

# Teaching guide: Ethics and safeguarding in Citizenship Studies

All educational providers have a responsibility, enshrined in legislation, for the safeguarding of students and the protection of children. It's the responsibility of the centre to ensure that all research and actions undertaken in the Active citizenship investigation in Citizenship Studies meets these regulatory requirements. We take safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and examiners must refer work to the safeguarding team if they feel a candidate's work suggests these ethical responsibilities have not been met. If we're concerned that a student may be suffering or at risk of suffering harm or abuse we will notify their centre Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). If we believe there are safeguarding governance concerns in a centre we are obliged to raise these concerns too.

There are also educational reasons for an emphasis on ethics. Students aren't just learning how to undertake independent research and citizenship action, they're also encountering the often-challenging issues regarding the impact of the research and action on participants; on the researcher and the school and wider community.

## What safeguarding considerations are relevant to a student's investigation?

As the citizenship investigation allows students freedom to choose topics that relate to the specification and interest them for further exploration, the range of issues we see covered are very diverse. Students can be, perhaps understandably, attracted to more controversial, topical and social issues. For this reason, careful consideration must be given to ensure students are not placing themselves or others at risk.

Below are some of the broad considerations teachers will need to reflect on when reviewing and approving a student's proposal for their investigation. Examples are provided which are reflective of some of the issues we have seen in previous cohorts.

Please note that it's often not the topic of the investigation that is the safeguarding concern, but rather the unguided research approach taken by the student. This isn't an exhaustive list.

## Harm to self

### Students putting themselves at risk or in criminal situations

This might include:

- Interviewing or corresponding with serving criminals. For example, writing to the convicted criminal requesting information or answers to interview questions when researching a topic relating to crime.
- Not telling anyone where they're going when visiting interview subjects as part of their investigation research.
- Interviewing people in the street, on their own, without adult supervision and support.
- Researching online topics such as terrorism, risking being contacted by terrorists and radicalised or committing a criminal offence.
- Using the dark web during their research and exposing themselves to illegal, dangerous or traumatic material.

### Students not considering the emotional impact upon themselves

This might include students:

- Choosing a topic which is deeply personal to them and of an unresolved nature eg mental health issues, bereavement or abuse.
- Choosing a topic which they don't have personal experience of, but is emotive or traumatic, and they're poorly equipped to cope with learning about this topic in an intense and independent way.

### Students engaging in social experiments that put themselves at direct risk or risk of criminalisation

This might include:

- Taking or manufacturing drugs for example as part of an investigation relating to drugs.
- Carrying knives or other weapons in public. For example, a student might plan to use these items in a research experiment.
- Posing as a criminal to gauge public reaction.
- Breaking laws (possibly unintentionally due to a lack of knowledge) such as those related to the production of child sexual abuse imagery. For example, producing body art by painting and then photographing a student under the age of 18.

## Harm to others

### Students probing sensitive subjects that may affect another young person, without the knowledge and skills to keep that young person safe

This might include questionnaires or interviews with young people about self-harm, eating disorders, peer-on-peer sexual abuse etc. For example, showing social media or website images related to self-harm as part of a research interview focused on this topic.

### Experiments on younger children

This might include surveys or focus groups with younger children which expose them to age inappropriate themes/information or harmful/traumatic material. For example, surveying a group of Year 7 pupils, asking about their knowledge of drug taking or alcohol consumption.

### Key considerations

- Teachers must consider whether they think the topic is appropriate from a safeguarding perspective. You may wish to discuss this with your centre DSL.
- Teachers must ensure that the methodologies students intend to use are appropriate. Student surveys can have little research value but can cause considerable harm if ill thought out and distributed to a younger group of children.
- If children are to be used as research subjects, specific, written consent must be gained from their parents or carers.
- Students aren't to be left in sole supervisory capacity of a group of younger children.
- Students must not access material that is age restricted for the purpose of their research.
- No laws can be broken during the course of completing an investigation. AQA will take appropriate action if this is found to be the case.

Teachers must ensure that students carry out their research ethically and safely and have considered ethical issues throughout the investigation process. This can be done by:

- Using an initial ideas meeting to refer to ethical considerations and challenge students to apply these to their initial ideas.
- Encouraging students to use the investigation portfolio to clarify the student's application of ethical principles and risk assessment.
- Proposing that students complete the investigation portfolio with adequate information so the teacher can make a sound judgement on approval of the investigation proposal.
- Once the student's investigation proposal is approved the teacher has a responsibility to ensure that the student follows any proposed safeguards. If their plan develops and the ethical nature of the research changes, for example the student decides on follow up interviews to a questionnaire, then the teacher may need to ensure the student has considered the ethical impact of this change.
- Involving the school's DSL (where appropriate) to support and advise the teacher and student in cases where material may be upsetting for the student.

If you have any safeguarding concerns about an individual student you must discuss this with your centre's DSL as per your Safeguarding Policy.