IICSA Research Code of Ethics

This guidance sets out the ethical standards required and the processes to be followed when undertaking research for the research project within the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). The code of ethics is relevant for all activities undertaken by or on behalf of the IICSA research project.

The Research Code of Ethics rationale
Research undertaken by the IICSA has responsibilities to society at large; to the safety and well being of people who take part in any research it undertakes; and to the safety and well being of IICSA staff, including the research team.

It also has responsibility to the wider academic and research community and to those contracted by the IICSA to undertake research on its behalf. Reconciling those responsibilities can be difficult and may entail ethical judgement. The IICSA Research Code of Ethics exists to assist in exercising such judgement.

The reach of the Research Code of Ethics
The code of ethics applies to any research undertaken by or on behalf of the IICSA research project, including research contracted out through invitation to tender (ITT) processes to external research providers.

Principles of good research practice
Ethically sound research is an essential component of research excellence. It is pursued to facilitate, not inhibit, research and to promote a culture of research undertaken by IICSA whereby researchers conscientiously reflect on the ethical implications of their research. That is, consideration of ethical issues is an ongoing process.

Ethically sound research includes safeguarding principles and involves:
- maintaining open and honest professional standards;
- following best current professional academic and ethical practice as well as all relevant legislation;
- respecting the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals and communities and enabling inclusivity where possible;
- providing a clear understanding of informed consent and establishing the processes required to safely and meaningfully gain consent;
- maximising the benefit to research participants, and the benefit of research outputs;
- preventing or minimising the risk of harm to participants engaging with the research project;
- ensuring data is stored, shared, preserved and disposed of in an appropriate and responsible manner;
- providing clarity regarding confidentiality of data provided to the IICSA including consultation where confidentiality may need to be breached;

- ensuring robust safeguarding procedures are in place for identifying and dealing with safeguarding concerns about the risk of significant harm, abuse or exploitation to research participants or others, including procedures for sharing concerns and relevant information with key agencies (children's services, police, operation Hydrant);
- ensuring the implications of safeguarding procedures are clearly communicated to and understood by all research participants.

IICSA ethical assurance process

The IICSA Research Code of Ethics has been developed by drawing on policies and procedures from the London School of Economics (November 2014), the University of Bedfordshire Institute of Applied Social Studies (2015), the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice and the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics.

Figure 1: IICSA research ethics review process
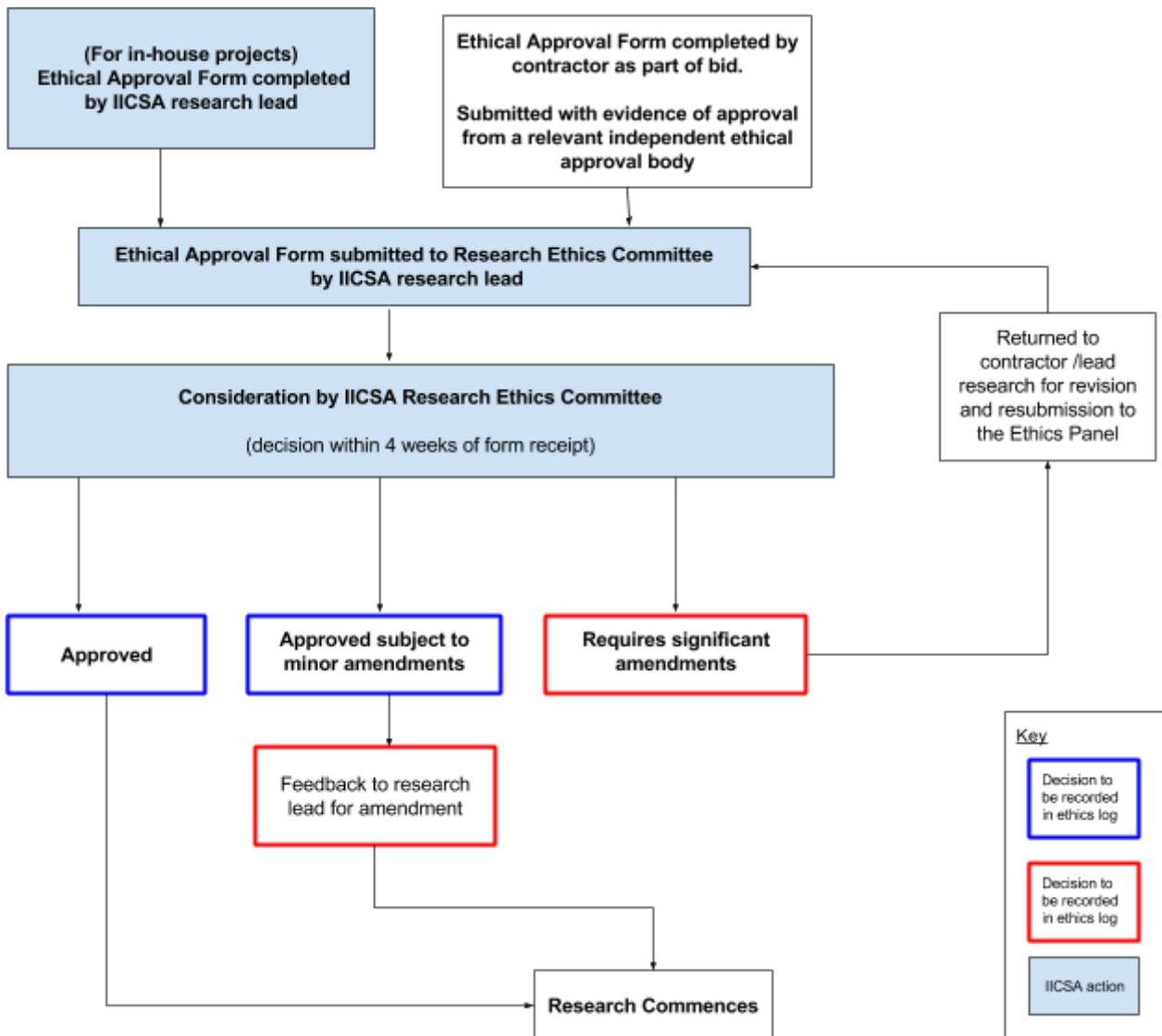
IICSA

All research undertaken by staff within the IICSA, or by researchers commissioned by the IICSA must adhere to the principles of good practice and follow the IICSA ethical assurance process set out below.:

1. All proposed research project proposals must be submitted to the IICSA Research Steering Group (RSG) for consideration and approval prior to commencement. Research proposals must demonstrate ethical issues have been considered and good practice followed in the development of the research project.

2. The Research Ethics Committee oversees all research activity undertaken by the research project, as outlined in the research project plan, within the IICSA. It's work is specific to the activities of the research project only. All research projects must be approved by the IICSA Research Ethics Committee prior to commencement.

3. To gain approval, all research projects must submit an Ethical Approval form to the Research Ethics Committee. This will cover details of access to research materials; access and engagement with research participants; risk assessment for researchers and researched; consent procedures; procedures for research participants to withdraw and/or retract information provided; a disclosure of harm protocol; confidentiality procedures; legal and data protection requirements (according to UK Data Protection Act 1998); health, safety and well-being of those researched and researchers; data collection techniques; data storage and disposal.

4. **For internally delivered research projects:** the IICSA research lead will be required to complete the IICSA Ethical Approval form which will be submitted to the Ethics Committee.

5. **For externally delivered research projects:** contractors will be required to complete the IICSA Ethical Approval form. This will be submitted to the Ethics Committee by the IICSA research lead, who will then inform contractors of decisions by the Ethics Board. **External contractors must provide evidence of approval from an independent ethics board when completing their IICSA Ethical Approval application.**

6. The Ethics Committee will provide a decision within 4 weeks of receipt of the Ethical Approval form.

7. The IICSA Research Ethics Committee comprises:
   - All members of the IICSA Academic Advisory Board (AAB);
   - One member of the IICSA Victim and Survivor Consulation Panel (VSCP);
   - Head of IICSA Research Team;
   - Member of IICSA Research Team (not leading the research project);
   - An independent child protection practitioner with experience of research.

8. Where a research project does not involve primary data collection, ethical approval can be considered and granted by an expedited IICSA Research Ethics Committee. The expedited committee includes only the Chair of the AAB (rather than all AAB members.