



Evaluation Practicalities: Ethical Considerations **6D**

This information sheet provides links to further reading and details about the following ethical considerations. It includes practical examples of resources that might be adapted for use in Aimhigher and widening participation evaluations. The list is not exhaustive but provides a useful background to those who want to understand some of the debates about ethical issues.

- Informed Consent
- Anonymity, Privacy and Confidentiality

Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent is an ongoing process especially in the context of a longitudinal study. It involves:

- Explaining to the participants the implications of taking part in the research or evaluation so that they can make an informed decision about what personal information to share and what information to withhold;
- Enabling participants to understand the explanation which might mean making information available in another language, talking through the issues and answering questions;
- Ensuring that they are participating in a voluntary capacity, that they do not feel pressured in the case of children gaining consent by proxy from their parents;
- Establishing a clear and transparent approach that is relevant to the context and that both participants and researchers understand.

Example consent forms

- For a selection of informed consent forms including some written using Board maker symbols for use with people with learning difficulties or limited literacy.
<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/resources/ethics/sample.htm>
- Aimhigher Southwest consent form for participants attending the Aimhigher Peninsula Programme <http://www.peninsulaonline.org.uk/strand0/Consent%20form.doc>
- Hampshire County Council provide a selection of consent forms for photographs and other visual images, schools and Local Education Authorities with whom you work may have their own example. This link simply shows the range of forms and the need for adapting for different situations permission to adapt or adopt their ideas would need to be sought from Hampshire <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/logos/cx-logos-corporatestandards/cx-logos-imagesofpeople/cx-logos-images-sampleconsent.htm>

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Wiles, R., Heath, S., Crow, G. and Charles, V (2005) *Informed Consent in Social Research: A Literature Review* ESRC National Centre for Research Methods NCRM Methods Review Papers NCRM/001 available

www.ncrm.ac.uk/research/outputs/publications/methodsreview/MethodsReviewPaperNCRM-001.pdf

This review explores the debates associated with informed consent particularly those relating to 'vulnerable' participants, which would include the majority of widening participation participants either because of their age or experience of the world of research. It outlines a number of issues associated with the practicalities associated with informed consent the use of incentives, role of gatekeepers who have access to participants, the issues of who gives consent and the right to withdraw consent.



Anonymity, Privacy and Confidentiality

Guaranteeing research participants anonymity is not only an ethical issue for researchers. Due to the requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998) it also relates to the roles and responsibility of everyone dealing with personal data. See also Evaluation Practicalities: Sharing Data **6B** a legal responsibility. The terms anonymity and confidentiality are often used interchangeably, they do however mean slightly different things.

- **Anonymity** is normally achieved by not asking for a name, however in some samples or groups even if a name is not asked for there are other distinguishing features which would make it possible to identify the person e.g. the only boy in a focus group
- **Confidentiality** is the promise given by the researcher to not reveal the identity or share information that would reveal the identity of the person with anyone outside the research team. It is possible to break confidentiality by revealing the name of an organisation or institution. For example, at present Ann-Marie Houghton is the only female wheelchair user working at Lancaster University. So stating in a report *Julie a wheelchair user at Lancaster University said: "..."* would not provide confidentiality. There are several ways around this and it might be useful to discuss with the participant or in some cases not use the information explicitly.
- **A pseudonym** is a 'false name' given to a research participant to help ensure their confidentiality, it is important to think carefully about the names being chosen. Typically researchers use a name of similar origin, e.g. Polish names Ania replaced by Beata. Exceptions to this approach would be when the name would reveal the identity of the person in which case a footnote to explain the approach used is good practice.

social research Update

Grinyer, A. (2002) *The Anonymity of Research Participants: Assumptions, Ethics and Practicalities* issue 36 social research UPDATE <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU36.pdf>

This paper outlines some very interesting issues concerning the practicalities of anonymity the views of research participants, it is likely to provide the basis of some interesting discussions within a team.

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Clark S (2006) *Anonymising Research Data* ESRC National Centre for Research Methods NCRM Working Paper Series 7/06 A node of the Real Life Methods www.ncrm.ac.uk/research/outputs/publications/WorkingPapers/2006/0706_anonymising_research_data.pdf

This paper considers the differences between anonymity, privacy and confidentiality. It includes some useful quotations which practitioners might use as the basis for discussion to support them working through issues of how to explain to participants what level of protection they will provide and how they will use the information provided. The paper also refers to the legal requirements associated with data. You might also refer to **6B** sharing data.

Although not written for or about widening participation the ideas discussed are relevant. Like informed consent issues of confidentiality are likely to be part of an ongoing process. It is possible that widening participation practitioners will want to return to a school, organisation or even an individual participant to renegotiate the status of the information provided, for instance identifying an example of good practice.

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