

# Public Engagement Professionals (PEP) Insight Research Project

## Code of Ethics

Our code summarises the fundamental ethical basis that the Public Engagement Professionals (PEP) Insight Research Project Team will adhere to throughout our work. Through this code, we do not wish to take on the impossible task of anticipating every aspect of our research and set prescriptive rules that have to be followed without contextual consideration. Instead, we seek to highlight the ethos in which we undertake this project. This ethos will inform our decisions throughout our collaboration, from our research design through to dissemination activities and everything in between.

The foundation for our ethical code is based upon the Academy of Social Sciences' principles for social science research<sup>1</sup>, which we reproduce here:

1. Social science is fundamental to a democratic society and should be inclusive of different interests, values, funders, methods and perspectives.
2. All social science should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values, and dignity of individuals, groups and communities.
3. All social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose.
4. All social scientists should act with regard to their social responsibilities in conducting and disseminating their research.
5. All social science should aim to maximise benefit and minimise harm.

## Working with stakeholders, respondents and participants

More specifically, within our interactions with stakeholders, respondents and participants, we follow the advice from the British Educational Research Association<sup>2</sup> in stating our headline commitments in our ethical foundation:

- We will endeavour to conduct this research project to the highest standards of which we are capable and act in a professional manner throughout to protect the integrity of our profession.
- We will establish an ethics consultative group within the research team to ensure consistency in ethically based decisions throughout our project.
- Participation in our research will be voluntary and be based on informed consent (or implied consent in the case of survey responses submitted anonymously). Participants who have supplied their names will be able to withdraw their consent (and data) for up to two weeks after specified deadlines without explanation. (Data may be part of analysis after these dates and so cannot be disaggregated from the overall data corpus.)
- We will seek the perspectives of PEPs through a variety of methods – survey, interview, focus groups – which allows PEPs to be involved at a level they are comfortable, yet still aligning with our research approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Academy of Social Sciences (2015) *Five Ethics Principles for Social Science Research*, UK. <https://www.acss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/5-Ethics-Principles-for-Social-Science-Research-Flyer.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, fourth edition, London. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018>

- Within the information shared with respondents and participants prior to their involvement, we will make clear how their data will be held securely. Our Data Management Plan<sup>3</sup> articulates the fundamental approach in the PEP Insight Research Project.
- We will use our own professional networks and communities of practice to seek participants. Moreover, we will invite those involved to share the call for participation more widely, so that we do not restrict participation to those that only the research team already know.
- We will make best efforts to deliver anonymity and confidentiality within our publicly disseminated materials by removing all identifiable markers.
- Furthermore, although we recognise the benefits of open science/research, we commit to not making our data available for secondary analysis, due to the accompanying risk of breaching confidentiality within the relatively small PEP community in the UK and through unintended identification of individuals through inferences based on the context and/or examples cited.
- However, if any information by participants is shared that suggests that harm will come to them or to others, the research team reserves the right to disclose this information to the relevant authorities.
- We will not offer any incentives for participation, however we will cover any reasonable expenses that are incurred to ensure a participant can be involved (e.g. costs of caring responsibilities).
- We commit to publish our findings through mechanisms suitable for PEPs and the wider HEI community and will share our reports and headline recommendations with leading UK research funders and HEI leadership in order to instigate appropriate action and responses to our findings.
- Any enquiries and/or complaints about our work and our processes from external parties – at any stage of the project – can be either directed to the peer researcher whom the external party has been engaging with or to Maddy Foard from the NCCPE in the first instance. If further escalation is required, then the enquiry/complaint will then go to Sophie Duncan, and then – if necessary – to Martin Boddy, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Business Engagement at the University of the West of England.

### Working as a research team

Within the research team itself, we are guided by the Community-based Participatory Research principles developed by the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University<sup>4</sup> in developing our working practices:

- Team members will treat each other with mutual respect by listening to the contributions of others and accepting that differences of opinion only serve to improve our project.
- We have a core research team that is comprised of people from a range of backgrounds and identities to aid the development of a research design and implementation that seeks to be as inclusive as possible.

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<sup>3</sup> [PEP Insight Research: Data Management Plan](#)

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University and the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (2012) *Community-based participatory research: a guide to ethical principles and practice*, Bristol / Durham.  
[https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/cbpr\\_ethics\\_guide\\_web\\_november\\_2012.pdf](https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/cbpr_ethics_guide_web_november_2012.pdf)

- As individuals, we commit to work with an open and honest mindset and to work with our data to develop reliable and trustworthy findings.
- Additionally, we commit to work collaboratively with priorities shared between different work packets that enable all team members to contribute their opinions and perspectives.
- We seek to learn not only from the research respondents and participants, but from other members of the research team in the design of our research, from the data we develop, and from the analysis we undertake.
- We wish to make positive change through our research project: we do not want to ‘take the temperature’ and reflect only on what is happening, but also to make recommendations for improving PEP cultures across the UK and work with stakeholders and participants to encourage change to happen.
- As a peer-research project, we recognise that it is impossible to guarantee complete anonymity and confidentiality within our team discussions. However, to reduce unacceptable breaches, we will operate a ‘two strike’ rule: any team member who breaches confidentiality in our private meetings will receive a single warning and will then be removed from the project completely if they break the rule again.

### Concluding statement

Since we will be working with participants in various ways, we cannot predict every single ethical challenge. However, we have discussed some potential scenarios within the peer research group to outline how our ethical approach will be enacted and created an internal Ethical Principles in Practice document for reference.

Therefore, the specific commitments in our Code of Ethics are not a comprehensive overview of every possibility within our work, but they summarise the ethical ethos in which we approach our research.