2 July 2015

by Lauren Hall-Lew, on behalf of the LEL/Philosophy Ethics Committee

This document is to clarify which consent form version should be uploaded to Learn and what you should do with your completed consent forms at the end of your degree. This advice pertains to all students in LEL or Philosophy who have collected primary data at any degree stage: Honours, MSc, or PhD.

Ethical Approval The form that you upload to Learn is a copy of the blank version that you give to your participants. You should never scan any of your completed consent forms (i.e., the ones signed by participants). Only you and your supervisor should have access to the completed forms, which have participants' real names and signatures on them. To scan those forms or otherwise share them with anyone else constitutes a potential breech of confidentiality.

Data Collection If you want to give your participant a copy of the consent form that they signed, which is good ethical practice to do, please avoid emailing them a scan of their signed form. Rather, bring two identical copies of the consent form with you and ask the participant to sign both and then keep one. Scanning and emailing documents adds slightly more risk to the confidentiality procedure than is necessary.

Project Completion Before you leave Edinburgh you should give your forms to your supervisor for safe keeping for three years. All supervisors maintain all ethical responsibility for student research during and after the research is carried out, and supervisors are the ones who will be audited if such an audit were to happen.

If you have already returned to your home country and will not be returning to Edinburgh until graduation, then hold onto your consent forms and bring them back to us at graduation.

If you have already returned to your home country and will not be returning to Edinburgh at all, then please email lel.ethics@ed.ac.uk and confirm that you will be keeping your consent forms secure for three years and that they will be destroyed after three years (from the date of the project completion). Describe how you will ensure that they will be kept secure. Use an email address that will be valid for at least three years, so we can contact you if necessary (i.e., not your university email address.) Do not destroy the completed consent forms before three years is up because they might be needed for ethical auditing purposes.

If your participants consent via electronic file (e.g., a Microsoft Word document), then that electronic file (not a copy of it, but that one document that uniquely records their consent) should be submitted. What we recommend in that case is that all individual electronic documents be put in a single zip file and then deleted from your computer (and any associated backup drives) after your supervisor confirms successful receipt of that zip file.

Online surveys Typically, each participant will be associated with a single document that can confirm that he or she gave consent. If your participants confirm consent by clicking through to an online survey, then no additional evidence need be retained of their consent, as long as you do not retain any unique identifier of that participant (e.g., their IP address). If any unique identification is produced from online data collection, this must be treated as sensitive information, and should be given consideration in the data management plan. However, it does not need to be treated like a signed consent form.

If you plan on continuing research on the data that you collect for your dissertation, your consent forms still reside with your supervisor; just ask your supervisor not to destroy them until your research is complete.

Please email the committee if you or your supervisor have any remaining questions: lel.ethics@ed.ac.uk