

AI Declaration

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

AI Declaration and Index - Page 1

Pilot Study Research Design – Pages 2-15

Reference List – Pages 16-30

Appendices

- i) Ethics form – Page 31-86
- ii) Gatekeeper Information Sheet - Page 87-88
- iii) Gatekeeper consent form Page 89
- iv) Participant Information Sheet Page 90-94
- v) Participant consent forms Page 95
- vi) Risk assessment Page 96-98
- vii) Safeguarding protocols 99-100
- viii) GANTT Chart Page 101
- ix) Data management plan Page 102-103

Exploring Focus Group Methodology Through a Pilot Study: Evaluating Feasibility and Refining Research Design.

Introduction

This paper will explore the methodology to be used in the above pilot study. A pilot study can be defined as a preliminary, small-scale study which is designed to examine and test the strategic methods and operational processes that are being considered for a main study (Moore *et al.*, 2011; Aziz and Khan, 2020; Wilson *et al.*, 2021). Baldeh *et al.* (2020) and Renuse (2024) state that a pilot study can be particularly effective in identifying problems and solutions that could otherwise impact the main study's value and validity. Furthermore, they claim that by modifying or improving the method as a result of the pilot study findings, the researcher can reduce the risk of challenges arising in the main study. Additionally, Wilson *et al.* (2021) believe that pilot studies can reduce the risk of wasting any further resources on flawed or weak designs. The aims and methods of the pilot study should align with those of the main study (Kunselman, 2024). However, according to Bartholemew, Campbell and Moore (2020) a pilot study does not intend to answer the overarching research question which forms the basis of the main study. Pilot studies are particularly effective for testing focus groups as a method, specifically to allow for testing features of the focus group including prompts, recruitment processes and data analysis methods (Nobrega *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the pilot study will help decide whether the process used elicits the meaningful responses desired. The preliminary testing of the focus group can support the smooth running and facilitation of future focus groups within the main study (Malmqvist *et al.*, 2019).

The main research project is titled; Contextual Safeguarding: An exploration of cultural sensitivity in early years safeguarding practices within contemporary Wales. The objectives of the main study are;

- To critically examine how cultural factors are represented within current UK and Welsh safeguarding policy frameworks
- To explore early years professionals' current perspectives and experiences on cultural competence in safeguarding

- To investigate potential training to ensure a culturally competent workforce to safeguard all children equitably

The main study will be taking a qualitative approach through utilising a combination of citizen's juries and focus groups to gather data. This should illicit a range of rich data from in-depth explorations of experiences, beliefs and perceptions. Lim (2024) and Ostfeld and Reiner (2020) believe these are effective methods for examining complex social phenomena. Cultural safeguarding is a complex social phenomena (Laird and Williams, 2023). This is supported further by Cresswell and Poth (2018) who claim that focus groups and Schoon and Chi (2022) who state that Citizens juries can be particularly effective for examining attitudes, opinions, and behaviours that are influenced by social contexts.

Pilot Study Design

The purpose of the pilot study is to assess the feasibility and suitability of focus groups for use in the main study. The main study will explore cultural competence in early years safeguarding practice in contemporary Wales. Cultural competence in this context can be defined as professionals' ability to engage effectively, respectfully, and sensitively with children and families from diverse backgrounds to ensure their equitable protection from harm (Laird and Tadam, 2019; Laird and Williams, 2023).

The pilot will explore the focus group element of the design with the aim of identifying challenges, testing recruitment and selection criteria, reviewing consent and information distribution procedures, trialling discussion prompts and questions, identifying emerging themes, assessing practitioners understanding of 'cultural competence', evaluating facilitation strategies, trialling data collection tools, and data analysis techniques, practice reflexive journalling and field note taking and trial methods of collecting participant feedback. The pilot will support the researcher to determine if the proposed methods support meaningful participation whilst considering and safeguarding participants' rights and well-being. These goals are embodied/incorporated in the formal objectives of the pilot study, as noted on the PG2 ethics form (Appendix i)

This objectives align closely to the objectives of the main study which, according to Kunselman (2024), is an important facet of pilot studies.

Testing recruitment and selection criteria

As part of the pilot, the recruitment process will be tested (Teresi *et al.*, 2022). The study will recruit 6 early years practitioners for one focus group. These practitioners will be made up of a mix of individuals (male and female) representing practice from rural West Wales and urban South Wales. The criteria will be as follows; qualified practitioners (to level 3) with a minimum of 12 months experience, working in any early years setting with children between the age of 0-5. There are however, some exclusions to the criteria, the pilot will exclude students, unqualified practitioners, and those with minimal experience in early years settings. This approach ensures that participants possess sufficient professional knowledge, safeguarding responsibilities and experience to provide meaningful insights into cultural competence. Including individuals with limited experience could dilute the depth and quality of discussion and therefore compromise the validity of the findings. Chand (2025) states that careful consideration should always be given to criteria set for focus groups. Further exclusions from the criteria will include; managers without direct child-facing roles; this is to ensure perspectives are grounded in current and contemporary practice rather than in policy, no participants currently under investigation for safeguarding concerns; this will help avoid any ethical or legal complications. The predetermined criteria will allow the researcher to capture a range of diverse perspectives on the subject of cultural competence within the field of safeguarding practice in the early years. The pilot will test the conceptual idea that a group of six is sufficient for providing variation for identifying themes and testing the effectiveness of the research design without being an overburden on participants or the researcher (Lokanath, 2016). Edwin and Hundley (2002) argue that because pilot studies often use small participant numbers the pilot study cannot guarantee that foundational methods are effective enough for the main study. However, according to Gandy (2024), establishing and rationalising sample sizes is less about the number element and more about the quality of the data obtained and its ability to elicit a meaningful, deep and precise narrative around the phenomenon being studied.

Trialling discussion prompts and questions

The pilot will be an opportunity to trial the questions and prompts for the focus groups in the main study (Majid *et al.*, 2017). This will allow the researcher to establish clarity and comprehension, ensuring that there is no ambiguity, misinterpretation and that the participants understand the prompts and questions in the way they were intended (Wurmbach *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, testing the discussion prompts and questions will allow the researcher to confirm that they elicit the desired rich and meaningful discussion that will yield useful and valuable data that aligns with the objectives of the main study (Shakir and Rahman, 2022).

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of safeguarding and potential child abuse (Silverio *et al.* 2020) some of the prompts, questions or discussions could unintentionally cause discomfort, emotional harm or raise safeguarding concerns. Sensitive topics can be defined as any subject that explores personal attributes or experiences as these are often associated with substantial emotional and/or distressing implications which can induce short term psychological suffering (Silverio *et al.*, 2022). The pilot will allow the researcher to refine or remove any such questions or prompts as deemed necessary based on feedback or observations (Roulston, de Marrais, and Lewis, 2003; Conn *et al.*, 2010) to minimise or mitigate for this. Additionally, the pilot will provide an opportunity to test the strategies in place for supporting participants' well-being, keeping them and others safe and reporting/escalating safeguarding concerns should the need arise. Novek and Wilkinson (2017) believe that developing effective support strategies is key to promoting safe participation, in particular where participants may feel vulnerable. Dempsey *et al.* (2016) argue that although sensitive topics can pose an emotional risk to participants, avoiding them could be viewed as disempowering those affected or avoidance of the responsibility of exploring the topic. However, Dempsey *et al.* (2016) continue by highlighting that the benefits of the research must outweigh the risks to the participants.

By trialling the prompts and questions, the quality of data is enhanced by ensuring that they generate the depth and type of data needed for analysis, this strengthens validity (Conn *et al.*, 2010). In addition, it will support practitioners in contributing authentic, well represented views on the topic (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (2021) states that studies that neglect

to undertake trials and pilots risk collecting data that is deficient, unsound and of limited value.

Identify emerging themes

The pilot study will be used to identify emerging themes, by doing this at the pilot study stage, this will confirm if the method, questions and processes align with the objectives of the main study, and allows for further refinement of the research focus (Ismail, Kinchin and Edwards, 2018). This is supported by Kimotho (2025) who states that if the themes that emerge from the pilot study are unclear, unexpected or too broad/narrow, aspects can be revised to capture more relevant, richer data in the main study. Furthermore, Triliva *et al.* (2020) state that a pilot will help identify gaps or overlaps in the themes, for example, if themes overlap excessively or if participants fail to engage as expected, the process can be streamlined. Additionally, Kimotho (2025) hypothesizes that the pilot will validate the researchers conceptual assumption that cultural sensitivity resonates with practitioners.

Assess practitioners understanding of ‘cultural competence’

Having the ability to assess practitioners conceptual understanding of terms including ‘cultural competence’ and ‘cultural sensitivity’ before the main study is important because these are nuanced terms and implicit in early years practice (Buchner, Eberl and Hess, 2023). Gaining an understanding of practitioners’ understanding and perceptions will allow the researcher to ensure the research resonates with lived experiences of practitioners and elicits the data required. Additionally, it will ensure that practitioners conceptualisation of cultural competence and cultural sensitivity aligns with the theoretical framework (Teresi *et al.*, 2022).

Evaluate and refine facilitation strategies

The pilot will allow the researcher to refine and hone their facilitation strategies (Pearson *et al.*, 2020; Norbrega *et al.*, 2021). This includes whether the guidelines are clear, if it encourages equal participation, how group dynamics are managed, how group etiquette such as cameras and microphones are established, how functions such as the mute function are used, how neutrality is maintained, how authoritarian type facilitation and dominating conversation are avoided, how participants are reminded of confidentiality so they feel able to share, how they are

reassured that there are no right or wrong responses, how the use of in-built Teams functions such as raise hand or chat function to allow those less confident to share is used. It will be an opportunity to practice clear, sensitive and culturally appropriate language, practice providing technical guidance on how to use Teams and how to troubleshoot before starting, consider the use of an ice breaker to put people at ease before starting, practice observation skills to identify disengagement or discomfort and adapt or have a back up plan. According to Murgado-Armenteros *et al.* (2012) and Zwaanswijk *et al.* (2014) an online focus group may require a more structured facilitation and intervention than an in-person focus group.

Data collection tools

Data collection tools will be tested during the pilot study; Teams audio recordings, Teams transcriptions, field notes and researchers 'reflexive notes. This is a methodological safeguard to ensure that data collected in the main study is of high quality, valid, trustworthy and ethically sound.

It can also act as a technical check, to ensure that the platform is reliable, capturing clear, interpretable data. Teams transcript quality can vary as a result of accent, overlapping speech, volume or specialist terminology. The pilot will allow the researcher to assess if Teams is an accurate platform for use in the main study. The accuracy of the transcript can be assessed to check its suitability for coding. The researcher needs to make sure that they are not required to substantially correct transcripts manually, overlapping speech is captured accurately and whether speaker labels are reliable. Checking these factors ultimately validates that any analysis will be accurate, credible and dependable, poor transcripts will compromise coding ability and quality.

Field notes will allow the researcher to capture non-verbal cues, body language, group dynamics, emotions, silences, power, all of which could influence data analysis. There is a need to practice this because note taking simultaneously with focus group facilitation can be challenging. Capturing what audio recordings may miss could add a richness to the data and ensure consistency across the focus groups in the main study (Dawson, Manderson, and Tallo, 1993).

Reflection and reflexivity are introspective analytical processes that can provide the researcher with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the topic being

studied (Band-Winterstein, Doron and Naim, 2014). Furthermore, Meyer and Willis (2019) believe that this is of particular benefit to novice researchers to develop and hone skills and to enhance the awareness of their positionality to better facilitate a thorough interpretation of the data. Jamieson, Govaart and Pownall (2023) add that the process of reflexivity prompts and encourages researchers to acknowledge and centre their own positionalities throughout the research process, resulting in a more considered engagement at every stage. Olmos-Vega *et al.* (2023) state that despite the knowledge that good quality qualitative research relies on researcher reflexivity, it can often be neglected completely or tackled in a superficial way.

Additionally, Olmos-Vega *et al.* (2023) state that reflection and reflexivity is essential in qualitative research because it permits the researcher to consider how subjectivity influences their investigation, which subsequently improves the validity and reliability of any findings. This becomes of greater importance when the researcher has some existing specialist knowledge in the area. This is because the researchers background and existing beliefs can subconsciously drive the research, shaping questions and influencing data (Trundle *et al.* 2025). Employing the use of reflexive journalling as part of this research, will allow the researcher to utilise their own biases, assumptions, influence on the group and emotional responses. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to hone their journalling skills so that they are meaningful rather than descriptive.

In addition, testing of the data collection tools together will allow the researcher to explore if there is synergy between them.

Trial methods of collecting participant feedback

Finally, the pilot study will allow the researcher to test methods for collecting participant feedback and use the feedback to inform any adaptations.

Methodology

This research is using a qualitative approach through the use of online focus groups with early years practitioners from both rural and urban locations in Wales. Data will be collected through recorded discussions using the Microsoft Teams platforms due to its convenience, functionality and usefulness for focus group activity. The recording, transcription and camera functions are particularly useful.

According to Gundumogula (2020) and Bachtiar, Fariz and Sholikhan (2024), a focus group is an effective qualitative method of which to gather data on a specific and nuanced topic which uses a structured approach to facilitate small group discussion. Focus groups are undertaken across a broad set of disciplines to explore a variety of phenomena to generate theories, investigate opinions and perceptions and develop new thinking. This is supported by Lobe and Morgan (2021) and Morgan and Hoffman (2018) who claim that focus groups can support the researcher to investigate how concepts are challenged and more importantly, developed through meaningful interactions amongst participants.

Furthermore, focus groups are particularly valuable when used to complement additional methods of data collection, such as interviews, questionnaires and observations (Gundumogula, 2020). This is a key point for this research as focus groups are not the sole data collection method, they will be used in partnership with citizen's juries in the main study.

The benefits of using a focus group to collect qualitative data includes allowing participants to respond to both the researcher prompts and questions but also to respond to each other's thoughts and opinions through facilitated discussion (Estrada-Jaramillo, Michael and Farrimond, 2022). They continue by highlighting that focus groups can allow for the inclusion of underrepresented groups and allow for sensitive topics to be discussed which may be challenging using alternative methods such as interviews.

Focus groups are not without limitations or challenges (Richards *et al.* 2020), these can include issues around anonymity, and limitations around the number of participants (Richards *et al.* 2020). Chauhan and Sehgal (2022) outline the risks of ethnocentric bias, where paradigmatic guidelines are indiscriminately followed. This means that approaches when using focus groups are often standardised, coming from only one cultural perspective, normally that of the researcher, therefore applying these universally can make research biased. In their research, Chauhan and Sehgal (2022) explore four main issues;

- relationships and onlookers; considering if people in the focus group know each other, or whether they are in the presence of other, which can impact their contribution

- Privacy assumptions; researcher have often decided in advance how much privacy a group may need, but this might not correspond with the expectations of the participants
- Individual focus; research often treats each person as separate, but in some cultures, people behave and think as more of a group.
- Ignoring social context; research is not simply about the collecting of data, but also social activity.

This explains the importance of considering focus groups as a dynamic process, environment, planning and design of the focussed discussion plays a key role in the success of eliciting useful and valuable data Gundumogula (2020).

Traditionally, focus groups were carried out in person however, due to technological advances and the development of videoconferencing software, online platforms are now a common way to conduct a qualitative focus group (Falter *et al.*, 2022).

Olawade *et al.* (2025) state that the increase of software such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams has expanded the capabilities of qualitative research by removing geographical/logistical barriers, improving participant diversity and accessibility.

Richard *et al.* (2020) highlight that data comparing traditional and online approaches is limited. However, Cheng, Krumwiede and Sheu (2009), when comparing online and face-to-face focus groups did identify some interesting points for consideration.

The findings from this research included that online focus groups yielded superior results, elicited more data and that participants were more open with each other.

Jones *et al.* (2022) support this further, claiming that their research demonstrated an increased interaction between participants online over face-to-face focus groups. In addition, they found that participants exhibited more empathy, agreement and harmony online, which, for the sensitivity of the topic in question is important.

The preplanning and design of the discussion as well as its environment play an important role in conducting focus group sessions. Focus groups are a 'carefully planned series of discussions, designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Therefore, participants will be encouraged to participate in a quiet, confidential and neutral space, where they feel free from judgement.

Paradigm

This research is based on a participatory and interpretivist approach. Participatory Research (PR) are methods/frameworks that use structured investigations in partnerships with those directly affected or involved with the issue being explored, with the desired outcome of instigating action or change (Vaughn and Jacquez, 2020). Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) support this and add that PR is a '*research-to-action*' method that focuses on the direct contributions of participants experiences, perspectives and knowledge. Opara (2025) claims that PR can promote development in important fields by empowering individuals to share conditions and experiences that impact lived experiences whilst balancing knowledge and priorities. This can lead to the implementation of processes that address societal needs. Duea *et al.* (2022) believe that research processes and any associated outcomes are dependent on authentic and meaningful engagement, which also positions participants as co-producers and develops the capacity of stakeholders to influence change. Moreover, Weddle and Oliveira (2024) believe that PR methods can better align to the needs of society and address urgent problems of practice, which the safeguarding literature has identified.

According to Ravi *et al.* (2025) involving participants and their lived experiences as part of the PR and subsequent production of knowledge has become an effective way to challenge power dynamics at a policy level. This is particularly pertinent for this research as traditionally, approaches to developing safeguarding policy has been to employ policymakers who are far removed from the lived experiences of the individuals whom these policies aim to protect (Rogowski, 2014; Parton, 2011). Power dynamics will be explored in more depth at the thesis stage due to word constraints for this piece.

Interpretivism can be defined as a way of developing an understanding human behaviour and social phenomena by interpreting data subjectively in order to construct new theoretical and social constructs (Pulla and Carter, 2018; Walt, 2020). Rooted in anthropology, interpretivism is a subjective approach to truth and knowledge, situated further in culture and history and based on the experiences of individuals and their understanding of them (Ryan, 2018; Alharahsheh and Abraham, 2020). Furthermore, Ryan (2018) claims that recognising that the researchers own values, beliefs and views cannot be completely separated and therefore will ultimately influence the collection, interpretation and analysis of data.

Interpretivist approaches, according to Choudhury (2014), stress the meaningful nature of individuals characters and their contribution to society and denotes the methods which utilises the position that peoples knowledge and understanding of reality is constructed socially by the actors inhabiting it rather than something that exists independently of humans and is a universal concept. One of the main approaches to interpretivism is phenomenology, which explores and delves into the interpretations and narratives of participants' experiences (Ryan, 2018).

Interpretivism has a realist approach, which argues that reality can only be known through constructing meanings socially and hypothesizing that there is no single/individual reality (Ryan, 2018).

Alharahsheh and Abraham (2020) state that the interpretivist approach, using qualitative methods will allow the researcher to gather depth and richness through the exploration of the safeguarding experiences and perceptions of social phenomena. However, William (2024) claim that there is a further need to investigate the nuances of interpretivism to explore their effective application in different contexts or fields.

Sampling

A sample is a subset of the population; a condensed, controllable representation of a much larger group, to make more broader deductions. Research sampling is a key factor in any research as it can potentially shape the impact on theory and practice and can affect both its rigour and value (Cash *et al.*, 2022). Careful consideration of sampling should be undertaken so as to gather accurate and valid data (Makwana *et al.*, 2023). This research will employ a non-probability, convenience sample. A non-probability sample is described as a sample where there is no equal chance of selection for the research (Rahman, 2023). This type of sampling is effective because it can typically be obtained quickly and without cost implications (Rahman, 2023). This is particularly useful for a pilot study because time and budget can often be a restrictive or limiting factor. Furthermore, Ahmed (2024) believes that non-probability sampling can be particularly useful in exploratory research; such as this. A convenience sample can be defined as individuals who are accessible to the researcher for one reason or another (Stratton, 2023). In this pilot study, the sample will be selected from exiting professional networks known to the

researcher across both rural and urban parts of Wales. The researcher must acknowledge that there could be an element of bias in convenience sampling which can lead to limitations with generalizability (Ahmed, 2024). However, Sarker and AL-Muaalemi (2022) believe that a convenience sample can yield some generalizability if the sample is chosen wisely with sensible criteria in place to support.

Additionally, there is an element of purposive sampling to this research which can be defined as individuals being chosen because of their relevance to the research objectives (Makwana *et al.*, 2023). In this research participants are chosen because of their roles and experiences within the field of safeguarding in their early years setting. In the main study there will be 4 focus groups with 6 members in each group. According to Nyamathi and Shuler (1990) and Hennink and Kaiser (2022), four focus groups is an adequate number, however there is a need to consider that there may be a saturation of responses after the third focus group. Due to the complex nature of this topic, the varied experiences of the practitioners and variation in safeguarding issues geographically, the researcher does not anticipate this happening. For this pilot study, one focus group will be conducted with 6 participants. According to Pope and Mays (2020), the optimum number for a focus group is somewhere between seven and twelve participants. However, Creswell and Creswell (2018) believe that smaller groups, for example between 6-8 participants yield better results. This justifies the number of participants chosen. Ultimately, it is not the size of the group that influences the quality of data gathered but the topic being discussed, the facilitation method, the heterogeneity of the group, the skills of the researcher and the format i.e. online or face to face (Ellis, 2023). This research will also have an element of comparison to it by inviting practitioners from rural and urban Wales. Blair-Walcott (2023) believes that employing a comparative element to research samples will allow for a richer and deeper data set. Participants from rural and urban areas of Wales will be used to gather deep and rich data.

Ethical Considerations

Kimotho (2025) claims that pilot studies are not only functional and effective for methodological context but to refine the ethical framework surrounding the research.

Additionally, the pilot will allow the researcher to review the consent procedures and the testing of methods for sharing information with participants (Khan *et al.*, 2020). Gatekeeper permission will be acquired before approaching the participants. This is a critical element of the pilot because these processes can directly impact the ethical compliance and gatekeepers/ participants understanding, which can subsequently impact the validity of the data (Khan *et al.*, 2020). Consent must be informed, voluntary and clearly communicated (Jenkins, Calvert and Draper, 2020). This can only be achieved if information about the research has been shared effectively and participants have fully understood (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2021). The pilot study will confirm whether or not the participants have fully understood the purpose of the study, the risks involved, the voluntary nature, and their rights before giving consent to participate. Failure to secure this information could result in ethical breaches or withdrawal at a later stage of the research. Research by Piertykowski and Smilowska (2021) found that, on examination of 14 studies, participant understanding of the fundamental basics of the research and its processes was limited. They continue by highlighting this as a significant concern as it undermines the ethical core at the centre of research (Xu *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the testing of the practicalities of distributing and sharing information can provide valuable insight into the efficacy of reaching participants and gaining consent in a timely and effective way. Testing of different formats and methods for sharing information will allow full participant understanding (O'Rourke *et al.*, 2025; Kelly, 2024). Jenkins, Calvert and Draper (2020) concluded that information sheets were only minimally effective and that participants took the majority of the information that informed consent from verbal discussions rather than written information.

The testing of information sharing, including consent forms and Gatekeeper/ Participant Information Sheets (GIS/PIS) (Appendix ii and iii), will allow the researcher to gather feedback on their clarity, accessibility, cultural sensitivity and appropriateness for the target audience (Health Research Authority, 2020). Feedback mechanisms are also being tested as part of the pilot study. Blom *et al.* (2025) articulate that well designed consent processes, effective communication and information sharing form the basis of good and ethical practice in research. Furthermore, they claim that it instils trust and improves engagement; essential for meaningful ethical participation (Kelly, 2024). Furthermore, according to UK Data

Service (2025) testing of consent and information sharing will ensure the research aligns with the institutional and legal requirements.

Jenkins, Calvert and Draper (2020), in their research highlight that employing a continuous process of consent, whereby consent is obtained and reaffirmed at different stages of the research, safeguards the consent process. Furthermore, they claim that it aligns with proposals to move towards a 'process based' model of consent rather than an 'event based' model of consent.

The pilot will determine whether the consent processes and the methods for sharing of information with participants are sufficiently effective for use in the main study, or if any modifications or adaptations are necessary. All information sheets and consent forms will be jargon free and clear to ensure that those participating in the research (setting gatekeepers and participants themselves) fully understand the process and how their data will be used and stored etc. The pilot will be an opportunity to gather feedback on the information provided and where there is a need for any refinement.

During facilitation, participants will be encouraged to contribute from a quiet, neutral space, where gatekeepers and observers cannot influence the depth and honesty of contributions. This will guarantee that the data is meaningful and rich and maintains confidentiality. This will reassure participants that they can share sensitive content without fear of breaching confidentiality.

The pilot study will allow the researcher to practice the safeguarding measures that have been put in place to reduce/ remove risk to participants well-being and to escalate any safeguarding concerns/referrals/disclosures should this become necessary. Measures in place include a full briefing and emotional/sensitivity warning prior to the focus group, flexible scheduling, breaks if necessary, avoidance of probing questions, debriefing session after the focus group, clear, robust and immediate escalation protocols for reporting procedures for any safeguarding concerns or disclosures, signposting to support services if needed and a safeguarding response plan.

Data analysis techniques

The pilot will further allow the researcher to explore data analysis methods to assess if the approach is compatible with the data collected (Kunselman, 2024). Testing the

analytic approach tools and methods will ensure that any final themes from the main study are credible, coherent and grounded in the data (Roberts, Dowell and Jing Bao, 2019). Data will be analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006), allowing patterns and themes to become apparent (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). This flexible approach supports inductive and deductive coding and refinement of themes during the pilot (Richards and Hemphill, 2018). This is particularly useful because although flexible, it is also a structured and systematic method for data analysis (Ahmed *et al.*, 2025). Maher *et al.* (2018) state that TA requires data which is deep, varied, meaningful and relevant. The data from the pilot will confirm if the method has the potential to produce the type of data needed for meaningful coding. The pilot will allow the practicing of coding and the subsequent testing of the codes to ensure they capture complexity of the topic. Pilot studies have the potential to reveal that the data does not align with the research questions, the questions do not elicit the depth needed for TA or that the analytical approach needs refining or adapting. By identifying this at an early stage, insight can be acquired which may prevent major problems later on in the study.

Ayre and McCaffery (2022) highlight three categories of TA that were categorised by Braun and Clarke; coding reliability thematic analysis, reflexive thematic analysis and codebook thematic analysis. This research will use reflexive thematic analysis. This means that the analysis will be presented in themes which describe models of shared meaning. They can include precise ideas, concepts and connotations (Braun, *et al.*, 2018). Coding from the data can be inductive (drive by the data) or deductive (data which is interpreted through existing research or literature) or a combination of the two (Trainor and Bundon, 2021). This approach can be complex and extensive however, it makes the most of the quality of the data gathered (Ayre and McCaffery, 2022).

The success of the study will be evaluated in terms of feasibility within the allotted time frame and the resources available, the generation and clarity of the data generated, the level of participant engagement, effective facilitation and management of ethical and logistical considerations. Success will be indicated by the successful completion of the study.

The pilot will be reviewed to reflect on the research design and findings. Particular attention will be paid to the identification of elements that work well and elements

that require further refinement. Any reflections will inform and influence any adaptations to future design and approaches. Any insights that may be gleaned from the pilot will enhance methodological rigour, address any practical or ethical issues, and strengthen the overall design and feasibility of the main study. This will translate the research into tangible improvements for all children in Wales.

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APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL – INTRODUCTORY NOTES

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**:

"[C]reative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications".

As such this covers activities undertaken by:

- Members of staff (academic staff or support staff);
- Individuals holding honorary title from the University;
- Postgraduate research students;

In all of these cases ethical review is required regardless of discipline.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the **lead researcher**.

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

For most projects you will only need to complete sections in the main part of the form. A few projects will need more detailed ethical consideration and will need you to fill in sections in an appendix. At some points in this form you will be asked questions about your research in the following way:

1	Does your research involve <<something specific>>?	YES	Click to continue to appendix <<N>>	NO	Continue to the next section
2	Have you completed appendix <<N>>?	YES	☐	NO	☐

Clicking in the appropriate box will take you to the appropriate location in the text. At the end of each appendix is a box. Clicking on this will return you to the question that originally took you to the appendix.

**Return to the
main form**

NB These clickable links will only work if you are editing the document in the desktop version of Word, not the browser version. Please download and save the form before editing it.

Guidance notes are provided as comments or as text IN GREEN throughout this form. Please ensure that the comments are removed and that the green text is replaced by your own text or removed as appropriate BEFORE submitting this form.

Please ensure that you have read the UWTSD Research Ethics and Integrity Policy and the UWTSD Research Data Management Policy BEFORE submitting this form.

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

SECTION A: About You (Lead Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Natasha Marie Young			
2	Tick all boxes that apply:	Member of staff:	☒	Honorary research fellow:	☐
	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☒	Postgraduate Research Student
3	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	Institute of Education and Humanities			
4	Campus:	Swansea			
5	E-mail address:	1804341@student.uwtsd.ac.uk n.young@uwtsd.ac.uk			
6	Contact Telephone Number:	07877001934			

7	Project Title	Contextual Safeguarding: Cultural Competence in the Early Years		
8	Proposed Start Date	January 2026	Proposed End Date	March 2026
For students:				
9	Student Number:	1804341		
10	Programme of Study:	Children's, Young People's and Communities Services Doctorate in Professional Practice (DProf)		
11	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Alison Murphy/Nichola Welton		

SECTION B: Grant or Contract Funding

1	Has your research been awarded, applied for, or intend to apply for external funding?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 1	NO	Continue to the next section
2	Have you completed appendix 1?	YES	☐	NO	☒

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

Ethical Guidance Documents		
Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.		
1	UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Policy	☒
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy	☒
3	UWTSD Open Access Publications Policy	☐
4	UWTSD Export Control Policy <i>Required if Appendix 8 completed</i>	☐
5	UWTSD Trusted Research and Innovation Policy <i>Required if research is taking place outside the UK</i>	☐

6	BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (5th edition, 2024) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fifth edition (2024) BERA	☒
7	EECERA ethical code for early childhood researchers Full article: EECERA ethical code for early childhood researchers	☒

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

1	Does your research involve collaborating partners at another institution or organisation?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 2	NO	Continue to the next section
2	Have you completed appendix 2?	YES	☐	NO	☒

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

Aims, Vision and Approach of the Research (maximum 200 words per section)	
Please outline what are you hoping to achieve with your proposed work and how will you deliver it?	
1	Research aims and objectives
Aims To explore feasibility and appropriateness of the focus group element from the main project; 'exploring cultural competence in early years safeguarding practice in contemporary Wales'. Cultural competence is defined as the ability of professionals to effectively, respectfully and sensitively interact with children and families from diverse backgrounds to safeguard them from harm. It seeks to test the research design, specifically; identify challenges, test recruitment selection criteria, test consent processes, trial potential prompts, identify potential themes, explore practitioners understanding of cultural competence and test facilitation approaches and data collection tools ensuring they are effective and ethical, prior to the main study. The pilot will assess whether the proposed methods enable meaningful participation from practitioners, while safeguarding rights and well-being. Objectives	

	• Test recruitment and consent processes: Assess clarity and accessibility of Participant Information Sheets(PIS) and Consent procedures. • Refine data collection tools and identify ethical and logistical challenges. Trial discussion prompts to ensure they elicit rich, relevant data, highlight potential risks, safeguarding concerns, and inclusivity issues. • Gather preliminary insights: Collect initial feedback on practitioners' understanding of cultural competence in safeguarding to inform adjustments to the research design. Field notes, reflexive journalling and feedback from participants will support analysis of the methods/approach used.
2	Vision The vision for this pilot study is to create a robust foundation for the main project by critically testing and refining the focus group methodology. Its purpose is to ensure that the research design is both feasible and ethically sound, while fostering inclusive participation from early years practitioners in Wales. By trialling recruitment strategies, consent procedures, and discussion prompts, the pilot will highlight any practical and ethical challenges. This will enable adjustments to be made which will subsequently safeguard participants' rights and well-being. Additionally, this exploratory phase seeks to generate preliminary and initial insights into practitioners' perspectives on cultural competence in safeguarding, offering valuable guidance for shaping the main study at a later date. It will assess whether facilitation approaches and data collection tools effectively capture meaningful dialogue, whilst being sensitive and considerate of diverse cultural contexts. Ultimately, the vision is to establish a research process that is transparent, respectful, and capable of eliciting rich, relevant data. The pilot will act as a learning space, ensuring that the main project is grounded in tested methods that promote trust, inclusivity, and ethical integrity. This will strengthening its capacity to explore cultural sensitivity in safeguarding practice in Wales with depth and authenticity.
3	Approach

Using online focus groups with early years practitioners from both rural and urban locations in Wales is consistent with a qualitative, participatory, interpretivist design. Data will be collected through recorded discussions via Microsoft Teams, with transcription facility in addition to researcher field notes. Microsoft Teams has been selected due to its convenience, functionality and flexibility.

Data will be analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), allowing patterns and themes to become apparent. This flexible approach supports inductive coding and refinement of themes during the pilot.

The approach is proportionate: small-scale and time-limited with clear safeguarding protocols. Recruitment will target practitioners already engaged in professional networks, ensuring accessibility and minimal disruption.

Risks include power dynamics, safeguarding disclosures, and emotional distress. Mitigation strategies include clear and concise information/participation sheet, flexible scheduling, emotional warnings, clear consent processes, having robust reporting and referring procedures, effective facilitation, scheduled debrief/plenary sessions and a safeguarding response plan, including support signposting.

The pilot supports the refining of tools and processes, ensuring effective and actionable insights. Outputs will inform the efficacy of the main study and maximise its output, including the potential to inform practitioner training, suggest policy recommendations, and inclusive safeguarding frameworks, translating research into tangible improvements for all children in Wales.

4 **Location of research activity**

Identify all locations where research activity will take place.

The pilot study research activity in the form of an on-line focus group will be conducted on Microsoft Teams. All participant interactions, meetings, discussions and data collection will be carried on Microsoft Teams. This digital platform will provide controlled access whilst maintaining confidentiality. It will also ensure that participants can engage remotely without the need for physical attendance.

Participants will be encouraged to engage from a neutral but confidential space rather than from their own home or workplace. This approach is designed to reduce any potential pressure or distraction that may arise in a personal or professional environment. By placing themselves in a neutral environment, participants are more likely to feel

comfortable, safe and free to express their views openly and honestly without fear of being overheard, influenced or pressured to respond in a certain way by external factors. This approach has several benefits, including promoting autonomy, enhancing confidentiality, reduce bias and support wellbeing.

(this box should expand as you type)

5	Will any of your research be undertaken outside of the UK?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 3	NO	Continue to the next section
6	Have you completed any of appendix 3?	YES	☐	NO	☒

SECTION F: Research Methods

Will the research activity include:		YES	NO
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☐	☒
2	Use of interviews?	☐	☒
3	Use of focus groups?	☒	☐
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☒
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☒	☐
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☒	☐
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☒	☐
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒

		analysis and ethical oversight and testing of facilitation and support strategies. A group of six provides sufficient variation to identify potential themes and test the effectiveness of the research design without overburdening participants or resources. The recruitment method for the pilot is purposive sampling because of the deliberate selection of participants who meet specific criteria (qualified early years practitioners) and can provide rich, relevant insights which will support achieving research objectives. This sample also has an element of convenience sampling, as practitioners will be accessed through existing professional networks, this makes recruitment more practical and feasible for a pilot study. Additional considerations will include: • Balance of roles and experience (e.g., practitioners from different types of settings such as nurseries, playgroups, or childminders). • Accessibility and inclusivity (ensuring participants can join online sessions easily). • Ethical proportionality (small sample reduces risk and supports focused facilitation). This approach ensures the pilot will meet its objectives: testing recruitment, consent processes, and discussion tools, while generating preliminary insights to refine the main study.
2	Who will the participants be?	All participants will be qualified (level 3 or above) practitioners currently working in early years settings, ensuring relevant, current and practical insight. Diversity in location is important because safeguarding challenges and cultural dynamics can differ between rural and urban contexts, influencing practitioner experiences and decision-making.

3	How will you identify the participants?	Participants will be recruited through existing professional networks, using a purposive and convenience sampling strategy to ensure they are qualified early years practitioners with safeguarding experiences. This approach is appropriate for the pilot because it targets individuals with relevant expertise and experience, enabling meaningful discussion of cultural competence in safeguarding. Accessing participants via professional networks also ensures feasibility and ethical proportionality, as these practitioners are accustomed to reflective dialogue and professional values of early years practitioners. The sample includes practitioners from rural West Wales and urban South Wales to capture diverse contextual perspectives.
4	Will you be excluding any groups of people, and if so what is the rationale for that?	The pilot will not include any students, unqualified practitioners, or those with very limited experience in early years settings. The rationale for this is to ensure participants have sufficient professional knowledge and safeguarding responsibilities to provide meaningful insights into cultural competence. Including inexperienced individuals could dilute the quality of discussion and compromise the validity of findings. Additional exclusions will include • No managers without direct child-facing roles (to keep perspectives grounded in practice rather than policy). • No participants currently under investigation for safeguarding concerns (to avoid ethical and legal complications). • No individuals unable to access online platforms (as the pilot uses Microsoft Teams).

5	Will the research involve any element of deception? If yes, please describe why this is necessary and whether participants will be informed at the end of the study	No, the research will not involve any form of deception. All participants will be fully informed about the purpose of the study by means of a detailed and concise Participant Information Sheet (PIS). This will include information on what participation involves, and how their data will be used. They will receive these information sheets in addition to consent forms a reasonable amount of time BEFORE taking part, and there will be opportunities to ask questions before the beginning of the focus group. Transparency is central to the ethical design of this study
6	Describe whether participants will be able to withdraw from the study, and up to what point (eg if data is to be anonymised). If withdrawal is not possible, after a certain point, explain why not.	Participants can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without disadvantage or judgement. They will be reminded of this verbally at the beginning of the process and via the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Consent Form (CF). • If a participant withdraws before transcription/analysis, their recording and notes will be deleted and excluded from the study. • Once data has been fully anonymised and integrated into aggregated analysis, it may not be feasible to remove an individual's contribution because it will no longer be possible to identify their specific data within the dataset. This limit will be clearly stated in the PIS. How data will be anonymised We will follow recognised good practice for qualitative anonymisation: 1. Transcription & redaction: • Export Teams autotranscripts; manually check and correct them. • Remove direct identifiers (names, emails, workplace names, exact locations). • Mask indirect identifiers that could enable reidentification (e.g., highly specific job titles, rare roles, unique projects). 2. Coding & pseudonymisation:

		• Replace identities with participant codes (e.g., P1–P6) and broad descriptors (e.g., <i>rural practitioner</i>, <i>urban practitioner</i>). • Store the codekey separately on an encrypted drive. 3. Quote management: • Edit quotes to generalise or combine potentially identifying details while preserving meaning. • Avoid publishing information that could reveal identity (e.g., the only specialist in a locality). 4. File security: • Keep original recordings in a secure, encrypted university repository; delete raw audio after verified transcription and quality check. • Retain only anonymised transcripts for analysis and reporting.
7	How long will the participant have to decide whether to take part in the research?	Participants will be given at least fourteen days from receiving the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form to decide whether to take part in the study. This timeframe ensures they have sufficient opportunity to review the study details, ask questions, and make an informed choice without pressure. The voluntary nature of participation will be emphasised throughout, and participants will be reminded that they can withdraw at any time without consequence. This approach aligns with best practice for informed consent and supports ethical transparency.
8	What arrangements have been made for participants who might have difficulties	The study will ensure that all participants can fully understand and engage with the research. To support this:

	understanding verbal explanations or written information, or who have particular communication needs that should be taken into account to facilitate their involvement in the research?	• Clear, accessible materials: Participant Information Sheets and consent forms will be written in plain language, avoiding jargon. • Verbal explanation: The researcher will provide a clear verbal overview of the study and check understanding before consent is given. • Opportunity for questions: Participants can ask questions at any stage via email or during the online session. • Alternative formats: Information can be provided in large print or digital formats if requested. • Support for communication needs: If a participant has specific needs (e.g., hearing impairment), arrangements such as enabling captions in Microsoft Teams or allowing a support person to attend will be made. • Flexible approach: Extra time could be given for reading or responding, and participants will not be rushed. These measures ensure inclusivity and uphold ethical principles of respect and autonomy.
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SECTION H: Research with Vulnerable People

1	Are your participants classed as vulnerable people?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 4	NO	Continue to the next section
2	Have you completed appendix 4?	YES	☐	NO	☒

SECTION I: Research Involving Animals

1	Are your participants non-human animals?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 5	NO	Continue to the next section
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2	Have you completed appendix 5?	YES	☐	NO	☒
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SECTION J: Research with the Prison Service or the Probation Service

1	Are your participants staff or offenders within the Prison Service or the Probation service?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 6	NO	Continue to the next section
2	Have you completed appendix 6?	YES	☐	NO	☒

SECTION K: Health and Social Care Research

1	Are your participants selected due to their health or social care needs?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 7	NO	Continue to the next section
2	Have you completed appendix 7?	YES	☐	NO	☒

SECTION L: Types of Personal Data

Personal Data		YES	NO
Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018)?			
1	Personal data means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants and transcription of such are considered to be personal data. If you ticked YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:	☒	☐
Personal data, including video/audio recordings and transcripts that may contain identifiers, will be processed under UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.			

Audio/video will be recorded via Microsoft Teams. Files will be downloaded to the university's encrypted, accesscontrolled storage (no personal devices or cloud accounts outside the institution). Only the main researcher will have access.

Teams autotranscripts will be quality and accuracychecked before analysis.

Transcripts will be anonymised: direct identifiers (names, workplaces, precise locations) removed; indirect identifiers generalised; participants replaced with codes (P1–P6).

A separate, encrypted codekey will be stored apart from the data. After verification, original audio will be securely deleted; only anonymised transcripts will be retained.

Anonymised data will be retained for the period approved by the university research ethics committee in line with data management policy and then securely destroyed following university policy. Any published quotes will be checked to prevent reidentification.

Participants can withdraw at any time; if withdrawal occurs before anonymisation, their data will be deleted. After anonymisation and integration into analysis, removal may not be feasible and this limit will be clearly stated in the PIS/Consent.

Data will be handled confidentially, with safeguarding exceptions explained in advance (e.g., risk of harm or legal obligation to report).

Special Category Data		YES	NO
Does the research involve the processing of special category data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018)?			
2	Racial or ethnic origin	☐	☒
3	Political opinions	☐	☒
4	Religious or philosophical beliefs	☐	☒
5	Genetic, biometric or health data	☐	☒
6	Sex life or sexual orientation	☐	☒
7	Trade union membership	☐	☒
If you ticked YES to any of questions L2-L7, provide a description of the data and explain why this special category data needs to be collected to support the research and that it is in the public interest to do so:			
8	Whilst special category data will not be intentionally collected, this includes data on racial or ethnic origin, religious or philosophical beliefs, health information, sexual		

	orientation, political opinions and genetic or biometric data. If any incidental special category information is disclosed, it will be redacted
9	Please describe how the research has been designed to gather the minimum amount of personal data necessary for the specified research purpose: This research has been designed to collect only the minimum personal data necessary to achieve its objectives, in line with the UK GDPR principle of data minimisation. The purpose of the study is to explore practitioners' perspectives on cultural competence in safeguarding, not to gather detailed personal or demographic information. Therefore: • Identifiers: No names, addresses, or contact details will appear in transcripts or analysis. Participants will be assigned simple codes (e.g., P1–P6). • Demographics: Only broad descriptors (e.g., rural or urban practitioner) will be recorded to ensure contextual diversity. No sensitive personal details will be requested. • Audio recordings: These are essential for accurate transcription and thematic analysis. They will be securely stored and deleted once anonymised transcripts are verified. • Transcripts: All direct and indirect identifiers will be removed during transcription. Quotes used in reporting will be edited to prevent re-identification. • Incidental sensitive data: If special category data (e.g., ethnicity) is disclosed, it will be redacted during transcription. This approach ensures that personal data is limited, relevant, and proportionate to the research purpose, while maintaining ethical integrity and compliance with UK GDPR. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

10	Demonstrate that the processing is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to individuals and that their interests will be safeguarded:
	The processing of personal data in this study is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to participants. The research involves professional practitioners discussing their experiences and perspectives on cultural competence in safeguarding—topics within their professional remit. No intrusive or highly sensitive questions will be asked, and participants can decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time without consequence. To safeguard participants' interests: • Transparency: Full details of the study, data use, and withdrawal rights will be provided in the Participant Information Sheet and consent form. • Data minimisation and anonymisation: Only essential data will be collected. Audio recordings will be transcribed, anonymised (removing names, workplaces, and indirect identifiers), and securely stored. Original recordings will be deleted after verification. • Confidentiality: Data will be handled in compliance with UK GDPR and institutional policies. Quotes will be edited to prevent re-identification. • Support and safeguarding: A clear protocol will be in place for managing emotional distress or safeguarding disclosures, including signposting to support services and clear reporting and referral processes • Voluntary participation: Participants will have at least seven days to decide and can withdraw at any point before anonymisation. These measures ensure the research is proportionate, respectful, and designed to protect participants' rights and well-being.
11	Demonstrate that the data will not be used to take any action or make decisions in relation to the individuals concerned:
	The data collected will not be used to take any action or make decisions about individual participants. Its sole purpose is for academic research to explore practitioners' perspectives on cultural competence in safeguarding. The study is designed to generate in-depth, realistic, current, contextual and anonymised insights, not to evaluate or assess participants' performance, competence, or professional standing in any way. All identifiers will be removed during transcription, and participants will be assigned codes (e.g., P1–P6). Quotes used in reporting will be anonymised and edited to prevent re-identification. The findings will be presented at a group level, focusing on themes rather than individual contributions.

Participants will be informed in the Participant Information Sheet and consent form that their data will be used exclusively for research purposes and will not influence their employment, training, or professional status. This ensures transparency and protects participants' interests.				
12	Data should be anonymised wherever possible, either at point of capture or once collated. If the data cannot be anonymised, and if pseudonymisation is not possible, demonstrate why that is possible. If special category data cannot be anonymised, explicit consent to share that data must normally be obtained.			
All data will be anonymised wherever possible. Audio recordings will be transcribed and then anonymised by removing direct identifiers and masking indirect identifiers that could lead to re-identification. Participants will be assigned codes (e.g., P1–P6), and the code key will be stored separately on an encrypted drive. Original audio files will be deleted once anonymisation is verified. If anonymisation is not possible for certain elements (e.g., voice in audio recordings prior to transcription), these files will be stored securely and deleted as soon as transcription and anonymisation are complete. Pseudonymisation will always be applied during analysis and reporting. The research does not intend to collect special category data (e.g., ethnicity, health, religion). If such data is disclosed incidentally, it will be redacted during transcription to prevent retention of unnecessary sensitive information. If, for any reason, special category data cannot be anonymised and is essential for analysis, explicit consent will be obtained from the participant before inclusion, in line with UK GDPR Article 9 requirements. This approach ensures compliance with data minimisation and privacy principles while safeguarding participants' rights.				
13	If special category data cannot be anonymised, will you obtain explicit consent to share that data?	YES	NO	N/A
		☒	☐	☐

SECTION M: Participant Information and Consent

Information for participants It is normally expected that those participating in research should do so having given their informed consent. If this is not appropriate or practical, explicit justification must be provided, in line with prevailing disciplinary	YES	NO	N/A
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conventions. Please note however, that informed consent to participate in the research is separate from consent to process (e.g. collect, analyse, store, reuse or share) personal data, as the University's lawful basis for processing personal data in research activities is part of its 'public task'.				
1	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☒	☐	☐
2	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
3	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
4	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☒	☐	☐
5	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	☒
6	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐
7	Will participants be made aware of how you will treat any information that may reasonably be considered as confidential?	☒	☐	☐
8	If your research requires your participants to sign up for a service provided by an external company or organisation will you inform them that their data may be stored and processed outside UWTSD?	☐	☐	☒
9	Will you give participants the UWTSD Privacy Notice for Research?	☒	☐	☐
If you have answered NO to any of questions M1-M8, please provide justification detailing why this is necessary for the research.				
10	n/a			
Informed consent: Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for				

participants to provide full consent before the research begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded.

11	Before providing consent, participants will receive a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) outlining the purpose of the study, what participation involves, potential risks, benefits, procedure for data handling (including anonymisation and withdrawal limits), and their rights. The PIS will be written in plain language and emailed at least seven days before the session. Participants will also have the opportunity to ask questions via email or during a verbal briefing at the start of the focus group. Full consent will be obtained before the research begins. Participants will complete a signed consent form electronically (e.g., scanned signature or secure digital form) confirming they understand the study and agree to take part. Consent will cover audio recording, transcription, anonymisation, and use of anonymised quotes in reporting. At the start of the session, the researcher will verbally reconfirm consent and remind participants of their right to withdraw at any time before anonymisation. Consent forms will be stored securely on the university's encrypted system, separate from research data, in compliance with UK GDPR. If a participant cannot provide written consent (e.g., technical issues), verbal consent will be recorded at the start of the session and documented in researcher notes.
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Confidentiality: Confidential information refers to information that can be related to an identifiable individual, whether living or deceased, which is not in the public domain and which is given with the expectation that it will be kept confidential. Under Common Law when an individual entrusts a researcher or research team with confidential information, the team must handle this in line with 'reasonable expectations'. In other words, confidential information should only normally be shared when there would be 'no surprises' for the individuals concerned. Where participants would not expect the researcher to be sharing their confidential information with others, researchers can manage their expectations by informing them of their intentions (e.g. in the participant information sheet or during discussions about participation) and asking them if they are happy with these plans. They should understand what is being proposed and what this might mean for them, before they decide whether the researcher can share their confidential information with others.

Please detail how you will treat confidential information:

12	All information provided by participants will be treated as confidential and handled in line with UK GDPR principles. Confidential information refers to any data that can identify an individual and is not in the public domain, shared with the expectation
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	that it will remain private. The research will ensure that participants experience no surprises and no harm regarding how their information is used. Participants will be fully informed, via the Participant Information Sheet and verbal briefing, about what data will be collected, how it will be anonymised, and the limited circumstances in which confidentiality may need to be breached (e.g., safeguarding concerns or legal obligations). They will have the opportunity to ask questions and confirm they are comfortable with these arrangements before providing consent. Data will be anonymised during transcription by removing names, workplace identifiers, and any indirect identifiers. Quotes used in reporting will be edited to prevent re-identification. Original recordings will be securely deleted once anonymisation is verified. Access to data will be restricted to the researcher and stored on encrypted university systems. These measures ensure confidentiality is maintained throughout, with clear communication to manage expectations and uphold participants' rights.			
Copies of any written consent form, written information and all other explanatory material should accompany this application. If you have included these then please list the documents included here.				
13	Participant Information Sheet (PIS) – see appendix Consent Form – see appendix			
14	Consent form attached?	YES ☒	NO ☐	N/A ☐

SECTION N: Research with Potential Military Application

1	Does your research have any potential military application?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 8	NO	Continue to the next section
2	Have you completed appendix 8?	YES	☐	NO	☒

SECTION O: Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Use of generative AI and other AI-based tools		YES	NO	N/A
There are a number of ethical issues relating to the use of generative AI and other AI-based tools, including data security,				

output bias, and output errors. In general you should assume that any generative AI or other AI-based tool that you pay to use is more secure and accurate than one which is free to use.				
Will the research use AI tools to do any of the following:				
1	Capture data?	☐	☒	☐
2	Generate and/or edit text?	☐	☒	☐
3	Generate graphics?	☐	☒	☐
4	Generate video?	☐	☒	☐
5	Generate sound/music?	☐	☒	☐
6	Generate code?	☐	☒	☐
7	Generate synthetic data?	☐	☒	☐
8	Analyse data?	☐	☒	☐
9	Analyse personal or sensitive data?	☐	☒	☐
10	Classify data?	☐	☒	☐
11	Do you intend to use the free version of any AI tools?	☐	☒	☐
If you have answered YES to any of questions O1-O11, please provide justification detailing why this is necessary for the research.				
12	n/a			

Section P: Research Data Management Plan

1	Data Summary
The research will generate qualitative data from an online focus group with early years practitioners. Specifically, the following data types will be collected:	

	• Audio recordings of the focus group discussion via Microsoft Teams (necessary for accurate transcription and analysis). • Automated transcripts produced by Teams, which will be checked and corrected by the researcher. • Researcher field notes capturing non-verbal cues, context, and reflections during the session. • Anonymised transcripts for thematic analysis, with all direct identifiers (names, workplace names, locations) removed and indirect identifiers masked. • Basic contextual descriptors (e.g., rural or urban practitioner) to ensure diversity of perspectives. No detailed demographic or sensitive personal data will be requested. No financial, health, or family information will be collected. If incidental special category data is disclosed, it will be redacted during transcription. All data will be stored securely on encrypted university systems and handled in compliance with UK GDPR and institutional policies.
2	Responsibilities
	The main researcher in this will have full responsibility for data management throughout the project, both the pilot and the main study. This includes ensuring compliance with UK GDPR and institutional policies. The researcher will oversee secure storage, anonymisation, retention, and destruction of all research data as per guidelines. As this pilot study will be conducted by a single researcher under supervision, there are no partner institutions or third parties involved and therefore, no data will be shared beyond the supervisory team. Supervisors will provide oversight and guidance but will not handle raw data. All identifiable data (e.g., audio recordings, consent forms) will remain under the researchers control and stored on the university's encrypted systems. Responsibilities include: • Collecting data securely (Microsoft Teams recordings stored on encrypted drives). • Anonymising transcripts and removing identifiers. • Maintaining a separate, encrypted code key for pseudonymisation. • Ensuring consent forms are stored securely and separately from research data. • Managing retention and secure destruction in line with university policy.
3	Assessment of existing data

??	
4	Management and curation of data
All data collected during the date will be prepared, organised and documented inline with the ethical and institutional guidance outlined in this form. All recordings, transcriptions and notes generated by Microsoft Teams will be downloaded and securely stored, on password protected institutional drives. Any identifiable or personal information will be removed and anonymised at the earliest opportunity. The researcher will standardise all file formats, for example transcripts will be stored in Word or PDF form and datasets in Excel, maintaining accessibility and longer term usability. Data will be categorised by indirect identifiers, removing any direct identifiers such as names to maintain confidentiality. A clear and organised filing system, for example using terms such as raw data, anonymised scripts, thematic analysis to separate original material and data from processed material and data. The researcher will use a data management log is required, where the creation of files, anonymisation and access can be recorded. Data will be retained securely for the period of 10 years as instructed by institutional guidelines. At the end of the retention period all files will be permanently deleted from all storage systems. Procedures for recording, anonymisation, storage, and eventual disposal will be documented to demonstrate compliance with GDPR and institutional policies.	
5	Quality assurance of data
Data will be collected directly through Microsoft Teams, which will ensure secure transmission and storage. Participants will be briefed on all procedures to minimise any potential for errors. All recordings and audio will be checked immediately after the session for completeness and clarity.	

Transcripts and notes will be produced promptly after data collection to avoid the potential for any memory bias. A consistent coding framework will be applied to ensure uniformity. Cross checking will be used to minimise any errors.

Any handwritten field notes will be scanned and digitised with files being standardised and saved, as outlined above. Meta data (including date, participant id, activity) will be attached to files to support traceability.

Supervisors may be invited to cross-check anonymisation and coding decisions to promote reliability.

6 Short-term data storage

Data collected will be stored on secure, password protected institutional drives immediately after collection. Files will be anonymised at the earliest opportunity with participant identifiers replaced with codes (P1-P6). All raw data will be stored separately from the any processed data to maintain clarity and integrity.

Access to data will be restricted to the main researcher. Permissions will be managed through institutional systems to avoid and unauthorised access. A data log, including any access to data will be in place to maintain and ensure accountability.

Data will be encrypted, both on Teams and once stored securely. Devices used to access data will be protected with multi factor authentication and updated security software on institutional devices. No data will be stored on any personal devices or external drives to reduce any potential security breaches.

Regular back-ups will be performed automatically by the institutional IT systems.

Version history will be used and will ensure that any changes or updates are easily traceable.

Data will remain secure on institutional storage for the duration of the project. On completion of the project, anonymised datasets will be retained for the specific period as per institutional guidelines. This will support traceability, transparency and reproducibility. At the end of the retention period, all data will be permanently removed from storage systems in line with GDPR and institutional guidelines.

7	Long-term data storage and preservation
Anonymised datasets will be stored on password protected institutional servers for the duration of the project and beyond (retention) for xxx in line with institutional guideleines. Any raw/identifiable data will not be retained beyond the analysis phase, only the anonymised files will be kept long term. Access will be remain restricted to the main researcher. Institutional IT services will manage permissions to ensure accountability and prevent any unauthorised access. Long-term storage will use encrypted servers with regular monitoring and updates by the iT systems. Multi factor authentication will continue ot be required for access with the data log being used throughout the project. No data will be stored on personal devices or external drives. IT services will maintain secure back ups to prevent accidental losses. Standardised formats will be used to ensue long term accessibility and compatibility. Metadata will remain attached to files for traceability. At the conclusion of the retention period all data will be permanently deleted from institutional systems following GDPR and institutional guidelines.	
8	Documentation and metadata
A data management log will be utilised in recording collection dates, participant codes type of activity and anonymisation steps. Furthermore access/ changes and updates will be recorded in the data log. A reflexive diary will capture contextual notes about the study, its design, decisions madem and any deviations from protocol.	

Coding frameworks and consent data will be stored alongside all other data to provide clarity and interpretation.

Each folder when stored, will have structured meta data attached, for example participant identifier (P1-P6), date and time of collection, format of data (recording, transcript, notes etc), stage of processing (raw, anonymised, analysed), research data activity type (focus group). This meta data will be embedded in file properties and maintained in a separate index to ensure consistency.

Contextual details such as study aims, sampling rationale, data collection method will be documented in accompanying notes.

An audit trail and version history will be kept/ used to record changes, corrections and data handling.

Documentation will be written in clear, accessible language to support any secondary users to understand the dataset.

Structure metadata and contextual documentation will allow any secondary users to assess the quality, relevance and limitations of the dataset. This ensure that there is transparency and reproducibility whilst maintaining participant confidentiality.

9	Data sharing
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Findings will be disseminated through the main researchers thesis as a later dated after the conclusion of the main study. Furthermore, peer discussions, academic publications and conference presentations are further avenues for sharing findings and data. Summaries of finding might also be shared with professional networks and practitioners to inform safeguarding practice and pedagogy.

The aim of the broader research is to contribute to cultural competence of practitioners in the field of safeguarding, therefore, sharing insights from the findings hold value in that it can offer an evidence-based data to support inclusive, equitable, competent and effective safeguarding. Sharing the findings from the pilot study can inform broader professional dialogue and enhance reflective practice. However, different audience will derive different value, for example academics may see value in the methodological rigour and theoretical contribution, practitioners may derive value in the practical strategies

and professional confidence and policy makers may derive value in the implications for staining and policy change.

Data will not be shared during the pilot study phase as this is predominantly exploratory, and its main aim is for refinement purposes. Sharing will occur on conclusion of the main study. This will ensure audiences will receive robust and reliable insights.

Raw data will NOT be shared. Only anonymised data will be disseminated.

A potential obstacle is the institutional requirements for embargo periods (for example thesis access is restricted until exam board). Practical challenges include ensuring anonymisation is thorough and consistent because sharing identifiable data is an ethical dilemma and ethical breach.

Longevity of the finding is dependent on how safeguarding practices evolve. Documentation will support future analysis, responsibility will remain with the researcher.

Access will be open access where possible.

10	Copyright and intellectual property ownership
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Any and all new data generated during the study (e.g. transcripts, anonymised datasets, coded materials) will be owned by the main researcher and the institution in accordance with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Participants will not retain copyright over their contributions once anonymised, this will be made clear both in the Participant Information Sheet and consent forms. However, the participants right to withdraw consent and have their data removed will be respected.

The researcher will hold copyright for the thesis, any subsequent publications, and outputs derived from the data.

Intellectual Property rights for the anonymised data set will remain with the institution, ensuring compliance with academic and legal standards.

11	Resources
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Institutional IT infrastructure resources including hardware, software (including access to Microsoft Teams which will be required for data collection and participant engagement and standard software such as Microsoft Office), secure servers, password-protected devices, for short term storage.

Researcher resources including time and expertise for data management, documentation and analysis.

There are no costs directly anticipated. As a student of the university, data storage is supported by the universities existing IT systems. Furthermore, as a student of the university all storage and security provisions are covered under the institutional licences and infrastructure.

Any additional software, for example scanning and transcribing reflexive journaling and field notes, will be sourced from existing student/ university resources.

SECTION Q: Risk Assessment

Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them.			
If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.			
1	Full risk assessment completed and appended?	YES ☐	NO ☒
Risks to participants, researchers, and the University			
2	Social risks: <i>disclosures that could affect participants standing in the community, in their family and their job.</i>	YES ☒	NO ☐
Risk:		How will you address any risks?	

Risks to Participants There is a potential risk to participants' professional reputation and position if identifiable comments are linked to them or their setting. Risks to the University There is a low risk of reputational harm if findings are misinterpreted as institutional views. Risks to the Researcher The researcher may experience pushback where findings challenge accepted practice.	To mitigate this, all data will be anonymised at source using coded IDs, and direct or indirect identifiers will be removed. Reporting will use grouped themes, and quotes will be checked before use. Recruitment will be voluntary, with no impact on employment, and participants may withdraw without reason until data is anonymised. Confidentiality limits (e.g., safeguarding concerns) will be explained, and a clear escalation protocol followed. Debrief information and wellbeing signposting will be provided. All outputs will include a disclaimer that views are those of participants/researcher only. Data will be securely stored on encrypted University systems, accessible only to the researcher and supervisory team. Reports will avoid naming local partners and present balanced findings. This will be mitigated through supervision, reflexive practice, and neutral language. Wellbeing support is available if needed, though risk is considered low.		
3	Legal risks: activities that could result in the participant, researchers and / or University committing an offence; activities that might lead to a participant disclosing criminal activity to a researcher which would necessitate reporting to enforcement authorities; activities that could result in a civil claim for compensation	YES ☒	NO ☐
Risk:		How will you address any risks?	

Risks to Participants There is a potential risk that participants may disclose information relating to criminal activity during interviews or discussions. This could necessitate reporting to enforcement authorities under safeguarding or legal obligations. Risks to the University The University faces a low risk of liability if data is mishandled or if reporting obligations are not met. Risks to the Researcher The researcher may encounter disclosures requiring mandatory reporting, which could create legal obligations and emotional strain. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	To mitigate this, participants will be informed in advance of the limits to confidentiality and mandatory reporting requirements. The study will avoid questions that directly solicit illegal behaviour and will focus on professional practice within ethical boundaries. This will be mitigated by strict adherence to University ethics policy, GDPR compliance, and secure data storage on encrypted systems. All reporting will follow legal and safeguarding protocols to prevent institutional exposure. This will be mitigated through clear participant information sheets, training in safeguarding procedures, and immediate consultation with the University's Designated Safeguarding Lead. The researcher will not engage in activities that could constitute an offence or civil liability.				
4 Economic harm: financial harm to participant, researcher and / or University through disclosure or other event.	<table border="1"> <tr> <th data-bbox="1203 1279 1305 1346">YES</th> <th data-bbox="1305 1279 1401 1346">NO</th> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1203 1346 1305 1413">☒</td> <td data-bbox="1305 1346 1401 1413">☐</td> </tr> </table>	YES	NO	☒	☐
YES	NO				
☒	☐				
Risk: Risks to Participants There is minimal risk of financial harm to participants. The study does not require payment or incur costs beyond time commitment. However, if identifiable comments were disclosed and misinterpreted, there could be reputational consequences that indirectly affect employment. Risks to the University The University faces a low risk of financial	How will you address any risks? This will be mitigated through strict anonymisation, removal of identifiers, and clear confidentiality protocols.				

harm through potential data breaches or legal claims. Risks to the Researcher The researcher faces negligible financial risk. No personal costs are anticipated. Any risk of liability arising from data misuse or breach will be mitigated through strict adherence to University data security protocols and ethical guidelines. The researcher will not engage in activities that could result in civil claims or financial penalties. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	This will be mitigated by compliance with GDPR, secure encrypted data storage, and adherence to University ethics and safeguarding policies. All reporting will be accurate, anonymised, and contextually balanced to avoid reputational or contractual issues. Any risk of liability arising from data misuse or breach will be mitigated through strict adherence to University data security protocols and ethical guidelines. The researcher will not engage in activities that could result in civil claims or financial penalties.		
5	Reputational risk: damage to public perception of University or the University / researchers' reputation in the eyes of funders, the research community and / or the general public.	YES ☒	NO ☐
Risk: Risks to Participants There is minimal risk to participants' personal reputation, as all data will be anonymised and identifiers removed. However, if confidentiality were breached, comments could be misinterpreted and affect professional standing. Risks to the University There is a low risk that findings could be misinterpreted as representing the official position of the University or its partners, potentially affecting public perception or relationships with stakeholders. Risks to the Researcher The researcher may face criticism or	How will you address any risks? This will be mitigated through strict anonymisation, secure data handling, and clear confidentiality protocols explained during consent. To mitigate this, all outputs will include a disclaimer stating that views expressed are those of participants and the researcher, not the University. Reports will avoid naming local		

	Sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics. <i>If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities.</i>	☒	☐
Risks to Participants The research may involve sensitive discussions about safeguarding, cultural competence, and professional practice, which could be upsetting or embarrassing. There is also a risk that participants disclose information requiring further action (e.g., criminal activity or child protection concerns). Participants will be informed during consent of the nature of these topics and the limits of confidentiality, including mandatory reporting obligations. They will have the right to pause or withdraw at any time without consequence. A debrief sheet will include contact details for support services and helplines (e.g., NSPCC, local safeguarding boards, professional wellbeing services). Risks to the University Failure to act on disclosures could create legal and reputational risk. This will be mitigated by following University safeguarding policy and statutory reporting requirements. Risks to the Researcher The researcher may experience emotional strain or face complex safeguarding decisions. Mitigation includes adherence to a written escalation protocol, immediate consultation with the Designated Safeguarding Lead, and supervision support. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
Health and safety risks			
8	Location hazards: <i>for example: fire; visiting or working in participant's homes; working in remote locations and in high crime areas; overseas</i>	YES	NO

	<i>travel; hot, cold or extreme weather conditions; working on or by water. Also hazardous work locations, such as construction sites, confined spaces, roofs or laboratories. For overseas travel, researchers will need to check country / city specific information, travel health requirements and consider emergency arrangements as part of their research planning. In all cases the University's International Travel Policy must be followed.</i>	☐	☒
Risk: As the pilot interview will take place on Teams this is not applicable (this box should expand as you type)	How will you address any risks? As the pilot interview will take place on Teams this is not applicable		
9	Activity hazards: for example: potentially mentally harmful activities; distressing and stressful work and content; driving; tripping, or slipping; falling from height; physically demanding work; lifting, carrying, pushing and pulling loads; night time and weekend working.	YES	NO
Risk: Risks to Participants The research may involve discussing sensitive safeguarding and cultural issues, which could cause emotional distress or discomfort. The primary concern is psychological impact from recalling upsetting experiences or professional challenges. Risks to the University Failure to manage participant distress could harm the University's reputation. Risks to the Researcher The researcher may experience emotional	How will you address any risks? Participants will be informed of the sensitive nature of topics during consent and reminded they can pause or withdraw at any time without consequence. A debrief sheet will include helpline numbers and wellbeing resources (e.g., NSPCC, local safeguarding boards, professional support services). The researcher will adopt a supportive, non-judgmental approach and monitor signs of distress throughout. This will be mitigated by adherence to ethical protocols, safeguarding policies, and provision of appropriate support information and debrief sessions.		

strain due to exposure to distressing content. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		Mitigation includes supervision, reflective practice, and access to University wellbeing services.	
10	Machinery and equipment: for example: ergonomic hazards, including computer workstations and equipment; contact with electricity; contact with moving, rotating, ejecting or cutting parts in machinery and instruments; accidental release of energy from machines and instruments.	YES	NO
		☒	☐
Risk: Risks to Participants There are no significant risks from machinery or equipment, as the research will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams. The only potential ergonomic risk relates to prolonged screen use. Risks to the University Minimal risk exists, as no physical equipment or hazardous environments are involved. Risks to the Researcher The researcher faces the same minor ergonomic risk from screen use. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		How will you address any risks? Interviews will be limited to one hour to reduce strain. Participants will be advised to position themselves comfortably and take breaks if needed. No specialist or hazardous equipment will be used. Compliance with University IT and data security policies will mitigate any technical risks. This will be mitigated by limiting sessions to one hour, using appropriate workstation setup, and scheduling breaks between interviews. No contact with machinery, electricity, or hazardous instruments will occur.	
11		YES	NO

	Chemicals and other hazardous substances: <i>the use, production, storage, waste, transportation and accidental release of chemicals and hazardous substances; flammable, dangerous and explosive substances; asphyxiating gases; allergens; biological agents, blood and blood products.</i>	☐	☒
Risk: N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		How will you address any risks? N/A	
12	Physical agents: <i>for example: excessive noise exposure, hand-arm vibration and whole body vibration; ionising radiation; lasers; artificial optical radiation and electromagnetic fields</i>	YES ☐	NO ☒
Risk: N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		How will you address any risks? N/A	
13	Environmental risks: <i>for example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems</i>	YES ☐	NO ☒
Risk: N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		How will you address any risks? N/A	

SECTION R: Disclosure and Barring Service

Disclosure and Barring Service				
1	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	YES	NO	N/A
	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☐	☐	☒
2	If YES, please give the certificate number. If the certificate number is not available please write "Pending"; in this case any ethical approval will be subject to providing the appropriate certificate number.			

SECTION S: Declaration

The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Policy which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	Name of applicant	Natasha Young
2	Electronic or written signature of applicant:	N. Young
3	Date	03/12/2025
4	Name of Director of Studies	Alison Murphy
5	Electronic or written signature of Director of Studies:	
6	Date	

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

1	☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
2	☒	I have completed all relevant sections of the form in full.
3	☒	I have attached a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) or Consent Form
4	☒	I have attached a completed copy of the Trusted Research and Innovation Checklist (where applicable)
5	☒	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate)
6	☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice
7	☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Data Management Policy
8	☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Export Control Policy
9	☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Open Access Research Policy
10	I have completed the following appendices:	1 ☐
		2 ☐
		3 ☐
		4 ☐
		5 ☐
		6 ☐
		7 ☐
		8 ☐

All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtgd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.

APPENDIX 1 – Grant or Contract Funding

A1.1	Has your research been awarded external funding?	YES	☐	NO	☒
A1.2	Have you applied for funding / awaiting decision?	YES	☐	NO	☒
A1.3	Are you intending to apply for funding?	YES	☐	NO	☒

A1.4	Funding Body	
A1.5	Lead institution (grant holder)	
A1.6	If awarded, grant reference	
A1.7	If awarded, grant value	
A1.8	If awarded, start date and duration	

[Return to the main form](#)

APPENDIX 2: External Collaborative Research Activity

INSTITUTION 1					
A2.1	Name				
A2.2	Researcher name and position				
A2.3	Role in project (e.g. co-investigator)				
A2.4	Contact e-mail address				
A2.5	External Ethical Approval <i>Please detail the ethical approval required and arrangements for this partner. See Section 14 of the UWTSD Research Ethics and Integrity Policy. If approved, please supply confirmation.</i>	Obtained?	YES	NO	PENDING
			☐	☒	☐

INSTITUTION 2				
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A2.6	Name				
A2.7	Researcher name and position				
A2.8	Role in project (e.g. co-investigator)				
A2.9	Contact e-mail address				
A2.10	External Ethical Approval <i>Please detail the ethical approval required and arrangements for this partner. See Section 14 of the UWTSD Research Ethics and Integrity Policy. If approved, please supply confirmation.</i>	Obtained?	YES	NO	PENDING
			☐	☒	☐

INSTITUTION 3					
A2.11	Name				
A2.12	Researcher name and position				
A2.13	Role in project (e.g. co-investigator)				
A2.14	Contact e-mail address				
A2.15	External Ethical Approval <i>Please detail the ethical approval required and arrangements for this partner. See Section 14 of the UWTSD Research Ethics and Integrity Policy. If approved, please supply confirmation.</i>	Obtained?	YES	NO	PENDING
			☐	☒	☐

Add additional collaborators as needed

[Return to the main form](#)

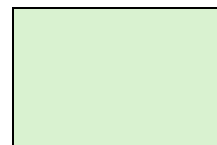
APPENDIX 3: Research Undertaken Outside of the UK

A3.1	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. Describe the measures you have taken to comply with these and provide evidence of approvals etc. If you live in the country where you will do the research then please state this. If you have a local research supervisor or research advisor then please give their contact details here.	
n/a	(this box should expand as you type)	
A3.2	Responsible Research and Innovation If research is taking place overseas please refer to the UWTSD Trusted Research and Innovation Policy and complete the Trusted Research and Innovation Checklist and submit it with this form.	
A3.3	Confirm that you have read the Trusted Research and Innovation Policy	☐

If you are a postgraduate research student working with a research supervisor or research advisor at your local university then you do not need to fill in any more sections of this appendix.

[Return to the main form](#)

If you are working in a research collaboration with an overseas partner please complete the remaining sections of this appendix.



Organisational Details	
A3.4	Name of Organisation
A3.5	Country where organisation is based:
A3.6	Registration number and name of registration body (examples of relevant registration bodies are government, tax, corporation, charity, educational authority):
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
A3.7	What is the legal status of the organisation? (for example: public university, private university, charity, private company, non-profit making company, government research organisation, independent research organisation) Please include the date of foundation. Note: We may be required to ask for evidence of this at a later stage.
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
A3.8	Is your organisation affiliated to any other organisation? (i.e. is the organisation legally part of a larger organisation or a group of larger organisations).
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
A3.9	Name(s) of investigators in the organisation who will be responsible for the collaborative research and innovation
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	

About New Partners			
A3.10	Why does a partner want to work with you?		
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
A3.11	What are they expecting in return for their financial support or involvement?		
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
A3.12	Is the organisation associated with a country which may be viewed as hostile to the UK or one which has different democratic and ethical values from our own? If you have ticked YES, please briefly describe below how you will maintain the UK's democratic and ethical values within the research.	YES	NO
		☐	☐
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
A3.13	Has due diligence into the partner identified any involvement in research on behalf of the military or police with links to a hostile state? If you have ticked YES, please summarise below how you will prevent information from this research from being released to these organisations.	YES	NO
		☐	☐
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
A3.14	Set within the context of any information gained from due diligence, could your research be misused or have unintended applications which would be negative? If you have ticked YES, please summarise below how this might occur.	YES	NO
		☐	☐

<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
A3.15	Are there any legal, regulatory or university policy constraints on undertaking your research with this partner? If you have ticked YES, please summarise these below.	YES	NO
		☐	☐
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
A3.16	Having considered the answers to questions A3.10-A3.15, are there potential reputational or ethical risks to you or the university? If you have ticked YES, please summarise these risks below.	YES	NO
		☐	☐
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

About Research Relationships		YES	NO
A3.17	Are the terms of any proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in keeping with the expectations of your department and university?	☐	☐
A3.18	Are you providing existing intellectual property (IP), research data, confidential or personally identifiable data to the project? If so, how is this going to be protected?	☐	☐
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
A3.19	Who will own any IP that is generated?		
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
A3.26	Does any non-disclosure agreement for this project include an expectation that you will need to provide visibility to existing partners? If you have ticked YES, please explain below how this will be managed.	YES	NO
		☐	☐
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			
A3.27	Will this research breach any existing contractual agreements that you, your department or university already have? If you have ticked YES, please explain below how this will be managed.	YES	NO
		☐	☐

(this box should expand as you type)

[Return to the main form](#)

APPENDIX 4: Research with Vulnerable People

Will the research involve data processing involving the following data subjects:		YES	NO
A4.1	Children under 16	☐	☐
A4.2	Adults with learning disabilities	☐	☐
A4.3	Adults with other forms of mental incapacity or mental illness	☐	☐

A4.4	Adults in emergency situations	☐	☐
A4.5	Prisoners or young offenders	☐	☐
A4.6	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. members of staff, students	☐	☐
A4.7	People who have not given their explicit consent to participate in the project	☐	☐
A4.8	People engaged in illegal activities	☐	☐
A4.9	Any other people who can be considered vulnerable in the context of this project	☐	☐
Please justify the inclusion of the above people (if applicable), explaining why the research cannot be conducted on non-vulnerable people.			
A4.10	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
Please give details of extra steps taken to assure the protection of vulnerable people participating in the research. You should describe any arrangements to be made for obtaining consent from a legal representative.			
A4.11	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
It is the researcher's responsibility to check whether a DBS check (or equivalent) is required and to obtain one if it is needed. Please confirm:			
A4.12	DBS Check required?	YES ☐	NO ☐
A4.13	DBS certificate obtained?	YES ☐	NO ☐
			N/A ☐

[Return to the main form](#)

APPENDIX 5: Research Involving Animals

The use of animals in research is tightly governed and monitored by law and by the Home Office, specifically under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and its accompanying codes of practice and processes. The Act regulates procedures that are carried out on protected animals for scientific or educational purposes that may cause pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm. Under the Act, a protected animal is 'any living vertebrate, other than man, and any living cephalopod'. The University does not hold a Home Office issued Establishment Licence and therefore researchers must ensure that any proposed work involving animals is either exempt from the Act or falls outside of its scope. Exempted research, for example involving routine veterinary practice or clinical veterinary research, may still require external ethical approval from the Royal Society of Veterinary Surgeons. When undertaking collaborative research involving animals, the UWTSD Research Ethics Committee must be assured that the partner institution(s) conform to the appropriate regulatory framework or legislation, and have approval from their local Research Ethics Committee. Any such work must follow the guidance of the National Centre for the Replacement, Reduction and Refinement of Animals in Research, known as the 3Rs. In all cases, advice must be sought from INSPIRE for any proposed research involving animals, either at UWTSD, or by research collaborators in partnership with UWTSD. This should be at the very early stages of research design, so that an appropriate due diligence exercise can be undertaken.

Will the research involve any work with any of the following animals (including observation in their natural habitat)		YES	NO
A5.1	Any living vertebrates, other than humans?	☐	☐
A5.2	Any living cephalopods?	☐	☐
A5.3	Has INSPIRE undertaken an initial due diligence exercise?	☐	☐
A5.4	Due diligence assessment appended to this application?	☐	☐
Please provide a summary of the due diligence exercise, noting arrangements for compliance with the necessary regulatory frameworks and legislation. Please append the full due diligence assessment from INSPIRE.			
A5.5	(this box should expand as you type)		

[Return to the main form](#)

APPENDIX 6: Research with Staff or Offenders in Prison Establishments and Probation Services

Research with staff and/or offenders in prison establishments, the Probation Service or within His Majesty's Prison and Probation Services requires additional approvals.			
Will the research involve any of the following?		YES	NO
A6.1	Staff in prison establishments	☐	☐
A6.2	Offenders in prison establishments	☐	☐
A6.3	The Probation Service	☐	☐
A6.4	His Majesty's Prison and Probation Services	☐	☐
All researchers wanting to conduct research with staff and/or offenders in prison establishments, the Probation Service regions or within HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Headquarters are required to formally apply for research approval to the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC). Before doing so, INSPIRE must undertake an initial due diligence exercise. If you have not contacted INSPIRE, please do so immediately. If YES to any of the above, please confirm:			
A6.5	Has INSPIRE undertaken an initial due diligence exercise?	☐	☐
A6.6	Have you applied to the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC)?	☐	☐
A6.7	Has HMPPS National Research Committee approval been granted? If yes, please append to this application.	☐	☐
A6.8	Due diligence assessment appended to this application?	☐	☐
Please provide a summary of the due diligence exercise, noting arrangements for compliance with the necessary regulatory frameworks and legislation. Please append the full due diligence assessment from INSPIRE.			
A6.9			

	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
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[Return to the main form](#)

APPENDIX 7: Health and Social Care Research

All health and social care research must have a sponsor as defined by the Health Research Authority UK Policy Framework for Health & Social Care. The University will under no circumstances act as the sponsor of health and social care research (i.e. that which requires approval by a NHS Research Ethics Committee). In all cases, therefore, an appropriate collaborating partner must lead the research. Any health and social care research therefore requires an initial due diligence exercise, which will be undertaken by INSPIRE. The purpose of the due diligence exercise is to ensure that the University has the capability to undertake the research, either independently or in collaboration with research partners. This will include advice on suitable collaborative arrangements and the appropriate involvement of UWTSD researchers in the proposed research study. This is likely to apply to the following areas:

Will the data processing involve:		YES	NO
A7.1	Participants who have been recruited on the basis of medical and health conditions, life stage or other physical or mental attribute.	☐	☐
A7.2	Participants who will engage in physical exercise, activity or exertion of any kind, or who use exercise equipment, assistive devices or other apparatus for the purposes of the research study. This includes interventions that are minimally invasive.	☐	☐
A7.3	Patients and users of the NHS (including NHS patients treated in the private sector).	☐	☐
A7.4	Individuals identified as potential participants because of their status as relatives or carers of patients and users of the NHS.	☐	☐
A7.5	Patients who are cared for in private and voluntary sector nursing homes.	☐	☐
A7.6	Confidential patient information.	☐	☐
A7.7	Clinical trial of a medicinal product or medical device.	☐	☐

A7.8	Access to organs or other bodily material of past and present NHS patients, or any material consisting of or containing human cells.	☐	☐
A7.9	Use of human tissue (including non-NHS sources) where the collection is not covered by a Human Tissue Authority licence.	☐	☐
A7.10	Foetal material and IVF involving NHS patients.	☐	☐
A7.11	The recently deceased under NHS care.	☐	☐
A7.12	NHS staff or premises.	☐	☐
A7.13	Practising midwives conducting a clinical trial.	☐	☐
A7.14	Investigational medicinal product.	☐	☐
A7.15	Medical devices that are not CE-marked or CE-marked medical devices that have been modified or are being used for a new purpose.	☐	☐
A7.16	Exposure to ionising radiation.	☐	☐
A7.17	Other health and social care related research.	☐	☐
Please specify		☐	☐
(this box should expand as you type)			
Researchers proposing to work on projects involving health and social care research must check whether their study meets the HRA definition of research and whether it should undergo ethics review by a NHS Research Ethics Committee. If you have answered YES to any of questions A7.1-A7.17 then this is likely to be the case and sponsorship by a third party will be required. This can be checked via the Health Research Authority's Decision Tool : https://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/			
A7.18	Does the research meet the HRA definition of research?	YES ☐	NO ☐
A7.19	Is the Research being sponsored by a collaborating partner?	YES ☐	NO ☐
A7.20	Has NHS ethics approval been granted?	YES ☐	NO ☐
A7.21	Has INSPIRE undertaken an initial due diligence exercise?	YES	NO

		☐	☐
Please provide a summary of the due diligence exercise, noting arrangements for compliance with the necessary regulatory frameworks and legislation. Please append the full due diligence assessment from INSPIRE. If you have not contacted INSPIRE, please do immediately.			
A7.22			
	(this box should expand as you type)		

A7.23	Have you been granted NHS ethical approval?	YES	Click to continue to Section R	NO	Return to the main form
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APPENDIX 8: Export Control for Research with Potential Military End Uses

Export controls apply to the physical, electronic or oral transmission outside the UK of applied research, sensitive technology, software and equipment that could potentially be misused, either directly or indirectly, for military purposes. These legal controls are a serious obligation and UWTSD researchers must actively manage the risks of these being misused to fuel conflict, threaten national security, support terrorism and crime, violate human rights or proliferate Weapons of Mass Destruction. UWTSD's Export Control Policy provides a clear six step process to determine if your research is covered by export controls. Please complete the following screening to judge if you need to complete a full export control assessment. If you are in any doubt, then please contact INSPIRE. Any research in UWTSD involving the following high-risk areas must be screened.

Will the research involve:

Defence		YES	NO
A8.1	Military equipment and munitions	☐	☐
A8.2	Defence equipment, including satellites	☐	☐
A8.3	Technical data, including some border and port information	☐	☐

A8.4	Dual use research	☐	☐
Materials and Technologies		YES	NO
A8.5	Nuclear materials, facilities and equipment	☐	☐
A8.6	Chemicals, microorganisms and toxins	☐	☐
A8.7	Electronics design, development and production	☐	☐
A8.8	Computers	☐	☐
A8.9	Telecommunications	☐	☐
A8.10	Sensors and lasers	☐	☐
A8.11	Navigation and avionics	☐	☐
A8.12	Marine technology	☐	☐
A8.13	Composite materials	☐	☐
A8.14	Aerospace and propulsion	☐	☐
Sensitive Information		YES	NO
A8.15	Cryptology	☐	☐
A8.16	Counterterrorism	☐	☐
A8.17	Counternarcotics	☐	☐
A8.18	Cyber-related	☐	☐
A8.19	Non-proliferation	☐	☐
A8.20	Transnational criminal organisations	☐	☐

Genetic Resources		YES	NO
A8.21	Genetic material of actual or potential value	☐	☐
A8.22	Organisms, or parts thereof	☐	☐
A8.23	Populations (or organisms)	☐	☐
A8.24	Other biotic components of ecosystems	☐	☐
A8.25	Domesticated or cultivated species in which the evolutionary process has been influenced by humans	☐	☐

Will you be exporting military or dual-use technology, now or possibly in the future? This information may take many forms, including:		YES	NO
A8.26	Physical transfer of goods, technologies, material or equipment	☐	☐
A8.27	Blueprints	☐	☐
A8.28	Plans	☐	☐
A8.29	Diagrams	☐	☐
A8.30	Models	☐	☐
A8.31	Formulae	☐	☐
A8.32	Tables	☐	☐
A8.33	Engineering designs and specifications	☐	☐
A8.34	Manuals and instructions	☐	☐
A8.35	Software	☐	☐
A8.36	Know-how	☐	☐

Will your project transfer technology using any of the following physical methods?		YES	NO
A8.37	USB flash drives	☐	☐
A8.38	Portable hard drives	☐	☐
A8.39	Laptops	☐	☐
A8.40	Tablets	☐	☐
A8.41	Intangible forms by using electronic media, such as email, phone storage and cloud file sharing	☐	☐
A8.42	Physical exports	☐	☐

Will your project involve any of the following?		YES	NO
A8.43	Oral transfer by phone or videoconferencing or presentations	☐	☐
A8.44	Travelling overseas for any purpose, while unintentionally carrying any of the above.	☐	☐

A8.45	Will you be hosting foreign visitors?	☐	☐
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If you answer YES to any of questions A8,1-A8.45 then you should complete a full export control assessment and append that to this application. Before doing this please contact INSPIRE who will advise further.		YES	NO
A8.46	Full export control assessment required?	☐	☐
A8.47	Full export control assessment completed?	☐	☐
A8.48	Full export control assessment appended?	☐	☐

[Return to the main form](#)

**Research Study Title:**

An exploration of cultural competence in early years safeguarding practice in contemporary Wales

Introduction

You are being invited to act as a **gatekeeper** for a research study being conducted as part of postgraduate research at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Before deciding whether to support this research, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study, what participation would involve for practitioners in your setting, and your role as a gatekeeper. Please take time to read the following information and feel free to contact the researcher if you require further clarification.

Purpose of the Research

This research explores **cultural competence within early years safeguarding practice in contemporary Wales**. Cultural competence is understood as the ability of professionals to work effectively, respectfully, and sensitively with children and families from diverse backgrounds to safeguard children from harm.

The study seeks to explore early years practitioners' lived experiences of safeguarding children from diverse backgrounds, including perceived challenges, training and preparedness, and understandings of cultural competence in practice. The findings aim to contribute to improved practitioner training, inclusive safeguarding frameworks, and policy development within the Welsh early years sector.

Pilot Study

This phase of the research is a **pilot study**, designed to test and refine the focus group method prior to the main study. The pilot will assess the feasibility, clarity, and ethical appropriateness of the research design. Findings from the pilot will inform adjustments to data collection methods and procedures to ensure the main study is robust, fair, and responsible.

Why You Have Been Approached as a Gatekeeper

You have been approached because you are in a position of responsibility within an early years setting and are able to **grant or deny access** to practitioners who may be eligible to participate. Eligible participants are **Level 3 Early Years practitioners working with children aged 0–5 years**.

Your role is not to influence participation, but to allow information about the study to be shared with potential participants so they can make an **informed and voluntary decision** about whether to take part.



GATEKEEPER CONSENT FORM FOR PILOT STUDY

Study: **An exploration of cultural competence in early years safeguarding practice in contemporary Wales**

Researchers: **Natasha Young**

Please check AND initial all boxes

☐

1. I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have these answered satisfactorily.

☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the focus group at any time without giving any reason and without any consequence.

☐

3. I agree to my participation being audio recorded for transcription purposes, and it has been explained how this data will be stored, destroyed and anonymised, who will have access to it and how long it will be kept (in the information sheet).

☐

4. I agree to my anonymised data being used in study-specific reports and subsequent academic chapters and articles that may appear in academic journals.

☐

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature



PARTICIANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Study: An exploration of cultural competence in early years safeguarding practice in contemporary Wales

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand the purpose of the study and why the research is being done and more importantly what it would involve for you. Please take some time to read the following information. Feel free to ask any questions if anything you read is unclear or if you want more information. Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary, so please take time to decide whether to agree to take part, before signing the consent form.

What is the purpose of the Pilot study?

This is a pilot study for a further study. The purpose of this pilot study is to create a firm base for the main project by testing and refining the focus group method I am using. Its purpose is to make sure that the research design is achievable, fair and responsible.

By trying this method out it will allow me to make adjustments where needed for the main study. Ultimately, the vision is to make sure that the process is clear, respectful, and capable of doing what I need it to do.

What is the purpose of the Main study?

I am exploring '*cultural competence*' in the field of early years in contemporary Wales. For this research, *cultural competence* is defined as the ability of professionals to effectively, respectfully and sensitively interact with children and families from diverse backgrounds to safeguard them from harm.

Specifically, I would like to hear about your experiences of working with children and families from diverse backgrounds in the context of safeguarding and keeping

children safe. The nature of safeguarding is complex and broad and I want to hear from practitioners' lived experiences of safeguarding children and families, specifically those from diverse backgrounds. I would like to know what challenges you may have faced, do you feel adequately prepared to keep children from diverse backgrounds safe (qualifications, training and experience etc), what is your understanding of *cultural competence*, do you feel comfortable with safeguarding ALL children equally regardless of background or circumstances. Safeguarding children is a topic that often finds itself in the media, the cultural factors that can impact safeguarding of children are often underreported (ref). This research could have the potential to inform practitioner training, suggest policy recommendations, and inclusive safeguarding frameworks, translating research into tangible improvements for all children in Wales.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to participate in the study because you are a level 3 Early Years practitioner working with children to 0-5 years old in an early years setting. I see practitioners as an essential part of informing this research because of the real life insight you have to offer.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is completely voluntary, and it is up to you to decide whether you want to take part. I will describe the study and go through the information sheet before any focus group takes part. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form to show that you are willing to take part. However, you are free to withdraw without giving a reason at any time and without any consequence to you.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to take part in an online focus group with 5 other practitioners from different parts of Wales, this so that I can gather different perspectives. The online focus group will be lead by myself – the lead researcher. The focus group will take place at a convenient time and a location of your choice (though a neutral location is recommended i.e. not your workplace). The focus group should last approximately 60 minutes.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Participating in the focus group will take up some of your time, but we will ensure that it is arranged at a time that is convenient for you. The nature of this research and some of the discussions which might occur could be quite sensitive and possibly triggering for some, therefore it is important that you understand, if you do chose to take part, you will be supported, before, during and after the focus group in the following ways;

Before –

- you will be briefed and given opportunities to ask any questions or raise any worries you might have
- An emotional warning will be given
- A reminder that this is a confidential process

During

- The running of the focus group, will ensure no probing or difficult questions are asked or that you are pressured for more information
- Constant reassurance

After

- A session at the end to ensure people can talk about the experience or concerns
- Signposting to any relevant support organisations

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that the study will provide valuable information about the way that early years practitioners keep children safe, but specifically, children from diverse backgrounds. I will share any important findings with policymakers, practitioners and other important groups of people about our findings so that they are able to think about how to best support children and families from diverse backgrounds.

What if there is a problem?

The study lead is Natasha Young who is a student and member of staff from the Institute of Education, Childhood and Youth at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, College Road, Carmarthen, SA31 3EP. My email contact details are as follows:

✉ n.young@uwtsd.ac.uk

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, before, during or after, you can speak with me and I will do MY best to answer your questions or resolve any problems or worries.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. The University's research data management team provides oversight of university activities involving the processing of personal data. The University's contact is Mr Matt Briggs (m.briggs@uwtsd.ac.uk).

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this information sheet. Standard ethical procedures will involve you providing your consent to participate in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you. However, the legal basis on which this task is being performed is public interest, approved by the University's Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact the research data management team, Mr Matt Briggs (m.briggs@uwtsd.ac.uk).

Details of your individual rights are available on the ICO website at:

<https://ico.org.uk/fororganisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

The information that is gathered about you will be kept securely according to the rules of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018. Transcripts will be anonymised, that is, assigned a code to identify people so that all names of people and places can be removed. Participants' statements may be included as quotations in research reports, but this will be done in an anonymised form, with only professional roles associated with the quotation.

The information gathered about you will be used for research purposes only and will not be passed to anyone outside the research team. In accordance with the Data

Protection Act 1998 and GDPR 2018, data will be stored for the duration of the research study and will be destroyed after five years.

What will happen if I do not want to carry on with the study?

You are free to withdraw from the focus study at any time, but data can only be removed up until the time it is no longer feasible, which will be after anonymisation has occurred. If you withdraw before this time, all the information collected about you will be destroyed responsibly and according to Data Protection Act 1998 and GDPR 2018.

Who owns the information I share?

Up until the time the information is anonymised, you own your information, you have copyright. Which is why, if you withdraw, it can and will be destroyed. However, once the information has been anonymised, you no longer have copyright, that ownership transfers to myself as the lead researcher.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The research will be written up in the form of a report about my findings. Information from my study will also be presented to educational practitioners and other researchers, for example, potentially in the form of an academic article. A summary of our findings will also be sent to you so that you can know the results of the study.

Who is organising or sponsoring the research?

There is no sponsor or funder for the study.

Further information and contact details:

For further information, please contact the study lead, Natasha Young at the email address below:

Email address: n.young@uwtsd.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information

Natasha Young

Lead Researcher

University of Wales Trinity Saint David



PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM FOR PILOT STUDY

Study: **An exploration of cultural competence in early years safeguarding practice in contemporary Wales**

Researchers: **Natasha Young**

Please check AND initial all boxes

☐

1. I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have these answered satisfactorily.

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☐

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature



Risk Assessment

This research involves minimal risk; however, potential ethical, emotional, and logistical risks have been identified and mitigated as outlined below.

Emotional or Psychological Distress

There is a potential risk that participants may experience emotional discomfort when discussing safeguarding experiences, particularly those involving children from diverse backgrounds. To mitigate this risk, participants will be fully briefed prior to participation, provided with an emotional content warning, and reminded that they may decline to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without consequence. The focus group will be facilitated sensitively, with no probing or pressure to disclose distressing information. A debriefing period will be included at the end of each session, and participants will be signposted to relevant support services if required.

Confidentiality and Anonymity Risks

There is a risk that participants may be identifiable due to the professional context of safeguarding discussions. This risk will be mitigated through strict anonymisation procedures, including the removal of all identifying details related to individuals, settings, and locations. Participants will be reminded to avoid naming specific children, families, or organisations during discussions. All data will be stored securely in accordance with GDPR (2018) and the Data Protection Act (1998).

Power Dynamics and Coercion

There is a risk that participants may feel obliged to take part due to workplace hierarchies or gatekeeper involvement. To address this, participation will be clearly communicated as entirely voluntary. Gatekeepers will not be informed of who participates, and consent will be obtained directly from participants by the researcher. Participation will occur outside the workplace where possible.

Time and Practical Burden

Participation may place a minor time burden on practitioners. This will be mitigated by scheduling focus groups at mutually convenient times and clearly communicating the expected duration (approximately 60 minutes).

Researcher Safety

As the focus groups will be conducted online, there is minimal risk to the researcher. Professional boundaries will be maintained throughout, and the researcher will follow university guidance on lone working and online research practices.

Overall Risk Level

With the mitigation strategies outlined above in place, the overall risk associated with this study is considered **low** and proportionate to the nature of qualitative educational research.

Safeguarding Protocol

This research involves discussion of safeguarding practice within early years settings. While participants will not be asked to disclose specific safeguarding cases or identifiable information, the potential for safeguarding-related disclosures is acknowledged. The following protocol outlines how safeguarding concerns will be managed ethically and responsibly.

Preventative Measures

- Participants will be clearly instructed **not to disclose identifiable information** relating to children, families, colleagues, or settings.
- The focus group will be framed around **professional experiences and reflections**, rather than specific cases.
- An emotional content warning will be provided prior to participation, and participants will be reminded of their right to pause, decline to answer questions, or withdraw at any point.

Managing Safeguarding Disclosures

If a participant discloses information that suggests:

- a child or vulnerable person is at **risk of harm**, or
- there is evidence of **ongoing or undisclosed abuse or neglect**,

the researcher will follow the safeguarding procedures outlined below.

Researcher Response

- The researcher will **not investigate** the disclosure or seek additional details.
- The researcher will respond calmly and supportively, making clear that confidentiality may need to be breached in line with safeguarding responsibilities.
- The focus group may be paused or stopped if necessary to prioritise participant welfare.

Reporting Procedure

- Any safeguarding concern will be reported promptly to the **University of Wales Trinity Saint David Safeguarding Lead** in line with university policy.
- Where appropriate, the Safeguarding Lead will advise on referral to relevant statutory agencies (e.g. local authority safeguarding teams).
- The researcher will document the concern factually and securely, recording only information necessary for safeguarding purposes.

Confidentiality and Limits

Participants will be informed in advance that confidentiality will be maintained **except** where there is a legal or ethical duty to report safeguarding concerns. This limitation will be clearly stated in the participant information sheet and consent form.

Researcher Training and Support

The researcher has an understanding of safeguarding principles relevant to early years practice and will seek guidance from supervisory and institutional safeguarding structures if concerns arise. Appropriate support and supervision will be accessed following any safeguarding incident.

Ethical Oversight

This safeguarding protocol has been developed in accordance with:

- University safeguarding and research ethics policies
- The principles of **Working Together to Safeguard Children**
- Professional standards relevant to early years practice in Wales



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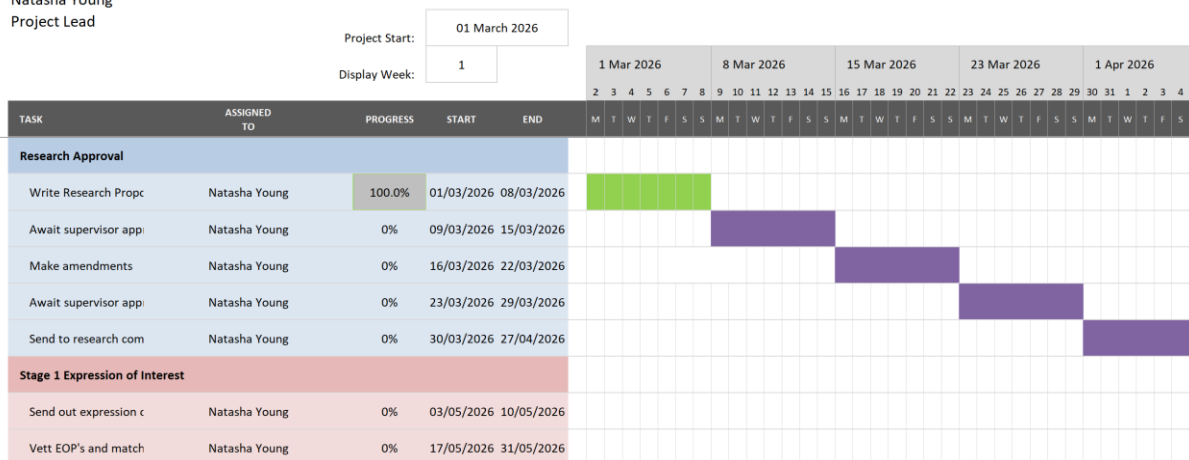
Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

GANTT CHART

The Gantt chart outlines the staged progression of the research, beginning with ethical approval and gatekeeper recruitment, followed by a pilot study to test and refine the focus group methodology. The main data collection phase is scheduled after pilot evaluation, with sufficient time allocated for transcription, analysis, and final reporting. This phased approach ensures feasibility and methodological rigour within the available timeframe.

Research proposal: Exploring factors impacting effective safeguarding practise in the context of early years settings.

Natasha Young
Project Lead





Data Management Plan

Types of Data Collected

This study will generate qualitative data through online focus groups with early years practitioners. Data will include:

- Audio recordings of focus group discussions
- Written transcripts of focus group data
- Researcher field notes and reflexive notes
- Consent forms and demographic information (stored separately from research data)

No identifiable information relating to children, families, or settings will be intentionally collected.

Data Collection Methods

Focus groups will be conducted online and audio-recorded with participants' informed consent. Transcription will be carried out by the researcher. Participants will be reminded not to disclose identifiable or case-specific information during discussions.

Data Storage and Security

All digital data will be stored on **password-protected, encrypted university systems** in accordance with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David data management policies.

- Audio files, transcripts, and notes will be stored in encrypted folders
- Consent forms will be stored separately from research data
- Access to data will be restricted to the lead researcher and supervisory team only

No data will be stored on personal or unencrypted devices.

Anonymisation and Confidentiality

Data will be anonymised at the point of transcription. Pseudonyms or participant codes will be assigned, and any identifying information will be removed. Settings, locations, and individuals will not be named. Once anonymisation has occurred, participants will no longer be identifiable in the dataset.

Data Protection and Legal Compliance

The data controller for this project is the **University of Wales Trinity Saint David**. Data will be processed in accordance with:

- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018

The lawful basis for processing personal data is **public interest research**, as approved by the University's Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

Data Retention and Disposal

Data will be retained securely for a period of **five years** following the completion of the research, in line with institutional policy. After this period:

- Digital files will be permanently deleted
- Any paper-based materials will be securely destroyed

Data Sharing and Access

Data will not be shared outside the research team. Anonymised excerpts may be included in academic outputs such as the dissertation or journal articles. No raw data will be made publicly available.

Participant Rights

Participants may withdraw from the study at any time prior to anonymisation, at which point all data relating to them will be securely destroyed. Once data have been anonymised, withdrawal of individual data will no longer be feasible.

Responsibility for Data Management

The lead researcher, Natasha Young, is responsible for ensuring that all data are managed securely and ethically throughout the research lifecycle, under the supervision of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.