

# GSR Ethics Checklist

## Purpose of the checklist

This checklist has been designed to improve consistency and thoroughness in the ethical scrutiny of social research in government. It is recommended that the checklist be completed as part of the commissioning process and should be referred to, and ideally updated, throughout the research management process.

Government Social Research (GSR) issued professional guidance for use by all those managing and commissioning government social research [GSR Ethical Assurance for Social Research in Government](#) and includes a requirement to put in place suitable systems and processes to ensure that appropriate ethical standards are met (the use of this guidance was formalised through the [GSR Code](#)). The guidance aims to ensure that all research is conducted in line with five key ethical principles. The checklist has been developed to help meet this aim.

It is up to individual departments/devolved administrations to put systems in place to manage the ethical issues that arise from the checklist. This may include setting up an Ethical Advisory Group to which identified ethical issues can be escalated or obtaining additional sign off for ethically sensitive projects.

## Instructions for use

The checklist is structured under the five key principles of the GSR guidance:

- Principle 1: Sound application and conduct of social research methods and appropriate dissemination and utilisation of the findings
- Principle 2: Participation based on valid informed consent
- Principle 3: Enabling participation
- Principle 4: Avoidance of personal harm
- Principle 5: Non-disclosure of identity and personal information

For each of the sections you should describe the relevant **ethical** sensitivities and risks and the appropriate action that will be taken to manage the issues identified. The grey text in the template provides example questions for each component of the principles to highlight what issues might be considered.

Please complete the checklist with as much detail as possible. If a component of a principle is not relevant to your project you should mark it as not applicable and move on. It may also be that a component is not relevant at all stages of a project it is therefore advisable to return to the checklist throughout the life of a project to ensure all ethical issues are identified.

Some projects may also fall under the ethical procedures of external ethics committees. This may include interviews with NHS patients and/or staff, and to participants who may lack the mental capacity to provide informed consent. The expectation of external ethical procedures applying to a particular project does not replace the need to complete the ethics checklist on the commissioning of a new project.

## Assessing Ethical Sensitivity

The checklist requires you to make a judgement about the level of sensitivity for each issue that is identified. This should take into account the inherent sensitivity of the issue itself and the steps that can be taken to manage the issue appropriately.

A guide to the sensitivity ratings is as follows:

- **Red** – Highly Sensitive: The issue will need to be closely monitored and managed with remedial action likely to evolve throughout the project.
- **Amber** – Sensitive: The issue will require to be managed throughout the project but initial identification of remedial action should ensure sensitivities are appropriately managed.
- **Green** – Not Sensitive: The issue has been assessed adequately as not being sensitive, and this has been documented in the checklist

In addition to rating each issue, the project also needs to be given an 'overall' sensitivity rating. In most cases, this should be the same as the most sensitively rated part of the project. However, this is a guide rather than a rigid rule.

**Project Title:**  
**Project Manager:**  
**Department/Division/Branch:**

**GSR Principle 1: Sound application and conduct of social research methods and appropriate dissemination and utilisation of findings**

Principle components	Issues	Sensitivity Rating
<p><b>a) Scope out existing/similar research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are you content that this research is not duplicating already existing work?</li> <li>- Does a new piece of primary or secondary research need to be done?</li> <li>- Is other research already taking place with the same groups, which could be amalgamated to prevent over-researching small populations?</li> </ul>		<p><b>Red</b>  <b>Amber</b>  <b>Green</b></p>
<p><b>b) Proposed methodology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is the research design appropriate to the groups being interviewed?</li> <li>- Is this level of respondent burden appropriate for the groups of people involved in the research?</li> <li>- How will the research consider the diverse perspectives of people according to their gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and age?</li> </ul>		<p><b>Red</b>  <b>Amber</b>  <b>Green</b></p>
<p><b>c) External ethical scrutiny</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are you interviewing NHS staff or patients? If so – the successful contractor will be required to obtain clearance from the National Research Ethics Service (NRES):  <a href="http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/">http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/</a></li> <li>- Are you interviewing participants who may lack the mental capacity to provide informed consent? If so the successful contractor may be required to obtain clearance from NRES:  <a href="http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/news-and-publications/news/mental-capacity-act-2005/">http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/news-and-publications/news/mental-capacity-act-2005/</a></li> <li>- Are Academics likely to tender? If so, they will be required to go through their ethics committees?</li> </ul>		<p><b>Red</b>  <b>Amber</b>  <b>Green</b></p>
<p><b>d) Dissemination strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is our role/responsibility to different stakeholders and research participants around dissemination?</li> <li>- Are there any accessibility or equality issues about how findings are made available or presented?</li> </ul>		<p><b>Red</b>  <b>Amber</b>  <b>Green</b></p>

<b>GSR Principle 2: Participation based on valid informed consent</b>		
<b>Principle components</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Sensitivity Rating</b>
<p><b>a) Consent to take part in primary research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What processes are in place to ensure that participants are informed and understand about the project, the purpose, the client, topics and that their participation is voluntary?</li> <li>- What can you do to ensure that participant agreement is made before the interview is conducted?</li> <li>- If you intend to follow up participants with further research, has this been made clear and consent given?</li> </ul>		<p><b>Red</b> <b>Amber</b> <b>Green</b></p>
<p><b>b) Consent via gatekeepers or proxy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is this required? If so, what processes need to be in place?</li> <li>- What steps can be taken to ensure representativeness, i.e. to ensure that participants are not “hand-picked” by gatekeepers or that there is a minority view promoted?</li> </ul>		<p><b>Red</b> <b>Amber</b> <b>Green</b></p>
<p><b>c) Children and young people (aged 15 and under)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consent from a parent or legal guardian is required for children aged under 16 to participate in research, what processes are in place to ensure this is done?</li> <li>- How can you ensure that the children are also adequately informed about the work?</li> <li>- It is sometimes recommended that an adult accompanies children and young people during and interview. What processes are in place to ensure this is in place when required? Who is best to accompany the child(ren)?</li> </ul>		<p><b>Red</b> <b>Amber</b> <b>Green</b></p>
<p><b>d) Vulnerable adults</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there any groups that might have difficulty giving informed consent themselves?</li> <li>e) How can you ensure that participants are adequately informed about the work?</li> </ul>		<p><b>Red</b> <b>Amber</b> <b>Green</b></p>
<p><b>f) Access protocols</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there any particular access protocols for certain groups, does this</li> </ul>		<p><b>Red</b> <b>Amber</b> <b>Green</b></p>

<p><i>apply to your respondent group?</i>  <i>Access protocols could apply to:</i>  <i>Courts, Police, Prisons, Schools</i></p>		
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<b>GSR Principle 3: Enabling participation</b>		
<b>Principle components</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Sensitivity Rating</b>
<p><b>a) Reducing the barriers to participation</b>  <i>- What steps can be taken to encourage and widen participation? (e.g. travel costs, childcare, varying times and locations of interviews, accessibility of venues, advance letters in different languages etc)</i>  <i>- Do you need interviewer assistance such as offering help with the completion or a translator?</i></p>		<p><b>Red</b>  <b>Amber</b>  <b>Green</b></p>
<p><b>b) Ensuring that hard to reach groups are included</b>  <i>- Is the research and sample design appropriate?</i>  <i>- Might the data collection method exclude some groups of people?</i>  <i>- Do you need to consult with others so that barriers to participation for certain groups are reduced?</i></p>		<p><b>Red</b>  <b>Amber</b>  <b>Green</b></p>

<b>GSR Principle 4: Avoidance of personal harm</b>		
<b>Principle components</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Sensitivity Rating</b>
<p><b>a) Research participants</b>  <i>- Might some of the research questions cover stressful or culturally sensitive subjects? If so, how will stress and sensitivities be minimised?</i>  <i>- How can interview length be kept to the minimum?</i>  <i>- Do you need to ensure that there is post-interview support?</i></p>		<p><b>Red</b>  <b>Amber</b>  <b>Green</b></p>
<p><b>b) Interviewers/ researchers</b>  <i>- What procedures are in place to ensure interviewers are properly trained and vetted (e.g. criminal record checks or disclosure Scotland)? This <u>must</u> be done if interviewing/ involving children.</i>  <i>- What procedures are in place for disclosure of abuse?</i>  <i>- What procedures are in place to ensure the safety of the interviewer/researcher?</i>  <i>-Have the interviewer/researchers</i></p>		<p><b>Red</b>  <b>Amber</b>  <b>Green</b></p>

