Dear Researcher

We kindly request that you take a moment to review the following important points:

Please find below a template created by the Faculty Ethics Screening Committee (FESC). This template will be used to generate the "changes requested" email that you will receive after your initial ethics application submission.

1. Please note that, after the first submission, 99% of ethics applications are typically returned for minor changes. However, in some cases, more significant changes may be required, which could result in delays.
2. To help ensure a smooth process and minimise the need for major changes, we encourage you to carefully review and apply the information provided below. This will support you in submitting a thorough and complete ethics application.
3. The "changes requested" list below is designed to cover a broad range of research areas, so some points may not apply to your specific project. We trust you will use your best judgement to determine which changes requested are applicable to your research.

The FESC has been appointed by the Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural, and Education Research (REC: SBE) to ensure that your application meets all the necessary requirements.

The REC: SBE applies a rigorous review process to ethics applications. If the REC: SBE returns your application to you with stipulations or modification requests, it can lead to significant delays. To help avoid this, the FESC is adopting a cautious and thorough approach in reviewing our Faculty's applications to ensure they meet REC: SBE requirements before submission.

SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

- Please run the "Completeness Check" on your application form to identify any incomplete sections, including unsigned fields.
- Two electronic signatures are required for auto-submission – your own and your supervisor's:
    - First, sign the application form yourself (refer to pages 8 - 9 of THIS guide for assistance).
    - Then, click the "Request Signature" button to prompt your supervisor to sign the form.
    - Once both signatures are in place, the system will automatically submit your application.
- Please follow up with your supervisor to ensure they've signed the form. If you encounter any technical issues, contact Ms Jennifer de Beer at jad@sun.ac.za.
- Once your supervisor has signed, I will receive your application and send a confirmation email within 48 hours. If you don't hear from me within that time, please contact me.
- I will review your application and send you a "changes requested" email within 7 days of receipt.
- After you resubmit your application, I will review it within a few days to confirm that all changes have been made. If complete, your application will be forwarded to an academic member of the FESC for review (please allow approximately 7 days).
- If no further revisions are required, I will then forward your application to the REC: SBE.
- If your application is classified as **low risk**, you will receive an email shortly after REC: SBE submission confirming that you may begin data collection. If your application is **medium risk**, please wait for formal approval via email from the REC: SBE before commencing data collection.

GRAMMAR, SPELLING & PUNCTUATION

- Please be aware that our FESC members are likely to reject an ethics application if it hasn't been carefully proofread for grammar, punctuation, abbreviations/acronyms, sentence construction, and spelling. This review should be applied to your application form, as well as all supporting documents – i.e. your research proposal, consent form, application letter, and data collection materials.

- To help ensure your documents are polished and professional, we recommend using the free application "Grammarly". Here's how you can use it:

  1) Download and install Grammarly on your desktop or laptop. 2) Sign up for a free account. 3) Start a new document by either clicking "New" or "Upload". 4) If you click "New," you can copy and paste your text directly into Grammarly. 5) If you click "Upload," you can upload any MS Word document from your device. 6) Grammarly will automatically check your text and suggest improvements. 7) If your document is in PDF format, you can use the "Save As" option to convert it to an MS Word document, then follow step 3. We hope you find this tool helpful in preparing your application for resubmission.

SECTION 2 *[Project information]*

- **Question 2.2:**
  - Please provide a summary of the background and rationale for your research project. In particular, include details about your research design and methodology (i.e. a brief summary of your responses to Questions 5.2 and 5.3).
  - Please state that this application is considered a "phased" application, seeing as your project will be executed in various phases, with data collected in the first phase influencing subsequent phases of your research.
- **Question 2.3:**
  - Please download Template 10 - Research Proposal and use it to draft your research proposal.
    - This template aligns directly with the application form questions, making completion faster and ensuring that nothing is missed. A copy-paste crosswalk allows information to be transferred quickly and accurately. It includes a 7,500-word cap (a requirement from the REC) with section length guides, as well as prompts that highlight permissions, identifiers, and data use requirements to cover key ethical considerations.
    - The 7,500-word cap is excluding the your references/bibliography (Section 7 of Template 10).
  - Please incorporate detailed responses to each of these nine questions in the methodology section of your research proposal.
  - Please include a detailed section or chapter in your research proposal dedicated to the ethical considerations of your project, referencing the information provided in THIS example.
  - The REC: SBE understands an "interview" to be a one-on-one discussion between a researcher and a participant, typically guided by a list of semi-structured, unstructured, or structured questions, with responses often recorded verbally. Interviews allow for a more interactive and in-depth exploration of topics. In contrast, a "survey" or "questionnaire" refers to a set of written questions administered to individuals to gather information, which can be done in person, by mail, over the phone, or online. Surveys or questionnaires are more standardised, requesting the same data from a larger group. Please ensure the correct terminology is used throughout your application form, research proposal, and supporting documents. Additionally, select the appropriate option in response to Question 7.2.
  - In the methodology section, please include details regarding the expected or minimum sample size, as the participating company will need to know how many employees may be approached.
  - If you've selected Option 2 in response to Question 4.1, please request the data provider to provide you with an Anonymisation Assurance Statement, i.e. a formal, written confirmation (email or letter) provided by the organisation supplying the data – that the dataset has been fully anonymised before being shared with you, and that there is no reasonable possibility of re-identifying any individual from it. The written confirmation should state that:
    - All identifiers have been removed.

- No indirect identifiers (e.g., rare purchase patterns, dates that could be linked) are left that could re-identify a customer.
- The researcher has no access to linkage keys.
- Please incorporate all of the above information into your research proposal.

- You've added "n/a" under Section 4.6 of your research proposal. However, seeing as you are currently employed by ___, which is also one of the participating institutions, please consider the following: acknowledge and mitigate power dynamics in the workplace (e.g. perceived pressure to participate), clarify how you will avoid introducing bias from your insider knowledge, explain how participant anonymity will be protected in a small organisation, describe where and how data will be securely stored (independent from your company's systems), and provide detail about the independent reviewer's role and confirm confidentiality protections.
  Below is more detailed guidance on this matter – please be sure, though, to rephrase it in your own words when incorporating it into your research proposal, rather than copying it directly:
  - Power dynamics and perceived pressure:
    - ❖ Even if not in a managerial role, the researcher is a colleague at your company. Participants might feel subtle pressure to participate or give favourable answers, especially if they report to or work closely with the researcher.
    - ❖ Please explicitly state in the *consent form* that participation (or refusal) will have no impact on the participant's job, evaluation, or work relationship, and that their manager will not be informed of who participated.
  - Access to internal information:
    - ❖ As an employee, you may have pre-existing knowledge of your company's internal systems, strategies, or operations, which could introduce bias in interpretation or affect how questions are framed or probed.
    - ❖ Please mention that you will rely solely on interview data, not personal knowledge, during analysis and reporting, and state this clearly in the ethics application.
  - Participant anonymity within a small work environment:
    - ❖ Your company may have a relatively small or specialised team, which increases the chance that participants may be identifiable, even if names and titles are removed.
    - ❖ Please include a strategy for protecting anonymity in small teams (e.g. avoiding quotes or examples that could unintentionally identify someone) and avoid using role-specific language that could make someone identifiable by inference.
  - Data security and access:
    - ❖ There's a risk that work computers or shared internal systems may be used to store identifiable data, especially given the dual role as employee and researcher.
    - ❖ Please confirm that all identifiable data (e.g. interview recordings) will be stored on secure, private, password-protected drives not linked to your company's infrastructure, and not shared with the institution.
  - Clarity on reviewer role (internal verification):
    - ❖ If a "trusted manager" will verify internal findings, this introduces another layer of risk: if the manager is not fully independent, it could influence the tone of reporting.

- ❖ Clarify that the manager is not a participant, not involved in supervision, and that they will only review non-confidential, anonymised, aggregated findings to help confirm interpretations – not to approve or influence conclusions.

- Please incorporate all the information in your amended *consent form* (refer to Questions 5.16 and/or 5.17), and in your amended responses to Questions 5.2 and 5.3 of the application form, into the methodology section of your research proposal.
- Please review and, if necessary, update the information in your research proposal and supporting documents to ensure consistency with your amended responses in the application form.
- Please state that this application is considered a "phased" application, seeing as your project will be executed in various phases, with data collected in the first phase influencing subsequent phases of your research.

- **Question 2.4**:
  - **Question 2.4.1:** Please indicate whether the funder has any specific requirements regarding the ethics review and approval of your project. If there are any special requirements, please list them.
- **Question 2.6**: Based on your feedback in response to Question 5.2, it appears that you may have had preliminary discussions with prospective participants (which is perfectly acceptable). If so, please select "yes" for this question.
  - **Question 2.6.1:** To clarify, please also state that no formal recruitment has taken place and that no data has been collected for this research project as of yet.

SECTION 3 ***[SU Principal Investigator (PI/applicant details]***

- **Question 3.2:** If you are an undergraduate student, please select the "undergraduate" option at the bottom of the drop-down list.
- **Question 3.3:**
  - **Question 3.3.2:** Please clarify whether you will collect data from individuals who may be in an *unequal* power relationship with you as the main researcher. For instance, if you intend to interview employees who hold positions lower than yours in the organisational hierarchy, this impacts how these individuals should be invited to participate in your study. The goal is to ensure that prospective participants do not feel any pressure or obligation to take part due to your position of authority.
  - **Question 3.3.3:**
    - It is essential that your colleagues do not feel under any pressure to participate in your research. Please describe how you plan to address and mitigate any of the potential concerns outlined below:
      - ❖ Awareness of Positionality: Reflect on your dual role as a researcher and employee, recognising how your position within the organisation might influence participant responses or your interpretations of the data.
      - ❖ Neutral Framing: Design research questions and communication materials to minimise leading or biased language.
      - ❖ Blind Data Analysis: Anonymise data before analysis to reduce unconscious bias during interpretation.
      - ❖ Peer Review: Involve external reviewers or colleagues who are not part of the study to check for bias in research design, data collection, and interpretation.
      - ❖ Voluntary Participation: Ensure participants understand there are no consequences for declining to participate or for their responses.

- ❖ Third-Party Facilitation: The FESC strongly advises that you use a neutral third party to invite participants to participate in your research to reduce power imbalances.
- ❖ Separate Work Relationships: Avoid including direct reports or supervisors in the study to prevent coercion or undue influence.

- Please include your response to this question in the "ethical considerations" section in your research proposal.

- **Question 3.4:**
  - EthicsRM usually auto-populates this section with information from the SU database. However, it seems this didn't happen with your application. To resolve this, please click HERE and follow the steps to update your personal details.
  - If you would like to change your email address, as displayed under Question 3.4, please click HERE and follow the steps to update your email address.
- **Question 3.6:**
  - If you are unable to add your SU-affiliated supervisor(s) – for instance, if no results appear when entering their name, surname, or email address – it is likely that your supervisor does not yet have a profile on EthicsRM. To resolve this, kindly ask your supervisor to log in at https://applyethics.sun.ac.za. Logging in once will automatically generate their profile, after which you will be able to add them to your application.
  - If your SU-affiliated supervisor wishes to update the email address reflected under Question 3.6, please request them to click HERE and follow the instructions provided to update their email address accordingly.

SECTION 3 *[Research assistants / Field workers]*

- **Question 3.8**:
  - If research assistants, fieldworkers, and/or external research companies will be involved in participant recruitment, please select "yes" for this question. In such cases, kindly use Template 9 as a basis for preparing a confidentiality/non-disclosure agreement (NDA) to be signed by the third party. Please ensure that all relevant sections of the template are completed, and upload the final signed document under this section of the application form.
  - Please state in both your *consent form* and *application letter for institutional permission* that the third party will be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement.
  - If you are using an external third party (i.e. someone outside of Stellenbosch University) to assist with the translation and/or transcription of your research data, please select "no" for this question. However, please consult with the SU Contracts Office (contracts@sun.ac.za) for guidance on whether a Data Transfer Agreement (DTA) is required. If the Contracts Office confirms that a DTA is needed, please select "yes" for Question 6.8.
  - Please also state in both your *consent form* and *Application Letter for Institutional Permission* that a Data Transfer Agreement (DTA) will be completed.

SECTION 3 *[Conflict of interest statement]*

- **Question 3.9:**
  - Since your study involves participants who may be your colleagues, please clarify the following:
    - Are any of the participants part of your immediate team, or do they report to you directly or indirectly?
    - How do you plan to manage any perceived pressure to participate, given your insider role?
    - What steps will you take to minimise potential bias during both participant recruitment and data interpretation?

- Please reflect on your dual role and explain how you intend to manage the risk of insider bias. For example, will you involve external reviewers, anonymise data prior to analysis, or include peer oversight to promote objectivity?
- You have indicated that the company funding your research is also actively involved, either by providing data for analysis or through the participation of its employees. Kindly confirm the following:
    - Will the funder have access to any identifiable data or preliminary results?
    - What safeguards are in place to ensure that the funder does not influence the research findings?
    - Will you include a conflict of interest declaration in your final report or any resulting publications?
- A non-disclosure agreement (NDA) is not required unless the participating institution specifically requests it. If such a request is made, please contact the Division for Research Development (DRD) at contracts@sun.ac.za to ensure the correct legal procedures are followed.

SECTION 4 *[Does this project require ethics review?]*

- **Question 4.1 - Option 1:** Please select the tick box for the following option: *I will collect data from (or interact with) one or more individuals through interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, video recording, etc*.
- **Question 4.1 - Option 2:** Since the data you will be collecting from ___ pertains to ___, and is related to human beings (rather than, for example, soil samples or financial records), please select the tick box for the following option: *I need access to confidential data or information (or archival data, contact lists or reports), of an organisation (or institution or company) where the data is not available in the public domain (i.e. not available to the general public). The data can be linked to individuals (or clients or employees, etc.).*
- **Question 4.1 - Option 2:** If you select Option 2: A non-disclosure agreement (NDA) is not required unless the participating institution requests one. If such a request is made, you are strongly advised to contact the Division for Research Development (DRD) at contracts@sun.ac.za to ensure the appropriate legal procedures are followed.
- **Question 4.1 - Option 3:** If the data you will be collecting from ___ is indeed linked to individuals, even if it does not contain personal identifiers, please *de-select* the tick box for the following option: *I am collaborating with an institution (or organisation or company) that is giving me access to physical data (or financial data) that is NOT linked to individuals or any personal accounts (or information). I have been granted access to this data by an authorised representative of the organisation (or institution or company).*
- **Question 4.1 - Option 3:** If you select Option 3: A non-disclosure agreement (NDA) is *not* required unless the participating institution requests one. If such a request is made, you are strongly advised to contact the Division for Research Development (DRD) at contracts@sun.ac.za to ensure the appropriate legal procedures are followed.
- **Question 4.1 - Option 4:** Please select the tick box for the following option: *I will have access to a database/archive that holds information linked to personal identifiers (e.g. names, ID numbers, account numbers, student numbers); AND/OR the database contains coded information but I have access to the codes that link the information to personal identifiers.*
- **Question 4.1 - Option 4:** If you select Option 4: A non-disclosure agreement (NDA) is *not* required unless the participating institution requests one. If such a request is made, you are strongly advised to contact the Division for Research Development (DRD) at contracts@sun.ac.za to ensure the appropriate legal procedures are followed.
- **Question 4.1 - Option 5:** Please select the tick box for the following option: *I will gather information/data that is available in the public domain, but that could be regarded as sensitive or potentially sensitive information (e.g. you will collect data via social media networks or public profiles such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook).*

- **Question 4.2:** Please incorporate your response to this question into the methodology section of your research proposal.

SECTION 5 ***[Participants requiring special/careful consideration by the REC: SBE]***

- **Question 5.1:**
    - Please select the tick box for the following participant category: *Stellenbosch University staff, students,or alumni*
    - Please select the tick box for the following participant category: *Persons functioning or operating in dependent or unequal relationships that could influence their voluntary participation in this study*
    - If you plan to invite students, staff, or alumni of Stellenbosch University (SU) to participate in your research, you must apply for institutional permission as soon as possible from SU's Division for Information Governance (IG). Institutional permission is required solely because the participants are affiliated with SU, even if your research topic is unrelated to SU or its processes.
    - The approval process can take up to 12 weeks during peak periods.
    - Submitting an ethics application does not automatically include an application for institutional permission – you need to apply separately via the IG Service Desk: www.sun.ac.za/permission.
    - A letter of institutional permission from IG is required before you may start your data collection (e.g., before inviting students or staff to participate).
        - Urgent queries about institutional permission: permission@sun.ac.za
        - Urgent queries about privacy: privacy@sun.ac.za
        - General information: www.sun.ac.za/paia and www.sun.ac.za/privacy
    - The ethics application form requires proof of institutional permission, while the institutional permission application form requires proof of ethics clearance. To ensure that delays in one process will not automatically affect the outcome of the other, follow these tips to avoid delays:
        - When completing your *ethics* application, upload a screenshot of the IG confirmation email (click HERE to view an example) showing you have applied for institutional permission.
        - When completing your *institutional permission* application, include your ethics application reference number (e.g., ING-2025-29040) as proof you have applied for ethics clearance.
    - **Question 5.1.3:** Once you have submitted your application to the IG Service Desk, you will receive a confirmation email. Please upload a copy of this email to your ethics application. The email should resemble THIS example.

SECTION 5 ***[Participant recruitment and selection]***

- **Question 5.2:**
    - Please indicate whether your inclusion criteria require any specific background information (e.g. minimum education level, years of experience in a particular field, or length of employment at the organisation).
    - If applicable, list this information in full, as it forms part of the eligibility criteria for participation.
    - Please incorporate a brief summary (1 – 2 sentences) of your inclusion criteria in:
        - Section 4 ("Why do we invite you to participate") of Template 1 (written consent for *in-person* interviews)

        - Section 4 ("Why do we invite you to participate") of Template 2 (electronic consent for *online* interviews)
        - Section 4 ("Why do we invite you to participate") of Template 3 (electronic consent for surveys/questionnaires)
    - Please insert your full list of screening questions (i.e. inclusion criteria) at the beginning of your *Data Collection* document (interview or survey), to ensure only eligible individuals proceed with participation.
    - Please include your complete response to this question in the methodology section of your research proposal.
    - Participants under the age of 18 may not be included in your study. Kindly state this in both your ethics application form and your research proposal.
- **Question 5.3:**
    - Thank you for the valuable information included in your response. While most points have been addressed, please ensure that your response covers *all nine* of the standard questions (available HERE).
    - For ease of review, please number your responses from 1 to 9 so that reviewers can clearly verify that each question has been addressed. This numbering system should be used only in your response to Question 5.3.
    - Although most of these nine questions are already covered in Section 4.7 of Template 10, kindly incorporate your full response to this question into the methodology section of your research proposal.
- **Question 5.4:**
    - Since participants will be invited via email, advertisement, social media post, or flyer/poster, please select "yes" for this question.
    - When preparing your recruitment letter, please include the following information:
        - Use the first person (e.g. "I am a Master's student at Stellenbosch University, currently conducting research for my Master's project…").
        - Keep the letter to one A4 page in length.
        - Insert the following sentence: "The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research at Stellenbosch University has approved this study (project ID: ING-2025-____)."
        - A brief summary (one to two sentences) of your research.
        - A short explanation (one to two sentences) of why participants are being invited, based on the inclusion criteria (refer to your response to Question 5.2).
        - A concise description of how data will be collected (e.g. in-person interviews, online interviews, surveys).
        - A summary of what type of information participants will be asked to share (e.g. personal opinions, work-related experiences).
        - A conservative estimate of the time commitment required (e.g. "The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete."). Please note that the REC: SBE may query applications where participation time appears to be underestimated.
        - Please include a sentence or two explaining that participants will be asked to complete a *written* and/or *electronic* consent form prior to participating in the research. There are three consent forms (Templates 1 – 3).
            - Participants need to sign Template 1 if they are participating in *in-person* interviews or *in-person* surveys/questionnaires.
            - Participants need to electronically sign Template 2 if they are participating in *online interviews*.

- ❖ Participants need to click "start" in Template 3 if they are participating in *online surveys/questionnaires*.
- ❖ If participants take part in more than one of the above data collection methods, they must receive a *separate* consent form that corresponds to each method in which they are involved.

- If the recruitment material is in the form of a letter attached to an email, please add the latest Stellenbosch University logo at the top of the letter. The Snipping Tool can be used to capture and insert the logo if needed.
- To protect the confidentiality of prospective participants, please make use of the Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) field when sending the email invitation, rather than asking recipients not to "reply all."

SECTION 5 *[Informed consent process]*

- **Question 5.11:** The REC: SBE requires that a *consent form* be used for all forms of data collection, regardless of whether the data is anonymous or whether personal or organisational information is collected. Obtaining informed consent is essential before conducting any interviews, surveys, questionnaires, or focus groups.
- Consent must be obtained through one of the following processes – please select the relevant tick box(es) based on your study design. If participants take part in more than one of the above data collection methods, they must receive a *separate* consent form that corresponds to each method in which they are involved:
  - Option 1 (only for *in-person* interviews or *in-person* surveys/questionnaires): *I will obtain written consent from prospective participants/respondents.*
    - Participants need to sign Template 1 if they are participating in *in-person* interviews or *in-person* surveys/questionnaires.
  - Option 2 (only for *online* interviews or *online* surveys/questionnaires): *I will obtain consent from participants/respondents by means of an electronic consent process.*
    - Participants need to electronically sign Template 2 if they are participating in *online interviews*.
    - Participants need to click "start" in Template 3 if they are participating in *online surveys/questionnaires*.
  - Option 3 (only applicable in exceptional cases): *I will use a verbal informed consent process (Note that a verbal consent process can only be approved with sufficient justification as to why a written or electronic consent process is not appropriate).*
  - **Question 5.11a:** Although your research is fully anonymous, it would normally be required to obtain written or electronic consent from prospective participants. However, given that you are inviting commuters to participate, and their level of literacy is uncertain, the use of verbal consent is acceptable in this instance.
- **Question 5.13:** Please select "yes" for this question *(will participants be allowed to refuse to answer questions during the data collection process).*
- **Question 5.14:** Please select "yes" for this question *(will participants be given the right to withdraw from participating in the study at any given time during the project).*
  - **Question 5.14.1:**
    - Please state that participants have the right to withdraw from the interview or survey at any time – either before or during the process – without any obligation or pressure to continue.
    - Please confirm that, should a participant choose to withdraw, any related data (e.g. written notes or electronic responses) will be disregarded or destroyed.
    - While optional, it is recommended that you provide participants with the opportunity to create a unique six-digit ID code at the start of your survey/questionnaire. If they

later wish to withdraw after submission (within a reasonable time frame), they may contact you using this code to request the removal of their data.

- Design your questionnaire to allow submission even if some questions are left unanswered. To avoid discouraging participation, consider including a "Prefer not to answer" option for sensitive questions and ensure that not all questions are mandatory. Incomplete responses can be managed during analysis, and missing data may still yield useful insights.

- **Question 5.15:** Please select either the "copy of informed consent form" option or, if not applicable to your study, select the "not applicable" option.

SECTION 5 *[Informed consent form(s)]*

- **Question 5.16 (written consent for *in-person* interviews or *in-person* surveys/questionnaires):**
  - Please complete a *written* consent form if you intend to:
    - conduct face-to-face or *in-person* interviews, or
    - administer face-to-face or *in-person* surveys/questionnaires.
  - Participants *only* need to complete the consent form relevant to their method of participation: if attending an *in-person* interview, they must sign Template 1; if attending an *online interview*, they must sign Template 2; and if completing an *online survey*, they must sign Template 3.
  - Thank you for uploading your *written* consent form. Please note that the Research Ethics Committee (REC: SBE) updated all consent form templates in May 2025 to ensure POPIA compliance. You are therefore kindly requested to copy the content of your current form into the updated REC-approved template (Template 1).
  - When completing Template 1, please ensure the following:
    - Add detailed information under each sub-section heading before uploading your form to Question 5.16 of the application.
    - Do not delete or modify any of the sub-headings (e.g. "Who is conducting this study?", "Why do we invite you to participate?", etc.).
    - Delete the instruction box at the top and any text marked in red.
  - Please refer to your response to Question 5.2 and incorporate the relevant information under Section 4 ("Why do we invite you to participate?") of Template 1.
  - Include a brief, conservative estimate of the time required for participation (e.g. "The interview will take approximately 20 minutes to complete") under Section 4 ("What will be asked of me?"). The REC: SBE may return applications where the estimated time appears to be underestimated.
  - Please include your Project ID in the following sentence: The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research at Stellenbosch University has approved this study (Project ID: ING-2025-_ _ _ _ _).
- **Question 5.17 (electronic consent for *online* interviews or *online* surveys/questionnaires):**
  - Please complete an *electronic* consent form if you plan to:
    - conduct online interviews, or
    - administer online surveys/questionnaires.
  - Participants *only* need to complete the consent form relevant to their method of participation: if attending an *in-person* interview, they must sign Template 1; if attending an *online interview*, they must sign Template 2; and if completing an *online survey*, they must sign Template 3.

- Thank you for uploading your electronic consent form. Please note that the Research Ethics Committee updated all consent form templates in May 2025 to ensure POPIA compliance. You are therefore kindly requested to copy the content of your current form into the updated REC-approved template – Template 2 for online interviews and Template 3 for online surveys/questionnaires.
- If your study includes both online interviews and online surveys/questionnaires, please complete both templates. To upload both forms under Question 5.17, click the blue "Upload Document" icon a second time after uploading the first form.
- When completing Template 2 or Template 3, please ensure the following:
  - Add detailed information under each sub-section heading before uploading your form to Question 5.17 of the application.
  - Do not delete or modify any of the sub-headings (e.g. "Introduction", "Who is conducting this study", etc.).
  - Delete the instruction box at the top and any text marked in red.
- Please refer to your response to Question 5.2 and incorporate the relevant information under Section 4 ("Why do we invite you to participate?") of the consent form.
- Include a brief, conservative estimate of the time required for participation (e.g. "The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete") under Section 4 ("What will be asked of me?"). The REC: SBE may return applications where the estimated time appears underestimated.
- Please include your Project ID in the following sentence: The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research at Stellenbosch University has approved this study (Project ID: ING-2025-_ _ _ _ _).
- *Optional:* Before distributing your survey, you may want to combine the electronic consent form and survey into a single document by placing the questionnaire directly below the completed consent form. This way, participants can review and indicate their consent (by selecting an "X") before moving on to the survey questions. If you choose this option, please ensure that the *full* consent form appears, in its entirety, at the beginning of the survey document.

- **Question 5.16 / 5.17:** You have already included some of the necessary confidentiality details; however, please expand on this section in your consent form by incorporating the applicable examples below (or appropriate variations thereof):
  - The information collected during this interview/questionnaire will be used solely for research purposes related to my thesis.
  - You will not be asked to provide any personal information that could identify you as an individual.
  - Your identity will not be disclosed or published. The only personal information requested may include general descriptors (e.g. job title or area of expertise), but your name and the name of your employer will not be recorded.
  - Your name will be replaced with an ID code in the research report.
  - The research report will not include direct quotes or any content that can be linked to personal identifiers.
  - All correspondence between you and the researcher will be treated as confidential and accessible only to my supervisor and me.
  - Your responses will be assigned a unique reference number, which will be used to manage and identify the data in the thesis.
- **Question 5.20:**
  - If English may be a second or third language for some of your prospective participants, you are encouraged to complete both Template 7 (English/Xhosa for printed forms) and

Template 8 (English/Xhosa for electronic forms), allowing participants to choose the version they prefer to sign.

- You may add information under each sub-section in Template 7 or Template 8, but please do not delete or modify any of the sub-headings. Once all missing sections (marked in yellow) have been completed in English, please upload the amended bilingual consent form under Question 5 of the application form.
- Guidance on template use:
  - Use Template 7 if the consent form will be handed to participants during a face-to-face interview.
  - Use Template 8 if the consent form will be emailed or integrated into a questionnaire/survey.

SECTION 5 *[Assessment of the potential risks and benefits]*

- **Question 5.21:**
  - Applicable to *all* ethics applicatons: Please select the "minimal inconvenience of time commitment or travel" option.
  - If your interview or survey questions relate to the organisational processes or procedures of a participant's employer, please select the "potential stigmatisation/reputational risks/embarrassment" option.
  - If your interview or survey questions relate to the organisational processes or procedures of a participant's employer, please select the "loss or breach of confidentiality" option.
  - If your interview or survey questions relate to sensitive topics or issues that may evoke a strong emotional response, please select the "emotional distress/psychological trauma" option.
  - If any part of your data collection process could potentially result in accidental injury, please select the "physical injury or harm" option.
- **Question 5.22:**
  - **Question 5.22.1:** Please provide a detailed description of the steps you will take to ensure the safety of both yourself and the participants during the data collection process. Your response should address the following:
    - Measures to protect participants' reputational safety, particularly if interview questions involve feedback on organisational processes. Given the potential risk of stigmatisation, reputational harm, or embarrassment, explain how you will safeguard participants' identities and ensure confidentiality throughout.
    - Physical safety measures for in-person interviews, including any precautions based on the crime rate in the specific community or area where data collection will occur. If the risk is negligible, please state so; otherwise, outline the steps you will implement.
    - Any challenges you anticipate when working in unfamiliar settings or areas with potential cultural or language barriers, and how you will address them.

SECTION 6 *[Collecting personal information]*

- **Question 6.2:**
  - **Question 6.2.1:** Please select the "Add Another" option (marked in green), and then select all other applicable options that reflect the types of personal information you will access during your study:
    - Background information (e.g. academic qualifications, professional experience)
    - Biometric information (e.g. fingerprints, facial recognition data)
    - Contact details (e.g. email address, phone number)

        - Correspondence (e.g. email communications, letters)
        - Demographic information (e.g. age, gender)
        - Financial information (e.g. salary data, bank account details)
        - Identifiers (e.g. ID numbers, employee numbers)
        - Personal opinions (e.g. views on organisational policies, perspectives on industry practices)
    - **Question 6.2.2:**
        - Please list the specific types of personal information you will access, and respond separately for each option selected in Question 6.2.1.
        - For example, if you selected "background information", specify the exact type of information you will collect (e.g. educational qualifications, work history) and explain why it is necessary.
        - If you selected "identifiers", describe in detail how participant anonymity will be protected. You may copy and paste relevant details from your consent forms, or include statements such as:
            - "Participants' names will be replaced with ID codes in the research report."
            - "The research report will contain no direct quotes or links to personal identifiers."
        - Please ensure this confidentiality information is reflected in your written and/or electronic consent forms. Once updated, upload the revised forms under Questions 5.16 and/or 5.17.
        - Please ensure that related questions appear at the top of your interview or survey, as these can serve as screening questions to confirm participant eligibility.
    - **Question 6.2.3:** Please provide a separate explanation for each option selected in response to Question 6.2.1, clearly outlining why access to that specific type of information is necessary to achieve the aims and objectives of your study.
- **Question 6.3:** Please select "yes" for this question.
    - **Question 6.3.1:**
        - Please select the "De-identification" option for this question.
        - Please include this information in the methodology section of your research proposal.
- **Question 6.4:** Please select "yes" for this question.

SECTION 6 ***[Data security and storage]***

- **Question 6.5:** Please use only one of the approved tools for secure data storage. If you select the "another storage space approved by Stellenbosch University Research ICT Services" option, you must upload proof of approval from ICT Services.
- **Question 6.6:** As you will have access to signed written consent forms, please select "yes" for this question.

SECTION 6 ***[Data sharing and preservation for future use]***

- **NB:** If the participating institution requires you to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA), it is strongly recommended that you first contact the Division for Research Development (DRD) at contracts@sun.ac.za to ensure the correct legal processes are followed. An NDA is *only* necessary if initiated by the institution; if no such request is made, there is no obligation on the researcher's part to pursue one.
- **Question 6.7:** Please select the "Add Another" option (marked in green), and then select all other applicable options indicating who else will have access to the data.

- **Question 6.8:**
    - Please select "yes" for this question if you intend to share any of the following with *external* individuals or organisations (*not* affiliated with Stellenbosch University) – including translators, transcribers, or *external* supervisors:
        - Raw, unprocessed data collected during the study
        - Any data that could potentially identify participants (even if coded)
        - Data shared for the purposes of processing, transcription, or analysis
    - *Important exceptions* – please select "no" for this question:
        - If your *external* supervisor holds an official appointment at SU as an *extraordinary* professor, *extraordinary* associate professor, *extraordinary* senior lecturer, or *extraordinary* lecturer.
            - Rationale: While not employed by SU, these individuals have official status and secure access to SU's systems, so they are treated as internal staff for data handling purposes.
        - If you are using the services of SU Language Centre staff for transcription or translation of your raw, unprocessed data.
    - Please select "no" for this question if you will share the following with *external* individuals or organisations:
        - Final research reports or publications
        - Fully anonymised, aggregated data presented in findings
        - Summary statistics or conclusions
    - The REC: SBE recommends that you contact:
        - The SU Contracts Office (contracts@sun.ac.za) for guidance on completing a Data Transfer Agreement (DTA).
        - Mr Sizwe Ngcobo at the SU Library (Research Data Management Services) for advice on suitable data-sharing platforms. The SU Library provides valuable resources on data management, secure storage and preparing research data for publication.
    - If your study requires institutional permission (see Section 8 below), please include a statement in your *Application Letter for Institutional Permission* confirming that a DTA will be completed.
    - **Question 6.8.1:**
        - If research data will be shared with *external* individuals or organisations (as defined above), the conditions for doing so must be formally outlined in a Data Transfer Agreement (DTA). This agreement must be signed by authorised representatives of all relevant parties to ensure compliance with applicable legislation and regulatory requirements.
        - To complete the DTA, visit the HREC Forms and Instructions page, and scroll down to the "Material/Data Transfer Agreement (MTA/DTA) Term Sheet" section. There you will find the following documents:
            - DTA Requirements and Processes
            - DTA Guidance to Researchers
            - DTA Term Sheet
- **Question 6.9:** Please select "yes" for this question if the data will be stored for future use beyond the current project (e.g. for follow-up research at a later stage).

SECTION 7 *[Identification of research methods]*

- **Question 7.2:**

- **Interview or Survey/Questionnaire:**
  - The Research Ethics Committee (REC: SBE) defines an interview as a one-on-one discussion between a researcher and a participant, guided by a semi-structured, unstructured, or structured list of questions. These are typically recorded and allow for in-depth, open-ended responses.
  - A survey or questionnaire as a written set of standardised questions used to collect data from a larger group, either in person, online, by phone, or by mail.
  - Please select the correct option in response to this question and also ensure that you use these terms consistently and correctly throughout your application form, research proposal, and supporting documents.
  - Please upload a separate document for each method of data collection (e.g. interviews, surveys, observations, focus groups, or institutional data). Each document should include detailed, method-specific questions.
- **Institutional Permission:**
  - If your data collection questions refer to a participant's employer, organisation, company, or institution, you will need to apply for institutional permission (see Section 8). To avoid this requirement, consider rephrasing terms such as "your company" or "your organisation" to "your industry," which does not trigger the need for institutional approval.
  - If you need to apply for institutional permission, please include your interview/survey questions directly below your *Application Letter for Institutional Permission*. Please add the following sentence to your letter: "For your information, please refer to the company-related questions outlined below, which will form part of the interview and/or questionnaire."
  - Please include the following statement (in quotes) as a tick-box option at the start of your online survey/questionnaire: *"I confirm that I will not disclose the name of, or any of the processes followed by, my current or previous employer in response to any of the questions included in this interview."*
  - For the interviews, participants should confirm this statement verbally – if they are unable to do so, institutional permission must be obtained before proceeding: *"I confirm that I will not disclose the name of, or any of the processes followed by, my current or previous employer in response to any of the questions included in this survey."*
- **Approved Survey Platforms:**
  - The REC: SBE discourages the use of third-party platforms like Google Forms or SurveyMonkey, due to data security and server location concerns. Please use one of the following approved platforms: Compusense, MS Forms, Qualtrics, REDCap, SUNsurveys (register HERE)
  - For support, log a request via the SU Research ICT Helpdesk. If alternative software is essential, first consult with the REC: SBE and SU IT services to confirm data security compliance.
- **Protecting Participant Identity:**
  - Open-ended questions may unintentionally reveal identifying information. Please use drop-down menus, where applicable, to limit disclosure (e.g. role descriptions).
  - Your data collection document must:
    - Include all screening questions (refer to Question 5.2 and Question 6.1) at the top.
    - Be detailed enough for the FESC to assess whether institutional permission is required.
    - Avoid requesting participants' names or surnames.

- ❖ Preferably replace open-ended screening questions with restricted-format alternatives to minimise identifiability.

- Examples of good screening questions:
  - ❖ "I confirm that I currently occupy a middle or senior management position in my organisation and have at least ten years' experience in the construction industry."
  - ❖ "The highest academic qualification I have obtained is:" *(with tick-box options such as Bachelor's, Master's, etc.)*
  - ❖ "My current role in the construction industry is:" *(with tick-box options for roles)*
- If demographic or background data (refer to Question 6.1) is required, include this information in a structured format (e.g. tick-boxes or predefined brackets such as age ranges: 18 - 23, 24 - 29, etc.).
- Please avoid asking participants to confirm their role or job title within the company, as this could make it more difficult to maintain confidentiality. If participants were drawn from a range of institutions, such questions would be acceptable, but since they are all employed by the same organisation, this information could increase the risk of identification and should therefore be omitted.

- **Personal Opinions:**
  - To align with the "personal opinions" category in Question 6.1, please reframe relevant questions using phrases like: "In your opinion…", "Do you think that…", "Would you say that…", "Based on your experience…"
- **Consent Form Integration:**
  - If using a survey/questionnaire, you may combine your electronic consent form and questionnaire into a single document. Paste the consent form at the beginning, allowing participants to read and "sign" it before proceeding to the questions. Upload the final version under the relevant section of your application.
- **Multiple Research Phases:**
  - If your project includes multiple phases (e.g. initial and validation interviews), and the follow-up questions have already been finalised, please state this in both your research proposal and your response to Question 2.2.
  - NB: If follow-up questions are significantly revised or newly created after the initial submission, an amendment form will be required – this may cause delays, as the risk level will need to be re-evaluated. To avoid this, ensure that questions for all phases are included from the outset where possible.

SECTION 8 *[Gatekeeper permission]*

- **Obtaining Institutional Permission from Stellenbosch University:**
  - If you plan to invite students, staff, or alumni of Stellenbosch University (SU) to participate in your research, you must apply for institutional permission as soon as possible from SU's Division for Information Governance (IG). Institutional permission is required solely because the participants are affiliated with SU, even if your research topic is unrelated to SU or its processes.
  - The approval process can take up to 12 weeks during peak periods.
  - Submitting an ethics application does not automatically include an application for institutional permission – you need to apply separately via the IG Service Desk: www.sun.ac.za/permission.
  - A letter of institutional permission from IG is required before you may start your data collection (e.g., before inviting students or staff to participate).
    - Urgent queries about institutional permission: permission@sun.ac.za

        - Urgent queries about privacy: privacy@sun.ac.za
        - General information: www.sun.ac.za/paia and www.sun.ac.za/privacy
    - The ethics application form requires proof of institutional permission, while the institutional permission application form requires proof of ethics clearance. To ensure that delays in one process will not automatically affect the outcome of the other, follow these tips to avoid delays:
        - When completing your *ethics* application, upload a screenshot of the IG confirmation email showing you have applied for institutional permission.
        - When completing your *institutional permission* application, include your ethics application reference number (e.g., ING-2025-29040) as proof you have applied for ethics clearance.
- **Obtaining Institutional Permission from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED)**:
    - If you plan to invite *public* schools in the Western Cape to participate in your research, you must first obtain institutional permission from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). This requirement does not apply to *private* schools.
    - A separate online application must be submitted to the WCED to obtain this permission. You may begin data collection only after WCED approval has been granted.
        - Processing time: Approximately 2 - 4 weeks
        - Queries: Contact Mr Meshack Kanzi at Meshack.Kanzi@westerncape.gov.za or 021 467 9272.
- **Obtaining Institutional Permission from the National Department of Health (NDoH)**:
    - If you plan to invite *provincial, public, or state hospitals or clinics* to participate in your research, you must obtain institutional permission from the National Department of Health (NDoH) before starting data collection. This requirement does not apply to *private* hospitals or clinics – please notify me immediately if you intend to involve a *private* facility, as the procedure differs.
    - The NHRD application requires an ethics approval number (e.g., ING-2025-11011) before submission. As such, submit your ethics application *first* via the REC: SBE Application Portal and obtain ethics clearance from the REC: SBE.
      For more on how to apply click HERE
    - Once ethics clearance is granted, complete the NDoH institutional permission application via the National Health Research Database (NHRD).
        - Processing time: Approximately 4 - 6 weeks
        - Additional resources: Researcher Manual
    - After NDoH approval, you will receive a written Permission Letter on official NDoH letterhead. Upload this letter to your ethics application:
        - Create a "Documentation Form" (see manual, but select *Documentation Form* instead of *Amendment Form*).
        - Upload the signed permission letter.
        - Both you and your supervisor must sign the updated ethics application so it can be resubmitted to the REC: SBE.
    - You may only begin data collection (e.g., interviews, online questionnaires, or collect company data at participating facilities) after receiving the written NDoH Permission Letter.
- **Obtaining Institutional Permission from various *external* institutions:**
    - You must obtain written and signed institutional (gatekeeper) permission on official letterhead from an institution if any of the following apply:

- Access to *non-public* quantitative data – e.g. financial records, consumer demographics, statistical datasets.
- Collection of *institution-related* information from participants – i.e. any question in your data collection document (e.g., interview, survey, questionnaire) which requires the participant to share:
  - The institution's name
  - Number of employees
  - Information on its processes, procedures, or policies (i.e. how the institution performs specific tasks)
  - Information relevant only to that institution
  - Information that would only be accessible to someone employed by the organisation
- You have targeted a *specific* institution and plan to conduct research (e.g. interviews, surveys, observations, etc) with its members, employees, customers, staff, or students – even if all questions focus solely on personal opinions, unrelated to the institution.

- **Exceptions** – institutional permission is ***not*** required if any of the following apply:
  - The *owner* or *CEO* of an institution participates in your research. This applies exclusively to the *owner* or *CEO* (not managers or any other employees).
  - Participants are interviewed solely as independent experts (not as representatives of their employer) **and** no information will be collected about the institution, including:
    - Processes, procedures, or policies
    - How the institution performs specific activities
    - Information unique to the institution
    - Information only accessible to employees
  - It is important to note that, if the owner or CEO participates in your research, an informed consent form must still be signed by each participant before data collection begins.
  - Please state in your research proposal, ethics application form, and consent form that neither participants nor the institutions they represent will be identifiable in your results.
  - If, at any stage, you need to identify an institution in your reporting or publications, you must first obtain formal institutional permission.

NB: Based on the green-highlighted section above, please follow these step-by-step instructions:

- **Question 8.1:** Please select "yes" for this question.
  - **Question 8.1.1:**
    - Please list the names of all institutions/organisations from which you will need to obtain permission.
    - Your application cannot be accepted unless your *Application Letter for Institutional Permission* includes full contact details of the person authorised to grant permission at each institution (name, telephone number, email address).
    - If you are unsure which institutions will participate at this stage, you must:
      - Upload *at least one* completed *Application Letter for Institutional Permission* before signing your application form.
      - State that the full list of participating institutions is not yet confirmed, and that written institutional (gatekeeper) permission will be obtained from each relevant institution before data collection begins.

- **Question 8.1.2:** Please select "no" for this question *(would seeking permission from gatekeepers jeopardise access to data/participants).*
- **Question 8.1.3:** Please select "no" for this question *(have you obtained permission from the relevant organisations/authorities).*
- **Question 8.1.6:** Use Template 5 (*Application Letter for Institutional Permission*) and Template 6 (*Permission Letter*) to prepare and upload the required documents for obtaining institutional permission. These templates are provided to help you save time and ensure all necessary information is included.
- **Template 5 (*Application Letter for Institutional Permission*):**
    - Customise Template 5:
        - Complete all sections highlighted in yellow, including the name, telephone number, and email address of the person authorised to grant institutional permission.
        - Indicate that you have included the survey/interview questions at the end of the document, or as an attachment to your email.
    - Attach data collection documents:
        - Attach all interview/survey documents (with the full list of questions) before sending the completed *Application Letter* to the institution.
        - Alternatively, copy and paste the questions at the end of the Application Laetter so it forms a single combined document.
    - Email the completed letter:
        - Send the completed *Application Letter* to the authorised person – preferably the Managing Director, CEO, or owner (as soon as possible).
    - Upload to the application form:
        - Upload the completed *Application Letter* to this section of the application form.
        - **NB**: At this stage, ***only*** the Application Letter needs to be uploaded. The signed Permission Letter can be uploaded once it has been received.
    - Prepare one *Application Letter* per institution:
        - Create and upload a separate *Application Letter* for each participating institution.
    - Include Data Collection documents in the Letter:
        - Add a copy of your interview/survey document(s) directly below the *Application Letter* to ensure the institution can review any company-related questions in advance.
        - Include this sentence (or similar) in the letter: "Please refer to the company-related questions below, which will form part of the interview/questionnaire."
- **Template 6 (*Permission Letter*):**
    - Purpose:
        - The institution must provide a signed Permission Letter, on official letterhead, confirming that they have reviewed your *Application Letter* (Template 5) and granting approval for you to begin data collection at their institution.
    - Customising Template 6:
        - Complete all the sections highlighted in yellow in Template 6, including the name, telephone number, and email address of the authorised person.

- ❖ Email the customised Template 6 to this person (preferably the MD, CEO, or owner) as soon as possible.
- ❖ Request that they complete all the sections highlighted in green, sign the document, and return an electronic copy on company letterhead.

▪ Timing considerations:

- ❖ **NB**: You do ***not*** need to wait for the signed *Permission Letter* before resubmitting your ethics application.
- ❖ **NB**: You must have the signed *Permission Letter* ***before*** starting any data collection (e.g., interviews, distributing questionnaires, collecting company data).

▪ If received after resubmission:

- ❖ If the signed *Permission Letter* is received later, upload it to your application form *after* the FESC has submitted your ethics application to the REC: SBE for final review and ratification.

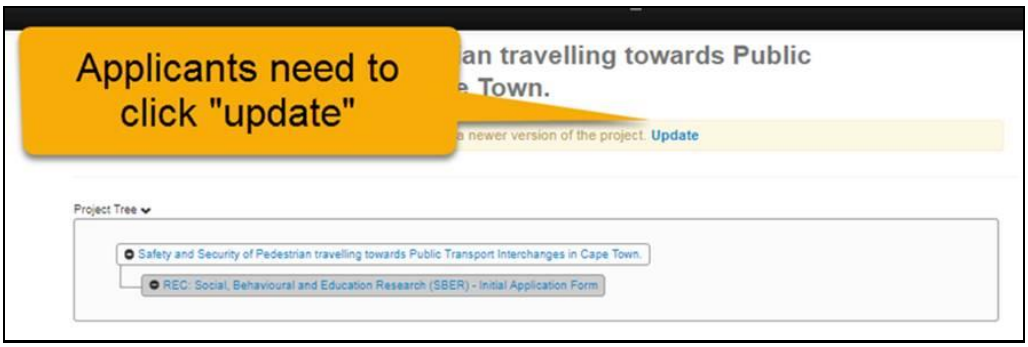
- **Question 8.2:** You've stated that "___". Will any of your interviews or data collection involve participants or organisations based outside South Africa? If so, please select "yes" for this question.

SECTION 9 *[Additional information and documents]*

- **Question 9.2:**
  - Kindly ensure all requested changes have been implemented before resubmitting to avoid delays.
  - **NB:** It is essential that all documents remain consistent. I recommend that you first download a PDF copy of your application form, then upload it together with your research proposal and supporting documents, and ask ChatGPT to identify any inconsistencies across them. Please ensure that you rephrase any suggested amendments in your own words before final submission.
  - Please upload your "Response to FESC feedback" document (please refer to the four bullet points at the start of this email) under Question 9.2.
  - Before resubmitting, please remove all outdated supporting documents.
  - If you require any additional information, please review FAQ # 6 on our ethics web page.

Important Information

- Before resubmitting, please remove all outdated supporting documents. Once both you and your supervisor have resubmitted the application form, I will confirm receipt within 48 hours – if perhaps you do not receive this confirmation, please follow up via email (tanya@sun.ac.za) as soon as possible.
- If prompted by EthicsRM to update your application form (due to system or backend updates), please complete this step before signing your application form *(refer to number 6)*.
- **NB**: Even if both you and your supervisor sign, I will not receive your application unless it has been updated when prompted.



Thank you for your time and effort in implementing these changes, and I look forward to receiving your resubmitted application!

Kind regards,
Tanya

Tanya Ficker
Projek Koördineerder (Dekaansafdeling) | Project Coordinator (Dean's Division)
Fakulteit Ingenieurswese | Faculty of Engineering
Room S4028 (Civil Engineering)
+27 21 808 9403 | tanya@sun.ac.za | Ethics Applications | Open Day 2025

Stellenbosch
UNIVERSITY
IYUNIVESITHI
UNIVERSITEIT