



Westminster Social Care Research Governance

Steering Group Terms of Reference

What is the role of the Research Steering Group?

The Research Steering Group (RSG) was formed to enable Westminster Social Care Services to meet the Department of Health's recommendation for all Local Authorities to establish robust research approval processes. It is expected that Westminster Children's Services department will follow the Research Governance Framework guidelines as a matter of good practice, and submit proposals through the Research Steering Group.

Overall it aims to promote the benefits of social care research through the introduction of appropriate governance arrangements thereby reducing the risk to staff, service users and their carers when participating in research activities

Main Objectives

1. To achieve a systematic, coherent and independent approach to the approval of social care research activities for Westminster City Council.
2. To raise the quality and standards of social care research involving staff and people who use social care services in Westminster.
3. To ensure staff, service users and their carers are safeguarded from exploitation or harm when participating in research activities.
4. To establish appropriate recording and monitoring methods for all in-house and external social care research.
5. To promote and publicise social care research both within Westminster, and externally both nationally and with our partners.
6. To effect improvements and inform service development, where appropriate through improved learning from research.

Scope of the RSG

The Social Services Research Group has defined the term research as **The systematic collection of data using explicit research methods and techniques (April 2005)**

INVOLVE has defined research as new knowledge or testing out existing ideas. "Research is about finding answers to questions and doing it in a planned way. research about what people think and feel, and what has happened to them"

The activity of the Research Steering Group shall cover all forms of external (social policy research groups, Universities, NHS), and internal (service or team based) research activities, which involve people who use social care services and its staff in order to meet the Group's objectives.



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The research will cover a variety of forms including: surveys; questionnaires; consultations; interviews and experimental research.

Those activities involving service users that are deemed, as outside of the scope of the RSG shall initially include:

- External and Internal Audits of service aimed at validating and quality assuring existing processes and practices (this would include quality assurance monitoring by provider organisations).
- Involvement with service users as part of the care management and needs assessment processes

Membership

Membership shall consist of a core group of six officers with experience in research and performance and include a balanced representation of skills and experience. Where indicated, the group may co-opt an 'expert' to assist with the specialist complexities of a proposal.

As part of future development of the Group, consideration will be made to service user and carer representation

Where appropriate, individuals can be co-opted to the group to provide specialist advice on a specific proposal e.g. potential Mental Capacity or Caldicott issues.

Meetings

Wherever it is practicable RSG members shall conduct business via e-mail (virtual meetings), in accordance with pre-agreed timescales and response times.

RSG meetings will be convened where there is a need to obtain consensus from the Group regarding a research application considered as high risk by more than one member of the Group and without the measures in place to reduce the risk and therefore is not approved. The proposal researcher will also be invited to attend.

The frequency of meetings will depend upon the volume of research that cannot be approved through virtual meetings due to lack of consensus.

Quorum

For the group to be quorate, at least **three** members are required to be present.

Documentation

Applicants will submit proposals using the London RGF Alliance Common Proposal Form, and the London Alliance Common Risk Assessment Tool will be used by RSG members for assessing proposals.

The communication of information including Research Application Forms, application outcomes, action points from meetings and other information will wherever possible be undertaken via e-mail.

Functions

The responsibility of the RSG members shall be

- To develop appropriate guidelines, procedures and forms necessary to enable the Group to operate.



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- To receive Research Application Forms from applicants and circulate to members of the RSG.
- To undertake independently a risk assessment / analysis of Research Application Forms using the London Alliance Common Risk Assessment Tool within 10 working days of receipt.
- To reach a decision following assessment as to whether or not the research application shall be approved or declined, together with any recommendations or requirements arising.
- Where a member has received and circulated a Research Application to members of the RSG, to coordinate the groups responses and report to the Chair.
- To meet as a Group in order to agree a consensus (or where required a simple majority) when there is a difference of opinion reached as to the level of risk involved in a research application.
- To log/ record electronically details of each Application Form and store copies of all proposal forms and completed risk assessment tools on a shared drive folder.
- To produce through the Chair an annual report to Adults Services Senior Management Team (and copied to the Children's Services Board) on the outcomes and lessons learned from the RSG
- To produce guidance notes, and other training and information materials for both potential research applicants and RSG assessors and make these available via the Council website.
- To update Services/Teams regarding research procedures
- To declare any conflict of interests in regards to research proposals received.

The responsibility of the RSG Chair shall be

- To chair meetings of the Group
- To act as the final decision-maker in cases where there is equal voting for and against a piece of research
- To present reports and feedback on behalf of the Group as required to senior management.
- Notify research applicants of the outcomes of RSG decisions
- To ensure that details of research approved are uploaded onto the National Social Care Database (National Social Care Research Register) - maintained through the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE).

Reporting Structure and Links

The RSG shall report annually to the appropriate senior management group a summary of the key outcomes and lessons learned from the Group including:

- Numbers of applications received
- Organisations involved, service areas and research topics
- Decisions and recommendations reached
- Other relevant performance data Issues relating to the work of the Group



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Training and Development

The RSG shall

- Produce Guidance Notes, FAQs, and briefings for the benefit of new members of the RSG, research applicants and the general workforce
- Arrange training and induction to new members of the RSG
- Cascade information as required to services and teams
- Organise annually a development day to review the structure and framework of the RSG, its processes and procedures and all guidance and training information available to both research applicants and assessors.
- Where possible attend national and regional events relating to research governance

Data Protection, Caldicott Guardian and Information Sharing Protocol

The RSG shall comply with their obligations under the Data Protection Act as they may be deemed to apply in the performance of its work. The RSG shall undertake to treat any personal and sensitive information derived from or obtained in the course of its work as confidential and shall take all necessary precautions to ensure that such information is not disclosed to third parties.

Disclaimer

Research governance is a relatively new concept in social care and therefore in terms of reference of this Group will evolve with time and by lessons learned

Equal Opportunities

The Research Steering Group will comply with relevant Diversity and Equalities Policies as deemed to apply in the performance of its work.