

# Barnardo's Research Ethics Committee (BREC)

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## What is BREC?

Barnardo's Research Ethics Committee (BREC) is a formal process for the ethical scrutiny and approval of research (including evaluation) facilitated within or through Barnardo's services. BREC was constituted in August 2011.

While there is always a balance to be struck between hearing the voices of those accessing Barnardo's services, and protecting them from intrusion or other harm, BREC reviews research (including evaluation) to ensure that the potential value/benefit of a research project outweighs risk of harm (to research participants, and the wider populations which they represent).

BREC seeks to protect the wider reputation of Barnardo's by ensuring that research proposed is of good quality and designed to be undertaken in a safe and ethical manner.

## Why is BREC important?

Research carries inherent risk, for research participants, researchers themselves, and for Barnardo's as an organisation. Research projects can present difficult, changing, and unclear situations that can bring ethical dilemmas. The BREC process forms the basis for consideration of these dilemmas, prioritising the welfare of those accessing Barnardo's services.

Research in Barnardo's is often focused on highly sensitive issues, e.g. child sexual abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, or experiences of care, so careful decision making is especially important. BREC enables Barnardo's to manage ethical scrutiny and research governance.

BREC aims to ensure that service management fully understands what participating in a particular piece of research will involve, which helps managers to ensure that Barnardo's interests and concerns are articulated in their relationship with the researcher(s).

BREC notifies Regional/Nation Directors of proposed research in their area, to ensure they are aware of research requests and consider the research a reasonable request of services, and a valuable use of resources. We also notify the Data Protection Team in case a data sharing agreement is needed and send notifications to the Policy and Voice & Influence teams.

## How does BREC operate?

BREC is managed by Barnardo's Research and Evaluation Team. The Chair of BREC is the Senior Research and Evaluation Lead, and the Vice-Chair is a Research and Evaluation Lead. BREC is co-ordinated by the Research and Evaluation Officer. Experienced researchers within the Research and Evaluation Team and external research ethics experts undertake Lead Reviewer roles.

To ensure thorough review, each research application submitted to BREC is independently reviewed by a lead researcher and two supporting researchers from the Committee. Committee members are based in teams across Barnardo's, many of whom are based in frontline services, offering unique and crucial review based on experience of day-to-day work with children, young people, and families. All reviewers have undertaken bespoke training in research ethics, facilitated by Barnardo's Research and Evaluation Team.

BREC aims to include, on each review team, a mix of research-experienced and practice experienced staff, and to include people with expertise in the application topic.

If a reviewer is involved in any way in the research project (e.g. as line manager or advisor) then another Lead Reviewer will lead the ethics review.

BREC reviews follow the principles of widely accepted research ethics frameworks, including:

- Economic and Social Research Council's [Research Ethics Guidance](#)
- Social Research Association's [Research Ethics Guidance](#)

## BREC process and timescales

Six weeks should be allowed for BREC submissions:

- 2 weeks for notification of intention to submit.
- 3 weeks for Supporting Reviewers to review.
- 1 week for Lead Reviewer to feed back to applicant.

BREC aims to respond as quickly as possible to applicants. Where required, BREC can aim to undertake reviews in shorter timescales, but it should be borne in mind that all staff involved in BREC undertake BREC duties alongside their substantive role.

To facilitate this:

- Applicants are asked to provide BREC with advance notification of a research ethics application, by submitting a Notification Form to [brec@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:brec@barnardos.org.uk) two weeks before they intend to submit their full application. BREC identifies a suitable review team based on this.
- Applicants are requested to include any research tools they intend to use (e.g. recruitment documents, consent forms, survey questions, or interview guides) with their completed Application Form. A BREC review cannot be undertaken without these documents. Applicants must also evidence 'support in principle' from the management of the service(s) they intend to involve in their research. This means making sure the service manager has seen the BREC application form and supporting documents, understand what the research is about and is clear on the services role in the research e.g. if they're supporting the recruitment of participants or offering follow up support afterwards.
- BREC will respond, via a Feedback to Applicant Form within 4 weeks from receipt of a complete application (with associated research documents), with a decision as to whether the application is approved or declined.

BREC's three possible responses upon initial review are:

- Your application has been approved – I am satisfied that this research conforms to Barnardo's ethical research guidelines, and you may proceed with your research.
- Your application has been approved – I am satisfied that this research conforms to Barnardo's ethical research guidelines. We request that comments above are addressed before proceeding with your research, but you do not need to re-submit your application.
- Your application has been declined – Your submission requires amendments before it conforms to Barnardo's ethical research guidelines. Your research should not proceed at this time. Please refer to the comments given above if you wish to re-submit your application.

BREC offers a supportive approach. Where applications do not meet Barnardo's ethical research guidelines, applicants are provided with feedback on how the research design might be modified to develop a research project which meets these guidelines.

Resubmissions are reviewed by the Lead Reviewer within 1-2 weeks of resubmission, as agreed with the applicant. Applications can be resubmitted any number of times. Resubmissions are either approved or declined, as outlined above.

It is a condition of BREC approval that final outputs are shared with Barnardo's/BREC. This is in recognition of Barnardo's resource in facilitating the research, and to contribute to organisational learning.

The BREC process is summarised in Figure 1 (see Appendix).

## BREC's remit and scope

### Inside BREC's remit and scope

- **Research and evaluation with Barnardo's service users**
  - Activities seeking to gather and analyse information/data from service users or former service users through a systematic process to discover new knowledge and extend existing knowledge. For example, an independent evaluation of the impact of a service or intervention.
  - Activities seeking to gather and analyse information/data from children and young people (CYP) and families accessed via Barnardo's services through a systematic process to discover new knowledge and extend existing knowledge.
  - Activities seeking to access information/data relating to service users held by Barnardo's. For example, a research study that seeks to analyse information from service users' case files.
  - Research (a systematic process of gathering and analysing information/data to discover new knowledge and extend existing knowledge), whether undertaken by Barnardo's staff, commissioned by Barnardo's, or by an external agency, such as a research institute or university.
  - Evaluation (a process to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of a project or service. It involves a systematic process of gathering and analysing information/data to determine if the project have achieved the effect that it set out to achieve, after the implementation of the activities/interventions), whether undertaken by Barnardo's staff, commissioned by Barnardo's, or by an external agency, such as a university or specialist evaluators. This is distinct from 'business-as-usual reporting' or 'feedback', as described in the 'Outside of BREC's remit and scope' section further down.
- **Student research**

Student research must be reviewed by BREC where access is sought to service users or former service users, or where Barnardo's services are requested to facilitate access to service users. It is BREC's advice that undergraduate or Masters' students should not normally be given access to service users for research purposes. Students may not be experienced researchers and the wider benefit often does not justify risk of intrusion or other harm to CYP and families. Exceptions must show that: the student can demonstrate research competence; thorough arrangements have been made to avoid service users feeling compelled to participate (where the student also provides a service in that setting); and, that measures have been taken to avoid any possible intrusion or distress. Where a BREC review is not required, responsibility lies with local management as to whether to assist the student with their work.
- **Research that has already been reviewed by other research ethics committees**

Research applying to BREC may also require approval by other research committees. For example, university, NHS, police, or local authority research ethics committees. BREC cannot rely on decisions made by other organisations. Barnardo's, as a service provider, stands in a relationship of trust to children and young people accessing our services, and needs to be accountable for its own decisions – a university research ethics committee, for example, looks at general principles, not at the specific benefits and risks to Barnardo's service users.
- **Commissioner research requests**

At times, a commissioner may require that Barnardo's agrees to a research or evaluation project linked to the commissioning or funding of a service. In such cases, relevant managers must inform commissioners that any research/evaluation that involves Barnardo's services facilitating access to service users (or former service users) must be approved by BREC.

### Outside of BREC's remit and scope

- **Barnardo's staff**

Research where the participants are Barnardo's staff.
- **Business-as-usual reporting**

Projects where information/data will be used only for 'business-as-usual' reporting to commissioners. This is reporting that could be for auditing, quality assurance and/or monitoring purposes, and is often necessary and integral to the running of the service. It could answer routine questions like "are additional staff needed?" or "how many service users are we reaching?". For example, service delivery monitoring report (number of children and

young people reached or service user satisfaction) linked to performance management or improving the service's quality.

- **Feedback, views and insights**

Projects that are gathering feedback, views and/or insights to inform and influence a decision/s in relation to a specific issue, circumstance, theme, project or service, without gathering and analysing information/data through a systematic process. There is a separate consent process for this outside of BREC's remit and scope. For example, Barnardo's Media or Marketing Team gathering quotes, or testing how well a mobile application works.

- **Foster carers**

Research where the participants are Barnardo's foster carers. Foster carers are not service users for our purposes, and therefore fall outside of BREC's remit and scope.

- **Voice & Influence**

Voice & Influence (V&I) activities like consultations, co-design and co-production, do not need BREC approval, unless they meet the criteria of 'research' or 'evaluation' as set out above. Some research or evaluation projects involve the co-design or co-production of research materials, such as consent forms or interview questions, with children and young people. The co-design or co-production of research materials does not need to be reviewed by BREC. An application should be submitted to BREC at the point at which the activities turn into/leads on to research or evaluation. V&I quality standards need to be followed for V&I activities. Find more information about V&I here.

- **Inspections**

Information/data gathering and analysis that form part of inspections by regulators, for example the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and/or the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

## **Governance of BREC**

A BREC report is produced annually, summarising reviews undertaken, review outcomes, and learning.

Barnardo's Director of Strategic Partnerships acts as a BREC Sponsor. This role is designed to support BREC with trouble shooting; increase awareness of BREC; champion its value within the organisation; and support decisions made by the Committee.

Where Lead Reviewers are in any doubt as to decisions regarding an application, they liaise with each other and agree on an approach. If dispute or difficulty requires referral to senior managers, the issue would be referred to the BREC sponsor, who would confer with relevant managers in Children's Services. The CEO holds ultimate responsibility. CSMT and CLT will be kept informed annually of BREC's activities and any issues that arise.

## **BREC documentation**

BREC documentation, including the BREC Application Form and Guidance for completion and submission to BREC is hosted on the BREC pages on Inside Barnardo's.

## **BREC contact**

Queries about BREC should be directed to [brec@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:brec@barnardos.org.uk).

## Appendix 1: BREC process

