



Cafcass Research Governance Framework

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of the Research Governance Framework is to ensure that research involving Cafcass staff, service users or data is conducted ethically and is of benefit to Cafcass and the children and families with whom we work. We define 'research involving Cafcass' as including any work which involves collecting information for research and/or evaluation purposes (as opposed to the routine collection of information for management, monitoring or audit purposes) from or about individuals who may be service users, their families, or those who work for Cafcass. This framework applies to all such research.
- 1.2. Cafcass' Research Governance Committee ('the Committee') considers applications to undertake research involving Cafcass. The Committee is made up of members of the Cafcass Board and senior management, advised and supported by the Cafcass Policy Officer.
- 1.3. The legal basis on which Cafcass is able to carry out its own research, allow interviews with its staff, and share information relating to family proceedings¹ is section 13 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 which says: *The Service may commission, or assist the conduct of, research by any person into matters concerned with the exercise of its functions.*

2. The application process

- 2.1. Any person thinking of undertaking research within Cafcass is, on making contact with Cafcass, offered the opportunity informally to discuss their idea or proposal with the Policy Officer.
- 2.2. Before making an application to Cafcass, prospective applicants should first get their proposal approved by the institution or organisation at which they are based, including, if relevant, by the institution's research ethics committee². Internal applicants should discuss the proposal with their line manager, supervisor or practice assessor, as relevant. Once these actions are complete, prospective applicants should complete the Research Governance application form, available on the Cafcass website or, for internal applicants, on the Cafcass intranet.

¹ If the research requires access to case information Practice Direction 12G of the Family Procedure Rules 2010 authorises any person who is lawfully in receipt of any information relating to the proceedings to communicate that information to anyone conducting an approved research project. An approved research project means a project approved in writing by a Secretary of State after consultation with President of the Family Division, approved in writing by the President of the Family Division or conducted under section 83 of the Children Act 1989 or *section 13 of the CJCSA* (above).

² For applicants not based at an institution with its own ethics committee, Cafcass' Research Governance Committee will need to perform this function and may require additional documents, such as consent forms, for scrutiny.

- 2.3. The application form, research proposal and any other supporting documents (for example, interview schedules, university ethics approval) should then be submitted to the Policy Officer who may, if necessary, seek clarification from the applicant.
- 2.4. The Policy Officer will then submit this application, with her own comments, to the Committee.
- 2.5. The Committee will decide, within a maximum of four weeks of receiving the request, to (a) approve the application (b) refuse it or (c) ask for revisions. They may also make comments and suggestions to improve the research design.
- 2.6. The Policy Officer will inform the applicant in writing of the Committee's decision and any comments. The applicant will be required to agree certain conditions before commencing the research, which will include the following:
- That Cafcass is kept up to date on progress and findings of the research and is given sight of the findings in advance of publication;
 - That Cafcass is acknowledged in the final research report and any publications arising from it;
 - That a full copy of the final report and any subsequent publications arising from it are provided to Cafcass for consideration by the Committee for placement in the Cafcass library;
 - That, if requested, the researcher will write a short summary of the research for inclusion in a staff newsletter within Cafcass;
 - That the Policy Officer will be advised of any major changes to the research design or plan, for her consideration as to whether re-approval from the Committee is required.
- 2.7. No fieldwork, such as interviews with staff or access to Cafcass data, may take place until approval has been received from the Committee.

3. Approval criteria

- 3.1. Applications from external undergraduate, masters or PQ students will not normally be supported. This is because such research is unlikely to be published externally and, consequently, of sufficient benefit to Cafcass and the children and families with whom we work to justify our participation. Internal applications for interviews with Cafcass staff will usually be supported; however, internal applications for contact with Cafcass service users or access to case related data for research purposes from students at undergraduate, post-graduate and PQ level will not usually be supported.
- 3.2. To be approved by the Committee, research proposals must meet the following criteria:
- The proposed research is judged by the Committee to be robust and scientifically sound.

- The proposed research is relevant to Cafcass' statutory functions and the findings are likely to be of benefit to Cafcass and the children and families we work with. Research may not be supported where Cafcass considers it would duplicate existing similar research.
- The nature of the proposal makes Cafcass' involvement necessary.
- Cafcass' participation in the research must be proportionate to the likely benefit derived from and expected significance of the research; applications may be declined because of the opportunity costs or other cost implications for Cafcass that would arise from supporting them. Any external projects should identify costs to Cafcass of supporting the work and these should be built into the initial funding bid.
- Ethical issues involved must be satisfied and confidentiality and anonymity must be guaranteed; researchers must ensure that no Cafcass staff, service users or cases are identifiable in any research report. Where applicable, approval from the relevant university or other institution's ethics panel should be sought before an application is made to Cafcass.
- Appropriate data security measures must be put in place by the researchers during the process and following completion of the research.³
- The researchers must have obtained any other necessary approvals for the research, for example from the President of the Family Division (see footnote 1) or the Association of Directors of Children's Services.

In addition, where research involves contact with Cafcass' service users or access to case related data:

- The research should have national significance contributing to the evidence base of best practice.
- All researchers should be in possession of a current, clear DBS check – Cafcass is to be provided with sight of an original certificate.

3.3. Where applicants are unsure that their proposal meets the criteria at 3.2, they may wish to contact the Policy Officer for an informal discussion before submitting their application.

Policy Owner	Helen Johnston
Approved by	Cafcass Research Governance Committee
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³ A signed confidentiality and information assurance declaration will be required; compliance is reported to the Cafcass Information Assurance Programme Board which monitors Cafcass' data sharing.