Lancaster University
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Management School
Research Ethics Committee

Terms of reference

Principles

1) The FASS-LUMS Research Ethics Committee (FASS-LUMS REC) will report to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), will work to the University’s Research Ethics Policy and ultimately to the Terms of Reference of the UREC.

2) The FASS-LUMS ethics committee is responsible for making decisions on whether research projects in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) and the Management School (LUMS) meet the University’s ethical standards and requirements as set out in the University’s Research Ethics Policy.

3) More specifically, the remit of the FASS-LUMS ethics committee is to provide guidance to FASS and LUMS postgraduate research students and staff on ethical issues with regards to research. The committee is responsible for reviewing and approving ethics applications submitted to the committee by staff and postgraduate research students (e.g. PhD and Masters by Research) in the two Faculties. The FREC will also consider applications for sponsorship under the Research Governance Framework via the NHS Integrated Research Applications Systems (IRAS).

4) The Committee’s Chair will be a member of UREC. The Committee will provide annual reports to UREC on decisions made and any recommendations for changes to University policy and procedure.

5) Heads of Departments or delegated members of staff from Departments in both Faculties are responsible for reviewing and approving applications by undergraduate and taught postgraduate students undertaking research. Heads of Departments or delegated members of staff should prepare annual reports on ethical reviews conducted for these students to submit to the FASS-LUMS REC. Although the FREC is not responsible for reviewing undergraduate or PG(T) projects in exceptional cases a department may decide that an undergraduate or PG(T) project poses ethical concerns which they need to refer to the FREC for guidance. Therefore in such exceptional cases the department will refer the project to the FREC for advice. The FREC will act in an advisory capacity only in this case.

6) The FASS-LUMS Research Ethics Committee has final approval powers.

Membership and Meetings

7) Membership of the Committee will be as follows: The Chair (FASS) and Deputy Chair (LUMS); normally at least one member from the staff of each department in the faculties, but two colleagues for a large department with high numbers of research students; two lay members; a research student representative from each of the two faculties;
membership of the committee will be multidisciplinary, include both women and men and at least one external (lay) member not affiliated to Lancaster University. The Chair will serve for 3 years and can be reappointed once. Ordinary members will serve for a term of 2 years, renewable twice by mutual agreement. Chair and members will not serve for more than 6 years except in exceptional circumstances and with the approval of UREC. The Committee will have at least 10 members and preferably 12.

8) Quoracy of the FASS-LUMS Committee at all meetings requires the presence of Chair and/or Deputy Chair, the Committee Secretary and members with sufficient expertise to assess the type and quantity of proposals at each meeting. We require a minimum of 2 ordinary members from two different departments of each faculty. The attendance of a lay member whilst important is not essential as long as the lay member has noted receipt of the meeting papers and considers that no issues prevail. In case they have identified issues that they wish the committee to discuss, they will have put these in writing to the Chair/Dep. Chair or Secretary who will bring them to the attention of the committee so that they can be discussed at the committee meeting. Furthermore, all documentation is made available to all committee members to comment on if they wish, should they not be present at the meeting.

9) The FASS-LUMS committee meets monthly throughout the year with the exception of August.

**Operational Procedures**

10) The work of the committee will be supported by a Faculty research ethics officer, who will act as secretary to the committee. S/he will be responsible for organising meeting dates, securing a meeting room for the meetings, circulating applications, drafting responses based on notes from the committee meetings, maintaining records related to applications and acting as an initial focus for enquiries. S/he will be responsible for dealing with all incoming applications whether discussed at committee meeting or via ongoing review (see point 8 below), ensuring that they will be screened, sent to reviewers, etc. S/he will also be responsible for communicating with the applicants.

11) The Committee’s procedure regarding staff and postgraduate research students’ applications will be as follows:

a) Incoming applications will be screened by the Committee’s Chair/Deputy Chair and Committee Secretary to identify level of review needed. The level of ethical review required will be decided in relation to the type of study and whether approval has been sought externally. The application form includes questions that seek to establish the level of ethical risk and the form invites applicants to provide more or less information about their study depending on the depth of ethical concerns it may raise. For example, research by staff and PhD students using secondary data and presenting minimal ethical issues will require less in-depth review. These applications will be reviewed by the Chair/Deputy Chair and unless any other ethical issues are identified, will be approved by Chair’s action. Research involving data from the internet may, depending on the nature of that data, require a fuller review, similar to studies involving direct contact with human participants.
b) Any applications that involve direct contact with human participants and/or which raise other ethical issues will be reviewed by at least two committee members, one being the lead reviewer. The lead reviewer will be responsible for writing the review and for checking amendments/revisions/corrections to the initial application. The second reviewer will be asked to read the application carefully, consider the lead reviewer’s comments and add/amend these as appropriate. Lead and second reviewer may decide to meet in person or to communicate by email or other means. The review needs to be submitted to the Faculty Research Ethics Officer who will forward it to the applicant.

c) Whether an application will be considered at committee meeting or not is decided by the Chair taking account of the following factors: date of receipt of the applications and numbers of applications received in a specific week or month (the higher the volume of applications, the greater the likelihood that in between committee meetings applications will be reviewed following the process explained in point b); complexity of cases: any complex cases, as identified by the Chair /Deputy Chair or lead reviewer, will be forwarded for discussion at the next committee meeting.

12) The committee and/or its Chair can, when appropriate, nominate a sub-committee, drawn from the main committee, to act on behalf of the committee in specified areas, for example to review a specific application.

13) Decisions made by Chair’s action can be made at any time. This concerns in particular applications where the complexity is considered to be low and where expedited review may be undertaken.

14) Externally approved projects need to submit paperwork to the Chair of the FASS-LUMS ethics committee for a light touch review. As part of this review, additional information can be requested and amendments to supporting documents may be asked for.

15) The Committee and/or Chair may decide to seek advice from other FRECs or from UREC in case of applications that are interdisciplinary or that present particularly complex ethical concerns.

16) Applications requiring amendments to a previously approved project will be considered by the Chair/Deputy Chair and dealt with by Chair’s action in case of minor changes which do not present significant ethical concerns. Such requests for amendments may be considered by Committee meeting and/or a delegated team of Committee members in case the changes result in major ethical concerns.

17) All staff and postgraduate students seeking approval from the FASS-LUMS FREC are required to use the FREC’s application form which will be available via dedicated ethics websites in both faculties, along with supporting documents.

18) Any adverse events or breaches of ethics will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis by the Faculty Research Ethics Officer, Chair and Deputy Chair. UREC will be informed of any
adverse events or breaches of ethics. See Serious Adverse Events guidance in ‘Lancaster University general guidance on procedures for research ethics approval’.

19) Requests for retrospective approval will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Faculty Research Ethics Officer, Chair and/or Deputy Chair. Applicants should provide details of reasons for why the study was set up and data collected prior to ethics approval being obtained.

20) The Committee will have a procedure for considering appeals against a decision. (See Lancaster University research ethics appeals procedure).

**Promoting Good Practice**

21) The Committee will promote awareness and understanding of ethical issues in research amongst colleagues and students in the two faculties. This may include training for staff and students, in departments and/or at faculty level (e.g. as part of research training programmes for PhD students).

22) The Committee will keep abreast of new developments, policies and regulations concerning research ethics through appropriate training available via OED, University seminars, external courses, etc.