

# Research requests from universities and other institutions

## 1 Introduction

Institutions (mainly universities) frequently make approaches at all levels of the u3a, seeking people to take part in research projects. It is vital that these are checked for ethicality and acceptability and that all relevant information is provided before they are sent out to u3a members, so that they can make an informed decision on whether to take part.

This Trust document has been produced by the Research and Shared Learning Committee's Ethics Working Group (EWG) and provides:

- Guidance at different levels of the u3a on how to address these requests
- A checklist of practical information for checking individual project details

A separate Trust document (<https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/u3a-research/ethical-implications-of-research>) gives guidance on ethical acceptability. The EWG is available to give advice on ethical matters where necessary.

## 2 Third Age Trust policy statement on research requests to u3a Committees

The Board of the Trust has agreed the following policy in relation to research requests:

"u3as are often approached by Universities to help with their research projects. Usually academic researchers, specialising in research with older people, seek to recruit u3a members to participate in their projects by giving data about themselves, being observed performing specific tasks set by the researchers on a one-off basis or taking part in repeated tests.

In principle, if appropriate guidelines are followed, research requests should be viewed positively so that members have the opportunity to become involved in research and SLP's.

u3a Committees are encouraged to welcome such approaches where they bring positive learning benefits for members. However, caution is advised about taking part in any research projects where such benefits for members are not clearly explained or apparent.

Special caution is reserved for research activities of a medical nature in which u3a members might be asked to take part in detailed medical examinations (e.g., MRI scans or lumbar punctures), or to give blood. Where requests involve DNA samples, the Trust recommends that u3a members do not participate in these kinds of research. If individual members choose to do so, it must be clearly understood that they do so on an entirely private basis and not as u3a members.

u3a Committees are strongly advised to contact their local Research and Shared Learning Coordinator for further advice before advertising to their members details of any outside research projects. See <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/u3a-research/contact-research-and-shared-learning>

All research projects approved by a u3a Committee should be fully compliant with the recommended Research Committee guidelines and assessment of potential risk of harm to participants.

Approved by the Third Age Trust Board - March 2020"

In support of the above, the Trust recommends that the following statement accompanies any circulation to u3a members (the Liability Statement) even if it has been advised as acceptable by a Research Ambassador, Shared Learning Project Coordinator or Research Coordinator:

*"We are often asked to publicise research studies and trials to our members. Where we do so it is because we believe it may be of interest to you although we are not endorsing or promoting the research study in any way. The (name of u3a) u3a Committee has not undertaken any checks or due diligence on the relevant department or the study itself and accepts no liability whatsoever if you decide to agree to participate. If you choose to take part in any study, you do so at your own risk and in your own capacity (and not as a u3a member. You should make sure that you understand all the risks associated with any study before you sign up and ensure that you understand the time commitment, any restrictions and possible side effects. You should also ensure that you will be insured as part of the study."*

### **3 How to deal with research requests**

It is advisable that all requests for u3a members to act as participants are checked before circulation to members by a member of the Research Network – refer to the website contacts list for the nearest Research and Shared Learning Coordinators on <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/u3a-research/contact-research-and-shared-learning> using the checklist at the end of this advice sheet and the guidance contained in the ethics advice sheet - <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/u3a-research/ethical-implications-of-research> .

#### **3.1 The Third Age Trust**

- Requests for national surveys should be forwarded to the Third Age Trust from wherever they are first received by u3as.
- Requests received by the Trust which are not national ones should be sent directly to the National Co-ordinator of the Research Network to be passed on to the appropriate local member of the Research Network for checking.

#### **3.2 Regional Trustees/u3a Networks**

- Requests for participants in a specific geographical area should be sent to the appropriate Research and Shared Learning Coordinator - <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/u3a-research/contact-research-and-shared-learning>

### 3.3 Local u3a Committees

- Local u3a committees should pass unapproved requests (e.g. sent directly by a researcher) to their nearest Research and Shared Learning Coordinator - <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/u3a-research/contact-research-and-shared-learning>
- Once comments on the request have been received, it should be circulated to the U3a membership with the Liability Statement (see above).
- Requests coming from a Regional Trustee or a Research and Shared Learning Coordinator can be assumed to have been checked for their suitability and to be safe to circulate to the local membership if the Committee wishes. Requests coming direct from a researcher will not have gone through any of these checks and should be passed back up the line to one of the above roles in the region.

Although Research & Shared Learning Coordinators are central to the above process, their role is purely advisory and therefore a u3a Committee is ultimately responsible for agreeing to support the research request.

**An unchecked request should never be sent out to the membership.**

**3.4 Research & Shared Learning Coordinators** must check compliance with u3a ethics guidelines -

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/u3a-research/ethical-implications-of-research>

- seek advice from the EWG if necessary - (non-personal email to be inserted for Chris Knight)
- Use the Practical Checklist in this document to assess suitability.
- Pass approved projects to appropriate local u3a Committee or Network Committee (with comments on its advisability) and a reminder that the Liability Statement should be included when circulated to the membership.

## 4 Practical checklist

### 4.1 Reject

- Projects that involve detailed medical examinations
- Projects which have commercial interests/aims
- Projects using drugs
- Projects that involve the collection and analysis of DNA. There are too many outstanding legal and medical ethical issues around this issue.
- Projects seeking younger people (e.g. up to the age of 60)
- Projects that do not comply with u3a ethics guidelines - <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/u3a-research/ethical-implications-of-research> seek guidance from the EWG if necessary - (non-personal email to be inserted for Chris Knight)
- Projects whose timescale is too short

### 4.2 Seek guidance

From the Trust's Ethics Working Group for:

- Projects whose ethicality is difficult to assess.

### 4.3 Checking

Check all projects have adequate and clear information on:

	Yes	No
What the project is about		
Project aims/objectives		
What a participant will be required to do		
Ethical clearance from the University's Ethics Committee (and NHS Ethics Committee if relevant)		
Desired characteristics of participants (e.g. age, gender, healthy, with specific health condition, English as a first language, etc)		
Where the research will take place (exact address)		
How many visits/trips will be the participant be required to make		
Period over which the study will take place		
Participant information sheet provided		
Information on what participants will learn from the research		
Researcher provides an institutional email address ('ac.uk') and contact phone number		
Project meets the Trust's ethical guidance requirements (see Practical Checklist above)		
Researchers will reimburse travel expenses		
Financial payment available? If so, should not be so much as to over-influence anyone to participate.		
Can the participant opt out?		
<b>Medical research:</b>		
Make sure a lay person's summary of the study is available		
Any medical procedures are very non-invasive.		
Who will be told about any unexpected findings?		
Participants advised to check GP is OK with their participation		
Will there be an interim report?		
Will volunteer participants be given a summary of the interim report?		

The use of this checklist should give the assessor (a member of the Research Network - <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/u3a-research/contact-research-and-shared-learning> ) an overall

perspective on whether the project has been well thought out from the potential participant's point of view. It is up to the assessor to judge whether

- a) the project's overall aims are worthwhile and therefore worth following up even if some details are missing or whether
- b) there are so many elements missing that it gives the impression that clear answers would not be achievable and that therefore the involvement of research participants would not be advisable. The assessor should be prepared, through the use of this checklist, to give the researcher feedback accordingly.