

## Metropolitan Police Service Research Ethics Committee (MetREC) – Terms of Reference

The Metropolitan Police Service Research Ethics Committee (MetREC) should examine the ethical aspects of research undertaken, funded or sponsored by the MPS. It should ensure that policies, considerations, standards and safeguards are applied appropriately and for the purpose of safeguarding the rights, dignity and welfare of people participating in research. It should ensure that any risks involved in conducting research are appropriate and proportionate to the potential benefit of the research.

This document sets out the Terms of Reference of MetREC.

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## Objectives

1. The objective of MetREC is to ensure that research undertaken, funded or sponsored by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) meets high ethical standards. In exceptional circumstances, and with the approval of the MPS, MetREC can provide ethical advice on research linked to other police forces. MetREC should ensure that policies, considerations, standards and safeguards are applied appropriately and for the purpose of safeguarding the rights, dignity, welfare and safety of people participating in research. It should ensure that any risks involved in conducting and participating in research are appropriate and proportionate to the potential benefit of the research.

## Scope

2. The following details what research proposals should be submitted to MetREC for consideration. The list is not exhaustive, and advice should be sought from the MetREC Secretariat ([metrec@met.police.uk](mailto:metrec@met.police.uk)) where doubt exists. The role of MetREC is to assure operational delivery conducted as scientific research. If operational changes are made without consideration for scientific evaluation, this falls outside the scope of MetREC and any ethical implications must be addressed elsewhere. Examples of research that should be submitted to MetREC include:
  - a. Where a policing operation or intervention is introduced or removed selectively or via randomisation in order to evaluate that operation/intervention;
  - b. Where police officers, victims, suspects or offenders are interviewed or consulted (e.g., by questionnaires, focus groups, etc.) for the purpose of research;
  - c. Where research is undertaken by the MPS to assess or understand old or new technologies, strategies, practices, behaviours, or approaches to policing;
  - d. Where the allocation of resources is altered, based on data, in order to evaluate that allocation;
  - e. Where research is undertaken which may impact on the trust of communities in the MPS.
3. The MetREC secretariat will make an initial judgement as to whether ethical approval is required and submit only those proposals that require independent ethical scrutiny. The exact threshold for submission will be a matter of continual review between the MetREC Chair and the MPS.

## Composition

4. MetREC will have enough members to allow for a sufficiently broad range of experience and expertise, so that the scientific, operational, methodological and ethical aspects of a research proposal can be reconciled with the welfare of research participants and with broader ethical implications. MetREC may seek the advice of outside experts on any aspects of an application that are relevant to the forming of an opinion on the ethics of the research.
5. MetREC will be constituted to contain a mixture of expert and lay members. MetREC will be an Independent Advisory Committee, with the voting members to be independent of the MPS. The Committee will be administratively supported by the MPS.
6. Appointment to MetREC, including appointment of a Vice-Chair, will be made by the Chair of MetREC. The Chair will be appointed by the Commissioner of the MPS (or representative).

### Expert Members

7. The 'expert' members of each committee will be chosen to provide the following expertise:
  - a. Relevant methodological/ethical expertise in:
    - i. applied criminological research
    - ii. qualitative and quantitative research methods
  - b. Relevant operational practice.
  - c. Experimental design.
  - d. Statistics relevant to research.

### Lay Members

8. At least one third of the membership should act as 'lay' members. These lay members should be independent of the MPS, as employees, and their primary personal or professional interest should not be in criminology or other aspects covered in paragraph 6.
9. Ideally, lay members should include those with:
  - a. professional ethical involvement;
  - b. specialist legal experience (e.g. practising or academic lawyers).

### Non-Representative Role

10. Despite being drawn from groups identified with particular interests or responsibilities in connection with policing, MetREC is not in any way representative of those groups. Members are appointed in their own right to participate in the work of MetREC as individuals of sound judgement and relevant experience.

### Terms of Appointment

11. The length of appointment will be no longer than 3 years without review. Re-appointment will be a matter for the Chair of MetREC, or in the case of the Chair, the Commissioner (or representative).

### Quorum

12. For meetings at which research ethical review is undertaken, a quorum shall be at least 5, including the Chair and/or Vice Chair, at least one expert member and at least two lay members.

### Education and Training for MetREC Members

13. MetREC members may have a need for initial and continued education and training regarding research ethics. The MPS will be responsible for funding the necessary education and training. Members of MetREC should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with operational practices and environments.

### The Annual Report

14. Within 6 months of the end of each financial year, MetREC will submit an Annual Report to the Commissioner which will include:
  - a. the names, affiliations and occupations of committee members ;
  - b. the number and dates of meetings held;

## Metropolitan Police Service Research Ethics Committee (MetREC)

- c. the attendance of members;
  - d. any training undertaken by the ethics committee members;
  - e. a list of proposals considered<sup>1</sup>, and the decisions reached on each;
  - f. the time taken from submission to MetREC to a final decision for each proposal;
  - g. a list of projects completed or terminated during the year;
15. The annual report should be produced as an unclassified document to allow publication.

### Administrative Support

16. The MPS Secretariat will provide secretarial support and provide suitable and discrete facilities in which the work of MetREC and its administrators can be undertaken and its meetings held in a confidential manner.

### Research Protocol Register

17. The MetREC Secretariat will keep an electronic register of all proposals that come before it. The register should form the basis of the MetREC Annual Report to the Commissioner. Provision must also be made for long term retention of research protocols in case of future enquiries.

### Legal Liability

18. MetREC members must act in good faith and provide impartial and independent advice.
19. MetREC members do not provide legal advice.
20. The advice provided by MetREC members on research proposals shall be deemed solely advisory. The advice will be provided to the MPS and not otherwise disclosed.
21. MetREC members shall be exempt from all legal liability of whatever kind arising from their actions or omissions which relate to their being a MetREC member unless such act or omission constitutes gross negligence.
22. Should an actual or potential claim be brought against a MetREC member relating to an act or omission made in the course of his or her work as a MetREC member, and regardless of who brings the claim or whether proceedings are issued, the MPS undertakes to provide legal counsel of its own choosing to the member and to indemnify the member against any and all loss or damages including legal costs.

### Procedure

23. MetREC should consider valid applications in a timely manner. In ordinary circumstances, full ethical review should take place within a 60 calendar day timeframe. A valid application is one that has been submitted by the Research Lead to the MetREC Secretariat, is complete, with all the necessary documents attached. The Research Lead will normally be expected to attend if the submission is considered at a committee meeting. In the absence of the Research Lead (or representative) a decision should be reached and communicated to the applicant within 7 working days of the MetREC meeting at which it is considered.

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<sup>1</sup> Listing must respect confidentiality.

## Metropolitan Police Service Research Ethics Committee (MetREC)

24. After an initial review, further written information or clarification may be requested from the applicant. The further information may be considered by the Chair of MetREC, by a sub-committee or at the next scheduled meeting of MetREC as appropriate. The Chair may be given delegated authority to issue the final opinion following the initial review.
25. Amendments submitted once the research has started shall be considered at the next scheduled meeting of MetREC or out of committee as appropriate. A response should be given to the applicant within 20 working days from receipt of the resubmission. However, where the amendment is far-reaching, e.g. involves a change in its primary purpose, a significant change of methodology or new types of investigation or intervention with research participants, it may be treated by MetREC at their discretion as a new application requiring full ethical review within the standard 60 calendar days timeframe.
26. MetREC should meet with sufficient frequency to complete its business in a timely manner. It is anticipated that this should be every two months. MetREC should have the capacity to convene rapidly in urgent cases.
27. To expedite review, protocols of a recurring and/or straightforward nature should be reviewed by the Chair/Vice Chair where appropriate.
28. If MetREC does not provide a favourable ethical opinion of a protocol, the Research Lead may request a review within 14 working days of receipt of MetREC's decision, providing reasons for his or her dissatisfaction with the decision. This should be done in writing and sent to the MetREC Secretariat and Chair. Where an application is rejected, the MPS may continue with the research with the approval of an NPCC rank officer.

### Confidentiality of proceedings

29. MetREC members do not sit on the committee in any representative capacity and need to be able to discuss freely the proposals that come before them. For these reasons MetREC meetings will be held in private. The Research Lead may be invited and other observers may attend, at the discretion of the committee. A summary of details of the application shall be made available, through the Minutes, once the final decision on the application is ratified by MetREC. These shall include:
  - a. the name of the Research Lead;
  - b. a brief summary of the research proposal comprehensible to a lay person;
  - c. the issues discussed by the committee and the committee's conclusions;
  - d. its overall opinion.

### Following up and reports

30. Once MetREC has given approval, the Research Lead is required to notify the committee, in advance, of any proposed deviation from the original research protocol. The committee may then wish to review its decision.
31. No deviation from, or change to, the research protocol shall be initiated by the Research Lead without the prior written approval of MetREC, save where this is necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to research participants ('urgent safety measures') or when the change involves only logistical or administrative aspects of the research of no relevance to the ethical dimension of the research. In these cases, the changes may be

## Metropolitan Police Service Research Ethics Committee (MetREC)

implemented immediately. MetREC must be informed no later than 3 calendar days from the date any urgent safety measures are taken.

32. The Research Lead is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to review significant developments as the research proceeds (particularly those which put the safety of individuals at risk) and to approve any modifications to the design of the research protocol. These modifications must be submitted to MetREC and approval obtained before implementation (except when there are immediate hazards to research participants).
33. MetREC should indicate at the time of approval any progress reports it requires from the applicant. It shall request a final report, to be delivered within 3 months of completion of the study. This need not be onerous and it should be possible to submit it electronically to the Secretariat.
34. Where the research is terminated prematurely, a report indicating the reasons for early termination should be submitted within 15 working days to the Secretariat and MetREC Chair.
35. Reports to the committee are also required if there are any unusual or unexpected results that raise questions about the safety of the research or highlight any backfiring impact of the operation. Where any serious untoward effects occur in any research study, the event must be reported promptly to the Chair of MetREC.
36. Other than by means of requested progress reports, MetREC has no responsibility for pro-active monitoring of the research, the accountability for which lies with the Research Lead. MetREC may, however, wish to be reassured of the process for such monitoring in certain specific cases.
37. A member of MetREC who becomes aware of a possible breach of good practice in research should report this initially to the Chair of MetREC, who shall inform the Commissioner or representative.

### The Review

38. MetREC shall meet as required to ensure that it has sufficient flexibility to deal with applications in a reasonable time. Meetings should be planned in accordance with the needs of the workload, but MetREC should aim to meet the time standards for review.
39. MetREC members should be given at least 5 working days in advance of the meeting to review the relevant documents.
40. Minutes shall be taken at the meetings by the MetREC Secretariat. There should be an approval procedure for the minutes. In order to ensure free discussion and a true record of meetings, the minutes must be confidential to the members of MetREC and held under such understanding by the MetREC Secretariat. They will be made available to the Commissioner and their staff upon request.
41. Independent experts may be invited by the Chair to attend meetings and/or to provide written comments, subject to applicable confidentiality agreements.

### Elements of the review

42. The primary task of MetREC lies in the ethical review of MPS research falling within the scope of such review. The review should cover all supporting documents, with special attention given to the nature of any intervention and its safety for participants (including researchers), to the informed consent process (if relevant), documentation and to the suitability and feasibility of the research protocol.
43. The scientific robustness of the research is the prime responsibility of the MPS and must be validated internally (and with relevant partners if relevant) prior to submission for ethical review by MetREC. It is not the task of MetREC to undertake additional scientific review, nor is it constituted to do so, but it should be satisfied that the review already undertaken is adequate for the nature of the proposal under consideration. The quality of the proposed evaluation, however, should be open to challenge by members on MetREC.

### Requirements for Approval

44. Before approving a research protocol, MetREC should be satisfied that the following (non-exclusive) list of issues has been addressed, as applicable:
- a. *Scientific design and conduct of the study*
  - b. *Recruitment of research participants*
  - c. *Care and protection of research participants*
  - d. *Protection of research participants' confidentiality*
  - e. *Informed consent process*

### Expedited review

45. The MetREC Chair or designated deputy may conduct expedited review of research proposals, in consultation with at least two expert members of MetREC, when the research concerns matters of urgent operational or business need. The requirement for expedited review in these circumstances must be formally certified by the research's MPS sponsor at Ch Supt rank or above.
46. Any such expedited decisions must be reported and endorsed at the next MetREC meeting.

### Decision-making

47. In making decisions on applications for the ethical review of research, MetREC should take the following into consideration:
- a. In the case of a potential conflict of interest a member may be asked to withdraw from the meeting for the discussion and decision procedure concerning an application. The potential conflict of interest should be indicated to the Chair prior to the review of the application and recorded in the minutes.
  - b. By invitation of the Chair, independent experts or others may take part in the discussion of the proposal at the MetREC meeting. At the Chair's discretion, the applicant may attend discussion of the proposal to answer any outstanding questions by the members, speed up or facilitate decision-making and accurately

## Metropolitan Police Service Research Ethics Committee (MetREC)

design redrafting. The process should be seen as constructive collaboration between the committee and the applicant, rather than an adversarial process.

- c. Decisions can only be made by full MetREC members and at meetings where a quorum is present.
  - d. The documents required for a full review of the application shall be complete.
  - e. Written comments from absent members shall be allowed to inform the discussion, but only those members who actually participate in the review by the committee at its meeting shall participate in the decision.
  - f. It is recommended that decisions be arrived at through consensus where possible. However, where members differ on the decision despite adequate discussion, a vote may be taken to determine the majority opinion of those members present at the meeting. Where there is a division of opinion, the Chair may obtain the views of any members of the Committee not present. He may also seek the opinion of additional outside experts. Final decision on a project may be carried on a vote with at least two-thirds of the Committee participating in the decision in agreement.
  - g. Where the decision is not unanimous, minority reservations should be recorded formally, and also made known to the Research Lead.
48. Non-binding advice may be appended to MetREC's decision on a protocol to assist the Research Lead.
49. In cases of conditional decisions, clear suggestions for revision and the procedure for further review of the protocol should be specified.
50. An unfavourable opinion/rejection of an application should be supported, in writing, by adequate reasons.
51. Where an application is rejected, the MPS may continue with the research with the approval of an NPCC rank officer.

### Submission of applications

52. The application shall be submitted by the Research Lead who is the person designated as taking overall responsibility for the design, conduct and reporting of the study.
53. MetREC should ensure that its requirements for submitting an application for review are described in an application procedure that is readily available to prospective applicants.

### Application Procedures

54. This will be published by the MetREC Secretariat and should include the following:
- a. Contact details of the MetREC Secretariat;
  - b. the application form;
  - c. any additional documentation;
  - d. the deadlines for submission of the application in relation to the review dates;
  - e. the means by which the application will be acknowledged ;
  - f. the expected time for notification of the decision following review;
  - g. the time frame to be followed in cases where MetREC requests supplementary information from the applicant, or changes to the documents;

## Metropolitan Police Service Research Ethics Committee (MetREC)

- h. the application procedure for amendments to the research protocol, the recruitment material, the information for participants, the consent form or procedure for obtaining consent;
- i. the process for addressing any disputed decisions.

### Documentation and archiving

55. All documentation and communication of MetREC should be dated, filed and archived, by the MetREC Secretariat.

56. Documents that should be filed and archived include, but are not limited to:

- a. annual reports;
- b. the curriculum vitae of each MetREC member;
- c. a record of all income and expenses of MetREC including allowances and reimbursements made to the Secretariat and MetREC members;
- d. the published guidelines for submission established by MetREC;
- e. the agendas of MetREC meetings;
- f. the minutes of MetREC meetings;
- g. one copy of all materials submitted by each applicant;
- h. the correspondence by MetREC with applicants or concerned parties regarding application, decision and follow-up;
- i. a copy of the decision and any advice or requirements sent to an applicant;
- j. all written documentation received during the follow-up;
- k. the notification of the completion, premature suspension, or premature termination of a study;
- l. the final summary or final report of the study.

### Complaints

54. Any complaints from applicants should be directed initially to the Chair of MetREC and then, if necessary, to the Commissioner through the MetREC Secretariat.