropriate confidential space.