

Coram Research Ethics Policy

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2. About this policy:

This document sets out Coram's research ethics policy, which must be followed by all parts of the group. It aims to ensure that internal and external research involving Coram service users or staff is carried out ethically, and that records are kept, in the interests of learning and development.

It is also a terms of reference for Coram's Research Ethics Committee.

3. Key points: what staff must do:

When anyone wishes to access service users or staff for research purposes, or is approached with a request to do this, then staff must inform the Group Head of Impact & Evaluation. The

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Group Head of Impact & Evaluation will ensure that scrutiny is proportionate, and that any delays are minimised. Researchers themselves retain ultimate responsibility for ensuring work is carried out ethically.

4. What counts as 'research'?

'Research' includes any process requesting information or engagement from Coram service users or staff, for wider learning rather than for their own benefit.

Included:

- Some consultation and participative processes are included in this definition.
- Student projects, including where students are also members of staff, are included.
- Internal and external evaluation is included.

The nature or source of funding, if any, does not affect whether a project or process should be considered research.

Excluded:

- Requests for access to Coram's archive by historians and researchers, who should approach the Executive Office (executive_team@coram.org.uk).
- Secondary data analysis, literature reviews and other forms of secondary research are 'research', but may not need to complete an ethics application. Colleagues should inform impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk about secondary research proposals and seek advice on whether to complete an application.

Research involving neither Coram service users nor Coram staff may still follow this policy if the funder or senior responsible owner requires that Coram research ethics procedures are followed.

If in doubt about whether a proposal is in scope of this policy, email impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk for advice.

5. Principles

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Coram adheres to widely accepted research ethics frameworks:

- the Economic and Social Research Council 's Research Ethics Framework: <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics>
- the Social Research Association's (SRA) Ethical Guidelines <https://the-sra.org.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/ethical%20guidelines%202003.pdf>

Members of Coram's Research Ethics Committee may also refer to the review panel checklist for applications (UK Research Integrity Office, 2020): <https://ukrio.org/wp-content/uploads/Appendix-1-REC-review-panel-checklist-for-applications.pdf>

Research ethics are an element of the wider concept of research integrity, which includes the conduct of researchers, authorship and publication practices, and the handling of data. It is the responsibility of senior responsible owners of projects to ensure that proposals are carried out with integrity, and are compliant with the law, the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Coram's [information security policy](#), Coram's [safeguarding policy](#), etc. This may require advice from Coram's HR team and/or specialist legal or other advice.

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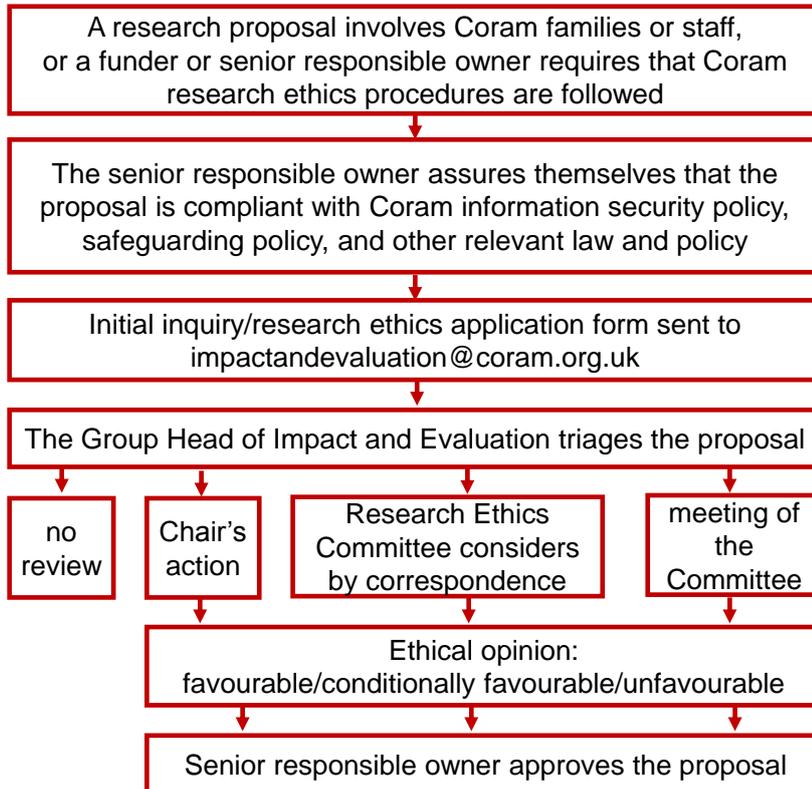
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6. Procedures

Summary of process:



Teams should alert the Impact & Evaluation Team to their research plans at the earliest possible stage by sending an initial inquiry email to impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk. Teams should submit proposals formally to the Group Head of Impact & Evaluation at the same address. The timing of this may vary, for example, once a plan has passed internal team review, or after funding has been secured for projects. Teams should use the template '[Research ethics application form](#)'.

The Group Head of Impact & Evaluation triages proposals into:

- File, but no further action (in the case of proposals which have already obtained or are obtaining satisfactory ethical scrutiny from other bodies, see section 6.1)

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- Chair's action (for small-scale, low-impact proposals)
- Consideration by Research Ethics Committee by correspondence only
- Convene a meeting of the Research Ethics Committee to consider the proposal

Where there is doubt, or if another view is needed, they may also consult the Chair of the group, or a Deputy Chair in the absence of the Chair.

The Research Ethics Committee meets twice per year, and can be convened as necessary by the Group Head of Impact & Evaluation when proposals come to Coram that require detailed consideration. As well as reviewing application forms, the Committee may ask teams to answer questions on their proposals, and commission additional advice or input on an ad-hoc basis.

Outcomes of ethical review

The possible ethical opinions are:

- Favourable as proposed
- Conditionally favourable, subject to certain conditions or requirements
- Unfavourable

This is not 'approval' for a project going ahead. It is for senior responsible owners (such as Heads of Service) to approve studies, once they are content that any legal, data protection, ethical and other issues have been considered satisfactorily. They must have reference to the Committee's opinion.

Following a 'conditionally favourable' opinion, the research proposal must be revised, or new documents provided, to take account of feedback. Any concerns raised by any member of the Committee must be addressed by the team who submitted the proposal, and the Committee may ask teams to report back on amendments made in response to their comments.

In the interests of learning and improvement across the Coram group, at the end of each project, the Impact & Evaluation Team contacts researchers, to request a short report on the ethical issues raised in the project.

Every year, the committee reports to CSC on the work of the committee, including the number of applications received and opinions given.

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6.1 Relationship with university or other research ethics boards

In some cases, ethical scrutiny is sought from university or other ethics processes. In such cases, there is no need for additional scrutiny Coram's Research Ethics Committee, but staff should inform the Group Head of Impact & Evaluation of the nature and outcome of its ethical approval process, which will need to be validated by the Group Head of Impact & Evaluation.

Researchers may be asked to provide the documents submitted to the university or other external ethics process, together with any resulting comments and details of any remedial action taken in response. Coram's Research Ethics Committee may raise additional comments or concerns if it finds that the ethical issues as they relate to Coram have not been addressed appropriately.

7. Coram Research Ethics Committee terms of reference

7.1 Status of the committee

The Research Ethics Committee (REC) reports to Coram group's Children's Services Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Board of Trustees. The CSC provides oversight and is the body to which complaints and appeals against the REC and its decisions should be addressed.

7.2 Role of the committee

The role of the research ethics committee is to provide opinions on the ethics of specific research proposals.

7.3 Membership of the committee

Membership is voluntary and unpaid. There are no minimum or maximum term limits for members.

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Members:

1. Chair (may be a Coram group trustee)
2. Coram group trustee (Deputy Chair)
3. Coram group trustee (Deputy Chair)
4. Lay member with current/recent service user or practitioner experience
5. Lay member with current/recent service user or practitioner experience
6. External academic
7. External academic

Membership should reflect the diversity of Coram service users and represent a broad range of methodological and subject matter expertise.

For a meeting of the Committee to be quorate, at least two trustees must be present.

Also attending (secretariat):

8. Group Head of Impact and Evaluation
9. Impact & Evaluation Coordinator (notes)

These attendees may contribute and answer questions, but may not take part in decision making.

Optional attendees

Meetings may also be attended by members of Coram's Senior Management Team, and by the person proposing the research or staff or others who are particularly involved with the proposal.

Any such attendees may present on their proposal, answer questions, or observe, but may not take part in decision making.

7.4 Expectations of group members

- Attend and contribute to group meetings once every six months

- Read and comment on all proposals within the timetable (which aims to respond to applications within 1 month of receipt).
- Read and comment on more urgent requests in special cases where required.
- Declare any conflicts of interest.
- Treat as strictly confidential all papers, discussions and correspondence relating to proposals and group business.

7.5 Principles for the Committee's work

- **Balance and independence** – membership of the group includes a range of roles, including trustees, and practitioner/service user and academic experience.
- **Quality and proportionality** – ethical review will be thorough and of high quality, but proportionate to the potential benefits and level of risk of the proposed research.
- **Participation and teamwork** - members of the group are expected to contribute to discussions on all proposals unless they have a conflict of interest, and to make reasonable efforts to work as a team to reach a consensus on proposals.
- **Transparency and confidentiality** – a description of Coram's research ethics process is publicly available, with group members named, but members are expected to keep confidential all papers and discussions.
- **Accountability** – members of the group follow up on their decisions and are accountable to Coram's Children's Services committee, accepting that charity trustees bear ultimate responsibility for the work done by charities.