

Research Code of Ethics

This guidance sets out the ethical standards required, and the processes to be followed, for all research undertaken within or for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (the Inquiry). It has been developed by drawing on relevant standards in the field, including from Government Social Research¹, Economic and Social Research Council² and the British Sociological Association³.

Rationale

In undertaking or commissioning research, the Inquiry has responsibilities to society at large; to the safety and wellbeing of people who take part in any research it undertakes; and to the safety and well being of Inquiry staff, including the Research Team. It also has a responsibility to the wider academic and research community and to those contracted by the Inquiry to undertake research on its behalf. Reconciling those responsibilities can be difficult and may entail ethical judgement. The Research Code of Ethics exists to assist in exercising such judgement.

Scope

The Research Code of Ethics applies to any research undertaken by or on behalf of the Inquiry's research project, including research contracted out to external research providers. It does not apply to market research and user testing activities undertaken by or on behalf of the Inquiry's communications team.

Principles

Ethically sound research is an essential component of research excellence. It is pursued to facilitate, not inhibit, research and to promote a culture within the Inquiry whereby researchers conscientiously reflect on the ethical implications of their research. Consideration of ethical issues is an ongoing process.

Ethically sound research means to:

- maintain open and honest professional standards
- follow best current professional academic and ethical practice as well as all relevant legislation
- respect the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals and communities and enable inclusivity where possible
- provide a clear understanding of informed consent and establish the processes required to safely and meaningfully gain consent
- maximise the benefit to research participants, and the benefit of research outputs

¹ Civil Service Government Social Research Unit (2011): *GSR Professional Guidance: Ethical Assurance for Social Research in Government*, available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/515296/ethics_guidance_tcm6-5782.pdf

² Economic and Social Research Council (2018): *Framework for Research Ethics*, available at:

<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/>

³ British and Sociological Association (2017): *Statement of Ethical Practice*, available at:

https://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf

- prevent or minimise the risk of harm to participants engaging with the research project
- ensure data is stored, shared, preserved and disposed of in an appropriate and responsible manner
- provide clarity regarding confidentiality of data provided to the Inquiry including consultation where confidentiality may need to be breached
- ensure robust safeguarding procedures are in place for identifying and dealing with safeguarding concerns about the risk of significant harm to research participants or others
- ensure the implications of safeguarding procedures are clearly communicated to and understood by all research participants.

Ethical approval process

All research undertaken within or for the Inquiry must adhere to the principles of good practice set out above and follow the Inquiry's ethical approval process (see Figure 1):

1. All research projects must be approved by the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee prior to commencement.⁴ To gain approval, all research projects must submit an Ethical Approval Form to the Research Ethics Committee.

This will cover a summary of the research project; details of the research team; research population; recruitment, consent and inclusivity; sensitive topics, risk of harm and burden on participants; and data management and protection (according to data protection legislation).

- For internally delivered research projects: the Inquiry's research lead for the particular project will complete the Ethical Approval Form.
 - For externally delivered research projects: the appointed supplier(s) will be required to complete the Ethical Approval Form. This will be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee by the Inquiry's research lead.
2. The Research Ethics Committee will review the Ethical Approval Form. The research leads and suppliers may be required to attend a phone call or meeting with the Research Ethics Committee to answer any questions.
 3. The Chair of the Research Ethics Committee will notify the Inquiry's Head of Research of the Committee's decision. The decision has to be sent in writing within four weeks of receipt of the Ethical Approval Form and include a justification on what the Research Ethics Committee has based their decision on, for example adherence to the principles for ethically sound research.

There are three possible outcomes:

⁴ The Research Ethics Committee is responsible for ensuring that any research undertaken by or on behalf of the Inquiry complies with the ethical standards set out in the Research Code of Ethics. The Committee is internal to the Inquiry, but independent of those commissioning and delivering its research. The Committee comprises: two academic experts (who will be Chair and Deputy Chair), an independent child protection practitioner, a member of the Inquiry's Victim and Survivor Consultative Panel, the Inquiry's Head of Research, and a member of the Inquiry's Support and Safeguarding Team.



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- Approved: Research commences.
- Approved subject to minor amendments: Feedback is provided to the relevant research lead that minor amendments need to be made before the research commences.
- Requires significant amendments: Feedback is provided to the relevant research lead that significant revisions and resubmission to the Research Ethics Committee is required.

Figure 1: Ethical approval process

