Minutes  Meeting of the University Research Ethics Committee

Date: 14th September 2016

Present: Professor Peter Bath in the Chair

Secretary: Mrs Lindsay Unwin

Minute Secretary: Miss Anita Kenny

In attendance: Harriet Baird; Jason Briggs; Dr Jennifer Burr; Lauriane Chalmin-Pui; Jez Cope; Dr Richard Cooper; Ms Anne Cutler; Prof. John Derrick; The Venerable Robert Fitzharris; Dr Carmen Levick; Dr Claudia Mazza; Dr Malcolm Patterson; Dr Ana Vivas.

Apologies: Dr Peter Allmar; Ms Sue Rose; Dr Eleanor Stillman

Action by

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11th May 2016
   The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. MATTERS ARISING ON THE MINUTES
   The Committee noted the matters arising on the minutes.
   It was noted that many of the outstanding items had been completed and that 1 or 2 are still ongoing.

   Under item 9:
   The Chair clarified that the workload allocation had now been approved at Senate and that it should be incorporated into departmental workload planning models. The term “considered” indicated that it should be taken in to consideration (i.e. included) not that it was still open for discussion. The Chair emphasised that the Senate appreciated and supported the work of the UREC and that it was important that the time taken by Committee members on UREC business is considered in workload allocation. The Chair suggested that the Committee discuss this again at end of the year to assess the extent to which the workload allocations were appropriate for the time colleagues spent on UREC work.

3. CHAIR’S REPORT
   The Chair reported that there had been a number of changes to the Committee’s membership. Introductions were made around the table and new members welcomed, as follows:
   - Carmen Levick as the re-appointed representative for Faculty of Arts and Humanities
   - Prof. John Derrick, as acting PVC for Research & Innovation (pending new PVC Professor David Petley starting role on 1 November)
   - Jason Briggs, the new Professional Services representative from Development,
Alumni Relations and Events
- Two new student representatives, Harriet Baird (Psychology) and Lauriane Chalmin-Pui (Landscape)
- Two new co-opted members, invited due to their relevant areas of expertise: Jez Cope, Research Data Manager in the Library, and Anne Cutler, Data Protection Officer in CiCS.

The Chair thanked members for their time and hard work on the Committee, particularly thanking Dr Peter Allmark who is to leave the Committee after this meeting. The Chair expressed the thanks of the Committee for all his contributions.

The Chair advised the Committee that replacements for external (lay) members are being sought. A number of applications have been received and two individuals will be selected. It is possible that the Committee may be able to appoint Dr Allmark’s replacement in his role within Sheffield Hallam University, however the Chair will report back on this at next meeting.

The review of the Ethics Policy is now nearing completion and a number of papers on the agenda contain the first draft of the revised Policy. There have been a number of activities in which the Committee has engaged with University in relation to this review. Particularly productive was a workshop on the ethics of social media research in July which was attended by 35 people, which has been very helpful in contributing to the development of new policy. The Chair and Committee expressed their sincere thanks to Dr Jo Bates from the Information School for her contribution to the organisation of the workshop and for her work on developing a new Policy Note with the Secretary’s support.

Following consideration at this meeting, the revised Policy will be circulated to all staff and postgraduate research students for comment. These comments will then be considered by the Chair and Secretary, and a proposed final version will then come back to the Committee for approval at the next meeting, with a view to this being approved by Senate by the end of calendar year.

The Chair and Secretary had been contacted by Deborah Green with regard to the government’s Prevent Duty requirement to reduce risks of radicalisation. The Minute Secretary and the Chair attended a meeting, where it was decided that this was a University issue which required a wider group be set up. The Chair and Secretary had been invited to a further meeting in October and will report back in due course.

4. **REVISED GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND STATEMENTS SECTION**
One minor typographical error was identified, in the fifth bullet point under section 4.

The Committee discussed and agreed to the proposed amendment that was highlighted in paper, and **recommended** that this paper should be circulated for consultation with staff and PGR students.

5. **REVISED ETHICS APPROVAL PROCEDURE SECTION**
The Committee discussed the definition of highly sensitive topics under section 3.1.4 and whether these should include gender identity. It was noted that the list
was intended to be indicative rather than inclusive and there was a danger of adding too many categories. However the Committee did agree that research exploring gender identity would be a highly sensitive topic. The Committee therefore recommended that the bullet point for sexuality be amended to 'sexuality and gender identity'.

Mr Briggs asked what would constitute administrative research, and whether ethics approval would be required for investigations into the employment destinations of students, or checks on the source of alumni donations. It was noted that ethics approval would not be required for these as they are part of standard internal university operating procedures.

Under section 3.1.10, bullet point 2, it was noted that there was an issue surrounding the legal definition of the 'data controller'. Ms Cutler advised that legally the University is the data controller and it could be deemed possible that data held by one research group could potentially be linked to other data held by the University. This means that data that a researcher believes that they have anonymised is not necessarily truly anonymous if it is combined with other data held elsewhere in the University. Such data should only be considered pseudonymous, as truly anonymous data cannot be identified from other data in the data controller’s possession.

The Committee discussed this issue at length, and it was noted that in the majority of discrete research projects, it was in fact highly unlikely for a research team or those reading a publication to have access to centrally held University data, or data from other discrete research projects, that might enable participants to be identified. However, there were two possible examples of when this might become an issue: in administrative research where administrative staff may be able to access centrally held data, and in research where there are particular identifiers that are widely used outside the research team (e.g. NHS numbers).

The Committee discussed other issues regarding the anonymisation of participants and agreed that the degree of granularity of the data can affect the potential for identification of individuals. For example if there was only one instance of a particular disease in a specific locality then the person is more likely to be identifiable than if there were hundreds.

The Committee recommended that R&IS develop appropriate wording for the policy in relation to the above issues, in consultation with Ms Cutler.

The Committee recommended that, subject to the necessary amendments, the revised Ethics Approval Procedure paper should be circulated for consultation with staff and PGR students.

6. **REVISED POLICY NOTES**

Policy Note no.1:

It recommended that a new paragraph be added to section 2 with reference to the discussion under the previous item regarding anonymisation of data.

Policy Note no.2:

A query was raised by Dr Levick regarding when consent can be withdrawn,
since in some types of research such as “practice as research”, there are occasions when it is impossible to withdraw input after a certain point in the creative process. It was noted that this was causing particular issues in the School of English, where ethics reviewers from some areas of the School were not familiar with these issues. The Committee suggested that Dr Levick discusses this with the Head of School and Principal Ethics Contact with a view to considering how ethic reviewers are selected, and whether a specific pool of reviewers should be identified for “practice as research” studies (the Secretary could provide support as required). It was also suggested that the School may wish to seek someone with appropriate expertise in this type of research and the ethical challenges it presents, who may be willing to write a specialist guidance paper for the UREC website.

Policy Note no.3:
The Committee recommended that some guidance is given at the end of the document regarding where a researcher might look for further information relating to risk assessment and lone work policies (e.g. the University’s health and safety website and departmental webpages).

Policy Note no.4:
The Committee recommended the re-wording of Policy Note no.4 in relation to the Data Controller issue discussed earlier in the meeting.

Policy Note no.10:
The Committee recommended that the second bullet point should be corrected (‘An historian...’).

7. **NEW POLICY NOTE – RESEARCH INVOLVING SOCIAL MEDIA DATA**
The Chair advised the Committee that the new policy note had been developed by Dr Jo Bates and asked the Committee to consider whether the policy note should be kept as one document or split into a policy note and supporting guidance paper (the Committee were reminded that a policy note is a requirement and a guidance note is not). It was noted that the formatting of the document varied from the existing policy notes, but it was agreed that the format was clear and should be kept without alteration. The Committee noted that if negative feedback was received or circumstances changed then it would be possible to review and amend the policy outwith the standard 5 year review period.

The Committee then discussed ethical issues surrounding social media research. The Chair commented that researchers should consider the timing of their research, in that concern was expressed that if live discussions were taking place there was a greater possibility of identifying people or changing the behaviour of participants or discouraging participation all together. This could have a negative impact on potential participants. The Chair advised that where possible it is always preferable to research inactive discussions. The Committee recommended that this point be added into the document.

The Committee recommended that policy note number be corrected.

The Committee recommended that sincere thanks be passed on to Dr Bates.
for all her hard work in planning and organising the workshop that contributed to this policy, and for the development of the policy itself.

Ms Cutler advised the Committee that a new data protection directive comes into EU law in 2017 and includes “the right to be forgotten”; it was noted that this needed to be kept in mind.

The Committee recommended that, subject to the necessary amendments, this new policy note should be circulated for wider consultation with staff and postgraduate research students.

8. NEW POLICY AND PROCESS RE SECONDARY USE OF DATA
The Secretary introduced the policy, noting that a proposed self-declaration process for projects involving existing data was discussed at last meeting. The Committee agreed that there was no need for an ethics review when robustly anonymised data were being used. There has been a discussion with epiGenesys and they will be able to build this into the online system.

The Committee recommended that the proposed question set out at the end of the first page of the paper should be set up as a form with a series of questions and tickboxes, enabling specific guidance to be provided depending on the circumstances. It was also noted that in the question text, ‘the researcher’ should be replaced with ‘the Data Controller’.

The Committee discussed the list of UREC-approved providers of research datasets, and recommended that this section of the document be clarified and further details be included with regard to when this applies, and the process by which a provider can become UREC-approved.

The Committee recommended that, subject to the necessary amendments, this policy note should be circulated for wider consultation with staff and postgraduate research students, and Epigenesys should be engaged to develop the self-assessment process as part of the online Ethics Application System.

9. INCREASING ENGAGEMENT WITH DEPARTMENTAL ETHICS CONTACTS
The representative for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities reported that an ethics meeting was planned for November. The Chair offered to attend if the Faculty would like him to do so.

The representative for the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health advised the Committee that a meeting took place in April and resulted in useful discussion. The Minute Secretary will liaise with the representative to arrange a meeting for late October 2016.

The representative for the Faculty of Social Science reported that a meeting was held in August; the meeting went well and there was useful discussion.

The representative for the Faculty of Engineering reported that a meeting took place in June, with another planned for a few months’ time.

The Minute Secretary reported that a meeting had been held for the Faculty of
Science in June.

The representative for the International Faculty noted that she was in regular contact with the four departments in the Faculty. The Faculty is currently arranging the meetings for the UREC visit in October, which will be attended in person by the Chair and Secretary, with one of the Faculty representatives joining each meeting remotely.

10. **REPORT OF SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH ETHICS WORKSHOP INCORPORATING FEEDBACK**
The Committee noted the contents of the report.

11. **REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE MEDICAL AMRC**
The Committee noted the contents of the report.

12. **REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS & STATISTICS**
The Committee noted the contents of the report.

13. **REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CHEMICAL & BIOLOGICAL ENGINEERING**
The Committee noted the contents of the report.

14. **UPDATE ON ETHICS QUERIES RECEIVED**
The Secretary advised the Committee that a number of queries had been received regarding the retention of consent forms. The Committee noted although the usual practice was to retain them for the duration of research, archiving so that the original data can be accessed is now a requirement for some funding bodies. The Committee **recommended** that this topic be investigated further (in consultation with Matthew Zawadzki as the University Archivist) and brought back to the Committee with a view to developing guidance.

A query that had been received involved a PhD researcher in linguistics who was using an oral history archive that had been collected, with consent for research, from a museum. However, the consent form of one of the participants had been misplaced, and the researcher wished to know whether she could still use the recording. The Chair and Secretary had consulted and agreed that the recording could be used, since there was a defined process for gaining consent such that it would be highly unlikely that the recording would have been made without consent; in addition, the researcher was only taking numerical measurements from the recording and hence it was highly unlikely that any harm would come to the participant in question.

A query had been received regarding some existing research data (recordings of speech of people with hearing aids) which had been obtained with consent for research. A research team had developed a self-administered training programme to help people in the use of hearing aids, which incorporated some of these recordings, and the team wanted to make this programme publicly available. In consultation with the Chair, it was agreed that this was beyond the terms of the original consent and there was a possibility that a participant could be identified from their voice; therefore recordings should not be used in the programme unless informed consent could be obtained for this from the participants.
Student Services had raised a query about the age of potential respondents to online surveys, and how a researcher can verify that children do not respond to surveys if they are not the target group. The Secretary referred to guidance from the British Psychological Society which stated that if undertaking higher risk research, and there is a possibility that under-age participants may respond, the researcher should consider whether an online questionnaire is the best methodology to use. In lower risk research, there are ways of reducing the possibility of under-age participants responding (e.g. asking for age details, and then based on the answer, routing those under the appropriate age range to an exit page from which they cannot re-enter).

The Secretary advised the Committee that she had confirmed that when a supervisor or ethics reviewer makes a decision as part of the ethics review procedure, the liability lay with the University and was accounted for under the University’s standard professional indemnity insurance.

15. **ITEMS TO INCLUDE IN THE SENATE REPORT**
   The Committee **recommended** that, due to time constraints the Chair and Secretary would address this item outside of the meeting.

16. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**
   02 November 2016 3pm

17. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**
   The Committee enquired regarding the availability of redacted minutes. The Secretary advised the Committee that these were currently being updated and previous meetings would be made available on the website in time for the next meeting or were available by contacting the Minute Secretary.

These Minutes were confirmed at a meeting held on..........................
..................................................Chairman