
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE: TERMS OF REFERENCE 2023-24

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 guidance¹; 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 Code² and the Committee Effective Behaviour Statement³.

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

¹ <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/research-and-innovation/research/research-ethics/research-ethics>

² <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Ethics/Ethics-Code>

³ <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.⁴ 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.

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

⁴ Students need to allow time for review by the supervisor first

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 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 Research Governance Manager⁵ 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 where⁶:

- 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

⁵ To be reviewed annually and/or should there be a change of Research Governance Manager

⁶ As above