

guidance for setting gatekeepers

Approached by Open University Masters students on module E822 ‘Multidisciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth’

This sheet offers guidance for those who have been approached by Open University Masters students to act as a gatekeeper in relation to research tasks which form part of their study of module E822: ‘Multidisciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth’. The guidance is offered in terms of questions we anticipate you might have as part of the requests made of you. The students will be supported in identifying and planning research which they can justify as worthwhile in contributing to knowledge and practice, which will be of value not only to the Masters’ student, but also others in your setting.

Why have I been approached?

Students on this masters module are studying how to understand practice in educational and childhood and youth settings and this gives them the opportunity to undertake small-scale research. You have been approached as someone the student has identified as a gatekeeper to carrying out their research in the setting for which you have responsibilities.

There are two forms of the dissertation: an extended literature review and research proposal (for a study which could be carried out in the setting at a future date) - called an EP - or a small-scale investigation – called an SSI - in which data will be collected and analysed during the course of the academic year covered by the module. Both of these forms of the dissertation will lead to findings which can be disseminated in your context.

If the student wants to explore carrying out the SSI format, to ensure the appropriateness and safety of all involved, the University need to be sure that the students have negotiated that the requests are acceptable to those like yourself, who are responsible for those in that setting.

What is my responsibility to the student as a gatekeeper?

The setting and the student are responsible for ensuring that any data collection is conducted in a safe and ethical manner. You are being asked to, either personally or through delegation to someone who would be able to act as a supervisor, review the students plans and documentation and ensure that it is in line with the expectations, processes and protocols of your setting. The documentation provided by the University to support the student includes an ethical checklist, ethical protocols, alongside suggested information sheets and consent forms for participants. As the gatekeeper you will be asked to sign an Agreement form so that the university are confident that these discussions have taken place. The E822 Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form is provided to sign off the outcome of the student’s discussions with you and returned to the University.

What am I being asked to do as a supervisor?

The student who has approached you has identified you as an important Gatekeeper to their gaining permission for and support with in-person research in your setting. Provided you give permission for them to develop their study, they are inviting you to either act as a supervisor for their dissertation or to delegate this responsibility to someone else in your setting. Supervision involves: a) reviewing with the student how to conduct the research in an ethical manner, drawing on the guidance provided by the university, b) providing permission for the student to access potential participants for each of the agreed research tasks, c) offering support for research instrument trialling and use and d) monitoring the collection and storage of data is in line with the policies and procedures of your setting, including safe storage of signed consent forms.

What kind of data collection are the students likely to be planning to undertake?

Their focus and research question will be developed throughout the module but will have been checked for appropriateness and feasibility 8 weeks (in November) into the module through the submission of their first tutor marked assignment. This will include checking that, if the student wants to carry out the SSI, they have gained your agreement and submitted the co-signed Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form. The student will then explore the use of Interviews, Observation, Questionnaires and analysis of Documents. In choosing from these methods the student will have had to explain why each method is necessary for their investigation. They will get formal feedback on the appropriateness and ethicality of their research design before data collection starts in response to submitting their second tutor marked assignment 21 weeks into the module (in February). This will have checked that you, or the delegated in-setting supervisor, have been involved with and are still happy with the developing plans.

What advice has the University provided about data protection regulation in relation to these tasks?

Personal data will only be collected in these tasks in the form of signatures on consent forms and these should be collected and stored securely in the setting until the task has been completed, after which they should be destroyed. Signed consent forms should not be submitted to the University. The information provided to potential participants will confirm that data they provide during data collection will be anonymised and de-identified in what is reported in the student’s dissertation or related publications. Confidentiality will be promised to the participants but explained that there will be limits to this should the research reveal criminal or safeguarding-related disclosures, which will be passed on in the setting in accordance with your local procedures. The student should discuss these procedures with you, as well as appropriate training you require.

Do I need to grant permission for the research to be carried out in this setting?

No. The student should accept your decision as to whether you grant your permission or not. If you feel that they could make changes to their plans which would make you feel more comfortable in granting permission, a student can take these concerns and suggestions to their tutor to discuss adapting their focus and research design. However, this would need to be at an early stage prior to the deadline in November for returning the Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form. Please ask the student for the exact deadline date.

What are the implications for the student if I do not feel I can grant this permission?

The students do not need to carry out a small-scale investigation in the setting in order to complete their Masters dissertation module. There are alternative materials for the students to work with to meet the learning outcomes of the module through carrying out the Extended Proposal form of the dissertation. This is considered of equal demand and merit by those assessing the quality of the dissertation module.

Can I withdraw permission for the dissertation to take place as a small-scale investigation?

If you do grant permission for the student to conduct their research in your setting, ideally any withdrawal would be before the November deadline for the return of the Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form. For students, it is not easily possible for them to change to the alternative form of the dissertation after this date, as they will need to complete alternative study. However, we appreciate that circumstances change. It has proven possible for some students to manage this transition should it become advisable or no longer feasible to carry out in-person research. Depending on how late in their studies this takes place, the student may need to defer their studies to the following year. If you do have concerns about the research, for whatever reason, please discuss these with the student in the first instance. If you would find it helpful, please also ask the student to arrange for to speak to their tutor or contact the email box below to raise your query/concern and arrange to speak with a member of the module team.

Your colleagues, children/young people and their parents/carers/guardians who are invited to act as participants may withdraw permission for their data to be used as part of the investigation and can request destruction of data collected up to two weeks after each form of data collection. Individuals approached for any of the data collection, can withdraw their support without giving a reason. However, there are implications for the student if they are left with insufficient data on which to base their dissertation. Therefore, once support has been given in a setting with the return of a co-signed Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form the University would hope that, as gatekeeper and/or supervisor, you would be able to support the student in gaining sufficient data for their dissertation. This might require renegotiating data collection for particular methods if there has been withdrawal of consent. If as supervisor/gatekeeper you do not feel you can offer this ongoing support, please discuss this with the student as soon as practical so that they can consider the alternative Extended Proposal option for their dissertation.

If you have questions which are not answered in this document, please contact the Masters module team via the email: WELS-ECYS-Masters@open.ac.uk noting ‘E822 Gatekeeper Query’ in the subject line and we will get back to you as quickly as possible.