RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE: ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

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 2024-25 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 Senior Research Ethics Manager is Secretary to the Committee and, together with the Research Ethics Manager, 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 2024-25 are summarized in sections 2-8 below.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES, 2024-25

2.1 Dr Bert Provan continued as Acting Deputy Chair and Dr Heather Kappes was appointed Acting Deputy Chair for the Winter Term.

2.2 Five new members joined the Committee in September: Matthew Benson (Conflict and Civicness Research Group), Daniel De Kadt (Methodology), Alison Powell (Media &

Communications), John Sidel (Government), Mariya Stoilova (Media & Communications). An additional six interim members were appointed (initially for the Autumn term only, but subsequently extended for the year) to help cover the absence of a number of members who were on sabbatical, research or other leave. The six members joined in October and are: Richard Perkins (Geography), Ronald Po (International History), Chana Teeger (Methodology), Yazan Dougan (Anthropology), Julian Hopwood (FLIA) and Andrea Pia (Anthropology). Two PhD students also joined the Committee the same month: Saumyadeep Mandal (Media & Communications) and Claudia Rodríguez-Castellanos (International Development). The role of the (paid) PhD student members is primarily to help review MSc applications, however they may also be asked to review PhD or staff applications where these fall within their area of expertise. Three induction sessions for new members were held in September and October 2024.

2.3   At the end of the academic year, the following members stepped down at the end of their terms of appointment: Chair, Professor John Chalcraft; Drs Lucia Garcia-Lorenzo (Psychological and Behavioural Science), Eleanor Power (Methodology) and Sara Salem (Sociology). Deputy Chair Dr Siva Thambisetty also stepped down at the end of the year, having served on the Committee for 10 years.

2.4   The vacancy for the 2nd Lay member has not as yet been filled, pending discussions with the School regarding whether Lay members could be offered an honorarium.

2.5   The full 2024-25 membership is provided in Annex 1.

3.   TERMS OF REFERENCE, 2024-25

3.1.   The Terms of Reference for 2024-25 were approved in October 2024. The only changes related to the 'Composition of the Committee' which was updated to reflect the addition of a second Deputy Chair, and the inclusion of two PhD student members. The Terms of Reference for 2024-25 are provided at Annex 2.

4. VOLUME OF APPLICATIONS REVIEWED, 2024-25

4.1   Annex 3 provides figures and data relating to the volume and type of applications reviewed during the course of 2024-25.

4.2   The Committee had hoped to see a reduction in the overall volume of applications this year as it would be the first full academic year in which all undergraduate applications were exempted from REC review. Instead, however, there was a small increase in overall volume.

4.3   An issue of concern was that there seemed to be a larger than usual number of MSc applications received late in the Spring Term/early summer break. A total of 66 MSc applications came to the REC for review after the 1st June, 11 of which were received after

the end of term (21st June). The issue will be flagged to Departments at the start of the 2025-26 academic year

5. REVIEW OF LSE INFORMED CONSENT GUIDANCE

5.1   Following a review of the *Informed Consent Guidance* by the Committee during the course of 2023/24, the revised guidance was approved in October 2024. The revisions included new text on the naming of participants and an improvement of the informed consent templates (with a new template for online surveys). A section was also added to the guidance regarding the use of Generative AI in research (and a new clause relating to this was included in the ethics review form at question G6).

5.2 The Committee also recommended that, across the School, awareness is raised about the data privacy and security concerns of using Generative AI tools to process research participants' information. In particular, researchers must be careful not to assume that obtaining informed consent excuses them from giving proper consideration to other ethical considerations regarding the use of Generative AI tools.

6. LSE GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI FOR RESEARCH

6.1   During the course of 2024-25 the Committee provided feedback to the AI in Research Working Group on the newly drafted *LSE Guidance on the use of Generative AI for Research*. Initially the Committee was concerned that the guidance emphasized the potential benefits of AI rather more than the possible risks (including the ethical ones), while the inevitability of the uptake of these tools should also be acknowledged by researchers. The Committee suggested a number of revisions, in particular that if research participants' identifiable/de-anonymised data may be used to train Generative AI tools, consent should be sought from participants, and a warning to researchers on the risks of bias and over-reliance when using Generative AI tools. These amendments were taken up by the AI in Research Working Group.

7. REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

7.1   Revisions to the Research Ethics policy were discussed at the February meeting. These included the addition of new sections relating to security-sensitive research and research involving animals. A new section and a streamlined review process was also included for the review of impact and engagement activities.

7.2 The revisions to the Policy were approved at the June REC meeting and subsequently approved by the Chair of Research Committee.

8. PROJECT MONITORING

Two project reports were reviewed during the year:

i) a final report on research by a PhD student in IR relating to defence/industrial modernisation in post-Cold War China (the study had raised concerns regarding the safety of both the student and participants);

ii) a final report on a project led by a member of research staff in the International Inequalities Institute entitled '*A digital patient feedback platform in Tanzania: Evaluating the pathways to impact*' where REC members had flagged the importance of giving local research collaborator(s) appropriate credit in outputs.

9. OTHER WORK AND TOPICS DISCUSSED BY THE COMMITTEE

The following topics and issues were also discussed during the year:

- a review of REC guidance on the use of social media & internet data;
- an update of the guidance document 'Ethics review considerations: a quick guide for researchers' (including advice on the use of crowdsourcing platforms);
- a review of the LSE Behavioural Lab guidance on incidental findings;
- a discussion of the boundary between consultancy and research (the Committee was asked for advice by a member of faculty);
- a discussion around the expansion of the current provision of ethics training around the School;
- a brief discussion around the issue of host country ethics requirements (which arose in relation to a particular application; the Committee agreed to discuss the issue in more depth next academic year);
- the remedying of an issue with the ethics form that came to light that meant that safeguarding issues in taught student proposals (where they were planning to work with vulnerable groups) was not being flagged to supervisors;
- potential ethics concerns in the use of Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) in the context of the poor/Global South;
- a discussion of potential ethics concerns in studies involving students as research participants.

Myriam Fellous-Sigrist, Research Ethics Manager
Lyn Grove, Secretary, Research Ethics Committee/Senior Research Ethics Manager

Report approved by Research Ethics Review Board (29 October 2025)
Report endorsed by Research Committee (03 December 2025)

Annex 1: REC membership 2024/25

Dr Cressida Auckland	Law **(Deputy Chair)** (on leave WT)
Dr Matthew Benson	Conflict and Civicness Research Group
Prof John Chalcraft	Government **(Chair)**
Dr Daniel De Kadt	Methodology
Dr Yazan Doughan	Anthropology (On leave WT)
Dr Sara Evans-Lacko	Care Policy and Evaluation Centre (on leave ST)
Dr Lucia Garcia	Psychological and Behavioural Science (on leave 2025)
Dr Anna Getmansky	International Relations (on leave AT)
Dr Julian Hopwood	Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa
Dr Lucy Kanya	Health Policy
Dr Heather Kappes	Management **(Acting Deputy Chair WT)**
Dr Sohini Kar	International Development
Dr Jens Madsen	Psychological and Behavioural Science
Saumyadeep Mandal	Media and Communications (PhD student member)
Dr Richard Perkins	Geography
Dr Andrea Pia	Anthropology
Dr Federico Picinali	Law (on leave 2025)
Dr Jean-Christophe Plantin	Media and Communications
Dr Ronald Po	International History
Dr Alison Powell	Media and Communications
Dr Eleanor Power	Methodology (on leave 2024/25)
Dr Bert Provan	CASE **(Acting Deputy Chair)**
Dr Aliya Rao	Methodology (on leave AT)
Claudia Rodríguez Castellanos	International Development (PhD student member)
Dr Sara Salem	Sociology
Dr Romola Sanyal	Geography and Environment
Prof John Sidel	Government
Jenny Stevens	Lay member/external
Dr Mariya Stoilova	Media and Communications
Dr Chana Teeger	Methodology
Dr Siva Thambisetty	Law (on leave 2024/25)
Dr Harry Walker	Anthropology
Prof Tengyao Wang	Statistics

Annex 2: REC Terms of Reference 2024/25[1]

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[2]; 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[3] and the Committee Effective Behaviour Statement[4].

Role of the Chair and Deputy Chairs

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[1] Approved October 2024
[2] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/research-and-innovation/research/research-ethics/research-ethics
[3] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Ethics/Ethics-Code
[4] https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/internal/comEffBehSta.pdf

The duties of the Chair (and/or Deputy Chairs, where appropriate) will be as per the normal expectations for LSE Committee Chairs; for instance, to undertake ad hoc work such as attendance at other relevant meetings and events. In addition, the Chair/Deputy Chairs will advise and/or make decisions in the following:

Expedited reviews: In accordance with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and procedure, the Chair/Deputy Chairs 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 Chairs 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 a 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.[5] 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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[5] 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 24 academic/research staff, two lay members and two PhD researchers. There is one Chair and two Deputy Chairs.

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 1st 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 Senior Research Ethics Manager[6] may confirm approval on the basis of one member's recommendation of approval.

Research using secondary data only

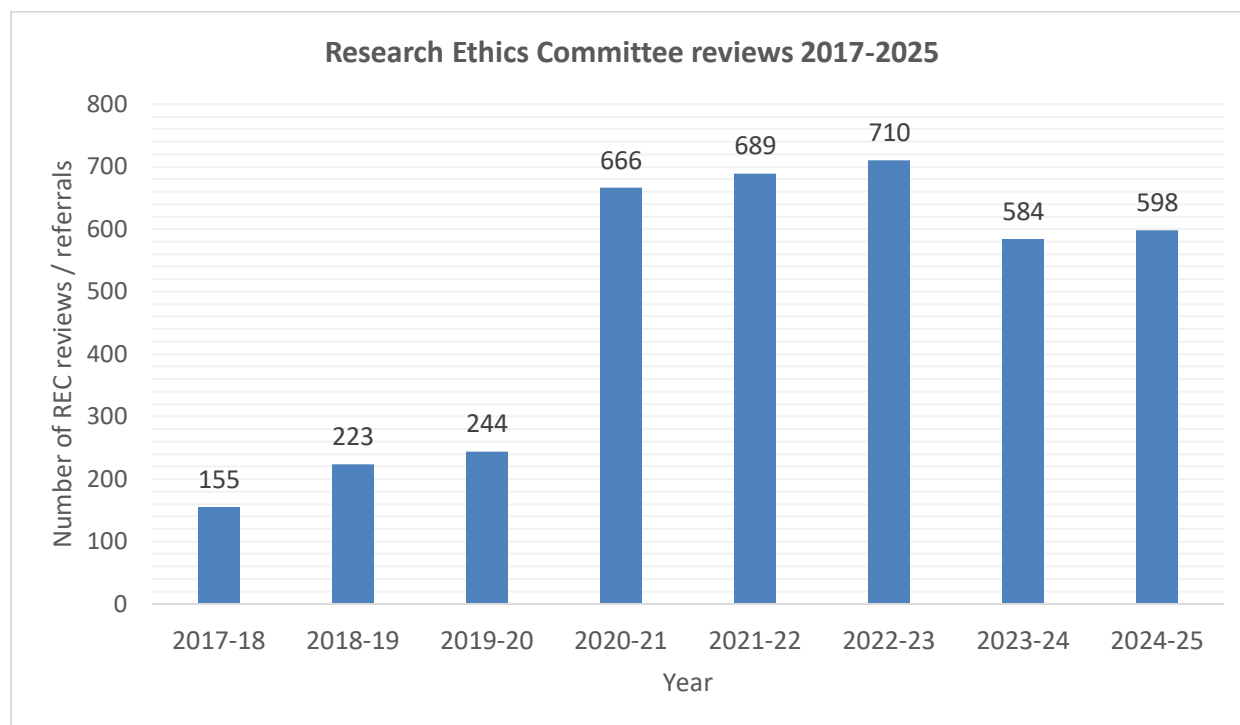The Senior Research Ethics Manager may, on behalf of the Committee, review and approve applications where:

- 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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[6] To be reviewed annually and/or should there be a change of Senior Research Ethics Manager

Annex 3: Research Ethics applications submitted 2024-25

Figure 1: Research Ethics Committee reviews, 2017-2025

Research Ethics Committee reviews 2017-2025

Year	Number of REC reviews / referrals
2017-18	155
2018-19	223
2019-20	244
2020-21	666
2021-22	689
2022-23	710
2023-24	584
2024-25	598

Notes

- 2020/21: The large increase in volume 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.)

- 2023/24: the reduction in volume was a result of measures put in place – primarily the exemption of non-dissertation MSc research and (from March 2024 onwards) the exemption of all UG research.

Amendments reviewed 2024/25:

In addition to the 598 ethics applications reviewed by the REC, **142** amendment requests were reviewed.

Table 2: REC reviews by researcher type, 2024/25

	UG	PGT	PGR	Staff	Other
Total number	13	379	88	108	10*
Percentage	2%	63%	15%	18%	2%

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

Table 3: REC reviews: breakdown per Department, 2024/25

Department	REC reviews	UG	PGT	PGR	Staff/other
Media & Communications	78	-	63	7	8
Sociology	64	4	50	4	6
International Development	63	-	48	7	8
Management	55	-	37	10	8
Geography & Environment	41	4	23	10	4
Social Policy	40	2	32	6	-
Psychological/Behavioural Sci	36	1	26	4	5
Gender studies	34	-	32	2	-
Methodology	31	-	15	4	12
Government	31	-	14	12	5
European Institute	15	-	13	-	2
International Relations	12	1	4	2	5
Health Policy	10	-	6	1	3
Anthropology	10	1	2	6	1
Economics	7	-	-	5	2
International History	7	-	3	2	2
Law	6	-	1	1	4
Public Policy	3	-	2	-	1
Centres/Institutes/other	55	-	8	5	42
Totals	**598**	**13**	**379**	**88**	**118**

Table 4: Applications reviewed at Departmental level 2024-25

In addition to the applications requiring Research Ethics Committee review, the online ethics system recorded the following numbers of applications reviewed at Departmental level:

Applications reviewed at Departmental level	2,204
Applications categorised as 'Approval not required'	847