Research Proposal Guide

Submission Information and Requirements

June 2025

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Key Information

Edmonton Public Schools (EPSB) welcomes researchers to submit project proposals to conduct research within the Division. To support this, the following criteria is being provided. EPSB approval is required prior to conducting research in the Division. The Division values the opportunity to support research that furthers the 2022–26 Division Strategic Plan:

Priority 1) Build on outstanding learning opportunities for all students.
Priority 2) Advance action towards anti-racism and reconciliation.
Priority 3) Promote a comprehensive approach to student and staff well-being and mental health.

Researchers are encouraged to contact the Research Team at research@epsb.ca with any questions they may have about the criteria or submission procedures outlined in this document. Requirements for approval depend on factors such as the project's purpose, methodology, and how the data or findings will be used. The definition below offers guidance on common types of research activities that require Division approval.

Research includes any activity that collects or uses Division data with the objective to share findings outside of the school or Division. This includes dissemination through academic publications, reports, presentations, collegial sharing, or to fulfill degree requirements. Educational research typically aims to improve teaching and learning and may influence broader educational policies and practices. Any research intended for external dissemination or tied to academic requirements must receive prior Division approval. Approval ensures that projects involving Division data, resources, or personnel align with Division policies and standards.

Proposals must address the criteria outlined in this document and adhere to EPSB Administrative Regulation IQ.AR Conducting Research within the Division. Proposals are outlined and submitted to the Division through completion of the ***EPSB Research Proposal Application*** (found here). EPSB has different ethical standards, legislation and regulations than post-secondary institutions; researchers are responsible for ensuring that their proposals also comply with Division-specific requirements and address any additional considerations necessary for conducting research within the Division. In addition, researchers affiliated with a post-secondary institution must submit REB approval as part of their application. Researchers not affiliated with a post-secondary institution are required to submit a Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2): Course on Research Ethics (CORE) completion certificate.

Preliminary Consultation vs. Formal Recruitment: Researchers may engage in preliminary consultations with Division staff through informal conversations or established networks before submitting for Division approval. However, formal recruitment of participants can only begin after receiving Division and principal approval. Upon Division approval, applicants will receive a letter granting permission to contact principals from eligible schools to begin the process of formal participant recruitment.

Division approval does not bind any Division staff to participate in an approved research project. Principals[1] decide whether their school community may be invited to participate in research projects. After principal approval, students, staff and families have the choice to participate in any projects supported by the school principal via informed consent/assent.

[1] For research involving non-school Division units, such as central Decision Units (DUs), approval must be obtained from the Decision Unit Director rather than a principal.

Please note that meeting the requirements outlined in this document does not guarantee approval of research project proposals. Decisions around research project proposals are made with consideration of a variety of factors including alignment with the Division's Strategic Plan, risk assessment, anticipated impact of school and program interruptions, timelines and capacity of school staff to support the project, applicability and the overall benefit of the research to the Division and study participants.

Research project submissions may be denied or deferred based on the number of projects currently underway across the Division, contextual conditions at any location that may prohibit their ability to participate, or incomplete proposal applications.

Division Staff Researchers

As a learning organization, the Division is supportive of staff members who are preparing a research or evaluation project as part of their post-secondary education. While engaging in research activities, it is important that staff are mindful of their dual roles and responsibilities as researcher and Division staff member. They must follow all processes and protocols required of any researcher seeking to conduct research in the Division. All research conducted within the Division requires approval through the Division's Research Team using the review process outlined in this document before initiating the research or accessing Division information or data collection. For more information, please see Division Staff Researchers.

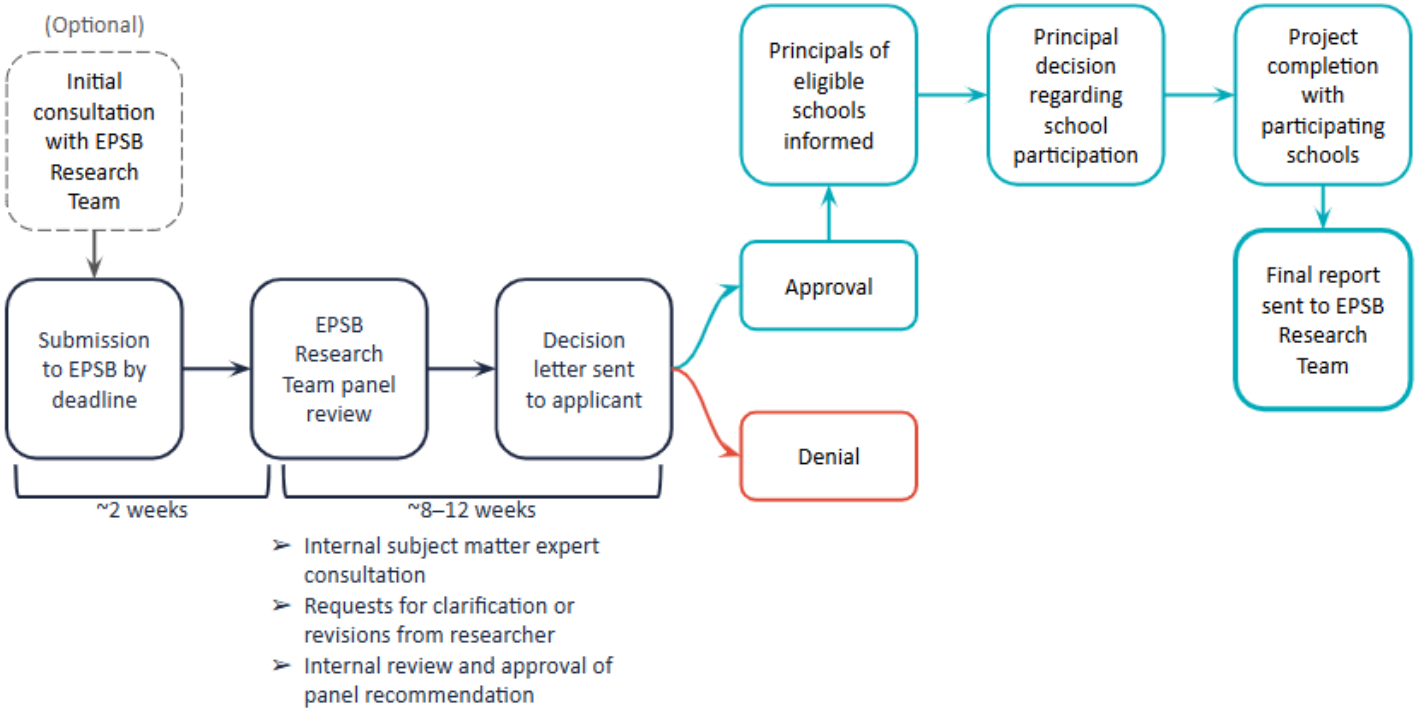
Guidance for Specialized Approaches

This guide includes a section on *Guidance for Specialized Approaches*, tools, and methods, as well as working with particular communities. Specifically, it provides important considerations for research involving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. It also provides guidance on the use of certain tools and approaches, for example, secondary data, surveys, and artificial intelligence. While not all projects will involve these elements, this section is based on the types of specialized approaches often included in recently submitted proposals and is intended to help applicants strengthen key aspects in their submission. All researchers are expected to review this section carefully and apply any guidance that is relevant to their applications.

Research Proposal Submission and Timelines

For research applications submitted to EPSB, researchers must complete the *EPSB Research Proposal Application* (found here). All researchers must adhere to the submission deadlines outlined in the next section. Refer to the workflow in Figure 1 for details.

Figure 1. *Research proposal workflow*



Guidance for Applicants

1. **Submit research proposal documents electronically to the Division:** Researchers must submit their proposal using the *EPSB Research Proposal Application* (found here). This Application form is designed to collect all necessary information upfront, streamlining the process and reducing timelines. Please submit a completed Application form and attachments to research@epsb.ca.

2. **Submission panel review by EPSB:** There are five review cycles throughout the school year when applications will be reviewed by a panel of Division Research Team members. Below are the submission deadlines and review dates for the 2025–2026 school year:

Division Submission Deadline	Division Panel Review Date
September 8, 2025	September 19, 2025
November 7, 2025	November 21, 2025
January 23, 2026	February 6, 2026
February 27, 2026	March 13, 2026
May 22, 2026	June 5, 2026

3. **Panel review follow-up and Division decision:** Researchers may be contacted to provide further information, clarify aspects of their proposal or make revisions based on initial feedback. The Research Team aims to provide a Division decision for approval or denial to the researcher **eight to twelve weeks** from the date of the panel review. However, this timeline may vary depending on the complexity of the proposal, required consultations with central leaders in relevant areas (e.g., technology, inclusion, diversity, Division senior leadership), and the time needed for researchers to address feedback. Researchers are encouraged to contact the Research Team with inquiries about their application status if needed.

   The Research Team highly recommends submitting the Application form as early as possible to ensure that a Division decision can be made well in advance of the project's planned start date. The Research Team aims to accommodate each proposal's desired timeframe but cannot guarantee approval by a specific date.

   Upon approval, applicants will receive a letter granting permission to connect with school principals.

Division Staff Researchers

The Division supports staff members who are preparing a research project as a part of their post-secondary education. Staff members who also serve as researchers are required to address specific considerations pertaining to their dual roles as researcher and staff member in their Application form.

Communication Protocols
Division staff conducting research must use the email address associated with their post-secondary institution and not their EPSB email address or other Division communication channels to carry out activities relating to their post-secondary studies (e.g., preliminary application, any revisions, inquiries about research, correspondence with schools, recruitment of study participants, etc.).

Commitment to Division Duties
Approved research project activities must not impede on the employment duties of the staff member conducting research. Research proposals must clearly demonstrate that the research does not receive priority over Division employment duties. Staff researchers are encouraged to share an acknowledgment in their application that their supervisor is aware of their proposed research project if they are seeking to conduct research in their own school.

Bias and Conflict of Interest
To avoid potential issues of bias, conflict of interest or power imbalances, proposals requesting participation from students and/or staff in a researcher's current work setting (e.g., classroom and/or school) will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Ethical Access and Approval Requirements for Division Research
Upon approval, access to Division data will be provided through the Research Team. Staff conducting research **are not permitted to** access data or formally recruit participants through their regular work functions. Accessing staff, student or family participants supporting the research must follow Division Research processes after principal or decision unit approval has been received. The research approval process includes a step that will identify eligible staff for the project being proposed.

Final Reports

Researchers are required to submit a final report to the Division at research@epsb.ca upon completing their research project. The final report must be submitted within a reasonable timeframe following the project's conclusion. Researchers needing more time should contact the Division to discuss and arrange a suitable deadline. There are no specific formatting requirements for research reports. Reports can align with existing publication or institutional requirements without the need for a separate format specific to EPSB.

Following TCPS 2 (Government of Canada, 2018), practices must be implemented to protect participants. To ensure confidentiality, research outputs must not include identifiable information about schools, students, staff or families. In respect to staff, any information relating to job titles and/or professional capacity, may only be included as outlined within the informed consent process. The Division could be referred to generically, such as a "school board in Western Canada," any potential identification of the Division will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Guidance for Specialized Approaches

This section offers guidance for research projects with specific communities and for researchers using particular tools or methods. It is intended to support applicants in strengthening key aspects of their proposals by providing relevant Division context and expectations. These topics reflect the types of specialized approaches often included in proposals submitted in recent years.

The information provided is not exhaustive; instead, it is a starting point for thoughtful, ethical and informed research design. Researchers are encouraged to reach out to research@epsb.ca with any questions about how these requirements may apply to the submission of their application.

Working with Specific Populations

For research involving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, the Division's Research Team refers to *TCPS 2—Chapter 9* (Government of Canada, 2022), and also reviews applications with consideration of methods that respect the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access and possession—more commonly known as OCAP® (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2021).

Specialized Tools, Processes and Methods

	Consideration	Description
☐	Secondary data	If requesting Division secondary data with the research application, please see Secondary Data.
☐	Surveys	For surveys (including anonymous surveys), the Division's Research Team uses this resource as a foundation for survey implementation: *Conducting Surveys: A Guide to Privacy Protection* (Government of Alberta, 2007).
☐	Technology Applications (including AI)	If using technology applications, including for example, Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools or statistical packages in your research, please refer to Technology Applications.
☐	Transcription	If recording interviews and transcribing, see Transcription.

Secondary Data

The *FOIP Act*, or any applicable successor legislation, provides clear rules for using secondary data, ensuring that it is used only for the purposes originally intended when it was collected. This is in line with the informed consent of the individuals who provided the data, safeguarding their privacy. Consequently, researchers are generally encouraged to collect new (primary) data relevant to their specific research questions. This approach is not only compliant with the *FOIP Act,* and any applicable successor legislation, but also allows researchers to secure explicit informed consent from participants from the beginning of their data collection. Such a method guarantees transparency and consent-based data gathering, upholding the ethical standards required by the *FOIP Act*, and any applicable successor legislation.

Technology Applications and Software

Technology applications and software such as AI tools, transcription services, and statistical packages for research require careful evaluation prior to use in research to ensure privacy and data security standards are upheld. Applications and software used in contemporary research are often cloud-based, meaning they automatically backup data to the internet. This presents challenges to data security that researchers must address, mitigate and communicate clearly through the informed consent process. In their application (found here), researchers are responsible for justifying the selection of these tools and detailing how data handling procedures will be communicated to participants. This ensures that participants are fully informed about how their data is collected, used, and protected, enabling them to make informed decisions about their participation.

When incorporating technology applications and software in research involving participant information, researchers are encouraged to consider the information needed for a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) for each tool used. The PIA identifies and mitigates potential privacy risks associated with the implementation of applications and software impacting personal information. The informed consent form should include a summary of the information in the PIA.

- **Appendix A: Example PIA for Technology Applications** — This appendix offers a template tool that guides researchers through the PIA process. It includes considerations for data handling that researchers should address in their application and communicate within the informed consent process.

- **Appendix B: PIA for Technology Applications—Qualtrics Example** — This appendix provides a practical example using the Qualtrics platform, illustrating how to effectively communicate details about data handling to participants as part of the informed consent process.

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to technology that enables computers to perform various functions that would be typically associated with requiring human intelligence. AI involves the development and use of algorithms and systems to learn from various data sets that can perform tasks such as problem-solving, pattern recognition, natural language processing and prediction and more. AI includes generative artificial intelligence, a machine learning system that can create new content such as text, images, music, audio and videos, in response to a prompt or series of prompts (Edmonton Public Schools, 2025).

Selecting an AI Tool

As we continue to integrate technology applications into research practices, it is critical to address the responsible and ethical use of AI in research. This section provides interim guidelines for the responsible and ethical use of AI and supporting data usage that aligns with our existing practices.

When using AI tools in your research project, it is important to evaluate whether the task is appropriate for AI and whether AI tools align with privacy requirements. Researchers should reflect on the following:

1. **Appropriateness of AI for the Task**: Consider whether AI is suitable for the task at hand. Researchers should clearly identify their role in assessing the accuracy, relevance, and appropriateness of AI-generated output compared to more traditional methods, ensuring that human judgment remains central to the research process.
2. **Platform Security and Data Use:** Understand where and how AI tools store data before inputting any information. Some platforms offer stronger data protections than others. Check the terms of use and privacy policies, and make a privacy request to the platform if these are not available. Choose tools that allow you to opt out of having your data used to train their models.
3. **Data Controls**: Look for features such as the ability to turn off chat history and other functionality that prevents the storage or potential misuse of data.

Requirements for Responsible AI Use

- **Confidential and Personally Identifiable Information**: Ensure that inputted prompts do not include confidential, sensitive, or personally identifiable information, such as student or staff names.
- **Anonymization**: Anonymize any data before uploading to AI tools. If this is not possible, research proposals must provide a clear rationale explaining the necessity of uploading data that is not anonymized to an AI tool.
- **Informed Consent**: Researchers must provide transparent information within the informed consent process about how data will be handled, whether using traditional methods or advanced tools like AI (*see example PIA for Technology Applications*).

Using Google Gemini for Research Support[2]

Google Gemini, a generative AI tool integrated within the Division's Google Workspace for Education services, is available for EPSB Staff Researchers and can be a valuable resource for researchers conducting studies within the Division. Staff must log in using their Division-provided Google account (e.g., first.last@epsb.ca) to access Gemini, ensuring compliance with Division data security and privacy standards. All interactions with Gemini remain within the Division's environment and are not used to train external AI models. For researchers needing to share findings externally, only aggregate and anonymized information should be extracted to a post-secondary account, ensuring that individual data and identities are protected.

Formal policies and practices specific to the use of AI in research continue to evolve. Researchers are encouraged to stay informed about updates and adhere to interim guidelines provided in this document to ensure ethical and responsible use of AI. By following these guidelines, researchers can help safeguard the privacy and security of data while responsibly leveraging AI in their research projects.

[2] While staff researchers are expected to use their post-secondary institution email accounts for all activities related to their academic studies, an exception is made for accessing Google Gemini. When using Google Gemini, staff researchers are required to use their EPSB email account for access.

Transcription

When selecting transcription methods, researchers have the option to choose between traditional or AI-based approaches. Regardless of the choice, it is imperative to detail the ethical handling of information in research proposals.

Key Considerations:

- **Choice of Transcription Methods**: Researchers should clearly state their chosen method of transcription in the proposal and ensure that this choice is effectively communicated to participants during the informed consent process.
- **Evaluation of AI Tools**: Proposals must include a documented process for the evaluation and selection of AI tools. This should cover aspects of their ethical use, security, and adherence to privacy standards (PIA; Appendix A).

For traditional transcription methods involving a hired transcriber, a confidentiality agreement is required to maintain the integrity and privacy of the data collected (*see Appendix C*).

Appendix A: Example PIA for Technology Applications—Template

This template is provided as a resource to support researchers in their applications as they evaluate each technology application involved in handling research data. Ensure that the insights gained from this evaluation are clearly incorporated into the informed consent documents. Guiding prompts are provided in the various fields and can be removed once completed.

Application Details	
Name of Application and Link	
Privacy Policy Link	
Research Tool Category	● Choose the category that best describes the application's use case. For example: ○ Data Analysis Tool ○ Survey Platform ○ AI Transcription Services ○ Educational Software ○ Social Media Analytics Tool ○ Health Tracking Apps ○ Mobile Data Collection Apps ○ Simulation Software ○ Project Management and Collaboration Tools
Purpose and Personal Information	
Overview of Tool	● Summarize the tool's purpose and how it will be used in the research. ● In this section, detail the specific purposes for which the tool will be used in the research. Elaborate on how the tool's functionalities align with research objectives, such as collecting data, analyzing participant responses, or facilitating communication. Understanding the tool's role guides the identification of personal information that will be collected and used.
Personal Information Use	● Clearly explain what personal information will be collected and how it will be used. ● This includes direct information (e.g., names, email addresses, demographic details) and indirect information (e.g., IP addresses, location data). Explain how this information contributes to the research goals and the legal and ethical basis for its collection and use. Discuss the measures in place to ensure data minimization and the application of privacy-enhancing technologies where possible. ● Possible examples of personal information: ○ Name ○ Contact Information (email, phone number, mailing address) ○ Demographic Information (age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, education level) ○ Health Information ○ Biometric Data ○ Financial Information ○ Location Data ○ Educational Records ○ Employment History ○ Social Media Profiles ○ Web Browsing History ○ Audio and Visual Data ○ Psychological or Behavioral Data ○ Device and Usage Data ● Familiarize yourself with data protection laws applicable in the jurisdiction where the data is stored and where the research is conducted.

Data Flow and Participant Information Use	● Describe how data is entered into the system and how participant information (if collected) is used. ○ Methods of data collection (e.g., direct input by participants, automatic collection via the application). ○ How data is transferred to and stored within the system. ● Data Access: Clearly describe who will have access to the data and under what circumstances. If the data will be shared with third parties (e.g., other researchers or institutions), specify the conditions and safeguards in place. ● Retention Period: Justify the chosen data retention period by linking it to the research goals and legal requirements, ensuring participants understand why their data is kept for the specified duration. ● Detail any third-party sharing, if applicable, and the purposes for such sharing.
Data Management and Security	
Data Storage and Ownership	● Indicate where the data will be stored. ● The researcher should retain ownership of any data that is considered to be personal information. ● The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the data is protected and not used for any other purposes than what they have been approved for. ● Specify where the data will be stored (e.g., cloud services, institutional servers), including the jurisdiction and its impact on data protection rights.
Data Deletion and Security Measures	● Describe how data can be deleted and the security measures in place. ● Provide detailed procedures for data deletion post-research or upon a participant's request. Outline the security measures implemented to protect data against unauthorized access, including encryption, access controls, and regular security audits. ● Encryption Techniques: Offer details on the encryption methods used for the hard drive where data is backed up, helping participants understand the security level protecting their information. ● Physical Security: If applicable, describe physical security measures for the encrypted hard drive (e.g., locked storage, access control).
Breach Notification	● Confirm whether there will be notification in the event of a breach. ● Elaborate on the protocol for notifying participants and relevant authorities in the event of a data breach. This should include the timeline for notifications, the type of information that will be provided, and the steps taken to mitigate harm. Researchers are responsible for notifying the Division and participants of the breach.
Cautions and Additional Information	
Cautions and mitigation of cautions.	● List any potential privacy concerns or risks identified. ● Highlight potential risks to participant privacy based on the application's features and the data handling practices. This could include risks associated with data storage locations, third-party access, and the potential for re-identification from anonymized data.
Researcher Notes	● Provide essential information for researchers on implementing this tool responsibly. ○ This might involve recommendations for configuring application settings to enhance privacy, reviewing and revising the PIA, and engaging with participants transparently about data handling practices.

Appendix B: PIA for Technology Applications—Qualtrics Example

Application Details	
Name of Application and Link	Qualtrics
Privacy Policy Link	Qualtrics Privacy Statement
Research Tool Category	Survey Platform
Purpose and Personal Information	
Overview of Tool	This survey aims to gather data on teachers' attitudes towards using AI as instructional support in educational settings. The objective is to understand the perceived benefits, challenges, and readiness of educators to integrate AI technologies into their teaching practices.
Personal Information Use	Your participation involves answering questions about: ● Your demographic background (age, teaching level, subjects taught) ● Your professional experience (years of teaching, experience with educational technology) ● Your attitudes and opinions on using AI in education
Data Flow and Participant Information Use	Your responses will be collected through Qualtrics and analyzed to identify trends in educators' views on AI. This analysis will help inform academic research and potentially influence educational policy and training programs related to AI.
Data Management and Security	
Data Storage and Ownership	Your survey responses will be stored on servers in the United States. This means your data could be accessed by the U.S. government for national security purposes, often requiring minimal judicial oversight. As the principal investigator, I oversee the data collected for this research, following Qualtrics' guidelines and Alberta *FOIP Act*, or any applicable successor legislation.
Data Deletion and Security Measures	The study concludes in December 2024, after which all data will be permanently deleted. To protect your privacy, data for analysis will be completed in Excel and will not be stored in the cloud or on OneDrive but will be backed up on an encrypted hard drive. This measure ensures your information is securely managed and accessible only to authorized researchers. After the study, data on the hard drive will be destroyed according to strict protocols, leaving no trace.
Breach Notification	If there's a data breach, Qualtrics will inform me immediately. I will then notify you, detailing the nature of the breach and steps taken to secure your data, adhering to ethical and legal standards.
Cautions and Additional Information	
Cautions and mitigation of cautions.	We are dedicated to safeguarding your privacy. To ensure your responses, especially those concerning your personal opinions and critiques about AI in education, remain anonymous, we will implement stringent precautions. Additionally, in the rare event of a data breach, we have designed our data storage procedures so no data stored will contain identifiable information.
Researcher Notes	This survey is designed to ensure anonymity; no personally identifiable information will be collected beyond what is necessary for the research. At the beginning of the survey, you'll receive detailed information about the study's purpose, how your data will be used, and your rights, including the option to withdraw at any time without consequence. We are dedicated to handling your data with the utmost care, from collection through analysis to deletion, ensuring your information is protected throughout the research process. Your understanding and trust are important to us, and we are here to answer any questions you may have about your data's security and use.

Appendix C: Example Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement[3]

<INSERT STUDY NAME>
<INSERT INSTITUTION AFFILIATION>

This research is being undertaken by <INSERT RESEARCHER(S)> in the <INSERT ANY RELEVANT DEPARTMENTS OR INSTITUTIONS>. The purpose of the research is to <INSERT RESEARCH PURPOSE>.

As a transcriber of this research, I understand that I will be hearing recordings of confidential interviews. The information on these recordings has been revealed by interviewees who agreed to participate in this research on the condition that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honour this confidentiality agreement.

I agree not to share any information on these recordings, about any party, with anyone except the Researcher of this project. Any violation of this and the terms detailed below would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I confirm that I will adhere to the agreement in full.

I, _____ agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the content of the interviews in any form or format (e.g. WAV files, CDs, transcripts) with anyone other than the Researcher.
2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g. WAV files, CDs, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g. WAV files, CDs, transcripts) to the Researcher when I have completed the transcription tasks.
4. After consulting with the Researcher, securely erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher with no copy or portion retained (e.g. CDs, information stored on my computer hard drive). Confirm in writing when the information has been securely erased or destroyed.

Transcriber:

(print name) (signature) (date)

Researcher:

(print name) (signature) (date)

This study has been reviewed and ethically approved by the <INSERT ETHICS RELEVANT ETHICS AUTHORITY>.

[3] Adapted from the UK Data Service exemplar.