

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Faculty Research Ethics Committee (HSS F-REC)

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

1.1 The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSS F-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](#).

1.2 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.

1.3 The overall objective of the F-REC is to encourage and facilitate low-risk research that is conducted in an ethical manner and with integrity.

1.4 The F-REC will aim to protect the rights and welfare of human participants in research studies as well as protecting and supporting researchers based in the Faculty.

2. Scope

2.1 The Faculty Research Ethics Committee (F-REC) assesses applications from staff, post-doctoral fellows, PhD students, and Masters by Research for the ethical conduct of low-risk research. Taught Masters' and undergraduate research projects are dealt with locally at School level by nominated School Research Ethics Convenors. The School Research Ethics Convenors will liaise with the Chairperson of F-REC, who ensures that local ethics approval procedures are in line with requirements set out by F-REC and REC. The F-REC will normally meet on eight occasions throughout the academic year for its Decision Meeting.

2.2 The F-REC will assess low-risk social science and humanities research projects. Any research deemed to carry a risk level higher than this will be referred directly to the University's Research Ethics Committee (REC). DCU's definition of low-risk research is where any personal information collected is not of a sensitive nature.¹ Further, in low-risk research the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort. Where the risk, even if unlikely, is more than discomfort, the research is not low risk.² High risk research includes, for example, research that could have a negative effect for vulnerable parties (e.g. children), research that represents a risk to the researcher, research that could have legal ramifications for the university.

¹ <https://www.dcu.ie/researchsupport/research-ethics>

² See, for example, Section 2.1 of this document: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/ethics/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research>

2.3 All applications will be assessed by at least two members of the Committee. The two members will not be from the same School as the applicant(s).

2.4 The F-REC will engage with the University's REC for ongoing training and policy matters. The Chair of F-REC will attend meetings of REC to report on activity and consult on any matters arising. The Chair of F-REC is not required to assess applications to the REC. The Chair of the F-REC will provide an annual report to the Chair of the REC and to the Chair of the Faculty Research Committee (FRC), which will include information such as number of applications, numbers approved, number of applications referred to the University REC for review, numbers rejected, etc., as well as issues of concern and training requirements identified. The Chair can also consult with other F-REC Chairs on matters arising.

2.5 Where an applicant disagrees with the verdict of the F-REC, they can appeal to the University's REC and must follow the REC's Appeal Procedures. The F-REC will notify REC of the reasons for a rejection.

2.6 If an applicant is in breach of the University's research ethics policy, the matter will be referred directly to the University REC and the University's Breach of Ethics Policy will apply.

3. Composition of the HSS F-REC Committee

3.1 The F-REC will have a Chairperson, appointed by the Executive Dean and the Associate Dean of Research (ADR), who will normally hold the position for three years, with the option of extension by one further year. When appointing the Chairperson, priority will be given to the existing Committee members who apply for this position to ensure continuity and preservation of institutional memory.

3.2 In addition to the Chairperson, the Committee will be composed of representatives from the Schools in the Faculty, nominated by the Heads of School, and approved by the Chair and ADR. The Committee should be composed of researchers with substantial experience in conducting and supervising research and will broadly represent the nature of research typically conducted in the Faculty, as well as the main methodological approaches. Efforts will be made to ensure gender mix on the Committee.

3.3 Each School should have at least one committee representative and no more than two, *not including the Chairperson*. Normally, the representatives will be as follows (subject to review, if required):

- 1) Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge: **1**
- 2) School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies: **2**
- 3) School of Communications: **2**
- 4) School of English: **1**
- 5) School of History and Geography: **1**
- 6) School of Law and Government: **2**
- 7) School of Theology, Philosophy and Music: **1**

The minimum duration of membership is two years, with the option of extension for one further year to ensure that not all members step down at the same time.

3.4 Committee members will be expected to undertake relevant training in aspects of research ethics, if required. This training will involve, for example, matters concerning GDPR and child protection.

3.5 The Chairperson can temporarily co-opt one colleague to review specific applications in the event that this is required for subject matter or methodological expertise.

3.6 Where feasible, the Committee should engage one external representative whose remit is to assess applications, provide a public insight to the Committee and, where such expertise is available, to provide guidance on matters such as risk, and/or GDPR, and/or child protection, and/or any relevant law or policies. The Chairperson, in consultation with the Committee, will nominate the external representative. The nomination must be approved by the ADR and the Executive Dean. The duration of membership is two years, with the option of extension for one further year. This position is *pro bono*.

3.7 The Committee will be supported by a dedicated Faculty Administrator.

4. Role of the Chairperson

4.1 The Chairperson has responsibility for the following:

- defining, in consultation with the Committee, application forms, processes and technological supports for the research ethics application process;
- providing information and guidance to the Faculty members on Faculty-level research ethics approval process;
- ensuring that applications are handled in a timely manner;
- agreeing, in consultation with the Committee, an annual schedule for applications and meetings;
- allocating applications to individual reviewers;
- organising and chairing meetings of the Committee;
- issuing letters to applicants informing them of the outcome of their application;
- identifying ongoing training requirements or policy issues that need to be addressed;
- co-opting a temporary member for the review of a specific application, if deemed necessary;
- reporting to the University REC;
- liaising with the Chair of the University REC and/or other F-REC Chairs, when necessary;
- seeking legal or similar advice from other DCU offices as and when required;
- nominating the external member to the Committee, where feasible;
- compiling the annual report for the University REC and for the FRC;
- consulting with the FRC as and when necessary on matters of procedure or policy.

4.2 The Chairperson is required to nominate a temporary acting Chairperson in the event that they cannot attend a Committee meeting and fulfil these duties at a scheduled meeting. During meetings where the Chairperson's own proposed project, or a project in which they have an interest, is the subject of review and discussion, the Chairperson should temporarily withdraw from the discussion and also nominate a temporary acting-Chairperson.

5. Role of the Committee Member

5.1 A Committee member has responsibility for the following:

- Attending all meetings of the F-REC;
- Reviewing applications in a timely, consistent and fair manner and according to the agreed protocols;


- Attending relevant training sessions;
- Acting as the School Ethics Convenor in their School – unless other arrangements are in place in that School;
- Providing support in operational and policy matters to the Chairperson;
- Assisting the Chairperson with the annual reporting process.

5.2 Committee members whose own proposed projects are under review, or who have an interest in a project under review, should make this known to the Committee and temporarily withdraw from the review discussion for that project.

6. Limitations of F-REC

6.1 The function of the F-REC will not include responsibilities that supersede the responsibilities of researchers in the ethical conduct of research. HSS F-REC will not be responsible for supervising the research programmes undertaken by Faculty members or their students.

Version Control

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