



Guidelines on the recruitment of participants for research studies

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What is a Research Participant?

A research participant, also called a human subject or an experiment, trial, or study participant or subject, is a person who participates in human subject research by being the target of observation by researchers.

General Information for Researchers and Participants

Information for Researchers

UCD Office of Research Ethics provides [information for researchers](#) who are conducting a research study involving human subjects. All studies involving human subjects must obtain [ethical approval](#), whether through full review or low risk exemption, from the UCD Office of Research Ethics, prior to starting the study. UCD Library has produced a guide on [The Interview process – a guide to best practice for research projects](#).

Information for Participants

UCD Office of Research Ethics has a webpage devoted to providing [information for participants](#) who are involved in a study with researchers in UCD.

Recruiting Participants

Expenses and Incentives

UCD Office of Research Ethics provides guidance on the use of [Expenses and Incentives](#) in participant recruitment. In order to comply with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), research participants should not be offered incentives to volunteer as a research subject. For their participation to be based on their 'consent' as a lawful basis, then this consent needs to be GDPR compliant. This means that it has to be a "... freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous indication of the data subject's wishes by which he or she, by a statement or by a clear affirmative action, signifies agreement to the processing of personal data relating to him or her". Incentives might put the 'freely given' aspect of the consenting decision in doubt.

Recruiting UCD Students

Ethical approval is required in order to recruit UCD students as research participants, along with permission from the relevant Head of School/College Principal. The procedure for applying for ethical approval to recruit UCD students is detailed on the UCD Office of Research Ethics Website: [Access to UCD Students](#). Researchers must not target UCD students directly to recruit them for a research study prior to obtaining ethical approval as outlined above (e.g. by using class email lists; via Brightspace; using posters or stalls; or by using social media).

Participants under 18 years of age

Participants under 18 years of age are legally considered to be minors and therefore any research with this age group requires Garda Vetting. UCD Office of Research Ethics provides [links](#) relevant UCD Policies and to other sites with information on requirements and processes for Garda Vetting. Requests for approval to access groups under 18 years of age are assessed on a case by case basis by UCD Office of Research Ethics. Advice or guidance is tailored for the specific age group but all fall under the office's definition of 'vulnerable group' category. The office has a number of guidelines that deal with vulnerable groups which include dealing with minors (16-17 years of age) and accessing UCD Students – researchers should consult www.ucd.ie/researchethics/ for the latest guidelines.

Using Direct Channels to recruit participants

Where appropriate, researchers may approach the gatekeeper for a specific cohort in order to recruit potential participants for a research study, e.g. a Charity/Non-Governmental Organisation that supports the specific cohort of people.

Where there is a gatekeeper, they can be requested to send the recruiting communications, which provides a separation between the researcher and target audience. However, the researcher must still provide information about how data will be processed, how long it will be stored for and who will have access to it on a project specific website (see details below).

Using Social Media to recruit participants

Social Media may be used to advertise a research study and to recruit participants. Specific [UCD Brand Guidelines](#) should be followed when using social media for this purpose. Individual units, schools or research centres may use targeted paid social media (also known as sponsored posts) to reach target audiences.

Social media platforms must not be used to conduct surveys or gather data from participants. These platforms should only be used to advertise a research study and then direct potential participants to a project specific website (see details below) which may host the survey. This is to ensure that the data collected complies with GDPR and that UCD remains the sole data-controller of the data collected. The project specific website must clearly convey required information for potential participants in the form of a Privacy Notice, in order for their recruitment to be GDPR compliant (see details below).

Researchers must not encourage the contribution/provision of any personal data on the social media platform via the comments section or direct messaging.

Using Advertising to recruit participants

UCD University Relations is [responsible for all above-the-line¹ advertising](#) (e.g. radio, press, outdoor, online display) for the university and does not recommend this form of advertising as appropriate for

¹ Mass or targeted audience advertising and promotional campaigns—for example, to describe campaigns that are targeted at high volumes of consumers in a large number of locations using press, magazines, television, cinema, online, outdoor posters and broadcast media (radio, TV). Doyle, C. (2016) A Dictionary of Marketing, 4th Ed, Oxford University Press

recruitment of research participants. Individual units, schools or research centres may not tender for advertising agency services.

If a researcher does not have access to a network cohort directly or through a gatekeeper, it is recommended to use targeted paid/sponsored posts on social media. There is little evidence that local print media is effective for reaching prospective research participants. In some instances, local radio may prove effective. This may be booked directly with local radio stations and does not need to be channeled through UCD University Relations.

Recommended recruitment channels for participants in research studies:

1. Direct marketing channels including targeted emails, newsletters to member networks: via Gatekeepers
2. Targeted paid/sponsored posts on social media
3. Announcement or text advertisement within the pages of or website of a particular journal or publication which is targeted to a specific audience cohort
4. Local radio advertising - scripted by the UCD School or unit and voiced and produced in-house by the local radio station

Project Specific Website

As referenced above, the project specific website hosting the survey or details of participating in a study, must contain certain key information for participants. Researchers need to consider all aspects of data protection and privacy in relation to the research being undertaken, including how long data can be stored for. The UCD GDPR website has a range of [Guidance and Resources](#) for use when constructing the project specific website. In addition, UCD Library provides guidance on Research Data Management (see further details below).

Privacy Notice

Research participants must be presented with a Privacy Notice prior to signing up and agreeing to be part of the research study. The Privacy Notice provides information about how data will be collected, processed and shared; how long it will be stored for, and who will have access to it among other things. Participants need to be able to see this Privacy Notice before they consent to participate in the survey, otherwise their consent is not informed and therefore not GDPR compliant. A record of this consent from all participants must be kept by the researcher. A short UCD guide on preparing the Privacy Notice can be found [here](#).

Cookies/Tracking technologies

Any website that drops cookies or other tracking technology on visitors' devices needs to be cognizant of ePrivacy legislation, which goes hand in hand with GDPR. See the Data Protection Commission's Guidance on [Cookies and Other Tracking Technologies](#).

Like/Share Buttons

The project specific website should not contain any like/share buttons for social media platforms. If they are included, this would, in most instances, make the social media provider a joint data-controller with UCD, of the personal data collected via the like/share button.

Survey Tools

UCD Research IT has a up-to-date webpage containing the current information on [available Survey Tools](#).

Research Data Management

UCD Library has a guide on [Research Data Management](#) which contains information about creating a Data Management Plan and guidance on sharing and archiving of research data. In addition, UCD has a [Research Data Management Policy](#) which should be consulted for guidance on the collection and secure storage of all research data.

The UCD GDPR website contains a wealth of information on data collection and retention, which can be accessed via your UCD login:

- [UCD Short Guide on collecting personal data](#)
- [UCD Short Guide on data sharing & collaborating](#)
- [UCD Short Guide on classifying personal data](#)
- [UCD Short Guide to retention of personal data](#)
- [UCD Short Guide to taking images & videos for UCD](#)
- [Further Guidance and Resources on UCD GDPR Website](#)

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