

## Research Ethics Committee

### 1. Terms of Reference

The scope of the work of the Committee will be research involving human participants and personal data, as set out by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

<http://www.research-integrity.admin.cam.ac.uk/research-ethics/university-research-ethics-committee>

The scope of the work of the Committee will be kept under review, in particular in respect of any changes to the scope of the work of the UREC.

The Ethics Committee shall:

- Provide advice to Departments on their review process and approve ethics policies written by Departments, seeking advice from the University Ethics Committee where needed.
- Facilitate and oversee the review of the ethics of a piece of proposed research work when requested to do so by a Departmental Ethics Committee, or by a Head of Department:
  - the committee will normally agree by circulation to appoint a specialist Panel to review each individual case.
  - each review will be conducted by a specialist Panel with a minimum of 3 members. One must be a member of the School Ethics Committee.
  - applicants may be invited to a meeting of the committee where this would assist scrutiny of the application.
  - the Committee may seek specialist advice or expertise, including legal.
  - applications will normally be reviewed at a meeting. Decisions may be made by circulation where appropriate, at the discretion of the Chair.
  - the Committee will seek to notify any applicant of a decision – which may include approval subject to changes or defined conditions - within two months of receipt of a complete application.
- Investigate any potential breach of Departmental or School ethics policy when requested to do so by a Departmental Ethics Committee or by a Head of Department.
- In reviewing a proposal or investigating a potential breach, the Committee shall follow the guidelines and policy set out by the UREC. This, and much other relevant guidance is available at <http://www.research-integrity.admin.cam.ac.uk/research-ethics>
- Report annually to the University Research Ethics Committee, copied to the Council of the School.
- Nothing in the above shall prevent a Departmental Ethics Committee escalating an issue to the School Ethics Committee of a different School, if that would appear to be more appropriate in a particular case.
- The annexes to this Terms of Reference set out procedures in more detail.

## **2. Membership**

The Ethics Committee will be appointed by the Council of the School and have the following membership:

- The Head of School or a nominated representative as Chairman.
- Three additional academic members from the departments within the School, to be appointed for periods of four years. Reappointment is allowed. Members will not review projects with which they have a conflict of interest.
- The Chair of the Ethics Committee of the Department of Geography (ex officio).

The Committee will have access to legal and specialist advice when necessary and will appoint specialist Panels to consider individual cases as required.

The Secretary of the School, or a nominated deputy, will act as Secretary of both the Ethics Committee and any specialist Panels appointed to consider individual cases.

## **3. Method of Working**

Meetings will be convened as required in response to requests submitted to the Committee.

## **4. Accountability**

To the Council of the School. The Committee will also provide an annual report on its activity to the University Research Ethics Committee. Appeals can be made to the UREC if an applicant has legitimate concerns about any review.

## **5. Other**

See PDF 'Ethics Cttee ToR Annexes' document.

Last updated: 1 October 2018

## ANNEX 1 - PROCESS

- The School's ethical review process involves up to three stages:
  - **self assessment** by the researcher, which might lead to
  - **departmental review**, which might require advice from a
  - **school ethics panel**.
- Departments in the School of the Physical Sciences should publish an ethics policy which includes a description of the Department's ethical review process, based on the three stages above. A Department's ethics policy must be approved by the School of the Physical Sciences Ethics Committee.
- Self assessment requires individual researchers to determine, in the light of Departmental or other guidance, what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour and whether formal Departmental review is required. Students should discuss ethical issues with their supervisor, and academic staff are encouraged to discuss issues with their colleagues. For research involving human participants or personal data this process should be recorded according to Departmental processes/guidance, for example through a checklist or declaration. Students should complete this process in discussion with their supervisor. In all circumstances, researchers should act with rigour, honesty and integrity in all their scientific work. They are also required to have respect for life, public good and the law. They have to ensure that their work is justified, minimising any adverse effect their work may have on people, animals and the environment. It is the researcher's responsibility to seek further guidance in case of doubt.
- Self-assessment is expected to be sufficient for uncomplicated cases, however research that poses more than minimal risk will require Departmental review, this includes research involving any of the following factors:
  - Research involving human subjects who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children or people with disabilities);
  - Studies that are likely to cause the subject physical or mental distress or embarrassment;
  - Experiments or other data collection involving deception;
  - The collection of sensitive personal data or its storage in a form that would allow individuals to be identified;
  - Research that may expose participants to a risk of legal or disciplinary action.This list is not exhaustive and Departmental ethical review policies may require additional types of research to be subject to Departmental review.
- The School of the Physical Sciences Ethics Committee shall form a Specialist Panel to review difficult cases, or request an appropriate body elsewhere in the University to do so. It is expected that self-assessment and, where appropriate, an internal Departmental review process, will handle the vast majority of cases.

Research in the following areas are subject to specific regulations and cannot be approved by self-assessment or Departmental review:

- research involving clinical procedures using human participants, NHS patients, staff or facilities, or data gathered from NHS patients, staff or institutions will require approval by an ethics committee operating under the NHS Health Research Authority. This also applies to intrusive research involving adults without the capacity to consent for themselves, health research involving prisoners, and a number of other types of research – for details see: <http://www.research-integrity.admin.cam.ac.uk/research-ethics/guidance/nres-review>
- research involving the use/storage of human tissue must be registered under a licence from the Human Tissue Authority or have approval from an NHS research ethics committee. For information on the University's Human Tissue Licence see: <http://www.safety.admin.cam.ac.uk/subjects/biologicals/human-tissue-act>. Any research undertaken under the University's Human Tissue Licence requires ethical approval from the University's [Human Biology](#) or [Psychology](#) Research Ethics Committees.

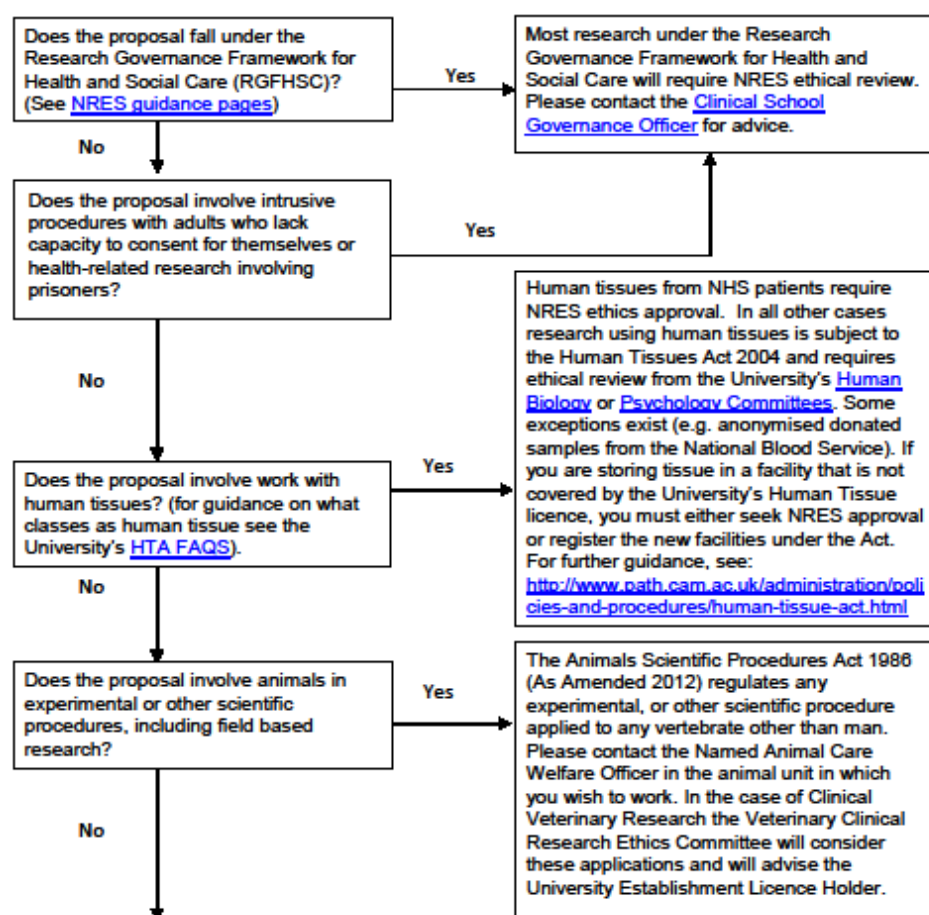
- research involving animals in scientific or experimental procedures, including field-based research is subject to review under a separate process and is overseen by Home Office licencing procedures. For guidance consult within your department or with the University Biomedical Services: <http://www.ubs.admin.cam.ac.uk/>.

## Guidelines: Seeking ethical review

Most research projects carried out at the University of Cambridge will involve no ethical issues, whereas some will raise significant ethical questions. All researchers should consider whether their research will raise ethical issues and in cases of doubt should, in the first instance, seek advice at a local level:

- Where the researcher is an undergraduate or postgraduate student: the project should be submitted to the student's supervisor or mentor for advice.
- Where the researcher is a University employee, or any other person conducting research on University premises: advice should be sought from the local ethics committee/contact or Head of the Department in which the research will be carried out.

In many cases advice and, where necessary, review will be able to be provided locally. Where this is not possible, local ethics committees/contacts or the Head of Department will be able to advise researchers on how to proceed. The following flowchart, however, provides guidelines on where to seek ethical review, to supplement local expertise.



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