



Research Ethics Committee Constitution and Operational Guidelines

Terms of Reference

The VSC Research Ethics Committee (REC) has the following delegated authority from Research Innovation Committee (RIC):

- To develop and review institutional guidelines in consultation with the RIC and faculties to ensure that appropriate advice is available for staff, supervisors and students on good practice in relation to the ethics of their research.
- To review and approve, or withhold approval from, all research proposals classed as 'high risk' as outlined in our guidance
- To review and approve, or withhold approval from, amendments to previously approved protocols
- To act as an independent ethics review panel for external applications delivering either a favourable or unfavourable review
- To review appeals, complaints and adverse events or incidents reported regarding ethically approved research.
- To report on an annual basis to RIC to include a summary of all reviewed projects and a report on the effectiveness of current practice and procedures

Membership

- An academic member of VSC staff to act as Chair appointed by the Head of Research Innovation Committee
- A minimum of one Deputy Chair to be appointed from within the membership of the Committee.
- The REC must consist of between 8 – 12 members with at least one lay members and one with no connection to VSC.

Operational Guidelines

Chair's review applications

The Chair to review minimum risk applications with the option to call upon the expertise of committee member(s) if required.

Chair

If neither the Chair or Vice-Chair is present at a meeting, the REC may elect a lay member present to act as Chair.

Term of Office of Members

Three years with the option of renewal for a further year.

Specialist Advice

The Chair may invite an individual to attend a particular meeting or meetings to give specialist advice to the REC. Such individuals however should not participate in the final decision-making of the REC.

Declaration of Interest

REC members must inform the Chair if they have a vested financial or personal interest in a research project or with a project sponsor. The Chair will decide whether the interest disqualifies the member from the discussion. The REC administrator will maintain a Register of Members' Interest which will be annually updated by members

Indemnity for Rec Members

VSC will maintain appropriate insurance cover, and will indemnify all members of the REC against any claims made against them which arise in respect of their membership of the REC, provided that they have acted in good faith in reaching the decisions made

Meetings

The REC will meet according to demand. Due to the narrow focus of the REC, dates for submission of applications will be published. The REC will operate asynchronously with each reviewer submitting their review from two weeks of the published dates. Closing dates for submissions will be three weeks prior to the reviews and will be strictly adhered to. The REC aims to convey decisions to the applicants within one week of the meeting.

Annual Reporting

Submission of an annual report to RIC to include:

- a list of membership;
- details of changes to procedures;
- a list of decisions made in the year;
- a report on any appeals, complaints or adverse incidents;
- a report on the overall function of the committee, including any emerging ethical issues and difficulties experienced during the year

Powers of the REC

The REC may:

- approve the research without requiring any amendment or correction to the research protocol.
- grant approval in principle. The application is essentially ethically sound, however the researcher needs to make some minor amendments before it can be approved (normally by Chair's action).

- defer approval. The REC could not reach a decision and needs to seek further advice.
- decide not to approve the research due to the fact that the application is seriously flawed and requires major revision before it can be re-considered.
- reject the research. The study is deemed unethical.

The REC will provide the researcher with comprehensive reasons for requiring modification to proposals, rejecting them or deferring approval. The REC will maintain a record of all approved research submissions and may call for reports in the course of a research project or on its completion to help the REC in formulating its guidance and so that the REC can be assured that projects continue to conform to approved ethical standards.

Independent Researchers

The REC can only approve ethical applications for which it is the legal sponsor as it is indemnified against loss in the event of a serious breach. Independent researchers can submit an application and the term approval will be substituted for favourable/unfavourable review.