Research Project Set-up and Initiation Policy: Metadata

Document Title	CLP-RQ-03: Research Project Set-up and Initiation Policy
Document Type	Policy - A formal statement outlining organisational principles, rules, and expectations that govern decision-making and behaviour
Version	1.0
Approval Date	22nd August 2025
Effective Date	22nd August 2025
Review Schedule	Biennial
Next Review Date	21st August 2027
Document Owner (Name, Role, and Email Address)	Polly Needs, Quality and Compliance Manager pneeds@ed.ac.uk
Document Contributors	Polly Needs Deborah Fry Zoe Lambourne
Target Audience (Select all that apply)	☒ Childlight Staff ☒ Childlight Senior Leadership Team ☒ External Partners & Collaborators ☐ Funders & Sponsors ☐ General Public & Media ☒ Global Data Fellows ☐ Governance & Ethics Committees ☒ Research Teams
Confidentiality Level	Public
Briefing Notes (Any additional information not captured by other fields)	

If you require this document in an alternative format please email Childlight@ed.ac.uk or write to Childlight Global Child Safety Institute, University of Edinburgh, Third Floor, St John's Land, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, UK, EH8 8AQ.

Childlight Global Child Safety Institute

Childlight Research Project Set-up and Initiation Policy

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Research Project Set-up and Initiation Policy

1 Purpose

This policy defines the standardised process for setting up and initiating research projects at Childlight. It ensures consistency, accountability, and compliance with institutional, legal, and ethical standards, while aligning with Childlight's commitment to high-quality, ethical, and impactful research.

This policy outlines the standard procedure for setting up and initiating research projects at Childlight, the Global Child Safety Institute. It is designed to support researchers in launching projects that are ethically sound, operationally robust, and strategically aligned with Childlight's mission to accelerate the global response to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). Research at Childlight spans a diverse range of methods and collaborations, including the use of both primary and secondary data, and often involves sensitive or high-impact outputs. This policy ensures that each project begins with the appropriate oversight, planning, and documentation, establishing a strong foundation for quality, compliance, and eventual impact.

2 Scope

This policy applies to all new research projects conducted or led by Childlight, including collaborative or secondary data studies. It is mandatory for all staff involved in Childlight research projects and is relevant across academic, operational, and quality assurance domains.

3 Roles and Responsibilities

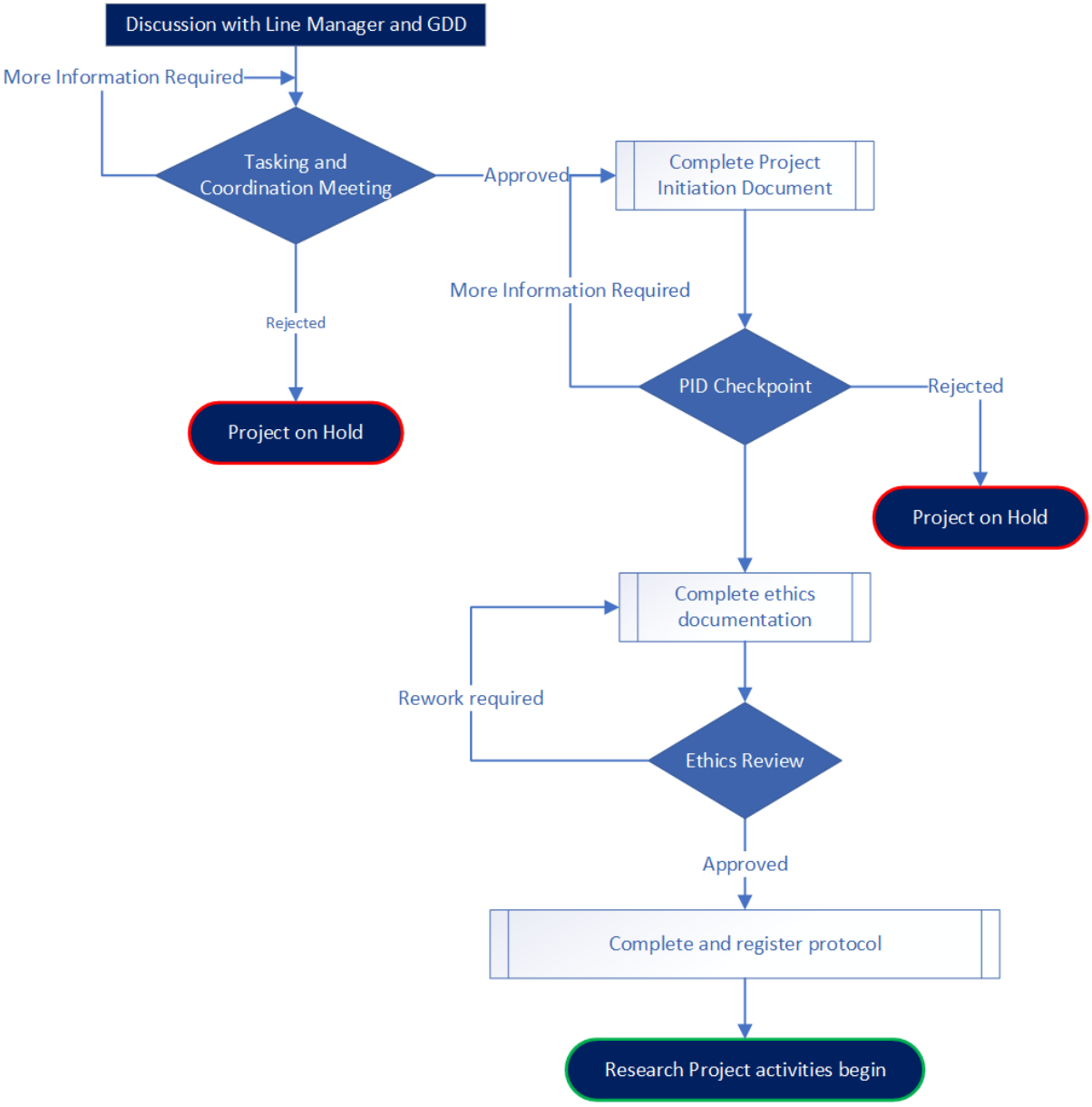
Principal Investigator (PI)	Leads the research project and is accountable for its scientific quality, ethical integrity, and strategic alignment with Childlight's goals. Is the data controller and is accountable for appropriate management and protection of data throughout the research lifecycle and compliance with University policies and relevant legal frameworks. Oversees project initiation, ethics, methodology, and impact planning, and ensures that all documentation is complete and accurate.

Project Manager (PM)	Supports the operational delivery of the project, maintaining timelines, documentation, and coordination with external teams to ensure project milestones and compliance requirements are met.
Lead Researcher (LR)	Delivers the research according to the approved plan, ensuring fidelity to methods, data handling procedures, and ethical commitments. May be allocated other responsibilities by the Principal Investigator as appropriate.
Pathway to Impact Manager (PTIM)	Advises on the project's intended outcomes and supports the team in identifying routes to influence policy and practice. Reviews the Pathway to Impact in the PID and tracks delivery of outputs throughout the project lifecycle.
Quality and Compliance Manager (QCM)	Provides oversight on research ethics, quality assurance, and compliance with internal and external standards. Reviews all initiation documentation and supports ethical approval, OSF registration, and sponsor assessment.
Tasking and Coordination (T&C)	Approves projects for initiation based on strategic fit and resource feasibility. Assigns project codes, reviews PIDs, and monitors alignment with Childlight's research priorities.
Chief Operating Officer (COO)	Ensures all operational requirements – such as contracts, budgets, and staffing – are in place for project launch. Reviews the PID for feasibility and compliance and coordinates with legal and finance teams as needed.
Global Director of Data (GDD)	Oversees the methodological robustness and data integrity of the project. Advises on data grading, statistical methods, and quality assurance, and ensures alignment with Childlight's data standards.

4 Overview of Project Set-Up

Every research project at Childlight progresses through a structured series of steps before data collection or analysis can begin. This process is designed not only to comply with institutional and ethical requirements, but to ensure each project has a clear sense of purpose, a realistic delivery plan, and a pathway to meaningful impact.

The workflow is as follows:



Approval through Governance Structures

All research must be approved through either the Tasking & Coordination (T&C) process or the Annual Planning cycle. This approval confirms that the project can feasibly be supported and that it aligns with Childlight's research themes and strategic direction.

Completion of the Research Project Initiation Document

Once a project is approved by T&C, the Principal Investigator (PI) or lead researcher (if the responsibility is delegated) is responsible for drafting the Project Initiation Document (PID) using the approved Childlight template found at appendix 1. This document defines the purpose, methods, data type, risks, team, and outputs associated with the project.

Project Initiation Meeting

The draft PID is submitted in advance of a formal Project Initiation Meeting (PIM), which is attended by the Chief Operating Officer (COO), the Global Director of Data (GDD), the Quality and Compliance Manager (QCM), and the Pathway to Impact Manager (PTIM). The PIM is a critical checkpoint. It is used to review, refine, and formally endorse the project's plans, ensuring senior oversight, cross-functional coordination, and early identification of risks or gaps. Each attendee brings a specific lens:

- The COO ensures operational feasibility, including contracts and budgets.
- The GDD ensures data integrity and quality standards.
- The QCM reviews compliance, sponsorship, and documentation needs.
- The PTIM ensures the project has a clear and realistic Pathway to Impact.

Projects may not progress until the PIM is completed and any agreed actions are addressed.

Agreements

In the case of contracting external parties, the COO finalises any outstanding queries and confirms the project deliverables so that the contracts can be signed off.

In the instance that Childlight will be receiving data from an external source, the Data Transfer Agreement (DTA) will be finalised. In certain cases, e.g., in projects where Childlight will be receiving both quantitative statistics and qualitative interview summaries, a Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) will be considered more appropriate. Research team will be advised during the PIM which agreement should be in place.

Projects examining health/social care-related data will require sponsorship.

Administrative and Documentation Set-Up

Following the PIM, the project is registered on the Childlight Project Management System (CPMS), and a central SharePoint folder is created with the appropriate permissions.

The PI or designated lead researcher, with support from the QCM, completes the required documentation including the Data Management Plan (DMP), which is required for every project. A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is required when project activities are "likely to result in a high risk" to individuals' rights and freedoms, and should be developed prior to or in parallel with the DMP. All such documentation must be stored in the central project SharePoint folder.

PID Checkpoint

Prior to moving forward with the submission for ethical approval, researchers must ensure that various key elements have been completed. These include:

- Meeting with the QCM to prepare the CPMS entry and SharePoint folders.
- Meeting with the PTIM to prepare the Pathways to Impact Plan.
- Finalising the DTA.
- Finalisation of contracts/agreements with the COO (if applicable).
- Confirmation of project sponsor (if applicable).

Preparation for Ethical Approval

All research projects involving human participants, secondary data from partners, or sensitive information must undergo ethical review through the appropriate University of Edinburgh ethics committee in line with the Childlight Ethics Policy. Before an ethics application can be submitted, all named members of the research team are required to complete a Conflict of Interest (COI) Declaration, ensuring any potential influences or external affiliations are transparently disclosed and managed.

5 Documentation and Compliance Requirements

All research projects must evidence the following components as part of its set-up:

Component	Description	Responsible
PID Completion	Completed using Childlight's standard template (see appendix 1).	Principal Investigator*
CPMS Entry	Project records created and linked to core team.	Principal Investigator* and Quality and Compliance Manager
SharePoint Project Folder	The SharePoint project folder is used for all collaborative work and secure file storage and sharing. (Note: datasets must not be stored on SharePoint unless confirmed otherwise in the DMP).	Principal Investigator* and Quality and Compliance Manager
Pathway to Impact Plan	Initial plan documented describing how the research findings will be used, by whom, and through what outputs or channels. See Childlight's Pathway to Impact Guidelines for further details.	Principal Investigator* and Pathway to Impact Manager
Data Management Plan	Created on DMPonline and reviewed by Quality and Compliance Manager	Principal Investigator* and Quality and Compliance Manager
Data Grading and Storage Plan	Determined based on sensitivity of data. (See Childlight's Data Management Policy for further details)	Principal Investigator* and Quality and Compliance Manager
Research Ethics Application	Due to the sensitive nature of Childlight's research subject matter, all projects must be ethically assessed according to the Childlight Ethics Policy.	Principal Investigator*

Open Science Framework Registration	Protocol registered on OSF with documentation of quality assurance steps. The University provides step-by-step guidance if you do not yet have an OSF account. (See Protocol Development and Registration Policy for further details).	Principal Investigator*

Certain projects will further require the following elements to be in place as part of their set-up process. This will be confirmed during the PIM.

Component	Description	Responsible
Data Transfer Agreement	Required for one-way provision of non-public data to or from Childlight. Specifies the permitted uses, restrictions, security requirements, and responsibilities for handling the data, ensuring it is processed only for the agreed purpose and in compliance with applicable laws and policies.	Principal Investigator*
Data Sharing Agreement	Required in projects involving exchange (either inbound or outbound) of non-public data. Sets out the terms, conditions, and safeguards for the transfer, access, and use of data across collaborators and partners.	Principal Investigator*
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Required in projects involving the collection or use of personal data and used to identify and mitigate potential privacy risks arising from the collection, storage, use, or sharing of that personal data.	Principal Investigator*
Sponsorship Confirmation	Required in instances where health/social care-related data will be considered	Quality and Compliance Manager
Contractual Agreements	Data sharing and subcontracting approved	Chief Operating Officer

*Note: The Principal Investigator may delegate responsibility for any project set-up component to the Lead Researcher or Project Manager. Such delegation must be noted in the "Roles and Responsibilities" section of the PID.

6 Risk Management and Quality Assurance

Risks to research quality, data integrity, ethical compliance, or project delivery must be proactively identified during the PID development and discussed at the PIM. These may include data access issues, participant recruitment challenges, or methodological uncertainties. Each risk should be assigned an owner and reviewed periodically during the project lifecycle.

All projects are subject to internal Quality Assurance (QA) checks. These include interim reviews of data integrity, methodology, and outputs, led by experienced colleagues independent of the project team.

Compliance with this policy is monitored through periodic audits and reviews conducted by the Quality and Compliance Manager. Researchers who do not complete the required documentation or initiate their projects according to this policy may face delays, withdrawal of project support, or escalation to senior leadership.

7 Policy Review

The Research Project Set-up and Initiation Policy is subject to regular review. Amendments are made to reflect changes in local practices, national and international policies, and professional guidelines. This policy will also be reviewed and updated as necessary by the Quality and Compliance Manager, based on findings from internal audits and feedback from stakeholders. Any such amendments require the approval of the Childlight Senior Leadership Team.

This policy must be reviewed every two years. The review may result in one of three outcomes:

Approved	The policy has undergone changes which have been accepted by the Childlight SLT. Results in a change of version number.
Renewed	The policy was reviewed with no necessary changes identified. Does not result in a change of version number.
Discontinued	The policy was found to no longer hold relevance for the organisation, either as a result of content integration with other policy documents, or a change in operational need.

This policy was approved on 22nd August 2025
This policy is due for review 21st August 2027

8 Contact Information

Polly Needs, Quality and Compliance Manager
pneeds@ed.ac.uk

9 Appendices

Appendix 1: Project Initiation Document

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to:

- Confirm the goals of the research project, including its planned outputs and impact
- Ensure alignment across all interested stakeholders within Childlight
- Identify any operational needs for the project, including resources, funding, and legal agreements
- Highlight key risks to the research project – and mitigations

This document is completed through a formal Research Project Initiation workshop held once a research project has been approved through Childlight's Tasking & Coordination or Annual Planning process.

Project Metadata

Project Title: Long Form	
Project Title: Short Form	
Project Reference Code (allocated by QCM)	
Lead Researcher	
Project Timeline	Start: DD/MM/YYYY End: DD/MM/YYYY
Document Version	

Project Overview

Briefly describe what problem, gap or opportunity the project is trying to solve. Describe the hypothesis [if any] for the research.

Note what is and isn't in scope for the research, if known as part of the conditions of approval.

Alignment with core Childlight research products:

Into the Light Global Index	☐	Year	2025/2026/2027/2028
Searchlight	☐	Year	2027/2029
Dashboard	☐		

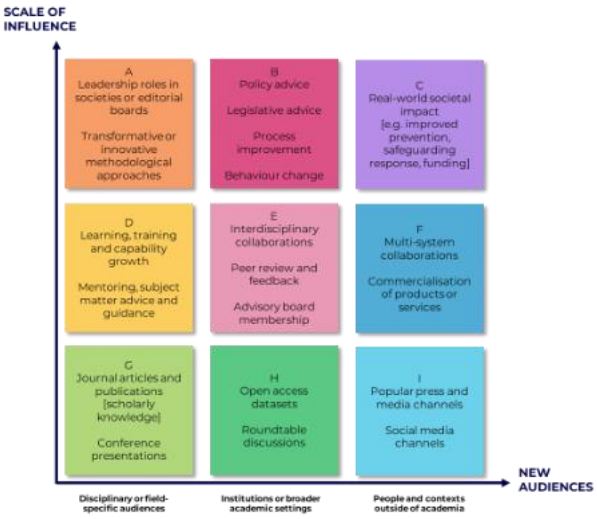
Proposed Methodology

Briefly describe what method or approach is anticipated.

Pathway to Impact

Briefly describe how the findings of the research are expected to be used, and by whom.

Include initial suggestions for outputs, mapped to the Pathway to Impact building blocks:



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Data overview

Data Source	Data Owner	Data Grade	Data Storage	Data Transfer Agreement Required?

		Grade 1/Grade 2.1/Grade 2.2/Grade 3	SharePoint/DataStore/Server/Safe Haven	Yes/No

Include any additional data usage requirements or restrictions as relevant.

Resources and team

Role	Definition	Name, Need or N/A	Workload %
Conceptualisation	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.		
Data curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later re-use.		
Formal Analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyse or synthesise study data.		
Funding Acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project.		
Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection.		
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models.		
Project Administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.		
Resources	Provision of study materials, participants, instrumentation,		

	computing resources, or other analysis tools.		
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components.		
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.		
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/ reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs.		
Visualisation	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualisation/data presentation.		
Writing – original draft	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation).		
Writing – review & editing	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research team, specifically critical review, commentary or revision – including pre- or post-publication stages.		

Governance and oversight

Anticipated Research Ethics review type: Level 1/Level 2/Level 3

Research participants? Yes/No

Sponsorship required? Yes/No

Project partners? Yes/No

If Yes, who:

Funding source:

Suggested Project Advisory Group Members [Organisations and/or Individuals]

Highlighted risks

Risk Description	Results In	Likelihood	Impact	Proposed Mitigation	Owner
		High/Medium/Low	High/Medium/Low		
		High/Medium/Low	High/Medium/Low		
		High/Medium/Low	High/Medium/Low		

Document Management Policy

Appendix 2: Version History

Version	Change Date	Description of Changes	Reason for Changes	Reviewer(s)	Approver(s)	Approval Date
1.0	22-Aug-2025	Initial release of the policy	Baseline document creation	Polly Needs Zoe Lambourne Debi Fry	Quality and Integrity Meeting	22-Aug-2025