ReConnect Project

Ethics and Data Management

The members of the ReConnect consortium are committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and research ethics that apply to social science research.

1. The research will be guided by the respective institutions 'research ethics policies and data management arrangements. Prof. Dr Martin Lodge (WP7) will be responsible for project specific ethics compliance as part of the overall management activities. Overall project monitoring will be conducted through the LSE's accountability structures. ReConnect will be included and accounted for as part of CARR's bi-annual review by its stakeholder departments and by the LSE's Research Committee. The overall ethics policy is based on LSE's research ethics and integrity policy which obliges all awarded research projects to go through a dedicated research ethics process. We do not anticipate any issues arising as the research relies on public documents, focus groups and interviews based on informed consent and non-attributability. While the LSE as Main Applicant has responsibility for overall research ethics and data management, site-specific responsibilities lie with the Co Applicants. The country-specific research efforts will be led by the country teams, with support from other teams.

2. The ReConnect members will take lead responsibility to ensure that the ongoing research is conducted at the highest level of integrity, quality and transparency. Each work package is embedded within institutional research ethics frameworks and committees. Where these bodies do not exist, the research ethics framework that applies to the co-ordinator, the LSE, will apply. All partners are expected to conduct their research in keeping with the principles of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.[1]

3. The primary responsibility for the conduct of the research lies with the individual leader of a work package. Each package is required to identify risks to researchers and research participants and identify ways of mitigating these risks. The co-ordinator will ensure that ReConnect-related research follows ethical guidelines and is approved by the appropriate institutional oversight and ethics committees.

4. Concerns regarding the ethical conduct of research conducted under the ReConnect project should be raised, in the first instance, with the ReConnect Project Manager. Contact information will be provided on the project website.

5. Consortium meetings will devote time for the consideration of emerging research ethics issues that may not have been foreseen at the outset of the research.

6. Unethical research behaviour will not be tolerated and will be raised as part of consortium meetings. Depending on severity, failure to comply may lead to the exclusion from the consortium, after consultation with the funder. The process of such investigation will be guided by the principles of integrity, fairness,

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[1] https://www.esf.org/fileadmin/user_upload/esf/ResearchIntegrity_Report2011.pdf

uniformity, confidentiality and no detriment. All members of the ReConnect consortium are committed to co-operate and support such investigations. They are also committed to consent to the conclusions of such processes and to take appropriate actions (subject to appropriate appeal processes).

7. Research staff will seek opportunities to train in research ethics as part of their activities in the ReConnect project. Such opportunities will be encouraged as part of career development opportunities.

The following principles guide the ReConnect project[2]:

8. All research is designed, undertaken and reviewed as part of ReConnect to ensure integrity, quality and transparency.

9. Researchers and research participants will be fully informed about the purpose, method and intended usage of the research, what their contribution to the research is and what risks, if any, may arise from participation.

10. Confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected. The dignity and autonomy of research participants will be respected at all times.

11. Research participants must participate voluntarily, without any form of coercion.

12. Harm to researchers and research participants must be avoided at all times.

13. The independence of the research must be transparent and any potential conflict of interest must be declared.

14. Risks must be minimised.

Across the diverse work packages, ReConnect research shares the following characteristics:

15. All primary research will be conducted under the principle of informed consent; participants will not contribute without their knowledge and consent. Participants will have the right to withdraw at any time. (These principles will be set out in the project information sheet and (where applicable) consent form for participants.)

16. It generally does not involve vulnerable individuals who are not in a position to give informed consent.

17. The research methods will vary. They may rely on the analysis of documentation of different kinds (for example, statutory provisions, budget data, voting records, public speeches). Other research will involve elite interviews, surveys and secondary survey data.

18. The research may, at times, involve sensitive topics. This research, especially in the case of elite interviews, will be conducted under the principle of 'informed consent' and under conditions of non-attributability of information so as to protect the anonymity of the participant. The conditions will be explicitly set out in the information sheet and letter requesting the meeting with a research participant and the conditions will be reiterated at the outset of the conversation. The letter will also illustrate why the individual's participation is being sought. As most of the research will involve elite interviews, participants should be aware of the nature of academic research and the conventions and rules that govern social science research. Participants will be granted the opportunity to

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[2] https://esrc.ukri.org/files/funding/guidance-for-applicants/esrc-framework-for-research-ethics-2015/

comment on transcripts and draft papers in order to correct factual information. The right to comment does not affect researchers' rights to interpret and analyse. The principle of critical social science research shall not, however, deflect from the commitment to treat all participants respectfully.

19. Research involving survey methods will be governed by the academic conventions governing this methodology. Individual level data will be anonymised so as to protect participants, participation will be voluntary and the purpose of the research will be made transparent to participants so as to enable fully informed voluntary choice as to whether to participate.

20. No financial inducements will be offered for research participation apart from where specifically specified (such as in focus group research).

21. The research is not expected to expose researchers to any particular risks. However, leaders of individual work packages (sub-packages) and the overall consortium will continuously monitor potential emerging risks.

22. Research may establish incidental findings. The likelihood of such findings is low as ReConnect does not directly cover areas where incidental findings have caused primary concern, namely medical ethics. Such unlikely incidents (unlikely given the nature of research) will not be used for the purposes of the research. Data will be anonymised where appropriate. The primary research across all ReConnect research activities is to trace data and processes that are 'open', namely it is about investigating phenomena that are in the public domain. In the unlikely event of incidental findings, such a finding may also lead to issues regarding limits to confidentiality (i.e., evidence of severe risk to the participant or (planned/committed) criminal behaviour, corruption). In these cases, national legislation and professional guidelines will determine when confidentiality has to be breached. The participants will, where possible, be informed about the steps undertaken, without placing researchers at risk of harm.

Data Management

The ReConnect partners are committed to making their data available and accessible for re-use.

Back-up and security: All partners are trained in data management; their institutions all have dedicated back-up and data-security policies. The primary storage for data will be at the partners 'organisations. Data of relevance for the whole consortium will be stored on a secure internal project platform, managed by the LSE; we will use password protection for project-related files to further enhance security. Primary responsibility for secure data storage rests with the national project partners.

Management and curation: We will make the data available at the end of the project on the project's website, including a codebook with detailed information on the data and data collection.

Challenges to data sharing: The shared software infrastructure will support project-wide coordination and information flows. Ethical issues regarding the sharing of interview transcripts will be addressed by (a) anonymisation of transcripts to enhance non-identifiability of interviewees, and (b) use of file passwords. When

seeking informed consent from interviewees, we will also ask for consent for data sharing within the project team.

Consent, anonymisation and strategies to enable re-use of data: All ReConnect researchers have been or will be trained in research ethics to ensure that no risks are presented to those conducting or engaging with the research. All interviews and focus groups will take place on the basis of informed consent and 'non-attributability'. We will seek consent regarding the anonymised transcription of interviews. We do not expect particularly sensitive information to be shared, especially as we are interested in patterns rather than individual administrative cases. Interviewees will be given the opportunity to comment on research output prior to publication. The documentary data will be recorded in a database which also includes source information. The project team will explore exporting data arising from this research in anonymised form in the UK Data Service at the end of the project; participants in the research will be informed about this.

Copyright and intellectual property ownership: ReConnect will carefully identify and attribute sources. The project follows the convention that copyright for research materials and publications rests with the researchers. For the project-related data, copyright is held by the researchers involved. All research outputs, whether project-base or individual-based will attribute the ReConnect research to the different partners.

Responsibilities: The overall responsibility for the data management lies with Prof. Dr Martin Lodge. Each partner is responsible for their site-specific management plans. This means that all researchers involved will be trained in data management to ensure the highest standards in research ethics, quality assurance, and data security and management. The LSE will host the internal project platform and will ensure high levels of data security and back-up services. We will all engage with our institutions to ensure awareness and dissemination of best practices, guidance and policies regarding data management.