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## RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE: ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Research Ethics Committee (REC) is a sub-committee of the School's Research Committee. Its core functions are:
- to review and make recommendations on the School's Research Ethics Policy and procedure and related guidance;
  - to take responsibility for the review and approval of ethics applications submitted by staff or students which are designated as high risk and/or requiring Committee review;
  - to provide guidance to departments, staff and students on matters relating to research ethics.
- 1.2 The Committee meets formally at least once per term. During the 2022-23 academic year the Committee met three times. Research ethics applications are reviewed electronically by Committee members as and when they are received (they do not need to wait for a Committee meeting).
- 1.3 The Committee periodically conducts a selective audit of current research projects. In addition, in the case of particularly sensitive or complex applications, a researcher may be invited to provide feedback to the Committee on the progress of the project after an initial period of data collection or at the end of the project.
- 1.4 Committee meetings aim, where possible, to include an item by way of training for members. This may take the form of discussion of a topical or developing issue relating to research ethics.
- 1.5 The Research Governance Manager is Secretary to the Committee and works closely with relevant colleagues across the School to ensure that the ethics review process is undertaken in conjunction with data management, data security, data protection and risk assessment processes.
- 1.6 Key areas of business dealt with by the Committee during 2022-23 are summarized in sections 2-9 below.

### 2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES, 2022-23

- 2.1 In September 2022 Professor John Chalcraft (Department of Government) was appointed Chair of the Committee. Dr Ilka Gleibs (PBS) continued as Deputy Chair.
- 2.2 Six new members joined the Committee for the 2022-23 year (increasing the size of the Committee from 20 to 24 members). New members were: Dr Sara Evans-Lacko (Care Policy and Evaluation Centre); Professor Myria Georgiou (Media & Communications); Dr Sohini Kar (International Development); Dr Alia Rao (Methodology); Dr Sara Salem (Sociology);

and Dr Harry Walker (Anthropology). An induction session for new members was held in October 2022.

- 2.3 Four members were on sabbatical/leave for the year: Dr Lucia Garcia (PBS); Dr Charles Palmer (Geography); Dr Romola Sanyal (Geography); Dr Siva Thambisetty (Law).
- 2.4 At the end of the year five members stepped down from the Committee: Professor Shakuntala Banaji (Media & Communications); Dr Sara Camacho-Felix (International Inequalities Institute); Dr Ilka Gleibs (PBS); Professor Suzanne Hall (Sociology); and Dr Charles Palmer (Geography).
- 2.5 Professor Shakuntala Banaji and Dr Ilka Gleibs were thanked for their particularly long service to the Committee, including their terms as Acting Chair and Deputy Chair respectively.
- 2.6 The full 2022-23 membership is provided in Annex 1.

### **3. TERMS OF REFERENCE, 2022-23**

- 3.1 At the March 2023 meeting changes were proposed and approved to Appendix A of the Committee's Terms of Reference which sets out the operating procedure for the sign-off of applications submitted for REC approval. These changes were designed to help streamline the process and thus help deal with the high volume of applications to the REC.
- 3.2 The amendment allows the Research Governance Manager (Lyn Grove) to approve applications on the basis of one member's recommendation (rather than two), without referral to the Chair or Deputy Chair, other than where she judges the application to entail quite complex (or unusual) issues or risks. This has previously been the agreed in practice at the busiest times of year (only) in order to manage the high volume of applications.
- 3.3 The changes also allow for the Research Governance Manager, on behalf of the Committee, to review and approve applications where the research will only be using secondary data (where the dataset is being supplied by a reputable data provider and appropriate data security measures are in place).
- 3.4 These changes were approved by the Committee with the proviso that they be reviewed annually and/or should there be a change of Research Governance Manager.
- 3.5 The Terms of Reference, as approved in March 2023, are provided at Annex 2. (The changes were approved by the Chair of Research Committee.)

### **4. RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY AND REVIEW PROCEDURE**

- 4.1 In November 2022 the policy was amended to reflect changes which had been agreed at the previous Committee meeting in June 2022 as follows:

- Applications from taught students to be reviewed at departmental level (regardless of whether they contain 'higher risk' elements) other than where the project is for a dissertation;
  - The review categories of 'Low risk' and 'High risk' to be replaced by the terms 'Departmental review' and 'REC review' respectively.
- 4.2 A change was made to the review/approval process with respect to applications categorised as 'Approval not required': such applications would now be automatically routed to the supervisor to check that screen C has been completed correctly. The supervisor is required to confirm that approval is not required OR that the student needs to make changes.
- 4.3 A mechanism for version control was implemented: the 'Attachments' section now automatically stores a pdf version of the review form each time a change is made and the form is re-submitted. Furthermore, the Review History now records the date each time the student/researcher submits their application and any subsequent responses they submit to reviewers' comments.
- 4.4 REC comments made on a student application can now be automatically copied to the supervisor for information. (The Committee has received good feedback in response to this.)
- 4.5 Two further minor amendments were made to the Policy in May 2023:
- Inclusion of a footnote to §3 the REF2021 definition of 'research';
  - Clarification of the process for approving amendments after an application has been approved (§29-31).

## **5. MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE VOLUME OF APPLICATIONS TO THE REC**

- 5.1 At the June 2023 meeting the Committee again discussed the issue of the volume of applications received by the Committee for review. The changes made at the start of the year, as noted above, had had little effect on overall numbers, and during the peak period of MSc submissions (between March and June) the Committee and the ethics support team had struggled to cope. The total number of applications received for the year remained the same as the previous year.
- 5.2 A breakdown of applications received by the Committee for ethics review during 2022-23 is provided in Annex 3.
- 5.3 Further measures to reduce the volume of applications that come to the REC for review were discussed and agreed. It was hoped to implement the following changes for (or near the start of) the next academic year<sup>1</sup> (2023-24). These include:
- Changes to the wording of some questions in screen F (which determines whether REC or Departmental review is required) – for instance regarding sensitive topics and risks to the participant or researcher;

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<sup>1</sup> Changes may be limited depending on resources/availability of the ARD/Research Systems of team

- That the Committee will aim to engage an additional member, such as an LSE Fellow or PhD student with suitable experience, who would be able to help with reviewing a higher volume of applications during the peak period.

## **6. PENALTIES FOR LATE (OR LACK OF) ETHICS SUBMISSION**

6.1 The Committee discussed the issue of very late student ethics submissions, or – in some cases – where students have undertaken their research without prior ethics approval. The issue was discussed with the Academic Registrar and a proposal was put forward to the Graduate School Board of Examiners (GSBE) that there should be some penalty for cases where dissertations are submitted without prior ethics approval, and that degree programme regulations should include reference to ethics requirements. GSBE rejected the proposal to include a penalty, but the Board agreed that research ethics requirements be added to the taught student General Assessment Regulations and degree classification schemes, as well as to Departmental handbooks for the 2023-24 academic year onwards. Furthermore, the template student assessment coversheet will also include a declaration regarding ethics approval (where such approval is required according to the Research Ethics Policy).

## **7. RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE GROUPS / SAFEGUARDING**

7.1 During the year the Committee continued work on a guidance paper for researchers ‘Working with children and vulnerable adults’, and also to review/feed into the development of a new School policy, ‘Safeguarding in Research and International Activities’. It was hoped that both the guidance and School policy would be approved/made available early in the autumn of 2023.

## **8. PRINCIPLES OF AUTHORSHIP GUIDANCE**

8.1 The Committee also reviewed and provided comments on guidance on authorship which the School is developing.

## **9. PROJECT MONITORING**

9.1 The Committee did not undertake any random auditing of applications during the year, but requested and reviewed interim and/or final reports from three researchers where their research entailed complex issues or risks.

*Lyn Grove  
Secretary, Research Ethics Committee/Research Governance Manager*

*Report approved by Research Ethics Committee, 08 November 2023*

*Report approved by Research Committee, 06 December 2023*

## Annex 1: REC membership 2022-23

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Dr Cressida Auckland       | Law   |
| Prof Shaku Banaji          | Media and Communications                                      |
| Prof Michael Bruter        | Government  |
| Dr Sara Camacho-Felix      | International Inequalities Institute                          |
| <b>Prof John Chalcraft</b> | Government ( <b>Chair</b> )                                   |
| Dr Sara Evans-Lacko        | Care Policy and Evaluation Centre                             |
| Dr Kate Gannon             | Grantham Research Institute                                   |
| Prof Myria Georgiou        | Media and Communications                                      |
| Dr Anna Getmansky          | International Relations                                       |
| <b>Dr Ilka Gleibs</b>      | Psychological and Behavioural Science ( <b>Deputy Chair</b> ) |
| Dr Suzi Hall               | Sociology   |
| Dr Lucy Kanya              | Health Policy   |
| Dr Sohini Kar              | International Development                                     |
| Leslie Morphy              | Lay member/external   |
| Dr Federico Picinali       | Law   |
| Dr Eleanor Power           | Methodology   |
| Dr Bert Provan             | CASE  |
| Dr Aliya Rao               | Methodology   |
| Dr Sara Salem              | Sociology   |
| Jenny Stevens              | Lay member/external   |
| Dr Harry Walker            | Anthropology  |

### **On leave 2022-23:**

|                     |                                       |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Dr Lucia Garcia     | Psychological and Behavioural Science |
| Dr Charles Palmer   | Geography and Environment             |
| Dr Romola Sanyal    | Geography and Environment             |
| Dr Siva Thambisetty | Law                                   |

## Annex 2: REC Terms of Reference 2022-23 (as at March 2023)

The Research Ethics Committee (REC) is a sub-committee of Research Committee. Its core functions are: i) to review and make recommendations on the School's Research Ethics Policy and procedure and related guidance<sup>2</sup>; ii) to take responsibility for the review and approval of ethics applications submitted by staff and students which are designated as high risk and/or requiring Committee review; iii) to provide guidance to staff and students on matters relating to research ethics.

More specifically, the Terms of Reference of the REC are as follows:

1. The Committee shall keep under review and make recommendations on the School's Research Ethics Policy.
2. The Committee shall have responsibility for making decisions on applications for ethical approval that have been submitted by members of staff and by students across the School. In doing so, the Committee shall, where necessary:
  - a. recognise where advice and guidance is required from colleagues outside the Committee, and if necessary call upon experts to assist with advice and review;
  - b. request further information from the researcher where it is considered that the documentation submitted is insufficient for the Committee to make an informed decision;
  - c. consult the Health and Safety team to ensure that, so far as may be possible and reasonable, risks are minimised both to participants and researchers;
  - d. take advice from the School's Data protection officer, Data Librarian and Information Security team to ensure that researchers comply with data protection procedures and legislation;
  - e. ensure that there are no conflicts of interest when making decisions;
3. At each termly meeting the Committee shall review a list of all applications which have been approved by the Committee since the previous meeting and discuss any wider issues which have arisen.
4. The Committee will periodically undertake a selective audit of current research projects.
5. The Committee will liaise with departments and centres and other relevant units of the School (such as LSE LIFE, PhD Academy, the Eden Centre) regarding the provision of research ethics training.
6. Committee members are expected to comply with the School's Ethics Code<sup>3</sup> and the Committee Effective Behaviour Statement<sup>4</sup>.

### Role of the Chair and Deputy Chair

The duties of the Chair (and/or Deputy Chair, where appropriate) will be as per the normal expectations for LSE Committee Chairs; for instance, to undertake ad hoc work such as

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<sup>2</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/research-and-innovation/research/research-ethics/research-ethics>

<sup>3</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Ethics/Ethics-Code>

<sup>4</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/internal/comEffBehSta.pdf>

attendance at other relevant meetings and events. In addition, the Chair/Deputy Chair will advise and/or make decisions in the following:

**Expedited reviews:** In accordance with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and procedure, the Chair/Deputy Chair will, where s/he deems appropriate, undertake expedited reviews of applications for ethical approval which have been submitted to the REC. Decisions taken by expedited review will be reported to the Research Ethics Committee at its next meeting.

**Thesis embargo requests:** The Chair/Deputy Chair will make a decision on cases referred by the PhD Academy/Research Degrees Sub-Committee relating to embargo or redaction requests where these arise from ethical, security or confidentiality concerns for the research participants (or researchers themselves).

**Research conduct:** the School Secretary may seek the advice/opinion of the Chair in matters relating to research conduct as and when they arise across the School.

### **Mode of Operation**

The Committee meets at least once per term. The quorum for Committee meetings is half of members plus the Chair. Applications for ethics approval are reviewed as and when they are received - they do not need to wait until a meeting of the Committee. Applications are usually reviewed by two or three members (more for particularly complex applications). Applications may be approved on the basis of the reviewing members recommendations or may require sign-off by the Chair or Deputy Chair (the circumstances for each are set out in appendix A below). The ethics support team assign applications to members for review, trying to ensure that workload is distributed evenly over the course of each term whilst at the same time taking into account members' areas of expertise.

### **Timeframe of REC review process**

The Committee aims to review applications and send initial feedback to the researcher within two weeks of receiving the application.<sup>5</sup> In most cases approval may take longer as the researcher may be asked to provide some additional details, clarification or to make amendments before approval can be confirmed. Thus researchers should typically allow four weeks for the REC review process. However complex applications may require even longer and/or further iterations with the researcher, and thus the review process could take up to 5-6 weeks.

### **Expedited review**

Where there is a genuine case for urgency due to circumstances which could not have been anticipated and which are outside of the researcher's control (for example, in the case of fast-track funding to address global or national emergencies), and where the ethical risks of the project are not especially complex, the Research Ethics Committee will expedite the review process as quickly as possible. However, even in expedited cases, time pressure should not be expected to pre-empt the full review process and the iterations or requests for clarification and amendment which require a further round of approval.

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<sup>5</sup> Students need to allow time for review by the supervisor first

## **Composition of the Committee**

Due to the nature of the Committee's work, the Committee has an exemption from the usual School Committee requirement to recruit members from each of the Academic Board constituency groups. As such, the Committee will have the opportunity to review potential candidates and make suggestions to the Vice Chair of Academic Board where the Committee has particular areas of expertise which it needs in order to fulfil its role.

The Committee currently comprises 18 academic/research staff and two lay members.

## **Appendix A: Chair/Deputy Chair sign-off of applications submitted for REC approval**

### **Chair/Deputy Chair sign-off of applications submitted for REC approval**

REC Chair or Deputy Chair sign-off is required where:

- An application has been reviewed by one REC member only (other than the Chair(s))
- An application has been reviewed by two members but the latter are both new to the Committee (within 1<sup>st</sup> year of membership)
- Two reviewers recommend approval but the study raises quite complex issues/risks

However, where a study appears to raise only minimal issues, the Research Governance Manager<sup>6</sup> may confirm approval on the basis of one member's recommendation of approval.

### **Research using secondary data only**

The Research Governance Manager may, on behalf of the Committee, review and approve applications where<sup>7</sup>:

- the research will only be using secondary data, and
- the dataset is being supplied by a reputable data provider, and
- appropriate data security measures are in place, and
- the study raises no, or only minimal, issues

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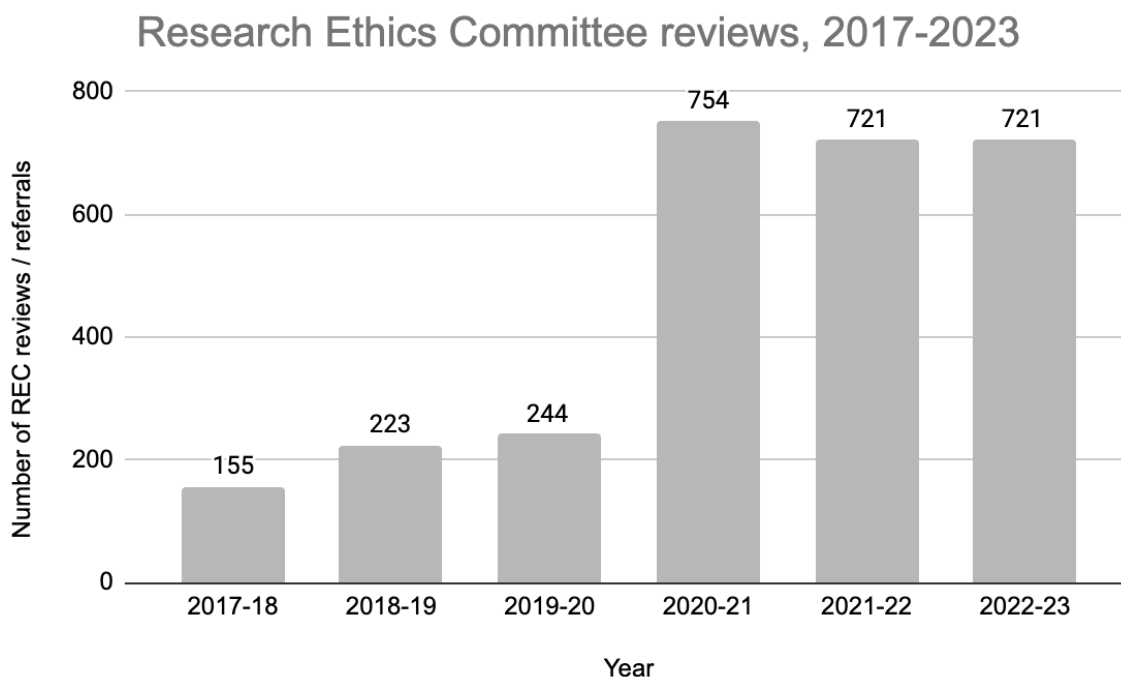
<sup>6</sup> To be reviewed annually and/or should there be a change of Research Governance Manager

<sup>7</sup> As above



## Annex 3: Research Ethics applications submitted 2022-23<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1: Research Ethics Committee reviews, 2017-2023**



Note: the large increase in volume in 2020-21 was due to the launch of the online ethics review submission system. (The categorisation of applications as either low risk/Departmental review versus higher risk/REC review was automated by the system.)

**Table 2: REC reviews by researcher type, 2022-23**

|              | <b>UG</b> | <b>PGT</b> | <b>PGR</b> | <b>Staff</b> | <b>Other</b> |
|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Total number | 55        | 470        | 85         | 93           | 18*          |
| Percentage   | 8%        | 65%        | 12%        | 13%          | 2%           |

\*Other = visiting staff, researchers based in non-academic units (e.g. Eden, Careers, EDI, LSE Groups).

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Thelma Obiakor for her help in producing the tables/figures.

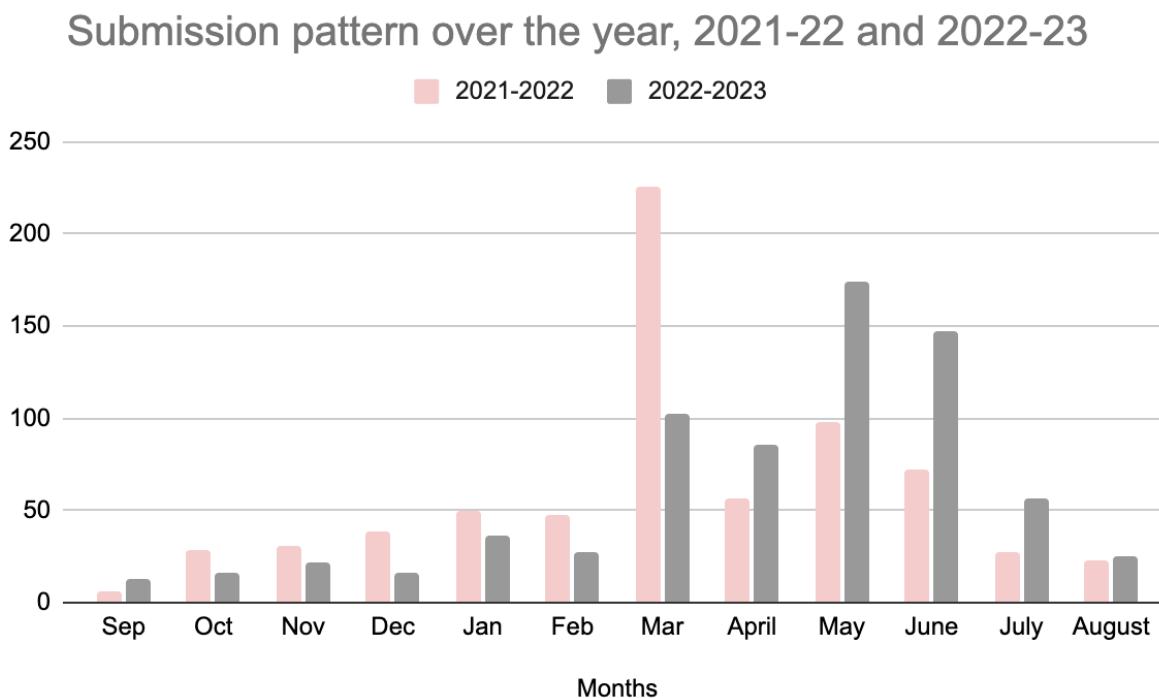
**Table 3: Applications not reviewed by REC, 2022-23**

In addition to the applications requiring Research Ethics Committee review, the system recorded the following numbers of other types of review:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Applications reviewed at Departmental level          | 2,101 |
| Applications categorised as 'Approval not required'  | 1,029 |
| Applications which underwent review externally only* | 17    |

\* Applications submitted by researchers who request exemption from LSE review because their study has undergone review/approval by an external research ethics committee/board are reviewed by the Research Governance Manager who confirms whether or not LSE ethics review/approval is also required (in accordance with §24-28 of the Research Ethics Policy). Any queries are forwarded to the Chair or Deputy of the Committee to advise on and/or for decision.

**Table 4: submission pattern over the year, 2021-22 and 2022-23**



Note re difference in submission pattern between 2021-22 and 2022: in 2022-23 applications for taught student projects were only submitted to the REC if the project was for a dissertation. Projects undertaken for coursework/other types of assessment were reviewed/approved at Departmental level, even where they involved elements that would normally require REC review/approval.

**Table 5: submission of applications per Department, 2022-23**

| Department                    | REC reviews | UG        | PGT        | PGR       | Staff/other |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Media & Comms                 | 95          | -         | 84         | 3         | 8           |
| Sociology                     | 92          | 24        | 58         | 4         | 6           |
| Social Policy                 | 65          | 7         | 48         | 6         | 4           |
| Psychological/Behavioural Sci | 64          | 1         | 45         | 11        | 7           |
| Management                    | 60          | -         | 51         | -         | 9           |
| International Development     | 54          | -         | 46         | 6         | 2           |
| Geography & Environment       | 49          | 14        | 26         | 5         | 4           |
| Methodology                   | 31          | -         | 26         | 1         | 4           |
| Government                    | 30          | 2         | 16         | 8         | 4           |
| European Institute            | 25          | -         | 15         | 4         | 6           |
| Gender studies                | 25          |           | 23         | 1         | 1           |
| Anthropology                  | 18          | 3         | 2          | 7         | 5           |
| International Relations       | 18          | 1         | 9          | 7         | 1           |
| Health Policy                 | 13          | -         | 9          | 2         | 2           |
| International History         | 8           | 2         | 4          | 1         | 1           |
| Economics                     | 7           | -         | -          | 6         | 1           |
| Law                           | 3           | -         | -          | 2         | 1           |
| Economic History              | 2           | 1         | -          | 1         | -           |
| Accounting                    | 1           | -         | -          | 1         | -           |
| Finance                       | 1           | -         | -          | -         | 1           |
| Public Policy                 | 1           | -         | 1          | -         | -           |
| Centres/Institutes/other      | 59          | -         | 6          | 8         | 45          |
| <b>Totals:</b>                | <b>721</b>  | <b>55</b> | <b>469</b> | <b>84</b> | <b>111</b>  |