

Research Quality and Integrity Policy: Metadata

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Research Quality and Integrity Policy

1. Purpose

At Childlight, we are committed to upholding the highest standards of quality, integrity, and ethical responsibility in all aspects of our work. This Quality and Integrity Policy establishes the principles, expectations, and mechanisms that ensure our research, publications, data management, and operational activities meet rigorous standards of excellence, transparency, and accountability.

This policy serves to:

- Define Core Principles that guide our approach to quality and integrity, ensuring alignment with Childlight's mission to advance global child safety.
- Set Quality Objectives that translate our commitments into actionable, measurable goals to drive excellence across the organisation.
- Establish Quality Indicators that allow us to measure and monitor our performance, ensuring continuous improvement and accountability.
- Ensure Compliance with ethical, legal, and regulatory requirements, including funder obligations, research ethics, and data protection standards.
- Foster a Culture of Integrity by embedding quality-focused practices into decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and knowledge dissemination.

This Quality and Integrity Policy sets forth Childlight's commitment to reinforcing its role as a trusted authority in child safety research and advocacy, ensuring that all outputs are credible, accessible, and impactful while maintaining respect for ethical considerations and the communities we serve.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all aspects of Childlight's work, ensuring that quality and integrity guide everything we do - from research and data management to publications, decision-making, and stakeholder engagement. The policy is intended to guide Childlight employees, researchers, and partners, setting clear expectations for ethical research practices, responsible data use, and transparent knowledge sharing.

This policy applies to all programmatic work that meets the definition of research. However, given the diverse nature of Childlight's work, there may be cases where certain projects require exceptions or modifications to the standard research quality and

integrity requirements. These will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that any deviations remain aligned with Childlight's broader commitment to ethical and high-quality research. The Global Director of Data holds ultimate responsibility for determining whether a project qualifies for an exception to this policy.

This policy applies to all individuals employed by Childlight, it further applies to contracted partner collaborations – both funded and unfunded, global data fellows, and students undertaking Childlight-sponsored research.

Everyone at Childlight is responsible for upholding these standards to ensure that our work remains rigorous, ethical, and impactful.

3. Mission and Vision

Through this policy, we ensure that our work - delivering impactful, evidence-based insights - not only meets technical and ethical standards but also upholds our mission to create safer environments for children worldwide.

At Childlight, our vision is to see CSEA to be treated as a global health issue that can be prevented and treated. To achieve this, our mission focuses on:

- Providing high quality data that drives sustainable, coordinated action to safeguard children across the world.
- Enhancing the quality, integrity and reproducibility of CSEA data.
- Establishing Childlight as the leading independent authority for global CSEA data.

Quality and integrity are at the heart of these efforts. By embedding rigorous standards, transparency, and accountability into everything we do, we ensure that our work is not only credible but also impactful in driving change.

Note: Research at Childlight is often conducted using secondary data. Childlight researchers do not regularly interact directly with child victims and matters of informed consent are therefore not addressed in this policy and are covered instead by the University Ethics Policy. The decision to interact primarily with secondary data further highlights Childlight's commitment to ethical research by maximising the value of existing data and ensuring the protection of child victims as it reduces the risk of further traumatising the participant by asking them to relive their experiences.

4. Definitions

Accessibility Standards	Guidelines ensuring that research materials are clear, inclusive, and usable by diverse audiences, including those with disabilities or limited technical expertise.
Accountability	Taking responsibility for research decisions, ethical compliance, and the impact of findings, ensuring adherence to standards and commitments.
Honesty	Conducting research with integrity by accurately representing data, findings, and methodologies, ensuring no misrepresentation or bias.
Impact/Impactful	The measurable contribution of research on policy, practice, and safeguarding efforts, leading to tangible improvements in child protection and data use.
Key Operational Decisions	Strategic and logistical choices that affect the efficiency and effectiveness of Childlight's processes. E.g., decisions on resource allocation, workflow management, policy implementation, and compliance with regulatory and quality standards.
Key Research Decisions	Critical choices made throughout a study that impact its design, methodology, analysis, and interpretation. These include decisions on data collection, participant selection, analytical approaches, and criteria for inclusion or exclusion.
Research	Any disciplined inquiry aimed at contributing to knowledge or theory, including some consultancy, knowledge exchange, and public engagement activities.
Research ethics	The application of ethical principles throughout a research project's lifecycle, ensuring responsible conduct from design to dissemination.
Research integrity	The principles and behaviours that uphold good research practice, fostering trust, accountability, and a positive research culture.

- Research Outputs Any published or shared findings, including reports, datasets, policy briefs, and analyses that contribute to Childlight's mission.
- Reproducibility The ability of independent researchers to obtain the same results using the same data, methods, and analysis. It relies on transparent documentation and shared datasets to ensure findings can be verified and trusted.
- Rigour Applying systematic, evidence-based methods to research, ensuring accuracy, reliability, and reproducibility in all analyses and conclusions.
- Transparency Openly documenting and communicating research processes, methodologies, and limitations to ensure clarity, reproducibility, and trust.

5. Policy Description

What Quality Means to Childlight

Quality in Context: We create the best impact if our data and research is trusted, credible and legal. Childlight alone cannot change the world and protect children from CSEA.

This means taking steps to ensure that others can:

- Access our research and data
- Understand what our work is telling them
- Constructively test and challenge our findings and methods
- Enhance and improve our work
- Reproduce our work across other areas, geographies, disciplines
- Apply our research to their own areas
- Be confident that we are acting ethically and responsibly
- Be assured that we are holding their data securely and responsibly
- Confirm that we are adhering to local and international laws

5.1 Core Principles

**Engage with
Autonomy** We conduct analyses grounded in a clear purpose, using sound logic and the most appropriate theories, methods, and data sources available. We act with independence, take responsibility for our decisions, and ensure that all actions align with ethical standards.

**Grow through
Reflection** We interact with those who have a stake in how our research is conducted, interpreted, and applied. We continuously evaluate and refine our approaches based on evidence, learning from past work to strengthen future impact.

Focus on the Goal We seek to inform and influence effective and timely solutions to important problems. We collaborate with diverse stakeholders to enhance the relevance and impact of our work, ensuring that our research supports real-world change. We design our processes and outputs to be inclusive, accessible, and equitable.

Be Transparent We conduct mission-driven research ethically, avoid conflicts of interest, and maintain independence. We commit to open communication about our processes and results and seek to ensure that our work remains accountable and accessible to all.

Leave a Trace We explain our research, methodologies, approaches, analysis, findings, and recommendations in ways that are understandable and reusable. We document our decision-making processes to maintain accountability and transparency, ensuring that our work is reproducible and contributes to the global knowledge base.

5.2 Quality and Integrity Objectives and Indicators

This section outlines how Childlight measures quality and integrity. Childlight activities are monitored and measured against specific criteria to assess whether we are meeting our desired quality standards.

Core Principles	Quality Objectives	Quality Indicators	Goals / KPIs
Engage with Autonomy	Ensure that 100% of research projects undergo an internal quality and integrity review, including ethical review and data protection compliance, at key project lifecycle timepoints.	Project Initiation Compliance: All projects begin with a structured Project Initiation Meeting between the Global Director of Data, the Chief Operating Officer, the Pathways to Impact Manager, the Quality and Compliance Manager and Research Team to align objectives, methodologies, ethical considerations, and stakeholder engagement.	100% of projects hold a Project Initiation Meeting, documented with an agenda and action points within one month of project approval.
		Research Projects Meet Ethical and Compliance Standards: The proportion of research projects that have secured and documented ethical approval and adherence to compliance requirements.	100% of projects undergo ethical review (either by the Moray House Ethics Committee or members of the Senior Leadership Team depending on the study type) prior to commencement of data collection and analysis.
			100% of projects comply with regulations as determined by the QMS Project Checklist.

	Reduce the risk of data errors by implementing both internal and external validation measures.	Independent Peer Review Rate: Reports and research outputs reviewed for data accuracy by independent evaluators before publication.	100% of research findings reviewed by independent assessors prior to publication.
	Ensure accountability in decision-making by maintaining a clear record of key research and operational decisions.	Decision Accountability Rate: Key decisions are formally recorded and justified to ensure traceability.	Implement at least two internal verification checks per dataset. 100% of key research and operational decisions are formally recorded and justified using the Childlight Decision Tracking Log.
Core Principles	Quality Objectives	Quality Indicators	Goals / KPIs
Grow through Reflection	Ensure structured stakeholder engagement to strengthen research quality, relevance, and potential for impact.	Advisory Group Engagement: Every project establishes an advisory group to provide oversight, expertise, and stakeholder input throughout its lifecycle.	100% of projects have an advisory group that meets a proportionate number of times relative to the length of the study, as determined during the project initiation meeting, with documented meeting minutes.
		Stakeholder Feedback Score: Stakeholders rate the relevance, clarity, and impact of the research project.	Stakeholder feedback is sought on the relevance, clarity, and impact of research prior to initiation, prior to publication, and post-publication.
			Any project scoring below 7/10 in the first or second feedback session is expected to show growth in stakeholder satisfaction through revision and re-review prior to the next feedback session.

	Establish a quarterly internal learning review to integrate insights from past projects into future work.	Continuous Learning Implementation Rate: Projects incorporate learnings from previous research, as documented in internal review meetings.	Each project references a minimum of one and contributes a minimum of two insights to the continuous improvement log. These can be added at the time of conducting the Project Retrospective. Log is monitored for updates on a quarterly basis.
Core Principles	Quality Objectives	Quality Indicators	Goals / KPIs
Focus on the Goal	Ensure that all projects have an established Pathways to Impact plan with named external audiences to maximise research influence and real-world application.	Research-to-Action Conversion Rate: Research outputs are cited in other research or used in policymaking, advocacy, prevention or intervention programmes. While Childlight cannot control citations, we can maximise the potential influence of our work by sharing results with appropriate stakeholders.	100% of research outputs shared externally to Childlight, unless findings are restricted by the Data Sharing Agreement established prior to the receipt of any data or safeguarding/tradecraft risk prevent disclosure.
	Ensure research outputs are accessible and inclusive to maximise their reach and usability.	Inclusion and Accessibility Conversion Rate: Reports and data visualisations adhere to accessibility and inclusivity standards.	Track the volume of Childlight research outputs cited in grey literature, including policy reports, advocacy materials, intervention guidelines, and media over the next 12 months to establish a baseline for future targets. 100% of reports and data visualisations meet accessibility and inclusivity standards.

Core Principles	Quality Objectives	Quality Indicators	Goals / KPIs
Be Transparent	Enhance transparency in research processes to 100% by maintaining clear documentation of methodologies, limitations, and data sources.	Open Data and Methodology Compliance Rate: Research outputs publicly share methodologies, assumptions, and data sources.	100% of research outputs include publicly available documentation of methodologies and data sources unless confidentiality agreements or safeguarding/tradecraft risk prevent disclosure.
	Uphold accountability and research integrity in 100% of projects by ensuring transparency in conflicts of interest, conducting regular internal audits, and embedding research quality standards in all protocols, and subjecting research protocols to external review.	Conflict of Interest Disclosure Rate: Projects publicly disclose any potential conflicts of interest. In cases where a researcher has a conflict of interest, this does not result in bias and associated risks are mitigated.	100% of project staff have completed the Childlight Conflict of Interest Form.
			100% of Conflict-of-Interest declarations are accompanied by a risk management plan.
		Internal Audits and Dip Sampling Frequency: All projects undergo regular audits and are subject to dip sampling compliance.	Conduct quarterly random dip sampling of research outputs to verify compliance with transparency and quality standards.
			Annual internal audits assess adherence to research integrity and transparency commitments.
		Research Quality Section in Protocols: Every protocol includes a dedicated section on research quality.	100% of protocols include a dedicated research quality section addressing potential limitations and how these are being mitigated.
			100% of projects have a completed and logged essential documents checklist on CMPS.
External Review Rate: All research protocols are reviewed externally before publication.	100% of research protocols undergo external review before publication.		

Core Principles	Quality Objectives	Quality Indicators	Goals / KPIs
Leave a Trace	Maximise the long-term impact of Childlight’s research by facilitating its reuse and citation.	100% of research projects, including those restricted by NDAs, maintain internally accessible documentation of data sources, analytical methods, and key decisions to ensure reproducibility and accountability.	Prior to being considered for publication, 100% of papers/reports are reviewed for alignment with the Research Excellence Framework (REF) criteria by the Moray House REF team.
		Major research outputs (e.g. <i>Into the Light</i> , <i>Global Index</i> , <i>Searchlight</i> , <i>Dashboard</i>) include clear documentation of data sources and methodology, and are supported by a completed decision log.	
		Reuse of Research Outputs: Research findings are cited or repurposed on subsequent Childlight projects, or, by external partners.	Word document manuscripts of all accepted publications are uploaded to PURE and marked as affiliated to Childlight within 90 days of publication in a journal. All citations are tracked in a locally centralised document.

5.3 Commitment to Ethical Practices

We commit to safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of all participants and stakeholders involved in our work, ensuring responsible data use and upholding of ethical practices at every stage.

For specific Ethical Guidelines please see the end-to-end [ethics workflow process](#).

Compliance with Legal and Regulatory Requirements - National and International Regulations:

- General Data Protection Regulation: Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council
- Data Protection Act 2018
- OECD Guidelines for the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- UNICEF Child Protection Standards
- Guidelines from Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Research Councils UK (RCUK)
- The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

5.4 Governance and Oversight

Principal Investigator / Project Lead Responsible for ensuring that all projects adhere to this policy, including compliance with ethical, technical, and procedural requirements. They must document decisions, uphold transparency, and facilitate internal reviews to integrate learnings from past work. Principal Investigators must actively engage in reflective learning and incorporate feedback to improve future work.

Project Advisory Group A project-specific group that offers strategic and subject-matter expertise to guide research design, stakeholder engagement, and the interpretation of findings. The panel ensures that research remains relevant, ethical, and aligned with Childlight's mission.

Quality and Compliance Manager Responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy, monitoring and enforcing compliance, and ensuring that all research and operational activities align with established

standards. Compliance will be documented and reviewed through regular internal audits, with findings used to drive continuous improvement.

- Research Ethics Committee An independent body that evaluates research proposals to ensure they adhere to ethical standards, protect participant rights, and comply with legal and regulatory requirements. It reviews risks, consent processes, and data handling to uphold research integrity.
- Researchers Responsible for conducting research in accordance with this policy, including following ethical guidelines, maintaining rigorous documentation, and ensuring findings are transparent and reproducible. Researchers must actively engage in reflective learning and incorporate feedback to improve future work.
- Senior Leadership Team Provides high-level oversight of the policy's implementation, ensuring alignment with Childlight's strategic objectives. The leadership team is also responsible for addressing any systemic challenges to quality and integrity. Members of the Senior Leadership Team hold accountability for activity at Childlight according to strategic pillar. Line Managers are accountable for staff, Principal Investigators for individual studies, the Global Director of Data for research projects at Childlight, and the CEO for the organisation, operation, and strategy.
- Technical Sub-Committee Provides expert guidance and independent review to ensure that methodologies, analytical approaches, and research outputs meet the highest standards of quality, integrity, and reproducibility. The committee plays a key role in validating research findings and identifying potential risks to data integrity.

5.5 Whistleblowing

Childlight is committed to maintaining the highest standards of research integrity, ethical conduct, and accountability. We encourage staff, researchers, and partners to speak up if they identify concerns about misconduct, unethical practices, or breaches of this policy.

Whistleblowing at Childlight follows the University of Edinburgh's Whistleblowing Procedure, which provides a confidential and structured process for reporting concerns.

Additionally, staff are provided with the Human Dignity Foundation's Whistleblowing Policy, which offers further guidance on raising issues related to research ethics and organisational integrity.

Anyone wishing to raise a concern should refer to these policies and follow the appropriate reporting procedures. Confidentiality and protection against retaliation are guaranteed for those who report concerns in good faith.

For further information, staff can access the [University of Edinburgh's Whistleblowing Procedure](#) and the [Human Dignity Foundation's Whistleblowing Policy](#), or speak to the Quality and Compliance Manager for guidance.

5.6 Mechanisms to Ensure Quality

Childlight employs a multi-layered approach to maintaining and enhancing quality across all aspects of its work.

Quality Management System	Childlight aligns its practices with recognised quality management framework Enhancing Quality in Preclinical Data (EQIPD) to maintain data integrity, research reproducibility, and accountability.
Governance and Oversight	Maintained through internal audits, compliance reviews, and advisory boards, ensuring adherence to ethical, technical, and procedural standards. Decision-making is documented, and a Continuous Improvement Log captures insights to refine our practices.
Training and Capacity Building	Staff are equipped with the necessary skills through mandatory training, specialist workshops, and internal knowledge-sharing initiatives. Research Work Instructions and policies provide clear guidance for standardised procedures.
Standard Operating Procedures	Define clear protocols for research design, data management, ethical review, and decision-making, ensuring consistency and reliability across all projects.
Legislation	Childlight adheres to all relevant national and international legislation governing data protection, research ethics, and child safeguarding, with regular reviews to ensure compliance.

Feedback Mechanisms Internally, structured consultations, team reflections, news bulletins, and reporting channels allow for continuous refinement of our processes. Externally, research user feedback, advisory input, and engagement with partners inform improvements and ensure relevance. Transparent internal and external communications not only disseminate findings but also invite critical dialogue, fostering an ongoing exchange that strengthens the quality and impact of our work.

6. Misconduct

Misconduct in research and academic work is a serious issue. The University of Edinburgh Research Misconduct Policy defines research misconduct to include (but not limited to):

- Fabrication: Inventing data or results.
- Falsification: Altering research processes or data without justification.
- Plagiarism: Using others' work without proper attribution.
- Misrepresentation: Providing false information regarding data, qualifications, authorship, or involvement.
- Breach of Duty of Care: Violating confidentiality, improper peer review conduct, or failing to meet legal and ethical obligations.
- Failure to Meet Ethical, Legal, and Professional Obligations: Not declaring conflicts of interest, misusing personal data, or engaging in unethical treatment of research subjects.
- Improper Handling of Allegations: Not addressing misconduct appropriately or retaliating against whistle-blowers.

We have a robust governance structure in place to oversee the integrity of our research and academic practices. Different forums and boards work together to monitor, review, and address misconduct.

If misconduct is identified, Childlight takes immediate action to explore the issue in order to delegate investigation to the relevant team. Investigation is carried out with fairness and transparency and includes notifying relevant authorities, gathering evidence, and following established procedures to resolve the situation. Any violations may lead to corrective actions, which can include retraining, reporting to regulatory bodies, or disciplinary measures depending on the severity.

7. Policy Review

The Quality and Integrity 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 07 April 2025

This policy is due for review on 06 April 2027

8. Contact Information

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Appendix 1: Version History

Version	Change Date	Description of Changes	Reason for Changes	Reviewer(s)	Approver(s)	Approval Date
1.0	07 April 2025	Initial release of the policy	Baseline document creation	Polly Needs Zoe Lambourne Debi Fri	Debi Fry	07 April 2025