
UK Research Integrity Office

Association of Research Managers and Administrators



Research Ethics Support and Review in Research Organisations

Full publication available from UKRIO and ARMA websites:
<https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.01-ARMA>

Aims of the guidance



- Support research organisations in achieving high standards of research ethics review, developing a positive culture of integrity and ethics.
- Provide benchmark policies and processes for the creation or revision of institutional practices to support the functions of research ethics committees.
- Synthesise developments in academic work on ethics and integrity, the expectations of funders and government, and other good practice.
- Provide a means for audit of processes, to demonstrate maintenance and enhancement of standards in research organisations.
- Support continued reflection, evaluation and development towards a set of common best practice standards in ethical review of research.

Full discussion: <https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.01-ARMA>, pages XX-XX

Core principles



1. Independence
2. Competence
3. Facilitation
4. Transparency and Accountability

Full discussion: <https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.01-ARMA>, pages 18-19

Core principles



1. Independence

- All institutional processes supporting best practice in research ethics, including formal and informal reviews, training and support, must operate free from conflicts of interest so that the application of ethics principles and reasoning is neither impeded nor compromised.



2. Competence

- Ethics review and other processes supporting institutional best practice and sector standards must be consistent, coherent and well-informed.



3. Facilitation

- Ethics review and other supporting processes must make the facilitation of ethically sound research a priority. This will be evidenced by researchers viewing engagement with institutional research ethics processes as positive and valuable for all phases of their research.



4. Transparency and Accountability

- Decisions and advice by RECs must be open to public scrutiny and responsibilities must be recognised and discharged consistently.

Maintaining ethical standards within a research governance framework



- A fundamental aim of good practice in ethics review is to ensure consistency and comparability of ethical standards for research.
- Higher Education Institutions' and other research organisations' ethics review has often been highly variable and inconsistent, lacking a national co-ordination system.
- Four main areas of research ethics committee operations require some degree of formalisation in order for consistency to be achieved:
 1. Institutional research ethics and integrity policy.
 2. Constitution and terms of reference for ethics committees.
 3. Training and development of ethics committee members.
 4. Standard operating procedures for ethics committees.

Full discussion: <https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.01-ARMA>, pages 20-27

Providing supportive ethics reviews



- Research Ethics Committees (RECs) must be easily accessible, providing support as necessary.
- Application forms should be constructed in such a way as to encourage researchers to reflect on key ethical issues.
- RECs should focus their reviews on matters of ethics.
- RECs should adopt structured approaches to review drawing on appropriate moral theory.
- RECs must always justify opinions, providing clear rationales.

Full discussion: <https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.01-ARMA>, pages 29-32

RECs and governance



- Research ethics review should be distinct from research governance and decisions over whether research can go ahead.
- Ethics and governance are both linked to different aspects of research integrity – ethics is primarily linked to good professional research practice, governance to responsible research sponsorship.
- The independence of a REC depends upon it being risk aware without being risk averse.
- Consistency in REC practice and procedure needs to be balanced by variability in the individual missions of research organisations.
- Good research design is vital to ethical research practice.

Full discussion: <https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.01-ARMA>, pages 33-37

RECs and governance



- RECs should aim to be facilitative in their support of high quality, safe research practice.
- Some ground-breaking, highly innovative research may necessarily contain risks and/or be considered intrusive. Both the culture and constituency of RECs must acknowledge this and suggest how it can be best accomplished.
- To maintain their independence RECs should only be in a position to offer a 'favourable opinion' concerning the ethics of a research proposal; the 'approval' must remain in the hands of the governance process.
- Corporate image or other institutional protections must be kept separate from REC practice.
- Both governance and research ethics review must be adequately resourced for good practice to be sustained.

Full discussion: <https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.01-ARMA>, pages 33-37

Ethics review and research data



- How 'data' is defined is an important consideration in dealing with research data effectively in ethics review.
- 'Personal data' as defined by various data protection regulations is only one part of what might constitute data in research and much research 'data' are not regulated in the same way.
- Some disciplines that undergo ethics review might not use the term 'data' in the same way, or at all, and applying the same approach to such research is unhelpful and potentially hinders effective ethics review in those disciplines.
- There are ethics and integrity issues associated with the move to open data.

Full discussion: <https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.01-ARMA>, pages 38-40

Two guidance documents: full and summary versions



- **Research Ethics Support and Review in Research Organisations**
<https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.01-ARMA>
- **Research Ethics Support and Review in Research Organisations – summary version**
<https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO-2020.02-ARMA>



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