**Research Ethics**

**Policy and procedure**

**Introduction**

This policy applies to all SASE staff, consultants, trustees, and volunteers who are involved in conducting research and evaluation projects on behalf of SASE.

SASE attaches considerable importance to the maintenance of high ethical standards and best practice in all research and evaluation work. For this reason, any work which involves contact with vulnerable people or members of the public requires due consideration with regard to ethical best practice and data protection legislation.

* Protect adults at risk from harm and abuse;
* Enable staff and volunteers to know what to do if they are worried; and
* Show that our organisation is responsible.

We believe that good research is research that aims at making positive change in society and our research focus, tools, and outputs are designed to empower and facilitate this change.

# Research Ethics Policy Statement

Application of the policy

Research and evaluation work carried out on behalf of SASE whether by staff, volunteers, trustees, or consultants that involves any contact with vulnerable people or members of the public and whether for external or internal purposes

The Chair of the Board of Trustees and any Director of SASE must be informed of any research projects being developed, commissioned or currently in progress, and follow any advice and support recommended.

1. Ensuring the well-being of participants

* 1. The physical, social and psychological well-being of participants must not be adversely affected by participating in research and evaluation projects.
  2. All participants must be able to understand any information provided to enable them to make an informed choice as to whether to participate.
  3. Participants must be emotionally robust enough for the research. Participants must be able to reflect on their experiences and tell their story without this resulting in significant distress or having an adverse impact on their wellbeing.
  4. Participants must be aware of the levels of confidentiality and anonymity related to the project.

1. Participants’ consent
   1. Participants must be fully informed about the project before deciding to take part. The information should be written and presented in an accessible manner, enabling participants to be fully aware of what is expected of them, the amount of time they will have to commit and any potential negative or distressing outcomes.
   2. Participants must be aware that it is their choice to take part, and not feel pressured to participate.
   3. Participants must be aware that they can withdraw at any stage, without needing to give a reason.
   4. Participants must provide written consent that they will take part in the research.
2. Confidentiality and anonymity
   1. Participants must be fully informed about the level of confidentiality and anonymity possible for the project. A full explanation of what this means in practice should be given.
   2. Confidential information can only be passed on to relevant parties if required or justified by law.
3. Use and dissemination of information
   1. Participants must be fully informed how the information they provide will be used, e.g. publications, training events.
   2. Participants will be informed about the complaints process and provided with the necessary details.
   3. Publications from the project must maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants with the exception of where participants have granted permission for their identity to be disclosed.
   4. Acknowledgement to those involved in the project can be given as appropriate. Any academic papers or publications used to inform the project must be suitably referenced.
   5. Information disseminated must not be false or misleading.
4. Safety
   1. In person interviews should be conducted in safe locations, where possible with vulnerable people at the secure premises of an organisation that offers them support services. If this is not possible, then a public place or room in a secure building with appropriate surveillance is necessary. This is to ensure the safety of both participant and researcher.
   2. Researchers must use their mobile phones and any other method decided upon to communicate with another representative of SASE about their movements and activities.
5. Use and dissemination of information
   1. Participants must be fully informed how the information they provide will be used, e.g. publications, training events.
   2. Participants will be informed about the feedback they will receive. All participants who request feedback must receive it.
   3. Participants will be informed about the complaints process and provided with the necessary details.
   4. Publications from the project must maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants with the exception of where participants have granted permission for their identity to be disclosed.
   5. Acknowledgement to those involved in the project can be given as appropriate, e.g. external research agencies, staff and volunteers, and agreement is required before printing. Any academic papers or publications used to inform the project must be suitably referenced.
   6. Information disseminated must not be false or misleading. For example, branches must not publish information from local based projects as being representative of Samaritans as a whole, but only as representative of the project itself.
6. Storage of information
   1. Information provided by participants will be stored in password-protected files, and only accessible to designated researchers. All hardcopy materials containing personal or sensitive information must be secured in a locked cabinet.
   2. Only information that is relevant to the purposes of the project, or as is required by law, should be collected.
   3. Evidence, data, findings or conclusions from the project must never be fabricated, falsified or misrepresented.
   4. Researchers should act in such a way that they do not jeopardize future research, the public standing of the field or the organisation, or the publication of results.
   5. Information should only be kept for as long as they are of benefit to the project, or in the interest of participants. As soon as records are no longer required, they should be rendered anonymous and/or appropriately destroyed.
7. Implications of disclosure of ‘serious harm’
   1. Participants must be informed that if they disclose that they or someone else is at risk of serious harm this information will not remain confidential.
   2. Where a disclosure of serious harm is made by a participant, the researcher must inform the participant what they are going to do, and what the next steps may be.
   3. If a participant discloses that they (or someone else) are at risk of serious harm the researcher must inform the Director or the Chair of Trustees.
   4. Participants must receive information about appropriate support organisations.
8. Expenses
   1. Participants should receive reimbursement for reasonable expenses incurred during the course of a research or evaluation project, e.g. travel expenses.
   2. A decision to provide payments for participation will depend on funds available and will be the decision of the project lead.
   3. Researchers, staff, trustees, and volunteers must not accept any gifts as this can undermine impartiality.
9. Complaints

9.1 Complaints from research participants, members of the public, or funders should be referred the Director or the Chair of the Trustees.

# Research Practice

This policy applies to all staff, trustees, volunteers, and consultants carrying out research and evaluation on behalf of SASE.

1. Criteria for research

All research projects must be approved by the Chair of Trustees and Director.

All individuals carrying out research must be skilled and able to undertake research appropriately.

Research projects must be planned and co-ordinated. This will ensure that good practice is maintained and research results are reliable and applicable. All research projects must be planned detailing background, research questions, objectives, methods, timescale, resource implications and dissemination activities.

All research projects must be monitored to ensure the projects are being carried out as proposed and agreed.

Research and evaluation work must be structured and carried out to maintain the privacy, rights and dignity of all involved.

2. Participants

The physical, social and psychological well-being of participants must not be adversely affected by participating in research and evaluation. Regard should be given to:

* Whether the research is needed and necessary
* Risks and costs to participants in participating in the research
* Individual differences and vulnerabilities that may impact on participants in the research
* Establishing rapport and trust
* Any issues raised by informed consent and payment in order to avoid any form of coercion but to respect time and energy offered by participants
* Embedding diversity and inclusion into the research, as well as sensitivity to culture and current social issues
* How to deal with participants who become distressed or disclose that they are in need of help or support – the standard procedure for this being to offer breaks, change questioning, remind them that they can stop at any time, seek help or outside support where appropriate, follow up to ensure the participant has had after care

3. Informed consent

Participants are able to decide whether or not to take part in the research and/or evaluation, having been made aware of exactly what is expected of them. Participants need to be informed about the amount of time they will have to commit and any potential negative or distressing outcomes as a result of their participation. Informed consent is an ongoing process and informed consent must be checked at appropriate times during the research, as well as the ongoing provision of accurate and easily understood information.

Researchers must make clear to all participants that it is their choice as to whether or not to participate in research, and work to ensure that individuals do not feel pressured to participate. Researchers need to recognise and uphold the rights of those who may not fully comprehend the aims or methods of a piece of research, and who might feel intimidated by the research process. Gaining informed consent must also include ensuring that participants realise that they can withdraw from the research at any stage, without needing to give a reason.

4. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Those who agree to participate in research and evaluation projects must be informed about the level of confidentiality and anonymity possible for the project. A full explanation of what this means in practice should be given. Confidential information can only be passed on to relevant parties if required or justified by law.

All data must be anonymised to the extent that a participant cannot be identified by any publishing or coverage of the research. Participants must give express permission to waive this anonymity and the particular details that they are willing to disclose must be identified and limited only to this.

The making of audio, video or photographic records of service-users or research participants will also remove confidentiality and anonymity, requiring all participants to provide informed consent in relation to the making of the material and how it will be accessed and used.

Voice recordings of interviews are permitted only if participants consent to being recorded. These should not be shared by the researcher and should only be used for the purposes of transcription and analysis. This data should be secured in password protected files or locked filing cabinets.

It is important to clarify within group work where information is shared that it must remain confidential within that group and must not be shared with any third party outside of the group. It is also essential to inform group participants who will attend, e.g. staff and third parties.

Participants must be told as early on as possible that confidentiality may be reduced if they disclose that they or someone else is at risk of ‘serious harm’.

5. Use and Dissemination of Information

Participants must be informed at the beginning of the research how the information will be used, for example as statistical information, individual quotes, or case studies. They should also be told in what format the information will be reported, for example as books, articles, and in conference presentations. In all such work, it is important to stress the level of confidentiality and anonymity for the project.

The researcher:

* Should only collect information relevant to the research and/or evaluation or as required by law
* Should never fabricate, falsify or misrepresent any data
* Should only keep information for as long as it is of benefit to the research project or in the interest of participants. As soon as records are no longer required they should be rendered anonymous and/or appropriately destroyed.

Feedback should be offered to both individuals and organisations, with the standard procedure being that organisations will be offered feedback that they can pass onto relevant stakeholders and participants that were accessed through them. However, should a participant request individual feedback this should be offered.

Any academic research papers and publications that inform the project must also be suitably referenced.

Where acknowledgements are made, all contributors must be fully informed of and agree to acknowledgements before printing.

Participants should be informed that, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), they have a right to see any information that SASE holds in relation to them.

6. Data Protection

Under the Data Protection Act (1998), any person or organisation processing personal information must comply with seven principles of good information handling. These state that the data must be:

1. Fairly and lawfully processed
2. Processed for limited purposes
3. Adequate and up to date
4. Not kept for longer than is necessary
5. Processed in accordance with the individual’s rights
6. Secure
7. Not transferred to countries outside of the European Economic Area, unless there is adequate protection

All information pertaining to participants should be kept in password protected files only accessible to those whose access to the information is regarded as essential. All hardcopy materials containing personal or sensitive information must be secured in locked cabinets.

7. Disclosure

During the course of a research project, if someone discloses that they (or someone else) are at risk of ‘serious harm’, then the researcher has an obligation to inform another professional who can provide support to the individual. Serious harm can refer to areas such as being at risk of, or experiencing physical, sexual, mental or emotional abuse, or poor emotional and mental wellbeing. This must be made explicitly clear to participants so that they are aware of the possible consequences of any disclosures they make.

Where a disclosure of serious harm is made by a participant, the researcher must inform the Chair of Trustees or Director immediately, in order to agree the most appropriate action. The researcher should inform the participant what they are going to do, and what the next steps may be. There may be times when a research participant is not considered at risk of immediate harm, but the researcher is concerned about their wellbeing. In such circumstances, the researcher should ensure that the participant receives information about organisations that can provide appropriate support.

8. Expenses and Payments

All participants should receive reimbursement for reasonable expenses incurred during the course of a research project, such as travel expenses. Where payment for participating in the research is offered, it should ideally be in the form of a voucher. Researchers, staff, trustees, consultants, and volunteers must dot accept gifts as it can undermine impartiality.

9. Complaints Process

Complaints should be made to the Chair of Trustees or Director, if both are involved in the complaint then it should be made to another Trustee. Details of the complainant and the complaint will be recorded at this point and a case-by-case response made. Additional information may be sought in order to clarify the most appropriate response to any complaints.

10. Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually.

This policy will be made accessible on the SASE website and directly via email on request from individuals or organisations.

**Appendix**

**RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

Before you provide consent to take part in this research, please confirm that you have read, fully understand and agree to points 1-11 below by marking the box by each point.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. I have been fully informed on the procedures and processes of how SASE will use the information I provide. I know exactly what is expected of me and SASE. |  |
| 2. I am fully aware of how the information I provide may be presented in publications, e.g. a case study, quotes. |  |
| 3. I am aware that the information I provide will be used indefinitely for the purposes of the research and as part of disseminating findings. |  |
| 4. I can withdraw from participating in the research at any time, without the need to give a reason. |  |
| 5. I can ask questions at any time. |  |
| 6. All of the information I have provided will be confidential and only be used for research project. No information will be shared that can identify who I am unless I give specific permission for a detail to be shared. |  |
| 7. All of the information I have provided will be stored securely. Information will not be passed on to another organisation or used for any other purpose. |  |
| 8. Information will only be collected that is essential for the research project, and no information shall be falsified or misrepresented. |  |
| 9. I have been advised on how to request feedback or make a complaint. |  |
| 10. I understand that confidentiality may only be broken if I disclose information that suggests myself or someone else is at risk of serious harm. In this event, information will only be shared with those necessary to ensure safeguarding. |  |

**Signature of research participant**

I have read, fully understand and agree with points 1-11 and to my case study being used in the ways I have identified above. I provide my signature as consent.

***Name:***

***Signature: Date:***

**Researcher**

**Name:**

# Signature: Date: