Lancaster University
Faculty of Science and Technology Research Ethics Committee

Terms of reference

Principles
1) The Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) Research Ethics Committee (FSTREC) 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) FSTREC is responsible for making decisions on whether research projects in the Faculty of Science and Technology meet the University’s ethical standards and requirements as set out in the University’s Research Ethics Policy.

3) More specifically, the remit of FSTREC is to provide guidance to FST 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 postgraduate research students (i.e. PhD students) and staff in FST. The FSTREC will also consider applications for sponsorship under the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research via the NHS Integrated Research Applications Systems (IRAS).

4) For research conducted overseas that has or will be considered by a research ethics committee in another country, a judgement will be made by the Chair and/or Deputy Chair, if necessary in consultation with FSTREC, as to whether a full review is necessary or recommendation for approval by Chair’s action.

5) Staff members with approvals made by another institution are required to submit a copy to FSTREC and a judgement will be made by the Chair and/or Deputy Chair, if necessary in consultation with FSTREC, it complies to LU standards and if not advice is given to the applicant about any shortcomings.

6) 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.

7) Heads of Departments or delegated members of staff from Departments in FST are responsible for reviewing and approving applications by undergraduate and taught postgraduate students undertaking research.

8) The FST Research Ethics Committee has final approval powers.

Membership and Meetings
9) Membership of the Committee will be as follows:
   • Chair and Deputy Chair (drawn from the membership of the committee);
   • Seven members from the Department of Psychology, four members from computing, two from LEC, one member from Physics, one member from Mathematics & Statistics;
   • One research student representative;
   • FST Associate Dean for Research;
   • Two lay members.
   Membership of the committee will include both women and men. The Chair will serve for 3 years and may 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 appointment of appointed and co-opted members shall be ratified by the Chair of UREC.
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10) Quoracy of FSTREC at all meetings requires the presence of Chair and/or Deputy Chair, the FREC Research Ethics Officer and members with sufficient expertise to assess the type and quantity of proposals at each meeting – a minimum of 2 ordinary members from two different Departments will be required. The attendance of the lay members, whilst important, is not essential as long as the lay members have noted receipt of the meeting papers and consider 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/Deputy Chair or secretary who will bring them to the attention of the committee so that they can be discussed at the 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.

11) FSTREC meets monthly throughout the year with the exception of August, unless no agenda items (including application for review at committee) have been put forward.

Operational Procedures

12) The work of the committee will be supported by a research ethics officer, who will act as secretary to the committee, and will be responsible for organising meeting dates, securing a meeting room for the meetings, circulating proposals, drafting responses based on notes from the committee meetings, maintaining records related to applications and acting as an initial focus for enquiries.

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

a) Incoming applications will be screened by the REC Chair/Deputy Chair and research ethics officer for an initial assessment of risk and ethical issues that are raised. 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 will include questions that seek to establish the level of ethical risk and the form will invite applicants to provide more or less information about their study depending on the depth of ethical concerns it may raise. All applications will be circulated to the whole committee. Following initial assessment, minimal-risk application, for example research using adult participants in simple standard paradigms presenting minimal ethical issues, will be allocated one lead reviewer and, unless any other ethical issues are identified, following review will be approved by Chair’s action. Higher-risk applications will be allocated a lead and a secondary reviewer. Reviewers or the Chair can refer proposals for review by the whole committee or can request additional comments by expert individuals in the committee. Simple amendments to already approved studies can be approved by Chair’s action. More complex amendments will be reviewed like new proposals.

b) Applications that raise more than minimal 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 (for expediency, simple revisions may be undertaken by the Chair). 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 research ethics officer who will forward it to the applicant.
14) The reviewers or the Chair can recommend that specific applications are reviewed by the full committee at the next scheduled committee meeting. This will usually be because applications are complex and raise issues that merit discussion in order to reach a decision.

15) Applications that are amendments to a previously approved project will be considered by the Chair/Deputy Chair and dealt with by Chair’s action in cases where minor changes which do not present significant ethical concerns. Requests for amendments where the changes result in major ethical concerns will be considered by the Committee and/or a delegated team of committee members.

16) The Chair/committee secretary will allocate applications to reviewers according to research expertise and availability. They will also need to take account of work load, ensuring, to the extent that this is possible, that the work of reviewing applications is spread evenly amongst committee members.

17) 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.

18) 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.

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

20) 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.

21) All staff and postgraduate students seeking approval from FSTREC are required to use the FSTREC application forms, which will be available via dedicated ethics websites, along with supporting documents.

22) Any adverse events or breaches of ethics will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis by the Research Ethics Officer, Chair and Deputy and will be reported to UREC in line with the University Policy. (See Serious Adverse Events guidance in ‘Lancaster University general guidance on procedures for research ethics approval’ document).

23) Requests for retrospective approval (where the research activity has already started) will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Research Ethics Officer, Chair and/or Deputy Chair. Applicants will have to provide details of reasons for why the study was set up and data collected prior to ethics approval being obtained. Retrospective approval cannot be granted but an opinion on whether or not the application would have been approved if submitted prior to the commencement of the research will be given.

24) The Committee will have a procedure for considering appeals against a decision (see ‘Lancaster University research ethics appeals procedure’).

**Promoting Good Practice**

25) The Committee will promote awareness and understanding of ethical issues in research amongst colleagues and students in FST. 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).

26) 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.