University of Limerick

Research Ethics Governance Committee (ULREG)

Terms of Reference, approved by Academic Council 16 May 2018, updated June 2025

1. Purpose and Function

The University of Limerick Research Ethics Governance Committee (ULREG) is responsible for research ethics governance, setting standards for research ethics scrutiny, defining mechanisms to deliver these standards and overseeing associated monitoring and assessment arrangements.

ULREG is supported in this role by research ethics committees (RECs). All research ethics applications are submitted to and considered by the relevant REC, whose decisions are reported to and ratified by ULREG.

2. Terms of Reference

ULREG acts on behalf of Academic Council and reports to Academic Council on matters within its remit.

The Terms of Reference of ULREG will be reviewed by the Academic Council as appropriate, with a view to ensuring that the Committee's responsibilities regarding the matters within its remit continue to be effectively discharged. Any changes to the ULREG Terms of Reference will require approval by Academic Council.

ULREG is charged with the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and procedures in relation to all aspects of research ethics governance.

3. Remit Research

ULREG's three principal functions are classified as:

- Oversight: of relevant policy and procedure
- Quality assurance: incorporating review and evaluation of ethics activity
- Monitoring: of ethics decisions and cases

Oversight

1. The development of guidelines of good practice in research ethics within the University and providing for their dissemination
2. To develop operational structures for research ethics approval within the University, and manage quality assurance of the performance of the RECs

3. To consult and advise University management, staff and students with regard to research ethics governance
4. To develop policy and procedures for matters that involve consultation and agreement with relevant third-party external regulatory and licensing agencies
5. The promotion of the University Research Integrity Policy

Quality Assurance

1. To evaluate operational structures for research ethics approval within the University:
2. To initiate and undertake Quality Audits of the RECs to ensure compliance with agreed policies and procedures and comment and make recommendations on:
    a. The application of the ethical principles in decision making
    b. The process, volume and speed of decision making
    c. The feedback to applicants
    d. The review of Research Completion Reports on Approved Applications
3. ULREG will report on the findings of their activities to Academic Council in its annual report

Monitoring

1. To monitor the implementation of operational structures for research ethics approval within the University
2. To promote guidelines of good practice in research ethics within the University and monitor adherence to those guidelines
3. To act as the final body of appeal and final decision maker on any disputed matter concerning research ethics
4. To promote awareness of all aspects of research ethics governance among the University community
5. To support researchers with ethics issues across all fields of research

4. Ethics Committees

ULREG may establish such and so many RECs as it deems necessary for effective research ethics governance and specify the structure and remit of these RECs.

ULREG will periodically request, review and digest at any time data from the RECs including:

- The number of applications submitted for review, those approved, those provisionally approved and subsequently approved by the Chair and finally those declined
- The number of relevant externally approved projects and their details.

ULREG will convene sub-committees as necessary, to consider appeals against REC decisions, or consider cases referred by RECs in exceptional circumstances.

5. Academic Council

Any proposed changes to ULREG's remit, structure, or related policies are subject to approval by Academic Council as per University procedure.

6. Research Integrity

ULREG will consider the annual report of the Research Integrity Officer ahead of its submission to the President each year and will be consulted on any changes to policy in the area of Research Integrity and/or other developments in the area.

7. Composition

The following shall be members of ULREG:

1. A Chairperson with appropriate expertise, appointed by Academic Council on the nomination of ULREG
2. Associate Vice President Doctoral College (Vice Chairperson)
3. Chairs of the RECs or their alternate
4. President of the Postgraduate Students' Union or alternate
5. Corporate Secretary or alternate
6. A member who is trained in or has practical experience in the area of research ethics, as approved by Academic Council from time to time, on the nomination of ULREG
7. The Research Integrity Officer
8. The Research Governance Officer
9. A representative from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee

The Chairperson will be appointed for a 3-year term, renewable by Academic Council, for one further term, on the recommendation of the President.

ULREG may co-opt internal and/or external members as deemed necessary for specialist support for defined periods subject to approval of a majority of the members of ULREG present at the meeting at which the proposal for co-option is made.

8. Committee Support

Support for the committee will be provided by the Office of the Vice President Research and Innovation.

9. Conduct of Business

1. ULREG will convene a minimum of four times a year, with additional meetings scheduled as required.
2. A quorum shall consist of half of the committee's membership and must include the Chair or Vice Chair.
3. ULREG members or their named alternates are expected to attend ULREG meetings; where alternates are attending, they must be appropriately briefed by the relevant primary member (i.e. REC Chairs, Corporate Secretary, or PSU President).
4. Independent Quality audits of Research ethics governance will take place on a 5-year cycle.

10. Reporting Responsibility

1. The Chair of ULREG will make an annual written report on its activities to Academic Council and will report regularly to Academic Council on its activities, issues, related recommendations and approvals as required.
2. Following approval by Academic Council, ULREG will arrange for the publication of its Annual Report in accordance with the provisions as set down in the Operational Guidelines.
3. ULREG when requested will present research ethics-related issues to Governing Authority.