

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (REC)
Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

1.1 Dublin City University (DCU) is committed to ensuring the highest standards of integrity in all aspects of our research, as outlined in the [National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland](#). Maintaining well-established ethical standards is an important aspect of upholding the integrity of the research process.

1.2 The Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee (DCU REC) was formally established in 2003 to facilitate the ethical review and approval process. The DCU REC reports to the Research Committee of the University and is supported by Research Support in the Office of the Vice-President for Research and Innovation.

1.3 The DCU REC operates in accordance with relevant national, international, and EU legislation; with the [DCU Code of Good Research Practice](#) and with the terms and conditions of research sponsors. DCU REC decision-making is guided by the [SATORI Ethics Assessment Framework](#).

1.4 The Research Committee has developed the DCU REC Rules of Procedure that guide REC activities and which provide further detail to researchers on the operation of the DCU REC.

1.5 The DCU REC Rules of Procedure, Requirements for Establishing and Operating Faculty Research Ethics Committees, the Research Ethics Committee Appeal Procedure, submission guidelines, relevant application forms for the ethical review of research projects, and other ethics resource documents referenced in this document can be found in the DCU [Research Ethics Committee](#) section of the Research Support webpages.

2. Scope

2.1 It is a condition of employment and study in DCU that research involving human participants or animal subjects must only be conducted in accordance with university policies and procedures, and according to acceptable ethical standards.

2.2 For the sake of clarity, DCU REC is relevant to all DCU researchers, research collaborators, postgraduate students and students undertaking research projects. The term researcher is used throughout this document to mean any category of person undertaking research under the aegis of Dublin City University.

2.3 In some cases where ethical approval has been granted by another appropriately constituted research ethics committee, separate approval from DCU may not be required. Further information is available in the [Research Ethics Committee](#) section of the Research Support webpages. However, all such projects need to be notified to the DCU REC.

3. University Research Ethics Review - System, Structures and Process

The university approach to ensuring the highest standard of ethics in research allows for appropriate Faculty level responsibility and accountability through the establishment of Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FRECs).

3.1 All research ethics applications from academic staff, research masters and PhD students should be submitted to their relevant Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) except those that involve cross-Faculty research which should be submitted to the DCU REC. If an approved FREC is not in place, applications should be submitted directly to the REC.

3.2 Applications that are deemed by FRECs to be medium or high risk – in line with considerations for FREC review contained within the Requirements for FRECs Tiered Review document – will be directed to the University Research Ethics Committee for review.

3.3 Requests to appeal FREC decisions should be made to the Chair of DCU REC who will decide whether there are adequate grounds for an appeal to proceed. This decision will be based on, and any subsequent appeal managed as per, the process outlined in the DCU Research Ethics Committee Appeal Procedure.

3.4 The FRECs will operate under the procedures, processes and policies which have been reviewed and approved by the Research Committee and are responsible for the implementation of policy and procedures related to research ethics.

3.5 In undertaking this role, the FRECs aim to ensure that research is conducted according to best practice for ethics in research which will operate within the principles and framework upheld by DCU REC, as outlined in the National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland and the SATORI Ethics Assessment Framework.

4. Primary Functions of the DCU REC

4.1 To protect the rights and welfare of human participants and animal subjects in research studies or trials conducted by or involving DCU researchers.

4.2 Consider applications, both directly and those that are escalated from FRECs

4.3 To provide guidance and support for all researchers to navigate and understand the ethical processes and procedures in DCU.

4.4 To facilitate the conduct of ethically sound, legally compliant research at DCU in accordance with national, international and EU legislation – e.g. GDPR.

4.5 To ensure an appropriate balance of gender and expertise is available on the committee to effectively carry out the functions of the DCU REC, in order to facilitate full review of all proposals.

4.6 To advise the Research Committee on the further development of ethical policies and

procedures at DCU.

- 4.7 To report to the Research Committee regarding ongoing DCU REC activities.
- 4.8 To monitor ethical compliance of randomly sampled ongoing research projects which have undergone full committee review.
- 4.9 To advise the Research Committee on the processes pertaining to managing a breach of ethics post approval.
- 4.10 To implement an appeals system under the auspices of the Research Committee
- 4.11 To have oversight of the ethics procedures, processes and policies in operation throughout DCU and support their implementation.

5. Responsibilities of DCU REC

DCU REC will meet formally 11 months in each calendar year to:

- 5.1 Consider applications, both directly and those that are escalated from FRECs
- 5.2 Prepare advisory documents for the further development of ethical policies and procedures as required, for approval by the Research Committee.
- 5.3 Promote and communicate research ethics policies and procedures to DCU researchers, where possible, through electronic delivery of information via the DCU website and the Research Ethics Application Portal.
- 5.4 Support institutional compliance with relevant legislation and with institutional requirements under the terms of externally sponsored research contracts.
- 5.5 Advise on appropriate training programmes for DCU researchers on issues of ethical compliance and good research practice.
- 5.6 Establish, as required, sub-groups to provide advice to DCU REC on ethical issues.
- 5.7 Seek legal and / or other specialist expert advice with the prior approval of Research Committee and to minimise the potential for claims of negligence in research conducted by DCU researchers.
- 5.8 Liaise with other similar bodies, such as other Universities, Hospitals or National Research Ethics Committees, as is required for the implementation of the functions and responsibilities of DCU REC.
- 5.9 Maintain adequate records of all meetings and activities and to publish these on the DCU website as appropriate.

5.10 Provide a report at each Research Committee meeting on its activities in the intervening period and undertake analysis and evaluation of its activities as required and / or as requested by the Research Committee.

5.11 Participate as required in Inquiry or Investigation Committees in the event of a request made by the Chief Operating Officer during Allegations of Research Misconduct.

5.12 Facilitate an Appeals process for applicants to REC via the Research Committee

5.13 Exercise oversight of FREC procedures, processes and policies in operation throughout DCU.

5.14 During the 'transition phase' of each FREC, REC will

- Address queries and discuss challenges arising from FREC set-up
- Provide assistance regarding specific ethical queries.
- Oversee effectiveness of FRECs in fulfilling their function of evaluating low risk research and giving ethics approval.

6 General Principles

6.1 Generally, DCU REC in consultation with University Research Committee (UDR) will seek to achieve a reasonable balance between expertise in legal issues, ethics management and review, research involving humans, research involving animals and research in different disciplines.

6.2 In selecting the DCU REC membership, the Research Committee will apply national regulations and good practice principles for the membership of Research Ethics Committees.

6.3 DCU REC will adopt procedures that aim to minimise the potential for conflicts of interest with and between members. In addition, the principles of efficiency, confidentiality and transparency in decision-making will be upheld in the operation of DCU REC and through periodic evaluation at the discretion of the URC.

6.4 The functions of DCU REC will not include responsibilities that supersede the responsibilities of researchers in the ethical conduct of research. DCU REC will not be responsible for supervising the research programmes undertaken by DCU employees or their research partners.

7 DCU REC Membership

7.1 A primary function of DCU REC is to ensure that the membership comprises of an appropriate balance of disciplinary expertise in order to effectively carry out the functions of DCU REC. The membership will not overlap with membership of Faculty Research Ethics Committees with the exception of FREC chairs who are required to attend REC meetings for monitoring and support but will not be required to review applications.

7.2 It is a requirement for memberships on REC to possess experience of submitting ethics applications and clear understanding of the ethical issues in their own discipline. REC members will be supported with training as follows:

- a) Members will receive training from the Data Protection Unit on GDPR Ethics and Research.
- b) Members can avail of UKRIO and attend webinars on issues which include but are not limited to – An Introduction to Research Integrity; Research Culture; Data Sharing and Ethics; and Consent.
- c) All new members will participate in an induction prior to any application review activity.
- d) The REC chair will offer individual support sessions if and when required by members to deal with any specific queries or concerns that might emerge in the review process.
- e) In the event that members identify an area of knowledge in which an upskilling requirement is identified, external expertise will be brought in to provide workshops.

7.3 The process of appointing the chair, vice-chair and new members to DCU REC will be managed by the Research Committee and will be informed by the expertise that is required. This requirement will be identified by the chair of DCU REC.

7.4 The chair, the vice chair and the DCU REC members will usually serve for a term of at least three years. The Research Committee may also approve serving or previous DCU REC members for a second term of a further three years. Proposals of this nature will be brought to the Research Committee by the DCU REC chair. In exceptional circumstances, with the approval of the Vice-President for Research and Innovation, the term of membership may be extended further.

7.5 DCU REC membership will not usually exceed 18 members, in addition to administrative support from the Research Support Office assigned by the Vice-President for Research and Innovation, the Chairperson, the Secretary and other temporary co-optees.

7.6 Members of DCU REC will be required to participate in REC sub-groups. Additional members may also be co-opted as necessary to sub-group membership to provide relevant expertise.

7.7 DCU REC will seek to replace members when they are on sabbatical or secondment, with the approval of the Research Committee.

8 DCU REC Composition

8.1 DCU REC will be composed of a minimum of eleven members, whose expertise and representation may be combined, but must include:

- a) At least two internal peer researchers, with experience and / or professional expertise in conducting ethical reviews of research proposals for human participants and animal subjects.
- b) At least one peer researcher from the humanities, social sciences, education and related areas.
- c) At least one member with statistical expertise (note that other types of methodological expertise are a key factor when recruiting members)
- d) At least one member with clinical expertise
- e) At least two external members, with experience or professional expertise in performing ethical review of research proposals, clinical trial compliance issues and / or with relevant legal expertise.
- f) At least one member with legal expertise.
- g) At least one member with GDPR expertise.
- h) At least one postgraduate researcher member.
- i) At least one external, layperson member.

8.2 One nominee from Research Support at DCU, assigned by the Vice-President for Research and Innovation will perform the Secretariat functions of the Committee, one member will perform the role of Chair of the Committee, and one member will perform the role of Vice-Chair of the Committee

9 Administration

9.1 Administrative support for DCU REC is provided by Research Support, based in the Office of the Vice-President for Research and Innovation. A designated Research Ethics Administrator (0.5 FTE) is responsible for facilitating the work of DCU REC, in conjunction with the DCU REC Secretary.

9.2 DCU REC will operate in accordance with REC Rules of Procedure accessible to DCU staff and the public on the [Research Ethics Committee](#) section of the DCU website. A suite of relevant resource documentation, including procedures relating to the granting of ethical approval for research projects, application forms and other policies will also be made available in the same section of the website, and on the Research Ethics Application Portal.


10 Contact Information

Any queries relating to this Terms of Reference should be directed to Research Support, in the Office of the Vice-President for Research and Innovation (Ph. 7008000, or e-mail rec@dcu.ie)

11 Terms of Reference Review

This Terms of Reference will be reviewed every three years by Research Support, in conjunction with the DCU REC (next review June 2024). All amendments and updates will be brought to Research Committee for approval.

Version Control

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