



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

Research Services.

## Minutes Meeting of the University Research Ethics Committee

**Date:** 15<sup>th</sup> November 2017

**Present:** Professor Peter Bath in the Chair

**Secretary:** Mrs Lindsay Unwin

**Minute Secretary:** Miss Anita Kenny (not in attendance)

**In attendance:** Ms Harriet Baird; Dr Jo Bates, Dr Jennifer Burr; Ms Lauriane Chalmin-Pui; Dr Richard Cooper; Ms Anne Cutler; Ms Margaret Ellis; Dr Karen Ford; Dr Carmen Levick; Dr Eleanor Stillman; Professor Ana Vivas

**Apologies:** Ms Maria Clark; Mr Jez Cope; The Venerable Robert Fitzharris; Dr Claudia Mazza; Professor David Petley; Dr Yog Upadhyay

Action by

### 1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13<sup>th</sup> September 2017

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### 2. MATTERS ARISING ON THE MINUTES

The Committee were informed that all matters arising were either complete or were in progress.

In relation to item 5, it was noted that the new Policy Note on Demonstrating the Impact of Research was approved by Senate at its meeting on 11 October 2017, and that communications about this would be sent out shortly, including to Impact leads in departments.

In relation to item 7, it was noted that the Secretary and Minute Secretary had had a very useful discussion with Dr Ford about the formatting of the survey, and that the survey is in the process of being entered into an online survey tool and would be sent out shortly. The Chair thanked to Dr Ford for her valuable help with this.

In relation to item 8, it was noted that Professor Petley has decided that the University will not continue to subscribe to the UK Research Integrity Office. This decision will be kept under review.

### 3. CHAIR'S REPORT

Update regarding research integrity fact-finding process: The Chair reported that the Secretary has facilitated discussions about research integrity at Faculty Research & Innovation Committees (looking at processes already in place to

ensure staff and students are aware of their responsibilities, challenges to maintaining a culture of integrity, and what should/could be done to address these challenges). A meeting of all Directors of Research took place on 13 November to discuss the outcomes and next steps – some issues raised were of particular relevance to the UREC, including challenges relating to the ethical implications of co-production methodologies and social media research (the new policy note on social media was mentioned in a number of Faculties as a useful development but there are still difficulties in this area), and in relation to informed consent procedures. The outcomes of this meeting will be discussed by the University's Research Strategy Group, and recommendations for action will be agreed in due course; some may involve the UREC.

Challenges in relation to co-production methodologies: Following on from above process, the Department of Urban Studies and Planning has raised specific issues relating to ethics approval for co-produced research being undertaken by PhD students and has proposed a 'preliminary ethics review process' for UREC's consideration. It was agreed that, since this proposal had been received very recently, the Chair and Secretary should discuss it first with a view to presenting it to the Committee formally at the next meeting, if deemed appropriate.

In general terms, it was noted that this may be a topic for the UREC to provide more guidance on and/or run an event in the coming year. It was noted that the level of interest in this topic across departments is being investigated; Dr Burr reported that this was likely to be of interest to researchers in SchARR, and Ms Chalmin-Pui and Dr Bates reported that co-production is a methodology of increasing importance across the Faculty of Social Sciences (Ms Chalmin-Pui agreed to provide details of an event for PGR students she attended on this topic, run by a PhD student who may be interested in being involved with UREC discussions).

General Data Protection Regulation: The Chair reported that consideration is being given to the possibility of holding briefing sessions for researchers after Easter 2018, on the implications of the GDPR for research ethics (some potential dates are currently being held in the Chair's diary for this purpose). It was noted that the Secretary will be communicating with the other Professional Services departments involved in working towards the University's compliance with the GDPR, to consider joined-up ways of communicating the requirements to the research community.

Student Services ethics arrangements: The Chair reported that, due to the restructuring of the former Student Services department, consideration is being given to arrangements for ethics review going forward in the three new departments. The Secretary reported that she had been in contact with the heads of the new departments to present the possible options (i.e. continuing with Student Services' current tailored paper-based process, requiring internal administration, or moving to the standard online process, administered by Research Services). The option of ethical review being undertaken via the new 'Elevate' learning and teaching academy had also been suggested. The Secretary will update the Committee on progress with these discussions at the next meeting.

Recent cases of breach of ethics approval: The Chair reported on the following cases of ethics approval not being obtained for research involving human participants.

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4. **OUTCOMES OF DEPARTMENTAL CONSULTATION ON TABLE OF EXAMPLES OF HUMAN PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

The Secretary advised the Committee that, as recommended at the last meeting, the draft changes to the Ethics Policy and the table of examples of human participation in a research project had been circulated to departments for comment. Responses had been received from eight departments, and in general the proposals were viewed in a positive light. A range of specific comments or queries had been raised – these were outlined in a tabled paper and discussed as follows:

1. Comment from the School of East Asian Studies – would ethics approval be required when contacting representatives of organisations to request information/documents, including asking those representatives to clarify the information given? The Committee agreed that ethics approval would not be required, assuming the information or documents would be of research interest rather than the comments by the representatives. It was **recommended** that an example to this effect be included in the relevant table. Research Services

2. Comments from Economics – the Committee agreed that researchers should not require ethics approval to report in general terms how consultations with service users and practitioners affected the study design. The Secretary reported that a definition of ‘research data’ had been included in the introduction to the table, as suggested, and that associated alterations had been made in the second and third examples for when ethics approval is not required; the Committee endorsed these changes.

3. Comments from Geography – the Committee discussed the comment from the first individual regarding the potential for the proposed policy and guidance to give the impression to the public of softening the University’s commitment to informed consent and thorough ethical review. On reflection, the Committee agreed that the introductory text for the second table already sufficiently points out that data protection requirements must be met and that the ethical treatment of people is still required, even if ethics approval is not. In response to the second comment, the Committee agreed that ethics approval would be required for student research involving human participants, even if the students are to be assessed only on the acquisition of research skills; the Committee endorsed the addition of an example in the first table to demonstrate this point.

4. Comments from Architecture – the Committee agreed that the first example in the first table applies equally to a student project or a staff project, and endorsed the related amendment to the example. The Committee noted the comments relating to the use of data obtained from spontaneous opportunities (e.g. at workshops), and agreed that this issue was sufficiently covered in the existing Ethics Policy, via the Policy Note on Retrospective Ethics Review. In relation to the comment on example two in table two, the Committee endorsed the amendments to the text to remove reference to projects not being assessed as research.

5. Comments from Psychology – the Committee endorsed the addition of an example in the first table relating to a teaching activity in which data from students would be stored for later analysis.

6. Comments from English – the Committee agreed that students who undertake research whilst on work placements still require ethics approval in line with the Research Ethics Policy, and **recommended** that the wording of the scope of the Ethics Policy Services be checked to ensure this is sufficiently clear.

The Committee **recommended** that once the above changes had been made, the proposed changes to the Ethics Policy could then proceed to Senate for approval. Research Services

5. **PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE ETHICS POLICY RE GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION**

The Committee discussed the proposed revisions, which were a first attempt to amend the Ethics Policy in line with GDPR requirements. It was noted that further changes are likely to be required as more information about the GDPR and the associated UK Data Protection Bill become clear.

The Committee **recommended** that the Chair and Secretary liaise to set up a sub-group of the Committee, to give detailed consideration to the required changes to the Ethics Policy and related guidance in view of the GDPR. It was agreed that Ms Cutler should be involved in this. Whilst there was agreement that the changes proposed in the paper seemed broadly appropriate, it was noted that the Policy Note relating to social media research in particular required careful consideration; hence it would be useful if Dr Bates could also be involved in the sub-group as the author of this Note. Chair & Research Services

The Secretary reported that Dr Mark Taylor from the School of Law, who wrote the existing Policy Note and guidance paper on data protection, had agreed to be involved in reviewing these documents in light of the GDPR. The Chair also reported that a GDPR expert from a law firm was due to give a talk in the Information School in the New Year, and may be able to offer advice.

Some specific points noted by Dr Stillman in relation to the proposed changes were passed on to the Secretary for consideration by the sub-group.

6. **PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE ETHICS POLICY RE NEW UK POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH**

The Committee discussed and endorsed amendments to Research Ethics Policy Note No.5 'Ethics Review of Health and Social Care Research in the UK', resulting from the recent publication of the 'UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research'. The Framework replaces the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care. It was noted that the proposed amendments do not represent significant changes to ethics requirements, but simply ensure that the Ethics Policy refers to the new Policy Framework, and draws on the revised definitions within it.

The Committee **recommended** that the proposed revisions to the Policy Note be put forward to Senate for approval. Research Services

7. **ANNUAL UPDATE SUMMARY AND CATCH-UP ANNUAL REPORT DATA**

The Committee discussed the paper. The total number of ethics applications dealt with during the 6-month period of February-August 2017 was 2257, compared to 2994 in the previous 12-month period. The Committee noted that this may not necessarily represent a significant increase over the whole year, since the period February-August is likely to include a larger number of submissions for postgraduate-taught dissertation and undergraduate project proposals than the period September-January.

The Committee also considered the summary of responses received from departments as part of the Annual Update process, in which departments are invited to complete an online form which asks a series of questions about the operation of the ethics review procedure, providing an opportunity to share good practices, raise any concerns and request support.

The Committee **recommended** that the good practices be circulated to all departmental ethics leads. In terms of concerns and requests relating to the online Ethics Application System, it was **recommended** that discussions be held with epiGenesys to investigate the feasibility of addressing these. It was noted that an automated amendments process within the system, requested by two departments, is already under development. It was noted that two requests are already in place (a non-blinded review process to facilitate practice-sharing between reviewers, and the requirement to indicate that scientific review is in place before submitting for ethics approval). Research Services  
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The Committee discussed the other concerns and request made by departments. In terms of the point made about PhD projects not being scientifically reviewed prior to ethics approval, the Committee mentioned that the supervisor must check the ethics application before it can be submitted, and that is a form of scientific review. It was **recommended** that a response be provided to the relevant department to suggest that it is made clear to supervisors that it is part of their role to scientifically review their students' research proposals, and to ensure that the project itself, and the ethics application, is of an acceptable standard to proceed to ethical review before signing the declaration and submitting the form. Research Services

In relation to the comment about students 'ignoring the procedure', there was a view that this will continue to happen in a small number of cases even if students, and for that matter staff, are provided with all the necessary information. The importance of awareness raising and sending reminders was discussed. It was noted that the comprehension of non-English-speaking students was an increasing concern, particularly with recent reductions in IELTS requirements for overseas students in some departments. It was noted that work is still planned on a short introductory training video to help raise awareness and comprehension of the process in departments. It was noted that there is a responsibility on staff, especially supervisors, to engage with the ethics process and ensure their students follow it where required.

In relation to a request for guidance on what is considered a minor or major change to an approved ethics application, it was noted that the planned development of an automated amendments process within the ethics system would address this issue. Research Services

The Committee **recommended** that the request for a policy on how to manage applications from students who are jointly taught/supervised should be investigated further with a view to developing a clear position statement. Research Services

The Committee **recommended** that departments which raised concerns about supervisors not being clear on how the process works should be contacted to point them in the direction of guidance documents, and to offer to give a talk for staff in the department.

In terms of the concern raised in relation to the use of the term 'vulnerable' the Committee felt that the use of the alternative term 'at risk' is not necessarily applicable across the University. It was **recommended** that a suggestion be made to the department concerned that they develop tailored guidance on this for their own staff and students, which the Committee would be happy to comment on with a view to endorsing it. Research Services

It was noted that the comment relating to data mining, artificial intelligence and machine learning would fall under the remit of the Research & Innovation Committee in terms of broader issues of research integrity and ethical governance, rather than the UREC. It was **recommended** that this comment be brought to the attention of that Committee. Research Services

## 8. INCREASING ENGAGEMENT WITH DEPARTMENTAL ETHICS CONTACTS

The representative for the Faculty of Science, Dr Stillman, reported that an event is being planned for ethics contacts across the Faculty, and there has been some discussion of potential topics for discussion. She has also been working with individual departments to provide ethics training as part of some modules.

The representative for the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health, Dr Cooper, reported that an event was being planned – he had been in contact with departmental colleagues to ensure the list of ethics leads was up to date, and had also sent emails to remind colleagues that he is available to support them.

The representative for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Dr Levick, reported that she hopes to hold a meeting for ethics contacts before the end of the Semester, and has sent emails to them periodically to ask if any concerns or issues had arisen.

The representative for the Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr Bates, reported that an event was planned for next Semester, and that there have been some discussions about particular issues e.g. relating to social media research.

The representative for the International Faculty, Professor Vivas, reported that she is in regular contact with the ethics leads for the four departments, and therefore there is no need to arrange a specific meeting for this.

It was noted that the representative for the Faculty of Engineering, Dr Mazza, was not in attendance.

The Chair offered to support the Faculty representatives in their endeavours, either through attendance of meetings by the Chair, Secretary or Minute Secretary, or through budget to cover reasonable expenses for refreshments.

9. **REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL AND PLANT SCIENCES**

The Committee noted the contents of the report. The members who attended the visit, Dr Burr and Dr Cooper, reported that there had been a query relating to how the sample of applications for discussion at the meeting had been selected. It had been explained at the meeting that the sample was selected randomly within broad groupings (e.g. staff applications, PGR applications, low/high UG/PGT applications), broadly in line with the numbers of each type that the department deals with (i.e. a form of purposive sampling).

The Committee **recommended** that the way the sample is selected be made clear in the information sent to attendees prior to each visit.

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10. **UPDATE ON ETHICS QUERIES RECEIVED**

The Secretary updated the Committee on ethics queries which had been received.

- A query had been received from a researcher who had undertaken research in an orphanage as part of her PhD, whilst she was at a different University. The study had received ethical approval from the other University at the time. The concern was that the researcher now wished to use the data collected during this study to write a book, and some of this would not present the orphanage in a good light. It was noted that it would not be possible to protect the identity of the orphanage or those who worked there, due to the specific nature of the organisation and its location and set up; the original PhD was still under embargo for this reason.

A number of issues were discussed with the researcher, including the terms of the participants' original consent; the potential for a 'public interest' argument to raise awareness of conditions for children at the orphanage; the legal implications; the potential reputational risk for the University; and the potential safety risk for the researcher should she wish to visit the orphanage again. It was agreed that she would discuss the issue with her Head of Department/Director of Research in the first instance to consider the ethical and reputational risks, and that she would seek advice regarding the legal situation.

- A query had been received relating to a bank of video recordings of a staff member's child (aged between 1 and 3 years), which she had donated on the express wish that they be used to benefit students in their research training. The Department was unsure what permissions/approvals would be required in order to use these recordings. The advice given was to ask the staff member to sign a formal consent form covering the proposed uses of the recordings, and to ensure that appropriate ethics approval is obtained for the use of them for research purposes. It was noted that a generic ethics approval may be appropriate for the use of the recordings for student research, providing the students are doing similar projects.

- A researcher working on a collaborative project had raised a query about a research/public engagement event due to take place involving a commissioned artist, and a photographer and filmmaker employed to record the proceedings. The query was about how these individuals fitted in to the ethics arrangements; it was advised that they would not be considered participants, but that it needs to be made clear to the actual participants who these people are and how they will be involved – particularly whether the images/ films made will be used for commercial purposes as well as for research purposes.

11. **ITEMS TO INCLUDE ON THE SENATE REPORT**

The Committee **recommended** that the following are included in the Senate Report: Research Services

- Proposed changes to the Ethics Policy resulting from the recent case relating to the involvement of 'experts' in research, and relating to the new UK policy framework for health and social care research (for approval);
- An update on progress in preparations for compliance with the GDPR (for information);
- A summary of the Annual Update report and actions to be taken as a result (for information).

12. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

14 February 2018

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was raised.

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

.....Chairman