

Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) Internal Light Touch Review Procedure

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Departmental Research Ethics Committee

The Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) is responsible for reviewing research proposals involving human participants to ensure ethical standards are met. The committee aims to support researchers while balancing efficiency and thorough analysis of potential risks.

The Aim of Ethics Review

Ethics review exists to ensure the safety of researchers and participants through collaborative discussion and awareness-raising. The REC aims to support research projects by providing a supportive and facilitative process, seeking reasons to enable research rather than create obstacles.

Internal Ethics Review: Process

To Whom Do I Submit My Proposal?

All research proposals involving human participants must be submitted by the student researcher to the Departmental REC via the appropriate area on Canvas. Each proposal undergoes preliminary screening to confirm all necessary documentation has been submitted. External applicants will need permission to submit to review and will need to contact the Voice Study before submitting.

After the Initial Screening, What Next?

Once all required documentation is submitted, the study is forwarded for review by the REC. Final approval is granted only when all core documentation is satisfactorily submitted.

What Does the Departmental REC Do?

The Departmental REC performs Light Touch reviews on student research projects. Membership includes the departmental Ethics Chair and Ethics Officers, with the option to co-opt external members or refer applications to the Higher Research Ethics Committee when necessary.

In brief, the Departmental REC:

1. Refers applications back to an applicant where change, clarification or additional information is required;
2. Approves applications;
3. Or, refers an application to the Higher Research Ethics Committee. The criteria to assist the Departmental REC in deciding whether to refer an application to the Higher Research Ethics Committee are set out in the Light Touch Review Guidelines

Types of Review

Full Committee Review of Proposals

Proposals presenting more than minimal risk are reviewed by two REC members and discussed by the full REC. A minimum of seven REC members are involved in Full Review decisions.

Light Touch Committee Review of Proposals

Proposals with minimal risk are sent to the Departmental REC Officer for Light Touch review. Where deemed necessary, the officer will seek further opinions from one or two other ethics reviewers within approximately 15 working days.

Expedited Review of Proposals

Proposals requiring quick review due to minimal risk are sent to the Departmental REC officer, who will provide feedback within 10 working days. Expedited review is rarely an option and requires clear justification.

Exemption from REC Review

Proposals are exempt from REC review when there is no possibility of harm arising from the research or when information is publicly available.

Continuing Review

Ethics approvals are provided for a limited time, and the REC reviews the study's progress periodically. Supervisors support ongoing review, and researchers must inform supervisors of any changes or new ethical concerns.

Retrospective Review

The REC does not perform retrospective reviews on completed research.

How is a Proposal Reviewed at an REC Meeting?

Full Review

Primary reviewers present the proposal, highlighting ethical issues. The REC discusses and reaches a consensus on the final recommendation. Details relating to full review are documented separately.

Light Touch Review

Similar to Full Review, primary reviewers present the proposal, and the REC discusses and reaches a consensus.

Expedited Review

The Departmental REC Officer presents their analysis and forms a subcommittee of two or three where the light-touch review borders on the need for a full review. A discussion follows until a consensus is reached.

What if the Departmental Rec Committee Cannot Agree on a Final Recommendation?

A decision is made by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, additional information or expert advice is sought. The proposal may be postponed or considered unapproved.

How is the Outcome of the Review Communicated to the Applicant?

The outcome is communicated electronically via a the relevant section on the ethics form outlining recommendations and concerns. Applicants can refer questions to the Departmental REC.

What Do the REC Recommendations Mean?

- **Approved as Submitted:** No modifications required; research can commence.
- **Approved Conditionally:** Approval contingent on satisfactory amendments.
- **Unapproved:** Requires additional information or rewriting; resubmit for re-review.
- **Rejected:** Ethically unacceptable; submit a new proposal addressing issues.

What is the Time Frame for the Review of Proposals by the REC?

- **Full Committee Review:** The full committee will run asynchronously, enabling flexible timetabling and facilitating external access. A decision must be provided within one month unless there are justifiable reasons for a delay.
- **Light Touch Review:** Reviewed within 10 working days; response within 2 weeks.
- **Expedited Review:** Reviewed within 10 working days; response within 2-3 weeks.

REC Committee

Departmental REC Committee

- **Co-Chair:** VSC staff member
- **Co-Chair:** VSC Staff member
- **Members:**
 - VSC staff members

Higher REC Committee

- **Chair:** VSC Staff member
- **Co-Chair:** VSC staff member
- **Members:** VSC Staff and external applicants
 - [Qualitative Research Expert]
 - [Quantitative Research Expert]
 - [Ethics Specialist]
 - [Non-researcher]
 - [Education/Pedagogy Expert]
 - [Interested parties, faith communities, delegates from industry, service users]