Sample Participant Information Sheet

Below is a sample participant information sheet that may be useful for researchers conducting empirical research with human participants that is low risk from the perspective of participants. For research where participants may face harms directly from taking part in the research, it is necessary to set out in much more detail the nature of the harm envisaged and what we have done to mitigate that. In the sample below, notes are shown in red, and between square backets. Usually these are areas where you must edit the text to take account of your particular study. This is provided as a guide to help you produce something useful for your study, but each participant information sheet will be reviewed on its own merits in the context of each individual study. You remain free to edit anything in the text, or indeed to use a completely different style.

The key objective is to provide the information participants need to know, without providing so much unnecessary that in practice people cannot read or engage with it in the timeframe they reasonably have. A 500 word clear, well laid out summary is likely to be much better at informing participants than a 1500 word complex document.

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[Short title of your research project]

Thank you for taking in an interest in this research. Before you continue it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. So, please take time to read the following information before confirming your consent to take part.

What is this study about?

We are conducting a study to understand [purpose of study in c. 2-3 sentences]. If you choose to take part, the study involves [tasks for participants, e.g., ‘completing a questionnaire’/‘answering interview questions’/etc.].

How long will it take to participate?

The study will take approximately [X minutes] to complete.

Why should I take part?

By taking part in this research you will directly help with the study of [topic]. The findings of this research will be useful because they will [explain in c. 2 sentences the impact your work could have - e.g., ‘allow businesses like yours to better understand investment decisions and improve revenues’.

If you are offering specific incentives to participate, you can mention those here too. You might use text like ‘As a thank-you for taking part, we are also offering a payment of £X for everyone who takes part in this research’. It may also be helpful to say how one would claim this if it is not immediately obvious from context.]

Who is doing the research?

The research is being [conducted by Dr X (De Montfort University)/led by Dr X (De Montfort University), Prof Y (X University), and Z (think tank Y)/etc.

If you are an undergraduate, master’s or PhD student, you should include this information too, for example saying ‘conducted by John Smtih as part of a second year module on accounting at De Montfort University’, or ‘conducted by Robyn Hode as part of a PhD in Business Management being undertaken at De Montfort University’]

Why are you asking me to participate?

You have been invited because [rationale for selecting this participant - e.g., ‘because you are a purchasing manager in a SME’].

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this research is completely voluntary, and you can answer as many or as few questions as you choose. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw without giving a reason.

Is the study confidential?

Yes. We take great care to ensure that we maintain the privacy of people who take part in research. We will handle your data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The data will be used only for research purposes, and your name will not be used in any research reports or publications. [if applicable:] Once the study is completed, a fully anonymized version of the data collected will be made available for other researchers to analyse for many years to come. This will help ensure the time you spent taking part in this research delivers the most benefits. It will not be possible to identify you in any way from the data made available.

What if I want to withdraw?

If you want to stop participating you are free to do so at any time without giving a reason by [briefly describe the process, e.g., ‘…closing the questionnaire which will withdraw your participation and not save any of your data’, or ‘informing the interviewer that you would like to stop the interview’]. You are also free to refuse to answer any question you choose.

[Further, describe how to withdraw post-participation. For anonymous surveys this might use language like ‘As the questionnaire is completely anonymous, it will not be possible to withdraw once you have submitted the survey’. For qualitative interviews this might use language like ‘You are also free to withdraw after the interview has been completed, and you can exercise this right be contacting the lead researcher at [DMU email].’ It might be helpful to have a process in place to set out how this right can be used, to avoid concerns about people withdrawing at the very end of a study. For example, one could set a window of 6 weeks in which someone could withdraw post-interview, and after this point the data will be transcribed and all linking information held internally will be deleted. This makes the responses completely anonymous, but also means that it would no longer be possible to withdraw].

[If you are using a focus group method, you should be particularly clear about how withdrawal works. In addition to the above language about qualitative research, you may want to use language like ‘While you are free to withdraw from the study, the fact that this is a focus group means that other members of the focus group will still know what you have said at any meeting where they were present. If you choose to withdraw, we will still maintain a completely anonymised brief statement about the topic you discussed in order to allow the context of the discussion by other members of the focus group to be understood’]

[If you are offering incentives to participate (especially monetary ones), you should be clear about how that is affected by withdrawal. Usually, we would expect that someone withdrawing would not prevent them from receiving the participation incentive, but this can be fact specific and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis – some survey company’s software tie completing the survey to receiving the incentive. We would never expect a participant to return an incentive already given and any suggestion of this would inherently make the proposal high risk.]

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and approved by De Montfort University’s Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics Committee.

What if I have a complaint?

If you have a complaint regarding anything to do with this study, you can initially approach [the key contact, with DMU email address - for staff projects this usually the lead investigator, for student projects this is likely to be your supervisor, who you should identify as such here and include their DMU email address].  If this achieves no satisfactory outcome, you should then contact the Administrator for the Faculty Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation Office, Faculty of Business and Law, De Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH or BALResearchEthics@dmu.ac.uk

What if I have further questions?

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact [Your name, and DMU email address. If you are a student, also include the name and DMU email address of your supervisor, identifying them as your supervisor for this module/programme of study].