

APPENDIX B: Sensitive research

Research is sensitive when it directly or indirectly investigates sensitive topics, adopts research methodologies that are sensitive to the context, or targets participants who may be vulnerable to the proposed research.

The Department recognises that sensitive research topics and vulnerable participants may be precisely the research that is required to enhance the school education evidence-base and that some research methodologies may be the best means of gathering that evidence. As such, **no** sensitive research is precluded.

All sensitive research will be assessed centrally by the Central Research Assessment Team and cannot be authorised directly by principals or site managers.

Research applications should identify how and why the research may be sensitive in a school education context and explain how the risks associated with these sensitivities will be prevented, mitigated or remedied.

Low sensitivity research commissioned by a school or site may be assessed and approved by principals or site managers. Principals or site managers can seek advice from the Central Research Assessment Team to confirm low sensitivity and/or request that the researcher submit an application to the Central Research Assessment Team.

Research topics that are likely to be sensitive:

- Bullying or other anti-social behaviour
- Violence, abuse or neglect, including family violence
- Grief, trauma and/or death including suicide or self-harm
- Use of alcohol or drugs
- Gambling or gambling-like behaviour
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Race, culture or ethnicity, including Aboriginality
- Sexuality, gender identity, sexual behaviour, contraception and pregnancy
- Religion
- Radicalisation to violent extremism
- Body image
- Parenting strategies
- Money and pocket money
- Personal domestic circumstances including housing, socio-economic status and family relations
- Employment conditions, including occupational safety and health and personal injury
- Research topics that may stimulate stress responses or risk-taking behaviour

Research methodologies that may be sensitive in context

In a school education context some research methodologies carry with them potential risks to individual participants, to the smooth-running of participating schools/sites, or to the Department's reputation.

Most research methodologies are not in themselves sensitive. It is their use in school education contexts that may present potential risks. Researchers should identify these risks and show how they will be prevented, mitigated or remedied.

For example, video or audio recording of classroom activities is not in itself sensitive. However, the ways in which students without consent are excluded from these recordings and the ways in which information unrelated to the research questions is excluded from the research findings and reporting are important in managing privacy and reputational sensitivity.

Similarly, ethnographic research methodologies need to address sensitivities related to the researcher status in relation to the school or site and the participants, how social interactions unrelated to the research will be managed and how information and observation that does not address the research questions will be managed.

Vulnerable research participants

All research participants are potentially vulnerable to a sensitive research topic or a particular research methodology. However, some categories of participants are particularly vulnerable. Research targeting these groups will need to recognise that vulnerability and show how risk will be prevented, mitigated or remedied.

Students, parents or staff may be vulnerable because they are in one or more of the groups below, or because the research will deal with topics, such as inter-generational trauma.

Vulnerable research participants may include those:

- with a disability
- in out-of-home care
- who are refugees, asylum-seekers or detainees
- receiving behaviour support
- with social, emotional or physical difficulties
- with cognitive impairment or neurological difficulties
- from a specific cultural, religious or ethnic group
- whose parents are unable to give informed consent because of language or other difficulties
- students who are unable to give informed consent because of language or other difficulties or because they are too young.