

ESRC Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre

Terms of Reference – Ethical Oversight Panel

The Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), hosted by the University of York and the University of Leeds, with a leadership team based within these universities and a wider team of Co-Investigators from a range of other institutions in the UK and beyond. This document sets out the Terms of Reference for the Centre's Ethical Oversight Panel (EOP), covering purpose, functions, membership, responsibilities and accountabilities.

1. Purpose

By combining issues of policing and coercive power with questions of vulnerability and work with vulnerable groups, the subject matter of the Centre's research programme inevitably raises a large number of fundamentally important ethical and normative issues that require thoughtful consideration and management. The Centre has been conceived on the premise of 'responsible innovation', whereby new approaches can be explored within frameworks of rigorous oversight, evaluation and transparency. As such, the primary purpose of the EOP is as an advisory group who will act as a 'critical friend' and counsel on ethical issues during the course of the Centre's work, helping the Centre team to understand and work through ethical implications and challenges of the work programme as a whole, but especially in terms of identifying and mitigating potential harms that may arise from novel uses of data/joining up data which includes crime data. The EOP will focus on broad issues of principle and ethical good practice, leaving specific questions of ethical approval to relevant institutional bodies. It will help ensure compliance with the highest standards of research ethics while also supporting responsible innovation and appropriate risk taking. It will champion Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), VPRC's [Values and Principles](#) and help ensure anti-discriminatory practices.

2. Schedule

The group will meet three times a year (broadly termly), including a mixture of in-person and online meetings. Subject to review and agreement meetings may reduce to twice per year after the initial three-year period of the Centre.

3. Membership

Membership of the EOP should include relevant project/stakeholder representation so that it can provide the necessary advice and challenge in relation to ethical issues arising from the Centre's aims, objectives and planned projects. Informed by good practice in diversity and inclusion, the Centre aims to ensure representation from individuals with strong links to the communities 'served' by the Centre. The group must include members with the expertise to interrogate the scientific robustness, social justice implications and effectiveness of the projects proposed. The group must also include members with lived experiences that fall under the remit of vulnerability

policing. Combined, members' expertise should cover/include: linked data/data science, research methods/social interventions with vulnerable groups, specialists in policing and specifically policing of vulnerable people, to include academic, legal and practitioner expertise, co-production of research with vulnerable groups. Membership will comprise four to six people (maximum of eight) in addition to the Co-Chairs. Membership will be for an initial term of three years, with the option to extend, given the Centre's initial five year funding period (from May 2022). Members will attend primarily on the basis of expertise rather than organisational affiliation. EOP members' organisational affiliations will be recognised and valued, and where these could potentially result in conflicts of interest this will also be recognised and due account taken.

The membership list will be available on the Centre website.

Members of the Core Academic Team, Leadership team and staff team will be called upon to present to the meeting on specific projects/progress as required. Centre Professional Support Staff (PSS) staff will provide administrative support.

4. Functions and operation

The key functions of the EOP are:

- Fulfilling an advisory role in relation to ethical issues
- To challenge and advise Centre colleagues in relation to ethical issues, in order to help navigate challenging ethical issues and support rigorous best practice.
- Supporting and holding the Centre to account in management of inevitable and necessary tension of insider/outsiderness associated in particular with co-production methods with a wide variety of stakeholders, including police and those subject to policing interventions
- Liaising closely with the Centre Leadership Team (via nominated Leadership Team link people) but operating independently of it.

The EOP's work is informed by and attuned to Centre's approach to policing in its plural sense, with the police seen as one agency in a wider network of multi-agency interventions that have both supportive and disciplinary functions/elements.

Consultation with and feedback from the EOP should be considered by the Centre team as an essential part of delivering a successful project (rather than a burden or constraining force).

The role of the EOP is to be an active and engaged group, ideally responsive to issues as they arise, subject to capacity; the group operates as a team, being small enough to remain agile and engaged with Centre work.

5. Accountability

The EOP fulfils a strategic advisory role and as such feeds back recommendations to the Centre's academic team both directly and via the Leadership Team.

Members of Centre governance groups are committed to observing the [values and principles of the Centre](#). ESRC advisory bodies, panels and groups are expected to observe the highest standards of integrity as outlined in the [ESRC Code of Practice](#).