

**HONOURS RESEARCH PROPOSAL TEMPLATE**

**SECTION A: GENERAL DETAILS**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Student number** | |  | | | | **Title** | | |  | | |
| **First name/s** | |  | | | | **Surname** | | |  | | |
| **Title/topic of research** | |  | | | | | | | | | |
| **Date and year of registration for the research report** | |  | | | | **Region** | | |  | | |
| **Existing qualifications** | |  | | | | | | | | | |
| **Proposed Qualification for project (mark with “X”)** | | **HRMHON** | **MMHON** | | **BPAHON** | | | **BBAHON** | | | **SCMHON** |
|  |  | |  | | |  | | |  |
| **Contact details** | **Work** |  | | | | | | | | | |
| **Home** |  | | | | | | | | | |
| **Cell** |  | | | | | | | | | |
| **Email** |  | | | | | | | | | |
| **Deadline for Research Report Submission** | |  | | | | | | | | | |
| **Date of research proposal submission** | |  | | | | | | | | | |
| **Supervisor details** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Name of supervisor | | Contact number | | Email | | | Institution/department | | | Qualification | |
|  | |  | |  | | |  | | |  | |

**SECTION B: GUIDELINES**

When using this template, please refer to the *Guideline for Selecting Topics & Writing a Proposal for the Honours Research Report*

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| **DOCUMENT EDITING & FORMATTING** |
| **LANGUAGE EDITING** |
| * **Abbreviations**   Abbreviations such as, e.g., i.e., etc. may *not* be used in a proposal. They must be written in full, such as, for example, that is, and so on. An exception to this rule is the abbreviation: et al., which means “and others” when you are doing in-text references.   * **Tense**   Proper use of tense is expected to be used throughout the document. Since the study has not yet been conducted, the research methodology section should be presented in the future tense.   * **Proof reading**   Enlist the assistance of a professional editor or have a peer read through the document to find errors that are easily overlooked by the author. Sometimes spellchecker does not pick up words that are used incorrectly, because they are correctly spelt, e.g. fro instead of for. Ensure that there are no grammatical, semantic and spelling errors in the proposal.   * **Long sentences**   A common stylistic trend when writing is to use long sentences.  These sentences often exceed 5 lines. They become cumbersome and the meaning of what is being presented can sometimes be difficult to fathom. Excessive sentence length can lead to poor clarity. It is more desirable to break up these long winded sentences into shorter ones.   * **Linking sections in the proposal**   The document should flow from start to finish.  This can be achieved by presenting the information in a logical sequence that show the topic is being developed. Linking sentences between sections can be used to demonstrate how each section fits into the overall document plan.   * **Informal language**   Do not make use of informal language. Your proposal is an academic piece of work and needs to be written formally. Try not to use words like “we”, “I” and “they”. Also avoid making use of words like “it”, “this”, “these”. |
| **FORMATTING** |
| * **Page Margins and page numbering**   It is important to number your pages correctly. The initial pages should be numbered in roman numerals. Page 1 begins at the introduction.  The standardisation for page margins is 2.5cm from the left and right of the page.   * **Line spacing**   The required line spacing for the proposal is 1.5   * **Font style**   Use either Arial or Times New Roman   * **Font Size**   Font size 12 must be used   * **Headings**   Headings should be numbered in the following manner:  - Main headings should be in caps and bold.  - There are no periods after the last number used.  - Headings such as TABLE OF CONTENTS are not numbered. |
| **REFERENCING (IN-TEXT AND BIBLIOGRAPHY)** |
| * MANCOSA suggests that all students use the HARVARD SYSTEM of referencing. * Please consult with the Referencing guidelines in this regard. * The **Harvard Referencing Generator** is a useful referencing tool. You can access it online: <http://www.harvardgenerator.com> |

***The research proposal is merely a structured plan for the actual research report, as such, the submission should not exceed 20 typed pages (excluding bibliography and appendices).***

**\*\*PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE READ THROUGH ALL OF THE INFORMATION IN THIS TEMPLATE BEFORE BEGINNING YOUR PROPOSAL WRITE-UP\*\***

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\*Page numbers must be inserted

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Note that by completing 1.1 to 1.5 in this chapter, you will need to convey to the reader the following:

* What is your study about?
* What is the problem at the organisation/municipality and how did it originate?
* What was the aim and research objectives of conducting this study?

**1.1 Introduction and Background to the Research Problem**

* This should be short and concise **(*approximately 35 lines).***
* Present basic information about the research project itself, and what the reader can expect.
* The background and introduction should set the stage for the problem to be researched.
* The general context of the problem area should be emphasized.
* Start with a concise overview of the research then emphasize the importance of the research. In addition, you should attempt to convey experts’ views on the problem/opportunity under investigation.
* As a hint, the information relating to the background to the problem should include quotations by other authors.

**1.2 Research Problem**

State the **exact problems/challenges/opportunities/issues** that the organisation is faced with and hence the need to research (this must be in line with your title). This section should flow from the background to the problem ***(approximately 10-12 lines).***

Keep the following in mind when writing your research problem:

* Key concepts and ideas which are current in the area should be highlighted.
* Briefly note some of the underlying assumptions in the research area.
* Describe what needs to be solved and identify the most significant issues that require exploration. It is imperative that the independent and dependent variables are identified.

**1.3 Aim of the study**

The aim of the study refers to the desired outcomes, or the general intentions of the research, which 'paint a picture' of your study. It should emphasize what is to be accomplished and reflect the aspirations and expectations of the research topic.

* Your aim must be clear, unambiguous and concise, and indicate what you intend to achieve with the research regarding the research problem or opportunity. The aim should consist of three parts: What is being studied, how it is being studied and why it is being studied. Once again, the aim needs to flow logically from the problem statement.
* This usually starts with, “The aim of this study is...”
  1. **Research Objectives (not more than 3)**
* The objectives of the study refer to the operationalisation of the aim of the study. Simply put, the objectives use specific statements which define measurable outcomes. Objectives are presented as brief statements, one sentence each.
* You should have **3 objectives.** Remember, the purpose of the research report is to investigate a **business issue**. However, simply investigating an issue is not enough, and, therefore, you must be able to recommend solutions to remedy problems and capitalise on opportunities. As such, the final objective should focus on this.
* Use bullet points to list your objectives.

**1.5 Research Questions**

* Convert your objectives into direct questions.
* In other words, there should be as many research questions as there are research objectives.

**1.6 Significance of the Study**

* Why and to whom is it important to conduct this study?
* Ensure that you are clearly stating who the study will benefit and how they will benefit from the study.

Additionally, state how the study will add to the body of knowledge in the study area.

1. **LITERATURE REVIEW (approximately 5-7 pages)**

The literature review is a critical analysis, evaluating existing knowledge relevant to your research problem. You are required to extract different kinds of information from what you read, and compare the different studies and how these relate to your own research.

Some questions you may think about as you develop your literature review are:

* What are the critical (recent and appropriate) pieces of literature that inform the reader on the variables of your study?
* What do other academic authors say about the problem you are studying and where is the gap that you are trying to fill by conducting your study?
* What theory is there that supports what you have stated about the problem?
* What are your concluding remarks about the literature you have reviewed?

Please note and ensure the following:

* You should have at least 20 in-text references from resources. At least 15 literature sources reviewed should be on the area of study and at least 5 of these sources should be from academic journals.
* Sources included in the literature should be current and no older than 5 years (exceptions only made for seminal or classic sources).
* The literature review should be at least 5 pages.
* Remember that this must be well-structured and follow academic writing styles.

Concepts discussed should be aligned with your research objectives.

**3.** **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (approximately 8 pages)**

**3.1 Research Approach**

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| **Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches:**  Deductive research is consistent with quantitative research, as it focuses on scientific principles, an examination of relationships between variables, highly structured research, researcher independence from the topic, and a selection of samples that are sufficient in size in order to generalize conclusions.  Inductive research is consistent with qualitative research, as it aims to gain an understanding of events that humans attach meaning to and a close understanding of the research context, as well as is more flexible in its structure to allow for emphasis on different aspects of the research in order to more away from generalization, and allows the researcher to be immersed in the research process. |

**NOTE:**

To ensure that your Research Methodology is aligned, the components of your study must follow either the quantitative or qualitative research approach.

**3.2 Research Philosophy**

Research philosophy deals with the source, nature and development of knowledge. In simple terms, a research philosophy is a belief about the ways in which data about a phenomenon should be collected, analysed and used.

Although the idea of knowledge creation may appear to be profound, you will participate in knowledge creation in order to complete your research study. You will collect secondary and primary data and engage in data analysis to answer the research questions; these answers, also known as results, mark the creation of new knowledge.

This section involves a discussion on the Research Philosophy. There are many schools of thought about science and knowledge. However, the following are commonly adopted in business research in the fields of social sciences and humanities:

* **Positivism and;**
* **Interpretivism**

You will discuss the Positivism (quantitative) **OR** Phenomenological (qualitative) research philosophies and you will motivate reasons for choosing a specific type.

**3.3 Research Strategy**

In this section, you will discuss the research strategies in-line with the chosen research philosophy.

**Positivist (quantitative) Research Strategy:**

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| --- |
| * Surveys |

**Interpretivist (qualitative) Research Strategies:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Commonly used** | **Less commonly used** |
| * Interviews | * Action research |
| * Focus groups | * Grounded theory |
| * Case Study | * Ethnography |

**3.4 Research Design**

Research design is defined as a framework of methods and techniques chosen by a researcher to combine various components of research in a reasonably logical manner so that the research problem is efficiently handled. It provides insights about ‘how’ to conduct research using a particular research methodology.

The research design is also the structure that holds the research together and enables the researcher to address the research aim and objectives in ways that are appropriate, efficient and effective.

Below are some of the main research designs:

* Explanatory research: the relationship between variables.
* Descriptive research: describes the ‘profile’ of the phenomenon.
* Exploratory research: asks ‘what is happening’.

**NOTE:**

Only indicate and discuss the research design that had been chosen for this research study.

**3.5 Target Population and Sampling**

**3.5.1 Target Population**

The target population must be defined with reference (Who does the population comprise of?).

Here you will indicate the population from which the sample was extracted.

**3.5.2 Kinds of Sampling**

**There are two broad sampling methods – Probability and Non-probability**

With probability sampling, the likelihood of any one member (or element) of the population being selected, is known. In non-probability sampling, the exact number of elements in the population is unknown, meaning that the likelihood of selecting any one member of the population is unknown.

The choice of sampling method will be dependent on the research questions, methodology chosen, and whether you want to generalize the results from the sample to the larger population. Each method has a number of sampling techniques available.

Once a decision has been made on which overall sampling method will be used, (probability **OR** non-probability), a sampling technique needs to be chosen. The lists below are not exhaustive but rather illustrate some of the more popular options. Briefly discuss the relevant options, highlight the sampling method and technique you had chosen, motivate why it was the most suitable option, and detail how the sampling was executed.

**Refer to the below information on the different types of sampling and the corresponding sampling techniques**:

3.5.2.1 Probability Sampling

The probability sampling technique only applies to a quantitative research study.

Examples of probability sampling methods include the following:

* *Simple Random Sampling*: Each population element has an equal chance of being selected into the sample. Sample drawn using random number table/generator.
* *Systemic Sampling:* A type of probability sampling method in which sample members from a larger population are selected according to a random starting point and a fixed periodic interval (every kth element). This interval, called the sampling interval, is calculated by dividing the population size by the desired sample size.
* *Stratified Sampling:* Divide population into sub-populations or strata and use simple random sampling or systematic sampling on each stratum.
* *Cluster Sampling:* Population is divided into internally heterogeneous sub-groups and an entire cluster is then chosen to be part of the sample.

3.5.2.2 Non-probability Sampling

The non-probability sampling technique only applies to a qualitative research study.

Examples of probability sampling include the following:

* *Haphazard / Convenience Sampling:* The researcher selects a sample that is convenient or easy to access.
* *Quota Sampling:* A sample in a predetermined group is selected, has the same proportions of individuals as the entire population with respect to known characteristics.
* *Purposive / Judgmental Sampling:* Is a sampling technique in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their study.
* *Snowball Sampling:* The researcher will select an element (participant) that is connected to another element. The first will refer the researcher to the next and so on. Hence, the reference to a snowball.
* *Maximum Variation Sampling*: The researcher identifies the categories of interest in relation to the research topic and then intentionally seeks out subjects or settings which represent the greatest possible range of differences in the phenomena being studied.

**Remember:** You are only required to discuss the kind of sampling (probability **OR** non-probability) and sampling techniques associated with the methodology that had been chosen.

*For example: If the qualitative research method was chosen then select non-probability sampling and an appropriate non-probability sampling technique. The chosen technique then needs to be defined and discussed using relevant theory and then justify the selection of the specific technique*.

**3.5.3 Sample Size**

The sample size must be explicitly stated (ensure that you justify why the sample size was chosen).

* If you are using the quantitative research approach – your sample size (number of respondents) should be a minimum of 50 (as per MANCOSA’s requirements).
* If you are using the qualitative research approach – your sample size should be 8 – 10 respondents (as per MANCOSA’s requirements).

**3.6 Research Instrument**

The research instrument should have been developed at the research proposal phase. However, should there be any changes to the objectives and the literature review, you will need to ensure that the research instrument is adjusted accordingly.

There are many different measuring instruments that can be utilized to collect the necessary data to answer the research questions. This discussion should include why particular instruments were used over others and what their appropriateness is to the study. The most commonly chosen research instruments are questionnaires and interviews.

The research instrument that was used should be indicated and described (these would generally include a survey or interview schedule). Thereafter, provide a discussion on how it was developed and its structure (number of questions, the different sections and so on).

**Remember: For every research question in the introduction section there should be at least:**

* 3 questions for a qualitative study excluding the demographics
* 5 questions for a quantitative study excluding the demographics

The questions you need to answer in this section are:

1. What research instrument options are there?

2. Which research instrument have you chosen and why?

3. How will your instrument answer the research questions?

4. How will the research instrument be administered?

**3.7 Pilot study**

* Define the term pilot study and explain the benefits/importance of conducting a pilot study.
* Discuss how many participants were targeted for the pilot study.
* For a quantitative study, the questionnaire should have been piloted on a sample of 10 participants.
* For qualitative studies, the interview questions should have been piloted using 1-2 participants.

**3.8 Reliability and validity (Quantitative)/ Trustworthiness (Qualitative)** (select one in alignment with the selected research methodology)

For a ***quantitative*** study discuss the following:

Validity and Reliability

**Validity and reliability deal with measurement quality.**

**Validity addresses the issue of whether the researcher is actually measuring what he/she has set out to measure. There are four specific criteria of validity – each of which the researcher would ideally want to establish for the research instrument prior to administering it for the actual study.** You will discuss how the four specific criteria for validity were considered in the questionnaire construction.

These include:

* *Construct validity* – identifies how well the research instrument measures the components of the research that it is meant to measure.
* *Content validity* – determines the degree to which the research instrument addresses the components of the study and the research topic.
* *Criterion-related validity* – determines how well the questions used in the research instrument measure the outcomes of the study.
* *Face validity* – is a simple form of validity where you apply a superficial and subjective assessment of whether or not your study or test measures what it is supposed to measure

**Reliability of a research instrument refers to the consistency or repeatability of the measurement of the phenomena. There are four criteria for reliability.** Discuss how these criteria for reliability were used in the questionnaire construction, as seen below.

* *Parallel forms of reliability* – is a measure of reliability obtained by administering different versions of an assessment/ research tool (both versions must contain items that probe the same construct, skill, knowledge base, etcetera) to the same group of individuals.
* *Test-retest reliability* – addresses the rigour of the research instrument by testing the same research instrument twice over the same period of time.
* *Internal consistency reliability* – determines how regularly the same answer is provided, particularly when measuring a specific variable. The consistency of the same response shows a reliability of the test.
* *Inter-rater reliability* – address the degree of agreement among the respondents.

For a ***qualitative*** study, you are required to discuss the trustworthiness of the study.

Criteria for Trustworthiness:

* *Credibility* – addresses how reliable the information provided in the study is. This is determined by ensuring that the sources of the information provided are reliable, in terms of peer-reviewed and accredited sources.
* *Transferability* – this determines the degree to which the results of the study can be generalized to another context or setting, when the concepts of the study are similar.
* *Dependability* – addresses the rigour of the data and results of the study through various challenges, like changes that occur through time.
* *Confirmability* – refers to how consistent the results of the study are with those of other reliable authors. You compare the results of the study with those of other studies to identify if the results are in-line with those of the other studies.

**3.9 Data analysis**

* This section must include a discussion on how data will be analysed.

**For a quantitative study:**

* Discuss descriptive and inferential statistics
* If you incorporated inferential statistics, the specific tests and measures that were applied to analyse the raw data must be referred to.

**NOTE:** Using inferential statistics is not a requirement at the Honours Level

* Specify the analysis software that was used (e.g. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS); Microsoft Excel).
* Thereafter, provide a discussion on the selected technique.

**For a qualitative study:**

* Specify which data analysis technique was used, for example, thematic analysis and so on.
* Specify the analysis software that was used (e.g. NVivo)
* Qualitative data analysis requires you to capture the literal responses from participants. This can be through audio-recordings or through written responses from participants. Note that the results from participants will be quoted in the presentation of results, as the direct words used by participants will represent the results of the study.

**3.10 Research Ethics: Key Considerations**

Provide a discussion on the following ethical considerations, citing relevant sources:

* Ensuring participants have given informed consent;
* Ensuring no harm comes to participants;
* Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity; and
* Ensuring that permission is obtained.

For each of the considerations discussed, you will need to define the consideration with reference and specify exactly what measures were taken to ensure that these were upheld in your study.

*For example, to ensure that participants give informed consent, you may draft informed consent forms advising participants of the nature and the scope of the study.*

**4. PROPOSED TIMETABLE**

* Consider the different sections of the research report.
* Formulate a table stating exactly when each vital stage in the research process will begin and when it will end.
* Take into consideration agreed upon feedback times from the supervisor and internal feedback times from the Postgraduate Research Department.

**5. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

* The Harvard system of referencing must be strictly adhered to.
* A correctly drafted bibliography is a minimum requirement for acceptance of the research proposal.
* Please ensure that all sources cited within the text are included in the bibliography.
* Sources must be cited in alphabetical order. As a general rule, do not number or bullet sources in the bibliography.
* Must be presented in alphabetical order.
* Do not indent sources listed.
* **The use of academic journal articles is compulsory.**
* **The use of Wikipedia and similar websites is not permitted as these are not considered to be credible academic sources.**

**6. APPENDICES**

The following appendices **MUST** be attached to the research proposal:

* **Appendix A:** Letter of Permission to Conduct the Study (approval from the organisation/government entity under study) \*Note if using SMMEs, signed consent forms must be attached to the research report
* **Appendix B:** Draft Covering Letter (to respondents, informing them of the aim of the study and any ethical considerations); and
* **Appendix C:** Draft Questionnaire / Interview guide
* **Appendix D:** Ethical Clearance Checklist
* **Appendix D: Ethical Clearance Checklist**

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| **Does your study cover research involving:** | **YES** | **NO** |
| Children (individuals under the age of 18 years) | **☐** | **☐** |
| Persons who are intellectually or mentally impaired | **☐** | **☐** |
| Persons who have experienced traumatic or stressful life circumstances | **☐** | **☐** |
| Persons who are HIV positive | **☐** | **☐** |
| Persons highly dependent on medical care | **☐** | **☐** |
| Persons in dependent or unequal relationships | **☐** | **☐** |
| Persons in captivity | **☐** | **☐** |
| Persons living in particularly vulnerable life circumstances | **☐** | **☐** |

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| If “Yes” indicate what measures you will take to protect the autonomy of respondents and (where indicated) to prevent social stigmatisation and/or secondary victimisation of respondents. If you are unsure about any of these concepts, please consult your supervisor/ project leader. |
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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Will data collection involve any of the following:** | **YES** | **NO** |
| Access to confidential information without prior consent of participants | ☐ | ☐ |
| Participants being required to commit an act which might diminish self-respect or cause them to experience shame, embarrassment, or regret | ☐ | ☐ |
| Participants being exposed to questions which may be experienced as stressful or upsetting, or to procedures which may have unpleasant or harmful side effects | ☐ | ☐ |
| The use of stimuli, tasks or procedures which may be experienced as stressful, noxious, or unpleasant | ☐ | ☐ |
| Any **form** of deception | ☐ | ☐ |

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| If “Yes” explain and justify. Explain what steps you will take to minimise the potential stress/harm. |
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| **Will any of the following instruments be used for purposes of data collection:** | **YES** | **NO** |
| Questionnaire (Structured, Semi-structured) | ☐ | ☐ |
| Interview schedule (one on one interviews, focus groups) | ☐ | ☐ |
| Observation Schedule | ☐ | ☐ |
| Psychometric test | ☐ | ☐ |
| Other | ☐ | ☐ |
| If data collection involves the use of a psychometric test or equivalent assessment instrument, you are required to provide evidence here that the measure is likely to provide a valid, reliable, and unbiased estimate of the construct being measured. If data collection involves interviews and/or focus groups, please provide a list of the topics to be covered/ kinds of questions to be asked. | | |
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| **Will the autonomy of participants be protected through the use of an informed consent form, which specifies (in language that respondents will understand):** | **YES** | **NO** |
| The nature and purpose/s of the research | ☐ | ☐ |
| The identity and institutional association of the researcher and supervisor/project leader and their contact details | ☐ | ☐ |
| The fact that participation is voluntary | ☐ | ☐ |
| That responses will be treated in a confidential manner | ☐ | ☐ |
| Any limits on confidentiality which may apply | ☐ | ☐ |
| That anonymity will be ensured where appropriate (e.g. coded/ disguised names of participants/ respondents/ institutions) | ☐ | ☐ |
| The fact that participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves | ☐ | ☐ |
| The nature and limits of any benefits participants may receive as a result of their participation in the research | ☐ | ☐ |
| Is a copy of the informed consent **form** attached? | ☐ | ☐ |
| If not, this needs to be explained and justified, also the measures to be adopted to ensure that the respondents fully understand the nature of the research and the consent that they are giving. | | |
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| **Specify what efforts been made or will be made to obtain informed permission for the research from appropriate authorities and gate-keepers (including caretakers or legal guardians in the case of minor children)?** |
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| **How will the research data collected via the interview or questionnaire be safely stored and subsequently be disposed of?** |

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| **In the subsequent dissemination of your research findings – in the form of the finished thesis, oral presentations, publication etc. – how will anonymity/ confidentiality be protected?** |

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| **Is this research supported by funding that is likely to inform or impact in any way on the design, outcome and dissemination of the research?** | **YES**  **☐** | **NO**  **☐** |
| **If yes, this needs to be explained and justified.** | | |

***\*\*Appendix D serves as a provisional checklist to confirm that the research proposal meets ethical requirements. In the event that formal ethical approval is required, the complete ethical clearance application form needs to be submitted for review by the Research Ethics Sub-committee*\*\***

**FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Research Coordinator |  | | | |
| Unique EC reference number |  | | | |
| Proposal approved / provisionally approved | ❑ | Yes | ❑ | No |
| Ethical clearance granted | ❑ | Yes | ❑ | No |
| Refer to Committee for approval | ❑ | Yes | ❑ | No |
| Referral date |  | | | |