

University Research Integrity and Ethics Committee: Terms of

April 2024

Aston University Research Integrity and Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

0. Introduction

The purpose of the University Research Integrity and Ethics Committee (URIEC) is to provide advice to the Research Committee and Senate on the development, implementation and review of institutional procedures and guidelines relating to research integrity and research ethics issues arising from research and other related activities, considering emerging issues of institutional, national, or international significance. URIEC will also provide support and oversight for the work of the College Research Ethics Committees (CRECs).

1. Principles

The Committee reports to the Research Committee and is responsible for:

1.1) Ongoing review of the University's Research Integrity Policy and Research Misconduct Policy, including providing guidance on their interpretation and oversight and review of policies and guidelines on good research conduct and the principles of research integrity.

1.2) Ensuring institutional adherence to the Research Integrity Policy, Research Misconduct Policy and the University's associated Ethical Principles and Procedures, including:

- i. Oversight and accreditation of the delegated ethics review arrangements in place within the University;
- ii. Monitoring CREC arrangements, receiving regular termly reports on numbers and types of approvals and termly reports on institutional sponsorship;
- iii. Providing guidance on cases of uncertainty raised by CRECs; and
- iv. Agreeing additional arrangements in relation to the CRECs as necessary.

1.3) URIEC shall review research applications that have been referred by CREC Chairs. URIEC will have the right to de-escalate applications to CRECs or reject reviewing applications where the scientific validity and/or governance checks have not met University standards. Subject to the Chair's agreement, review of applications may take place by a sub-group of URIEC and may also take place by correspondence. URIEC may invite the research applicants to attend a committee meeting to provide clarifications related to their project. Amendments to applications reviewed and given a favourable ethical opinion by URIEC shall first be submitted via the URIEC secretary and referred back to the CREC if required. URIEC has final powers to issue approval to any research ethics application brought to it for consideration.

1.4) Whilst CRECs will be sufficiently equipped to review and consider the ethical implications or considerations of an ethics application, at the point at which a piece of research raises concerns regarding research integrity and governance (e.g., reputational risks, safety) the URIEC Chair shall be

notified, and a decision made regarding the level of necessary URIEC input and review of the study. URIEC can assess whether there is an appetite for the research (e.g., on illegal drugs use) even if it has been deemed ethical by the CREC.

1.5) In the event of receiving complaints or appeals against decisions made by CRECs, the Chair of URIEC will investigate the matter, normally within two weeks of notification of the complaint or appeal. If appropriate, URIEC can overrule decisions made by the CRECs, suspending the approval process for that proposal or suspending the research activity in question.

1.6) URIEC shall promote awareness and understanding of ethical issues in research throughout the University and disseminate good practice in accordance with the Research Ethical Principles and Procedures policy.

1.7) URIEC will provide advice on any ethical matters relating to research that are referred to it from within the University. This may include arranging or conducting ethics reviews on an exceptional basis to deal with special circumstances which cannot be dealt with by CRECs, e.g., where specific confidentiality requirements apply. In such a case, a sub-group of URIEC may be required to review as requested by the Chair of URIEC.

1.8) URIEC will keep abreast of externally driven developments, policies and regulations concerning research ethics and research integrity ensuring that the University meets all necessary requirements.

1.9) URIEC will take a pro-active approach to promoting good research practice and developing initiatives which would further enhance a positive environment which enables high integrity research.

1.10) On an annual basis URIEC will provide a report to Research Committee following an assessment of the Committee's own performance and efficiency with any recommendations for change as necessary.

1.11) The URIEC and CRECs recognise that the definition and perceived significance of ethical problems may be subject to change and difference of opinion. In this light, URIEC will conduct an annual review of its work reporting annually to Research Committee on the management of the Committees, indicating in this any suggested or agreed change in policy or procedures. URIEC will also report on any outstanding or anticipated difficulties. Each CREC will provide a report to URIEC for these purposes – expert members of CRECs will monitor and inform best practice in respect of relevant professional guidelines. A list of all submissions and the decision taken in respect of them together with any major issues arising and a record of applications considered outside formal meetings will be required as part of the annual report. Each CREC annual report will also be presented to the appropriate College Research Committee for information.

1.12) URIEC will ensure that the Research Integrity Policy and associated policies, procedures and processes support compliance by the University with the Universities UK Concordat to support research integrity.

1.13) Appeals against a decision made by URIEC may be referred to the Secretary of Research Committee. In line with other University policies and sector norms, appeals are typically accepted only on the grounds of procedural irregularities or where new information has become available that would significantly impact the initial outcome.

- Procedural irregularities:

If a colleague believes that procedural errors occurred during any stage of their application, they have the right to appeal. Procedural errors may include but are not limited to misapplication of policies or failure to follow established procedures. To initiate an appeal based on procedural errors, the colleague should submit a formal written appeal detailing the specific errors observed.

- New information:

In cases where new and relevant information becomes available after the initial decision, colleagues are encouraged to submit an appeal. The appeal should clearly outline the new information and explain how it impacts the initial decision.

1.14) Meetings shall be minuted and there shall be an approval procedure for the minutes.

2. Membership

Ex officio

Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Research Integrity (Chair)

Chairs of CRECs

Director of Legal Services

Director of Library Services

Head of Procurement and Insurance

Director of Health and Safety and Business Continuity

Designated Individual – Human Tissue Licence (Research)

Director of the Biomedical Facility

Director of Research Services

Research Integrity and Governance Manager

Co-opted

Senior academic with a clinical background

Lay person with appropriate knowledge

Early career researcher

Representative of the Graduate School

Open Research Data and Bibliometrics specialist

Sponsor's Representative

President(s) - Aston Postgraduate Research Society

In Attendance

Research Integrity Officer (Secretary)

Research Ethics Officer

Notes:

- i) The membership will include at least one male and one female member.
- ii) URIEC may temporarily co-opt members of CRECs in exceptional circumstances.
- iii) The committee will normally meet four times per year.
- iv) Six committee members shall constitute quoracy; quoracy requires the presence of the Chair and at least three ex officio members.
- v) The appointment of appointed and co-opted members shall be ratified by the Chair of Research Committee.
- vi) The attendance of the lay member(s), whilst important, is not essential if the lay member(s) 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 should put these in writing to the Secretary who will bring them to the attention of the committee so that they can be discussed at the meeting. Furthermore, all documentation will be made available to all committee members to comment on if they wish, should they not be present at the meeting.
- vii) Quality assurance reviews will be undertaken by URIEC regarding the business of the CRECs; this could include sampling of cases not reviewed by the full CREC and additional requests received by the CREC.
- viii) all Ex officio, Co-Opted and Student members of URIEC have voting rights (unless any conflict of interest precludes them from voting on an item). Where an individual occupies two or more posts on committee, they will be limited to one vote. Similarly, if both a member (Ex officio, Co-Opted or Student) and their nominee attend the same meeting, the nominee will be deemed to be 'In Attendance'. Any members 'In Attendance' do not have voting rights.

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