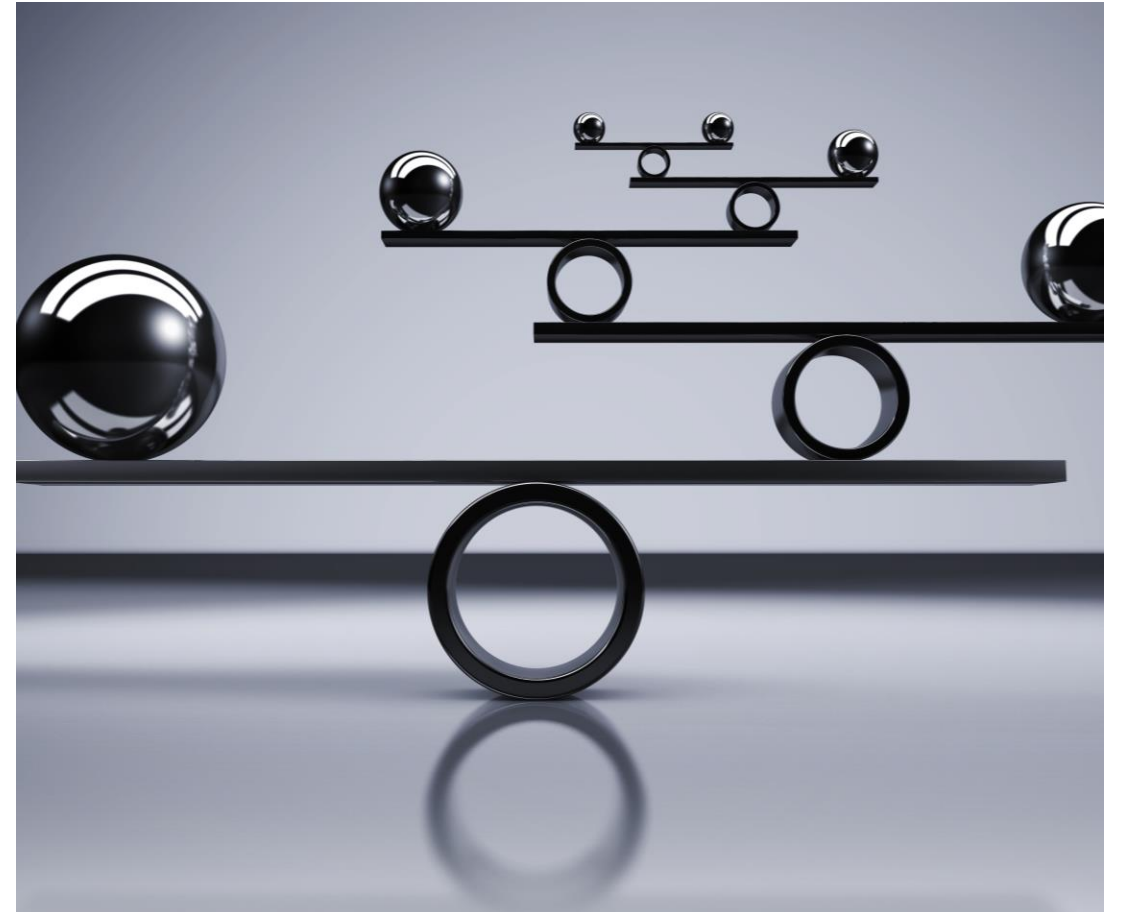


# Session 2: How do we conduct research ethically and with integrity as an inspectorate?



# Today's session

- Ethics at Ofsted
- Government Social Research principles
- Research integrity
- Government professions



# How do we conduct research ethically?

- Ofsted carries out all research with dedication and commitment to the Civil Service and its core values: **integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality**.
- Ofsted is a member of the **Government Social Research** profession, which supports the development, implementation, review and evaluation of government policy.
- Ofsted is fully committed to **high-quality research carried out according to ethical principles**.

# How do we conduct research ethically?

- We aim to ensure that all research by Ofsted employees, or on behalf of Ofsted, is carried out in a way that **protects all those doing the research as well as those taking part in it.**
- All of our research has **the welfare and safety of children and young people at its core.**
- Ofsted is committed to building our reputation as a **high-quality research institution.** We believe this depends on Ofsted being held to account for how we carry out research.
- At Ofsted, we subscribe to the **highest standards of ethics**, and follow [Ofsted's ethical research policy](#).
- As part of this, we follow the accepted professional standards that are integral in the field of research.

# Our ethics committee and process



# Ofsted research ethics committee

- Members of the ethics committee:
  - Head of Research / Head of Strategic Evaluation (chair)
  - Head of Information Rights and Data Protection (deputy chair)
  - Two external academic experts
  - Research ethics lead(s)
  - Research and Evaluation team representative
  - Data and Insight representative
  - Assistant Regional Director (ARD) representative

The committee may co-opt internal or external members onto the committee for a short period where additional expertise or lived experience would be beneficial for ethical consideration.



# Definition of applications to ethics committee

No application required	Routine inspection and regulation	Annual report work	Official stats production
Lower risk applications	Secondary research which does not involve data linkage and there is legal basis for data to be used for secondary analysis, i.e. clarity in privacy notice.	Primary research which is a continuation or replication of a previous project or stage(s) of a project which has used similar methodology and has ethical approval.	Primary research in which inspectors-as-participants feedback on their professional practice, there is no sensitive data involved, and voluntary informed participation does not apply.
Higher risk applications	Anything else		

# Possible outcomes





# How we adhere to the GSR principles



## GSR ethical principles (2021)

- Principle 1: Research should have a clear user need and public benefit
- Principle 2: Research should be based on sound research methods and protect against bias in the interpretation of findings
- Principle 3: Research should adhere to data protection regulations and the secure handling of personal data
- Principle 4: Participation in research should be based on specific and informed consent
- Principle 5: Research should enable participation of the groups it seeks to represent
- Principle 6: Research should be conducted in a manner that minimises personal and social harm

# Principle 1: Research should have a clear user need and public benefit

- Identifying a clear need
- Timing of research
- Assessing the public good
- Transparency



Principle 2: Research should be based on sound research methods and protect against bias in the interpretation of findings



- Methodology consideration
- Burden
- Civil Service core values (integrity, honesty, objectivity, impartiality)

# Involving inspectors in research

## Issue

We benefit greatly from **using inspectors in our research activities**. Inspectors bring experience and knowledge that significantly enhances our ability to carry out research in the sectors we regulate and inspect.

Involving inspectors as researchers is an Ofsted USP but **also presents some challenges**, e.g.:

- Inspectors stepping out of inspector role when doing research – the approaches have significant differences
- Inspectors **may** have less knowledge of research and ethical protocols
- Limited time to train inspectors ahead of research activities

## Our response

- a) To **update and enhance the training that inspectors receive** ahead of undertaking research activities and develop a new learning and development module that is a requirement ahead of doing any research activities.
- b) To continue to **accompany inspectors on research visits** to support the activities and provide guidance and feedback.

## Principle 3: Research should adhere to data protection regulations and the secure handling of personal data



- Security
- Anonymisation
- Special category data
- Retention
- Accuracy
- Confidentiality

# Principle 4: Participation in research should be based on specific and informed consent

Voluntary participation

Informed

Have capacity

Right to withdraw

Free from coercion

Use of incentives



# Informed consent to participate in research



## Issue

GSR standards require research participants to give informed consent\*. However, **Ofsted's unique legal powers** mean this is not always possible or meaningful:

- Ofsted has a **position of authority** which means that it cannot rely on GDPR consent which needs to be *\*freely\** given
- Research guidelines have a particular expectation that for **research involving children under the age of 16, their parents should complete written ethical "consent" forms**
- Researchers can be unsure how to **balance legal and ethical considerations**, particularly in relation to obtaining written "consent" and in relation to how inspection powers interact with research activities

\*In Ofsted, we call this **voluntary informed participation** to avoid confusion with GDPR consent

## Our response

- **Taken advice from our external ethics experts and Head of Information Rights and Data Protection** on how we should deal with this issue
- **R&E staff and Research Ethics Committee to receive further training** (including case study examples) to understand the complexity of consent, and how standard published ethics guidelines need to be adapted to our specific inspection and regulation context.
- (With DfE, Legal and Data Protection) To **further explore options for ensuring parental voluntary informed participation of children under age 16**, including relying on schools and providers to record this.



# Principle 5: Research should enable participation of the groups it seeks to represent

- Support for people to take part (fair representation)
- Different levels of involvement
- Benefits/ costs



# Principle 6: Research should be conducted in a manner that minimises personal and social harm

## What do we mean by harm?

- Physical
- Social
- Psychological



## Who can be harmed?

