
Terms of reference for the PhD expert committee on ethics and security, Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University

Members: Head of graduate school (chair), four representatives of the academic staff with expertise in the field of ethics/security, PhD team leader.

Current members: Anne Marie Pahuus (chair), Christian Axboe Nielsen, Christian Ulrik Andersen, Hans Fink, Mads Daugbjerg, Anna Louise Plaskett.

Purpose: To deal with issues relating to research ethics and security in connection with the project proposals of PhD students, for instance assessments of potential security problems in connection with planned field study periods; research ethics regarding opportunities and possible limitations relating to the freedom of research, independence and academic development in planned projects; and any need for ethical approval in connection with the inclusion of participants in research studies (this approval is granted by the Aarhus University Research Ethics Committee).

- The expert committee was appointed with effect from 1 March 2017.
- The head of the graduate school is the chair of the committee.
- The committee plays an advisory role and is not authorised to make decisions. Decisions regarding security issues are the responsibility of the head of school; decisions regarding issues of independence/academic quality are the responsibility of the head of the graduate school; and issues regarding ethical approval are the responsibility of the principal supervisor.
- The committee has been set up to provide expert assistance for the head of school, the PhD supervisor, the head of PhD programme and the expert assessment committee.
- Heads of PhD programmes can ask the expert committee for their views regarding specific cases. For instance: Does the project involve any ethical problems? Are there any security issues in connection with fieldwork/study abroad?
- In connection with the recruitment of PhD students, the PhD Administration must ensure that the expert committee has given advice on specific projects for



which applications have been submitted in areas which may constitute a security risk for PhD students or participants in research studies.

- The committee considers cases on an ongoing basis. This does not necessarily involve meetings in person.

The assessment of research ethics is based on the principle of freedom of research, and in general on the system of research ethics and the guidelines and code of conduct that it contains.

The basis for the decision and therefore for the committee's advice about sending PhD students to unstable areas can be found in the travel advice issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <http://um.dk/da/rejse-og-ophold/rejse-til-udlandet/rejsevejledninger/> and International SOS: <https://travelriskmap.com/#/planner/map/security>

If the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have any travel advice for the location in question, the British travel advice can be used: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. Direct contact with the diplomatic service can also be used to gain updated knowledge on the security situation in individual areas.

In general, the graduate school does not think that PhD students should be given permission to carry out field research in areas where international foreign-affairs services advise strongly against all travel.

If it is decided to ignore these travel guidelines, the same risks as those applying in the travel guidelines must be assessed specifically, including the level of risk involved in connection with infection, lack of access to medical treatment, (political) violence, terror, kidnapping and traffic injuries. Any such assessment may also include:

- Further consultation with the Danish Institute for International Studies and/or the Danish or Norwegian Refugee Council regarding the use of their networks when visiting specific areas
- Professional advice from a security company
- Risk assessment in relation to the applicant's specific network, for instance if the applicant has already been in the area in question for a long time prior to project implementation
- The price of taking out kidnapping and ransom insurance (in special cases, but in most cases the price will be too high for the graduate school budget)

It is not possible to appeal against decisions made on the basis of the advice of the expert committee, apart from decisions relating to major changes in a project's ethical set-up or significant changes in the security level in the area which a PhD student plans to visit.