 **GSR Ethics Checklist**

**Purpose of the checklist**

This checklist has been designed to help users ensure that research is conducted in line with the six ethical principles of the GSR outlined in this wider guidance. It is recommended that the checklist be completed as part of the research or project design process and should be referred to and updated, throughout the research management process. A separate copy can be found on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ethical-assurance-guidance-for-social-research-in-government) and the [GSR members site](https://members.gsr.gov.uk/).

This checklist is an example and is not intended to provide a fully comprehensive list of factors/issues to consider for all potential projects, nor does it replace any existing processes in place in individual government departments. Researchers may wish to add additional items to this checklist, so it is tailored to their project or for research more generally within a department. Researchers should refer to the relevant principle or section in the main GSR ethical guidance if they require further information or guidance.

It is important to note that it is the responsibility of those managing or conducting social research to uphold the six GSR ethical principles and put systems in place to manage the ethical issues that are identified whilst completing the checklist. This may include: adjusting the research design or timing; seeking additional advice from relevant stakeholder groups; setting up an Ethical Advisory Group to which identified ethical issues can be escalated at the start and throughout the research; obtaining sign-off/approval for ethically sensitive projects; or, not going ahead with the research if the risks are deemed too high, cannot be sufficiently mitigated and outweigh the potential public benefit.

**Using the checklist to assess ethical sensitivity**

The checklist is structured under the six principles of the GSR ethical guidance. For each component of the principle, example questions have been provided to highlight what issues could be considered. For each of the sections you should describe in as much detail as possible the relevant considerations, along with the appropriate action that will be taken to manage and mitigate all the potential issues/risks identified.

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** – Moderately 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 once all elements are complete. In most cases, the ‘overall’ sensitivity rating should be the same as the most sensitively rated part of the project (i.e. if one section is marked as ‘Red- Highly Sensitive’, then the project’s overall rating should be ‘Red-Highly Sensitive’ too). Where projects are highlighted as ‘red’ or ‘high risk’, it is recommended that users seek specialist guidance and/or independent ethical advice as appropriate.

**Project Title:**

**Project Manager:**

**Department/Division/Branch:**

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| **GSR Principle 1: Research should have a clear and defined public benefit** | | |
| **Principle components** | **Considerations and mitigations** | **Sensitivity rating** |
| **a) Identifying a user need**  *- Does the research aim to meet a clearly defined, legitimate and unmet user need?*  *- Have you engaged with relevant stakeholders in order to fully establish the user need?*  *- Is other research already taking place with the same groups, which could be amalgamated to prevent over-researching small populations?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **b) Public benefit**  *- How will the findings from this research benefit the public?*  *- Are there any risks that public benefits will not be realised?*  *- Could the research disproportionately benefit or disadvantage a particular group?*  *- Is it necessary to conduct this research in order to realise the public benefits?*  *- Does the public benefit outweigh any identified risks?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **c) Transparency and Dissemination**  *- Have you got a clear dissemination strategy in place? i.e. where, when and how you will disseminate findings?*  *- What is our role/responsibility to different stakeholders and research participants around dissemination?*  *- Are there any accessibility or equality issues about how findings are made available or presented?*  *- How will you ensure that research findings are brought to the attention of relevant stakeholders?*  *- Will the research process be fully transparent?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |

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| **GSR Principle 2: Research should be based on sound research methods and protect against bias in the interpretation of findings** | | |
| **Principle components** | **Considerations and mitigations** | **Sensitivity rating** |
| **a) Proposed methodology**  *- Is the research design appropriate to the groups being interviewed?*  *- Is this level of respondent burden appropriate for the groups of people involved in the research?*  *- How will the research consider the diverse perspectives of people according to their gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and age?*  *- Is the proposed methodology the best and most cost-effective way of answering the research questions?*  *-Have you considered all the possible potential biases in the data, methods and analysis techniques that will be used in the project?*  *- Are you using new, emerging, or controversial methodologies or techniques? If so, what steps have been taken to ensure the integrity of the methods and results?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **b) External ethical scrutiny**  *- Has your project been subject to independent ethical review?*  *- Does the project fall will in the remit of the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research? (See section 3.13-3.15 in the main guidance for further information and links to decision making tools)*  *- Will contracted partners be required to go through internal ethics committees?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |

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| **GSR Principle 3: Research should adhere to data protection regulations and the secure handling of personal data** | | |
| **Principle components** | **Considerations and mitigations** | **Sensitivity rating** |
| **a) Data Protection**  *- What procedures are in place to*  *ensure adherence to the GDPR, Data Protection Act (2018) and other government data security requirements?*  *- What is your legal basis for processing of personal data?*  *- How will you inform and assure participants that you will treat their data in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation (e.g. privacy notice)?*  *- Do you need to complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **b) Research findings**  *- How can you ensure that the data collected during the research is not going to be used for any other than its originally defined purpose?*  *- What checks are in place to ensure that no one can be identified in reporting? (for both quantitative and qualitative work)* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |

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| **GSR Principle 4: Participation in research should be based on specific and informed consent** | | |
| **Principle components** | **Considerations and mitigations** | **Sensitivity rating** |
| **a) Consent to take part in**  **primary research**  *- What processes are in place to ensure that participants are informed and understand the project, the purpose, the client, topics and that their participation is voluntary? Will you ensure that participants have given fully informed consent before taking part in the research?*  *- If you intend to follow up participants with further research, has this been made clear and consent given?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **b) Consent via gatekeepers or proxy**  *- Is this required? If so, what processes need to be in place?*  *- 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?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **c) Children and young people (aged 16 and under)**  *- What processes are in place to ensure consent from a parent or legal guardian has been sought for children under the age of 16 and how has this been done?*  *- How can you ensure that the children are also adequately informed about the research?*  *- What processes are in place to ensure, where required, an adult accompanies children and young people during an interview? Who is best to accompany the child(ren)?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **d) Vulnerable adults**  *- Are you interviewing participants who may lack the mental capacity to provide informed consent for themselves? If so, the successful contractor may be required to obtain clearance from an NHS Research Ethics Committee.*  *- How can you ensure that participants are adequately informed about the work?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **e) Access protocols**  *- Are there any particular access protocols for certain groups, does this apply to your respondent group?*  *Access protocols could apply to: Courts, Police, Prisons, Schools* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **f) Secondary Research**  *- Does the consent cover all potential future uses of the data?*  *- If your legal basis for processing data is not consent, have you still considered whether individuals have been (or should be) given the choice of their data being included in this research?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **g) Incentives?**  *- Is the use of incentives necessary? What evidence do you have that the use of incentives will significantly improve the research?*  *- Is your use of incentives in keeping with the GSR ethical principles? (See section 2.33-2.35 in the main guidance for further information)* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |

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| **GSR Principle 5: Research should enable participation of the groups it seeks to represent** | | |
| **Principle components** | **Considerations and mitigations** | **Sensitivity rating** |
| **a) Identifying and reducing the barriers to participation**  *- What steps have you taken to identify potential barriers to participation?*  *-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)*  *- Do you need interviewer assistance such as offering help with completion, or a translator?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **b) Ensuring that hard to reach groups are included**  *- Is the research and sample design appropriate?*  *- Might the data collection method exclude some groups of people?*  *- Do you need to consult with others (e.g. support groups, charities and other relevant stakeholders) so that barriers to participation for certain groups are fully identified and reduced?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |

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| **GSR Principle 6: Research should be conducted in a manner that minimises personal and social harm** | | |
| **Principle components** | **Considerations and mitigations** | **Sensitivity rating** |
| **a) Research participants**  *- Do any of the research questions cover stressful or culturally sensitive subjects? If so, how will stress and sensitivities be minimised?*  *- How can interview length be kept to the minimum?*  *- Do you need to ensure that there is post-interview support?*  *- How will you offer support to those that are approached but decide not to participate in the research?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **b) Interviewers/ researchers**  *- What procedures are in place to ensure interviewers are properly trained (for example in methods, relevant legislation such as the Equality Act)?*  *- Do all interviewers /researchers have appropriate security clearance (e.g. criminal record checks or disclosure Scotland if interviewing/ working with children)?*  *- What procedures are in place for handling disclosures of abuse, self-harm or suicidal ideation?*  *- What procedures are in place to ensure the safety of the interviewer/ researcher?*  *- Has consideration been given to exposure of researchers and analysts to sensitive topics? (e.g. potential for vicarious trauma)* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |
| **c) Wider Social Groups**  *- How will you mitigate any potential for harm to those who have not taken part in the research? For example, research focussing on specific groups has the potential to impact the wider social group.*  *- Have you considered or sought the public’s views on the research?* |  | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |

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| **Relevant legislation** | |
| Will your research comply with all relevant legislation?  For example:  [Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (2001)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2001/24/contents)  [Crime and Disorder Act (1998)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/contents)  [Data Protection Act (2018)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/contents/enacted)  [Freedom of Information Act (2000)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents)   * [General Data Protection Regulation (2016)](https://gdpr-info.eu/)   [Health and Social Care Act (2012)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/7/contents/enacted)   * [Human Rights Act (1998)](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents)   [Mental Capacity Act (2005)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/9/contents)  [Equality Act (2010) - Public Sector Equality Duty](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty)  Do you need to ensure compliance with any additional legislation, policy, code of practice or guidance? |  |

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| **Summary** | **Overall sensitivity rating** |
| **What are the key sensitivities?**  **How are you addressing them?**  **How often will you re-visit this research ethics assessment?** | **Red**  **Amber**  **Green** |