

The value of personal statements - Privacy Notice

Who is undertaking this research project?

The research project is being undertaken by a research team based in the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) within the University of Essex

Institute of Social and Economic Research,
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Colchester,
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Web: <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk>

The University of Essex is registered as a data controller with the Information Commissioner's Office (Registration Number: Z699129X).

The Data Protection Officer for the University of Essex is ;

Clare Chatfield
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What are the purpose(s) for which data are being processed within this research project?

"The value of personal statements" is a project funded by the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change at the University of Essex. It will answer three academic research questions:

- What aspects of the content of personal statements submitted with UCAS applications are correlated with student demographic characteristics?
- Does the content of personal statements help explain demographic inequalities in outcomes from university applications?
- What is the impact of the reform to the personal statement, breaking it down into three separate questions for applicants for 2026 entry onwards, on inequalities in personal statement attributes and outcomes from university applications?

What is the legal basis under which data is processed within this research project?

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a legal basis is required for processing of personal data. The legal basis under which data is processed within this project is:

Article 6 (1) (e) – “processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller;”

Processing of data concerning gender and ethnicity (and other ‘special categories’ of data) requires the fulfilment of an additional condition under GDPR. The specific condition fulfilled by the processing of such data within this project is:

Article 9 (2) (j) – “processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes in accordance with Article 89(1) based on Union or Member State law which shall be proportionate to the aim pursued, respect the essence of the right to data protection and provide for suitable and specific measures to safeguard the fundamental rights and the interests of the data subject.”

When relying on this condition for processing special categories of personal data, an organisation must determine which condition of the Data Protection Act 2018, Schedule 1 Part 1 supports that processing. For this project that will be Condition 4 as the data will be processed for Scientific Research.

For further information, see: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/>

Which sources of data are being used by this research project?

Administrative data from prospective students’ applications to study undergraduate degrees at the University of Essex.

How is the data being collected within this research project?

All data has been collected by the University of Essex or by UCAS, the University and Colleges Admissions Service. No new primary data are being collected for this project.

What categories of data will be obtained from these sources?

The data on applicants to Essex (whether direct applicants or those via UCAS) to be analysed at ISER will contain the text of a personal statement and reference letter, information about the course that the student has applied for, their demographic and prior educational characteristics, and the outcome of the application.

Will my data be used by the research project?

It is impossible for the Project Team to determine if your data is included within the secondary data provided to us by the University of Essex Admissions Office since these data are functionally anonymised. ISER cannot identify any living individual from the data received

Data will be used to produce statistical summaries and models. All outputs will be rigorously checked to ensure there is no risk that information about individuals or small numbers of individuals can be identified from any published outputs.

Can I opt-out of the use of my data by the research project?

ISER have no way of knowing who is included within the data sets supplied to us by the University of Essex Admissions Office since all data are functionally anonymised when we receive them. You cannot therefore opt out of this project by contacting ISER.

How will my privacy be protected?

The project will use anonymised data for analysis purposes. This means that no identifiable data, such as name and address, will be included in the data obtained by the research team at the Institute for Social and Economic Research. The data requested are necessary and sufficient to build a statistical model of the effect of school holidays on children's and adults physical activity levels.

All data received at the Institute for Social and Economic Research will be securely stored within an infrastructure that is certified to the Internationally agreed standard for Information Security (ISO27001:2013) and will be managed in accordance with the Data Sharing Agreements that govern the use of the data obtained from the different sources. Access to the data will be restricted to a small number of named and approved members of the research team.

What are my rights in relation to the data?

The General Data Protection Regulation provides the following rights for individuals in relation to their personal data:

The right to be informed
The right of access
The right of rectification
The right to erasure
The right to restrict processing
The right to data portability
The right to object
Rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling

For further information, see: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/individual-rights/> .

A summary of these rights and their applicability in respect of this project is provided in the table below.

Right	Applies to this project ?	Rationale
The right to be informed	Yes	Details regarding the project and its use of data are provided within this privacy notice.

The right of access	No	The research team are unable to determine the data that relates to a specific data subject.
The right to rectification	No	The research team are unable to determine the data that relates to a specific data subject.
The right to erasure	No	The research team are unable to determine the data that relates to a specific data subject.
The right to restrict processing	No	The research team are unable to determine the data that relates to a specific data subject.
The right to data portability	No	The research team are unable to determine the data that relates to a specific data subject.
The right to object	No	The research team are unable to determine the data that relates to a specific data subject.
Rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling	No	The research team are unable to determine the data that relates to a specific data subject.

Will my data be transferred to any organisations outside of the University of Essex?

No data will be transferred outside of the University of Essex.

How long will my data be retained by the research project?

Data will be retained by the research team until 31/01/2028 in the first instance, to facilitate the completion of the research. The retention period may be amended if both parties agree it is needed when this data sharing agreement is reviewed.

What approvals have been obtained by the research project?

The research project has successfully obtained:

Ethical approval from the University of Essex ethics sub-committee 1

What if I have further questions?

The Data Controllers for University of Essex, ICO registration number Z699129X. Their data protection officer may be contacted at dataprotectionofficer@essex.ac.uk

Additionally, any queries or concerns regarding the processing of personal data can be made to the Information Commissioner's Office (<https://ico.org.uk>).