



Senate

Paper Title	Ethics of Research Committee (QMERC)
Outcome requested	To note the executive summary report of the QMERC meeting on 23 November 2022 and action taken since.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	
Questions for Senate to consider	N/A
Regulatory/statutory reference points	N/A
Strategy and risk	N/A
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	Ethics of Research Committee Senate
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QUEEN MARY ETHICS OF RESEARCH COMMITTEE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Date of Meeting – 23 November 2022

Main Items Discussed & Relevant Action Since

Research Ethics Application ‘software as a solution’ system

The Research Ethics team are in the implementation phase of embedding the online application system which will host our application form, associated forms and also comprise our database and information repository. In the building of the new forms, we have taken the opportunity to review the questions, guidance and workflow design. The Research Ethics team have started preliminary testing from the ethics applicant’s perspective in advance of formal User Acceptability Testing with Committee members and our research community. The previously proposed launch date of Autumn 2022 / Spring 2023 will be delayed to Summer 2023 due to staff vacancies in the team.

The ethical review process for the Devolved School Research Ethics Committees (DSRECs) - delegated by QMERC to review low-risk applications at School/departmental level - will be available on the online application system after implementation of the core functionality.

Non-compliances and ethical breaches

Further to receiving a large number of notifications about research commencing without prior ethical approval in place last reporting period, we have drawn up a non-compliance/ ethical breaches procedure which was ratified (with minor amendment to one word) by QMERC. The proposed procedure categorises the level of breach severity as critical, major and minor, based on the evidence available, and assesses it against the level of recklessness and the extent of risk.

Devolved School Research Ethics Committees (DSRECs)

We are delighted to report that there are now DSRECs operational in the following Schools / Departments: n = 12.

- Geography (UG)
- History
- Business and Management (PGR & Staff)
- Business and Management (PGT & UG)
- Department of Psychology
- Department of Linguistics
- Electronic Engineering and Computer Science
- Politics and International Relations
- Centre for Medical Education
- Sports & Exercise Medicine
- Global Public Health
- Trauma Sciences (MSc)
- *{Law – pending}*.

DSRECs are entirely voluntary and are a really effective way of embedding good research ethics practice and involving more individuals in the research ethics process across the University, thereby helping us achieve our commitment to the Concordat for Research Integrity. The DSRECs review research that is low-risk but the QMERC are very open to conversations that demonstrate flexibility in the remit and scope of DSRECs in certain fields, for example in the definition of what is a 'sensitive issue' and some DSRECs have been given flexible scope to review these studies. We recognise that researchers' expertise and experience represents risk mitigation in and of itself and so we encourage discipline-specific flex in the definition of risk. (The Risk Review Project is a direct outcome of these developments – further information given at end of this paper).

Review Panels & Membership

The QMERC analysed data that suggests the current 6 Review Panels is not sufficient to meet demand for moderate-risk applications and it was agreed that a seventh Panel

should be created. Furthermore this additional Panel should be Chaired by a member of HSS to ensure equity in the Chair roles across the Panels.

A proposal was put forward to include an additional lay member, in addition to the current QMERC Chair, in QMERC Main Committee membership. This is in part to prepare for succession planning for the current incumbent Dr Helen Jenner, and to gain lay perspectives on the items discussed at QMERC level. We will look to our current lay membership of the Panels to action this.

Data Storage Matrix

Although it is not the responsibility of the Research Ethics team/ QMERC Review Panels to ensure compliance with data storage policy, the Ethics Committees act as a signpost to ensure that researchers comply with the Queen Mary policies on how to conduct research and that includes those relating to data protection, security and storage issues. The proposed Data Storage Matrix was reviewed by the QMERC in a previous meeting and raised concerns about the likelihood of compliance in line with the availability of the storage options cited. Since that point QMERC are aware of conversations and work taking place in IT in order to meet the gap in provision.

Risk Review Project

As part of the QMERC Development Plan a proposal on formalising risk definitions and risk matrix planning was circulated to members, included UKRIO's risk assessment matrix.

We have embarked on project around assessing risk and risk assessments, that aims to formalise the current process of judging risk and detailing mitigations so that we can more clearly communicate our processes with researchers.

We have hosted two events with key stakeholders. The first, held on 8th February 2023, invited the Chairs and Deputies of the established DSRECs to discuss the challenges of defining risk and labelling studies that span the low and moderate borderline risk categories.

The second event held on 1st March 2023 invited all Review Panel members (Chairs, Deputies, academic members, lay members) where we discussed the current procedures of assessing risk and routing through the appropriate approval pathway; and lessons learned from individual studies - those that are borderline low-risk and those that are deferred to QMERC Main Committee as being high-risk. These sessions have been practical, scenario-based sessions and the aim is to identify themes in determining the risk of a project, and mitigations leading to further clarity in our risk guidance and/or the development of a risk matrix.

Research Ethics team

Dr Nooreen Shaikh was recruited to the position of Senior Research Ethics Facilitator and started on 9th January 2023.

Metrics for 01 September 2022 to 31 January 2023

The report below provides a summary of the applications for QMERC ethical approval received and approved between **01 September 2022 to 31 January 2023**.

	Received	Approved
Panel review apps	26	21
Low risk apps	51	45
QMERC apps	1	0
Amendments	27	22
Generic applications	1	1
DSREC set up applications	2	3
Total	108	92

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