GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

A 'How to' for researchers completing the QM REC application

January 2026

Submitting an ethics application using the QM Ethics online system

Ethics approval is essential if you are conducting research involving human data of any kind. Queen Mary uses an online system called QM Ethics for its ethics process, from initial submission to amendments and end of study reports. You can access this system by clicking on the following link: **https://www.qmethics.qmul.ac.uk/**

This guidance has been designed to help you better understand how to navigate the system and to answer the frequently asked questions. If you have an ethics-related query that is not addressed in this document, please contact research-ethics@qmul.ac.uk

What is included in this document:

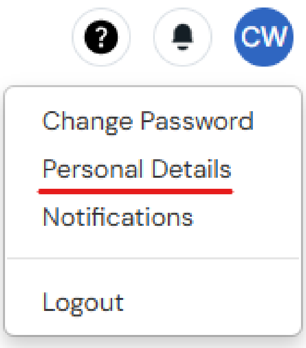
1. Logging in, updating details, and creating an application

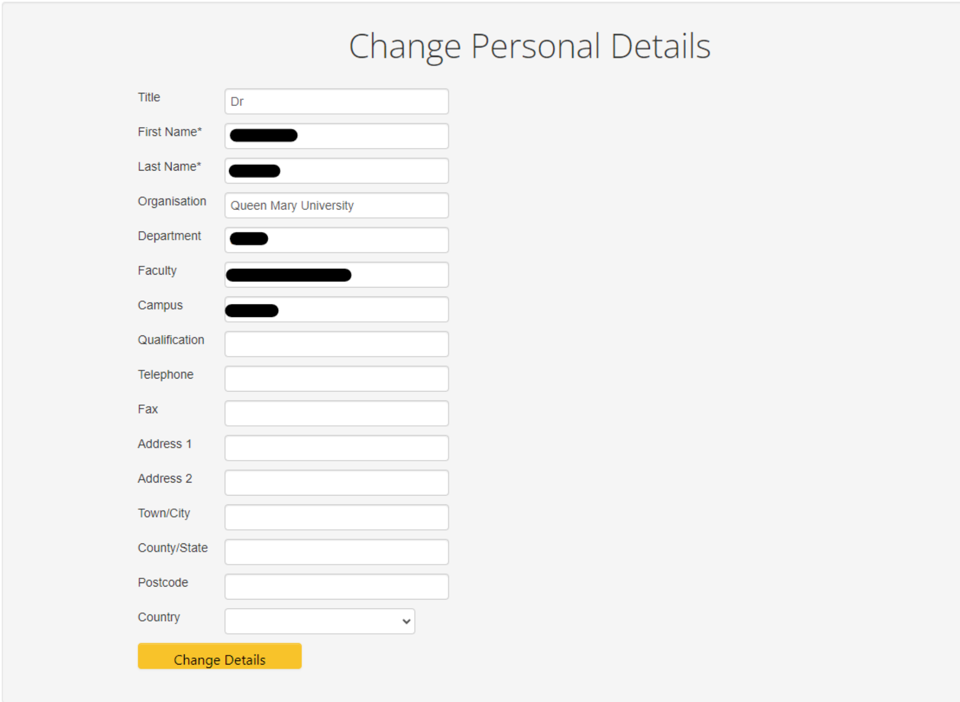
When you first access the system, you will be asked to log in using your Queen Mary credentials. Please ensure you use the username made up of three letters and three numbers, and not the email address with your name. The password should be the same, and you will not be asked to create a new one.

Once you have logged in, your first steps should be to update your details in the system. This will make the process of filling out the form smoother. You can update your details by following the steps below:

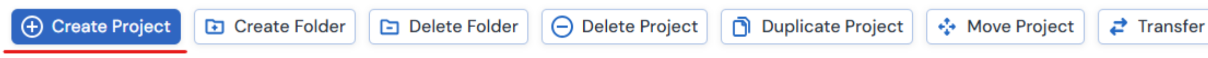
- Click on your name in the top right-hand corner
- Select ‘Personal details’
- Add or update your details in the relevant sections
- Click on ‘Change details’

The screenshots below show what the process should look like:



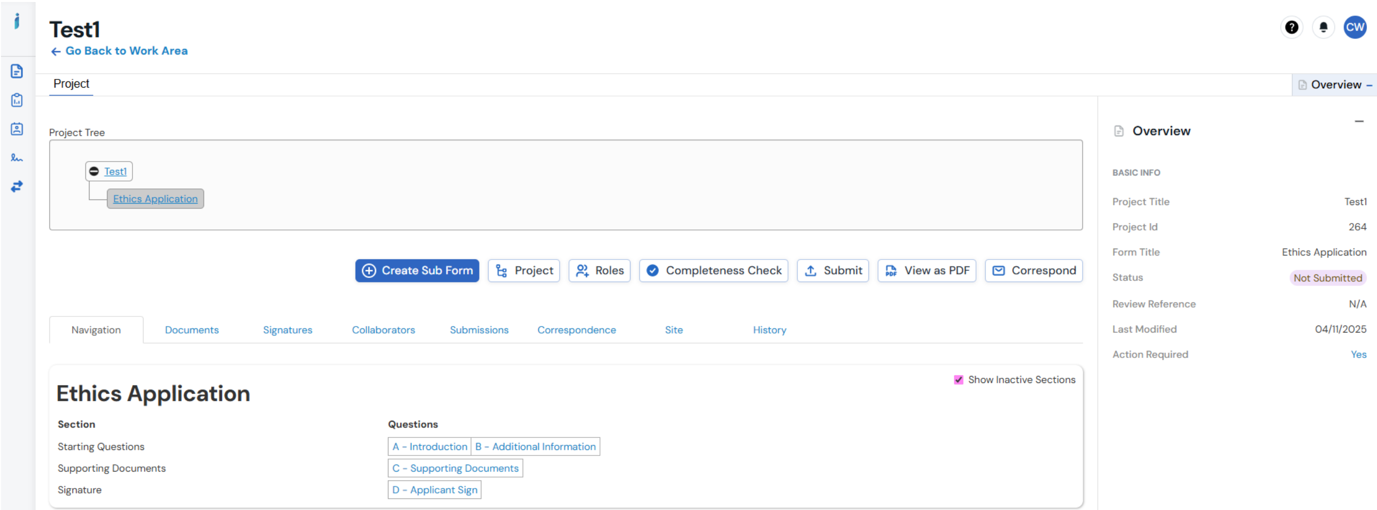


Once your details are updated, you can start your application process. In your work area, which is the landing page, click on the blue 'Create Project' in the tool bar:

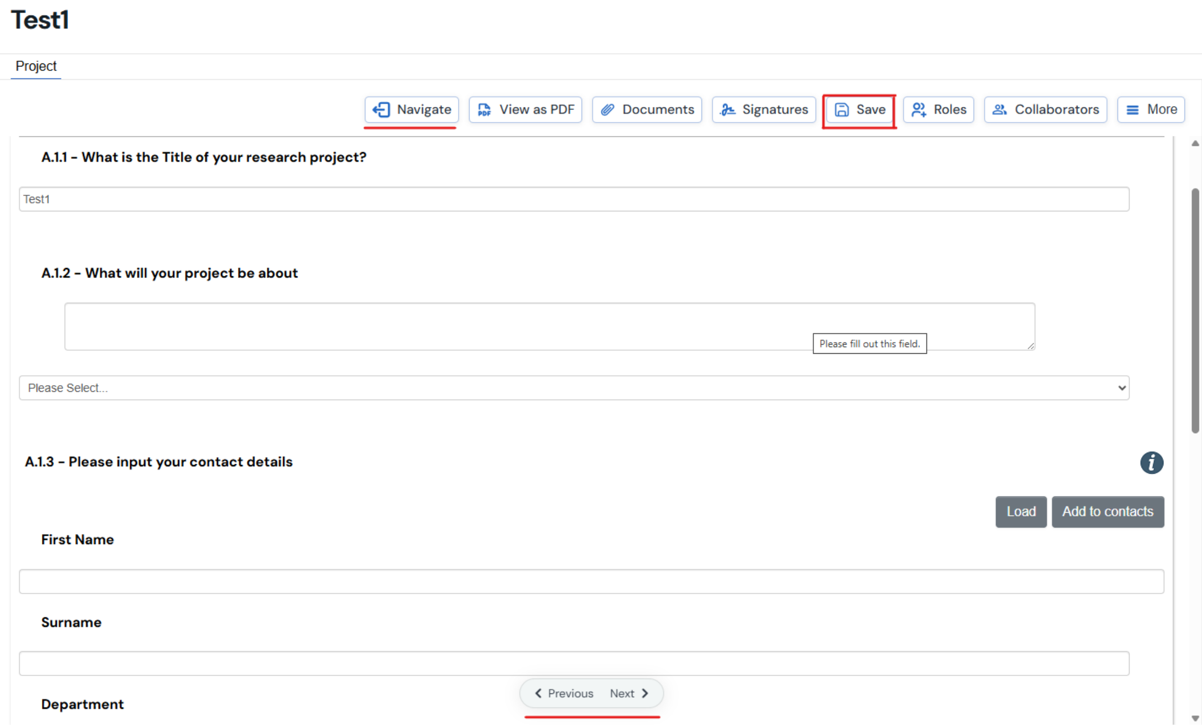


This will open a window asking you to fill in your project title, and select a form and a centre, with a drop-down list. Please select 'Application form' and 'Queen Mary University of London'.

After clicking on the 'Create' button, you will be taken to the application form, which looks as pictured below:



While we recommend filling the form out in order, as some sections will only appear after you have selected specific options, please note that you can navigate from section to section easily and come back on yourself should you have missed a question. The arrow buttons at the bottom of the screen allow you to navigate from page to page by clicking on the 'Previous' and 'Next' arrows. You can also come back to the form's landing page by clicking on the 'Navigate' button in the tool bar at the top of the form. As you can see circled in the screenshot below, you can also save your progress to come back to the application at a later time. You can also check your progress by clicking on the 'More' button and using the 'Completeness check' option, which will let you know of any incomplete sections.



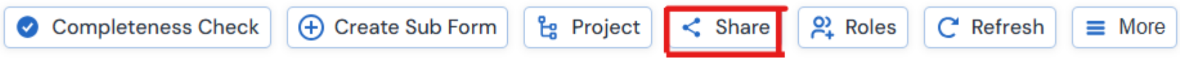
Please note the form may sometimes be updated to reflect changes in policies, correct mistakes, or address feedback. If you have a beige ribbon at the top of your form with an 'Update' button attached to it, please do update the form. Please note that while this will not affect your existing progress, there may be additional sections to fill as a result.

2. Filling out the application form: what the reviewer looks for and common mistakes

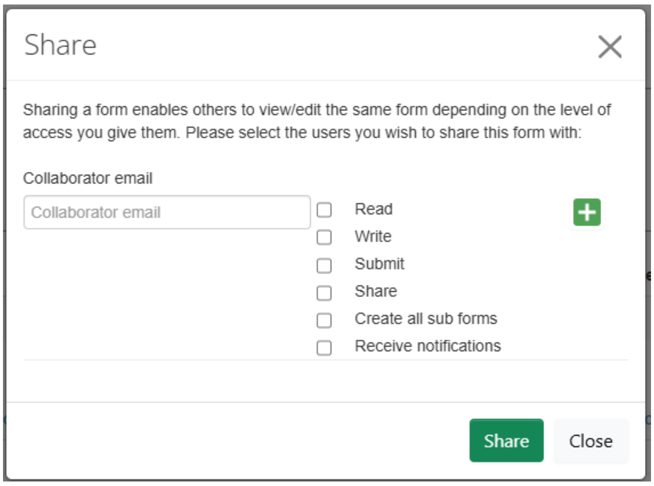
Filling out the application form should be straightforward, but the section below will provide some guidance on the information the reviewer is looking for, as well as highlight some common mistakes and how to avoid them to obtain your ethics approval faster.

The ethics process is not here to be an obstacle to your research, but **to help you think** about every little detail to ensure the safety of your participants and yourself, and that your project goes smoothly. However, this is not a tick-box administrative exercise, and reviewers will take **a close look** at your application, and will send it back if anything is incomplete, inconsistent, or if the information is too vague. If you have any questions about your project, the Ethics team is available to help.

Before filling out the application form, we strongly recommend making sure **you have discussed your project with your supervisor** in details, and that you involve them in the ethics process. You can share your application with them (or any collaborators) by using the ‘Share’ tile in the left-hand side panel.



This will make a pop-up screen appear, where you can enter the email address of your supervisor or collaborator, and select which permissions you wish to give them.



Once you have shared your application with them, they will receive an email to let them know, and the project will be available to them in their own Work Area.

It is your **supervisor’s responsibility** to help you through the ethics process, and explain what ethics requirements are. They should talk through your project’s methodology, recruitment, data handling, and any potential risks associated with your project. The ethics application will ask for all of these aspects to be addressed, so discussing it with your supervisor ensures you have thought about them and know exactly what your project will entail.

Your supervisor will also be required to sign off your form before it can be submitted. It is a good idea to ask them to **take a look** at the form before signing it off, so you can discuss any sections you are unsure of – this will help avoid having to re-submit your application a number of times because some information is lacking.

2a. What information should you provide?

The form will be taking you through the different sections and questions to help you break down all the information the reviewer will need.

Please ensure **you have carefully considered every aspect** of your research before submitting your application. If anything is unclear or too vague, the reviewer will send the application back asking for more details. When you apply for ethics, you should_know who your supervisory team is, and whether any research will be conducted internationally.

You should also have discussed whether your research could be considered medium risk. While it might not seem particularly risky to you, if you are asking potentially upsetting, invasive, or triggering questions, **this may heighten the risk**. If you are unsure, please discuss this with your research team, supervisor, or get in touch with the Ethics team.

Please provide **specific information** about what you are trying to find out, what your research questions are, and how you will investigate them. This should be explained briefly, **in lay terms**, which means the description can be understood by anyone without any knowledge of the subject. You should have an idea of how many participants you will be recruiting, how you will be recruiting them, and how long their time commitment to the study will be. You should also have considered **how you will be collecting consent**, and how long you will be giving them to withdraw after data collection has taken place.

You should also **carefully consider any risks** to your participants and to yourself, and have specific mitigations in place to address them. No study will ever be without risk, and the reviewer will feel more confident in your research seeing you address risks that are minimal rather than you dismissing them.

Similarly, you should know what kind of data you are collecting, how you will be storing it, and who will be accessing it. **This should be in line with QMUL's data policies**, and you can use the information bubbles on the right should you have any doubt.

Your participant-facing documents should reflect all of this information. They are here to help your participants **make an informed decision** – this means they need to know what the study is about, what will be asked of them, and what will happen to their data. If you are conducting primary data collection, please include your interview questions, questionnaires, or focus group guides, which will help the reviewer check the risk level for your study.

The key to a good ethics application is **to be specific and to the point**. The reviewer needs to be able to see that you have thought your project through, and know how each step will be undertaken. The more specific and complete your application is, **the quicker you will get your approval**.

2b) Common mistakes

In **section A2**, please ensure you know which route you are applying to. If you are applying for a DSREC, please ensure you select this option, and then select the correct DSREC in the subsequent **section A2.1** which will appear after you selected the DSREC route.

In **section A5**, please note that the start date of your project needs to be after your ethics approval has been received, as you **<u>cannot</u>** start work until your project has been approved. We usually recommend putting the start date around two weeks after you first submit your application to allow for any potential revisions.

In **section A7**, please note that international research includes **<u>only</u>** research which requires the researcher to travel abroad. If you are running online data collection with international participants, this does **<u>not</u>** fall under international research.

In **section A8**, please note that 'Use of social media data' only applies if you are collecting data from social media websites for analysis purposes. If you are using social media for recruitment purposes, please do **<u>not</u>** tick that box.

Additionally, please note that 'pre-existing human data' does **<u>not</u>** apply to data freely available in the public domain. If you are analysing published academic articles, press releases, etc., this box does **<u>not</u>** apply to you. Data collected for the purpose of this research (i.e, interviews, questionnaires, etc.) also does not count as pre-existing data, even if it is data that technically existed before your research (such as your participants' name).

Section B1 serves as a triage to determine the risk level of your study. Please do note that any study deemed a moderate risk project will have to be reviewed by a Research Ethics Panel. **This might delay the start of your study**, as these Panels fill up quickly and function on a first-come, first-served basis. If you think your study might be moderate risk, please ensure **<u>you allow enough time for the ethics review process</u>**. If you are a dissertation student, we strongly recommend you discuss this with your supervisor first.

In **section C**, the applicant and supervisor details are auto-fill boxes. If when you search your supervisor's or collaborators' names, they do not come up, this means their account **<u>has not been created</u>**. Please let them to log into the portal, then try again.

In **section D**, please ensure you read all the questions carefully, and that you answer **<u>all of them</u>**. This will expedite the review process.

In **section D2**, please ensure you tick **<u>all</u>** relevant boxes. If your main method is interviews, but you will be recording these interviews, please tick 'Audio or video recordings of participants'.

In **section D3**, please note that if you are using several methods, you have the option to answer separately for each method, by clicking on the 'Add another' button. This is not mandatory, but should you wish not to do so, pleas ensure that your answers cover each method you are using (i.e., indicate the number of participants for each method, the time commitment for each method, etc.)

For **question D6.2**, please only tick the boxes if your participants are **taking on a co-investigator** role (i.e., contributing to the design of the study, undertaking research on your behalf, etc.). Participants taking part in interviews or focus groups should **not** be taken into account for this question.

In **section E**, please ensure you indicate **<u>all the relevant information</u>** about your participants. Please consider their inclusion and exclusion criteria, and their numbers. The answers also need to match any information given in section D.

In **section F3**, please ensure you are giving a final withdrawal date for your participants (unless your data is fully anonymous, in which case please indicate so). This needs to be a **<u>specific timeframe</u>** during which your participants can change their minds, and so they know past this date, their data will be used. Please consider when your data will be analysed and published to work out **<u>a final date prior to these deadlines</u>**.

In **Section J**, please think carefully about the data you are collecting. If you are collecting any personal information about your participants, including names, please tick 'Yes'.

In **section L1**, please consider how you will store your research data. Please note that if your data is **fully anonymous**, it cannot be linked in any way to your participants, which means they **<u>cannot</u>** withdraw consent once they have completed their participation. This is fine, but your participants need to be made aware.

Supporting documents are of utmost importance if you are working with human participants. The **Participant Information Sheet** will provide your participants with all the information they might require to make an informed decision on whether to take part or not. You can find a template in the 'Help' tab in the black ribbon at the top of your screen. Please ensure you fill it out **<u>in a detailed manner</u>**.

The Consent Form will summarise what your participants are agreeing to, and will enable you to have a written trace of their consent to participate. You can find a template in the 'Help' tab in the black ribbon at the top of your screen. Please ensure **<u>you tailor it</u>** to your study, and delete any non-relevant clauses from the template.

Please ensure you include any other relevant documents. The Research Ethics Facilitators will need to see any questionnaires, interview guides, or focus group guides to double-check the risk-level of your study, as well as any advertising materials you may use, including emails or social media posts. If you are conducting fieldwork, you will need to fill out a risk assessment, which you can find on the H&S directorate page.

Once you have completed all the sections of the form, you will be asked to sign the form. If you are a student, your supervisor will also be required to sign the form. Once both signatures have been obtained, your application will be automatically submitted.

Please note: the committee cannot see your application has been submitted. If you have sent your supervisor a signature request, please ensure you check your application status regularly. It is your responsibility to make sure your supervisor signs the form in a timely manner.

3. Re-submissions

Should your application be missing any details, or the Committee require more information, the application will be sent back to you for amending on the system. Please note the system tracks changes **automatically**.

If your application needs to be re-submitted, please ensure you tick 'Re-submission' in the page following the 'Supporting documents' section. If your study is moderate risk, ticking this option means your application does **not** need to be signed again by the Head of Department. Please note, if you are a student, your supervisor will still need to sign off resubmissions.

4. Post approval sub-forms

1) Amendments

Should you wish to amend an approved study, please go onto the system, and in your work area, click on the project you wish to amend. Amendments include anything from a change in your study title or an extension, to methodological changes.

You can then select 'Create a sub-form', and select 'Amendment form'. This will take you to a short form to fill, which you can then submit to be reviewed.

Please note: the form will be submitted automatically if it is complete. Once you have filled in your answers, please check the 'Completeness' check option on the left-hand side panel to ensure the form is complete.

2) Annual progress reports

If you are conducting a study over several years, you will be required to provide the Committee with Annual Progress Reports on each anniversary of your ethics approval.

To submit an Annual Progress Report, please log in onto the system, and in your work area, click on the relevant project.

You can then select 'Create a sub-form', and select 'Annual Progress Report'. This will take you to a short form to fill, which you can then submit. The form does not require approval, but will be acknowledged by the Facilitators as having been received.

Please note: the form will be submitted automatically if it is complete. Once you have filled in your answers, please check the 'Completeness' check option on the left hand side panel to ensure the form is complete.

3) End of Study Notifications

Once the project for which you required ethics approval has been completed, you will be required to inform the Facilitators via an End of Study Report. To do so, please log in onto the system, and in your work area, click on the relevant project.

You can then select 'Create a sub-form', and select 'End of Study form'. This will take you to a short form to fill, which you can then submit. The form does not require approval, but will be acknowledged by the Committee as having been received.

Please note: the form will be submitted automatically if it is complete. Once you have filled in your answers, please check the 'Completeness' check option on the left hand side panel to ensure the form is complete.