



Minutes Meeting of the University Research Ethics Committee

- Date:** 12th September 2018
- Present:** Professor Peter Bath in the Chair
- Secretary:** Mrs Lindsay Unwin
- Minute Secretary:** Miss Anita Kenny
- In attendance:** Dr Jo Bates; Dr Jennifer Burr; Ms Maria Clark; Mr Jez Cope; Ms Anne Cutler; Ms Margaret Ellis; the Venerable Robert Fitzharris; Dr Carmen Levick; Dr Ana Vivas; Dr Thomas Webb.
- Apologies:** Professor Stephen Beck; Ms Lauriane Suyin Chalmin-Pui; Dr Richard Cooper; Dr Karen Ford; Professor David Petley; Dr Yog Upadhyay.

Action by

1. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16TH MAY 2018**
The Committee **recommended** that the minutes are circulated for approval outside of the meeting. Research Services

2. **MATTERS ARISING ON THE MINUTES**
The Committee were informed that all matters arising were either complete or in progress.

Under item 3 it was noted that a budget of £10,000 has now been confirmed for the coming year, and that this will enable the Committee to continue to offer the funding opportunity to staff and students to undertake small projects that promote ethics and/or integrity.

Under item 4 it was noted that the Secretary had investigated the potential implications of making the existing Information Security training provided by CiCS compulsory for all students undertaking research involving human participants or personal data. CiCS had confirmed that the modules currently required for all staff are not particularly appropriate for students, but that CiCS is in the process of developing an online module for Undergraduates. It was noted that this issue should be kept under review but that it would be beneficial for the Committee to develop its own tailored guidance for students on handling personal data in line with the Ethics Policy.

Under item 10 it was noted that the words 'Twitter ID' should be replaced with 'Tweet ID' as the data items referred to were the tweets as opposed to the author of the tweets. It was also noted that the Secretary had identified some useful guidance on the issue of when it is acceptable to publish datasets that include Tweet IDs, and will be seeking the views of a number of members of the Committee in due course with a view to the Committee endorsing the guidance.

3. CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair welcomed the following new members of the Committee:

- Representative for the Faculty of Engineering: Professor Stephen Beck from Multidisciplinary Engineering Education;
- Representative for the Faculty of Science: Dr Thomas Webb from the Department of Psychology.

The Chair also expressed his thanks to members leaving the Committee:

- Mr Jez Cope, Research Data Manager and co-opted member
- Ms Harriet Baird, student representative.

The Chair advised the Committee of recent cases of breach of Ethics Policy:

- An issue has arisen relating to a former member of staff in which interviews have been published as part of a government inquiry. There is a concern that ethics approval was not obtained for interviews carried out whilst employed at the University of Sheffield, and the issue has highlighted some potential issues with the quality of ethical review in the Department concerned. Due to a conflict of interest, the investigation is being led by another Head of Department in the same Faculty, and the Deputy Chair will represent the UREC in the investigation.
- A case involving two staff members is under investigation by the department concerned.
- Two cases involving postgraduate research students are under investigation by the departments concerned.
- A case involving two postgraduate taught students has been resolved. The students were asked to do interviews whilst on a work placement, but this was not part of their assessed work. They were not penalised as there was unclear guidance from the department and a number of issues with supervisory support. The department concerned will be reviewing its ethics procedures for students as a result of this case, and will report back to UREC on this in due course.
- A case involving a postgraduate taught student who used data collected from her students as part of her teaching duties outside the University, and used this in her dissertation, without obtaining ethics approval, has been resolved. The supervisor did not provide accurate guidance. The dissertation had not yet been submitted so the student was required to remove all reference to this data from the dissertation. The Department will also review the information about ethics provided to students as part of this course, and will advise the supervisor to attend ethics reviewer training.

The Committee were advised that a full report on ethics breaches during the past year will be provided for discussion at the November meeting; this report will include comparison to other recent years.

The Committee were also advised of educational activities planned for 2018-19:

- There will be 3 ethics reviewer workshops. This number varies from year to year based on requests and demand from departments.
- Development of an online training module to introduce research ethics and raise awareness of the need for ethics approval, particularly for students and new staff. The Committee were advised that the Committee will be able to apply for additional funding to enable development by an external provider.

- Funding opportunity to be offered again for small projects designed to promote ethics and/or integrity, run by individuals/groups based in departments/faculties.
- Further activities to be informed by the Annual Ethics Update process (an online form has been sent to Principal Ethics Contacts for feedback regarding ethics arrangements; the findings will be reported in November).

The Chair reported that it has been necessary for the University to review the arrangements for an existing Human Tissue Authority licence, since the current licence holder is due to leave the University. The Chair advised that there is a proposal for the University to be named as a Corporate Licence Holder, with an appropriate individual to be named as the 'Corporate Licence Holder contact' (CLHc). Since human tissue comes under the remit of the Ethics Policy, it has been proposed that the CLHc be made an Ex-Officio member of the Committee. The Committee endorsed this proposal. The Chair will update the Committee on progress with this proposal in due course.

4. **REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Chair asked the Committee to review the Terms of Reference.

It was noted in relation to the first bullet point in point (ii) that the Committee no longer 'accredits' the ethics review arrangements in place within academic departments.

The following revised wording was agreed:

- Auditing the ethics review arrangements in place within departments on at least a five yearly basis, including the review of a sample of applications and corresponding decisions;
- Monitoring the ethics review arrangements in place within academic departments, which includes reviewing information from departments on an annual basis;

The Committee also agreed that point (vii) should list the roles of all other members of the Committee (lay, co-opted, Ex Officio etc.).

The Committee **recommended** that subject to the necessary changes being made, the Terms of Reference should be put forward to Senate for approval. Research Services

5. **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY NOTE NO.7: ADMINISTRATIVE RESEARCH WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY**

The Secretary introduced the paper, which presented proposed changes to Ethics Policy Note no.7: Administrative research within the University. It was noted that the changes were required due to the re-structuring of the former Student Services, and the decision made by the resulting new departments to move from using the previous bespoke paper-based ethics review procedure to the online ethics system, in line with the rest of the University.

A discussion was had in which the Committee questioned whether the Policy Note was necessary given that all Professional Services are now using the online ethics system. Further discussion by the Committee concluded that it was helpful to have the Policy Note to raise awareness of the particular

circumstances encountered by Professional Services researchers. The Committee also appreciated that, unlike individual departments, Professional Services researchers were spread across the University and this had the potential to lead to problems with communication and awareness raising. The secretary advised the Committee of an ethics awareness raising event for Professional Services staff, attended by the Chair, which had recently taken place. The Committee **recommended** that the Chair and Secretary discuss how further awareness raising may be undertaken across the Professional Services. Research Services

The Committee discussed the proposed amendments to the Policy Note and the Chair asked for any further comments. The Minute Secretary proposed that in Section 2.1 the wording “they may contact the Ethics Administrators for Professional Services” should be amended to “they may contact the Principal Ethics Contact or the Ethics Administrator for Professional Services” thereby maintaining consistency with the process and hierarchy in other departments. The Committee **recommended** that this alteration be made. Research Services

The Committee endorsed the revised Policy Note subject to the above revision, and **recommended** that the document be presented to Senate for approval. Research Services

6. **ETHICS SELF-DECLARATION APPLICATION FORM AND RE-USE OF EVALUATION DATA**

The Secretary introduced the paper, explaining that the online ‘self-declaration’ process for research involving only existing, secondary data had been piloted in a small number of departments in recent months and feedback had been received. The Committee considered the suggested amendments, and **recommended** that the following changes be made: Research Services

- Question 2 in the final line: the word ‘offense’ should be replaced with the word ‘offence’.
- Question 3 should be simplified to read “Could your analysis and subsequent reporting of findings lead to the re-identification of data subject(s), by yourself or any third party (e.g. the data provider)?”.
- In the explanatory paragraph below question 3, a clearer definition of ‘data subject’ should be used, and the guidance relating to discussion with an external data provider about the possibility of re-identification should be retained. In addition, guidance should be added that highlights the possibility of third parties having access to other data that may enable identification of the data subjects, for example if an identifier used for other purposes is included (e.g. NHS number).
- In the declaration at the end of the application form, the 7th bullet point should be amended to read “This research project will not involve any primary data collection from human participants, or any research involving personal data or human tissue. In addition, the next two bullet points should be deleted since these points will already have been addressed through completion of the questionnaire.

The Committee **recommended** that the Chair reviews the amended form, with a view to endorsing this by Chair’s action so that the new self-declaration process can be added to the online system for use by all departments as soon as possible. Chair

Regarding the second item within the paper, the Secretary clarified that this related to a number of queries received recently regarding when ethics approval is needed for the use of teaching evaluation data (e.g. in presentations to conferences or at other events). This may have an impact on the self-declaration questionnaire. A discussion followed and the Committee made a number of points:

- There is a clear distinction between evaluation and research in the Ethics Policy;
- Consideration should be given to the purpose and intention when collecting the data – i.e. whether it is collected purely for teaching evaluation or whether there is the possibility of the data being used in research;
- The Committee noted that there are procedures outlined in the Ethics Policy to allow for the use of data which has been collected without ethical approval for the purposes of evaluation, and is subsequently found to be of research interest. This process necessarily relies on trusting the researcher to report their original intentions honestly.
- It was agreed that this issue does not affect the self-declaration process which should proceed as agreed earlier in the discussion. Research Services
- It was **recommended** that this issue be discussed further at a future meeting.

7. **PROPOSED REVISED SPECIALIST GUIDANCE PAPER: RESEARCH INVOLVING ADULT PARTICIPANTS WHO LACK THE CAPACITY TO CONSENT**

The Secretary introduced the paper, and a discussion was had by the Committee.

The Committee wished to express its grateful thanks to Dr Tony Ryan and Ms Jane McKeown for their work on the paper. The Committee felt that this paper and the example Participant Information Sheet were an excellent resource for both staff and students.

There was a view that some of the wording had a negative rather than positive construction, and that some assumptions are made that had the potential to cause offence in some circumstances. The Committee **recommended** that Ms Clark reviews the paper for these minor changes to wording. Ms Clark

The Committee also **recommended** that it should be made clear that the Participant Information Sheet was an example of good practice and was not expected to be used in every project; in addition, it should be made clear that this document had been developed for a project that took place before the introduction of GDPR, and hence there may be additional information that would now need to be included to ensure data protection requirements are met. Research Services

The Committee **recommended** that, subject to the minor changes outlined above, the paper should be endorsed and made available on the central ethics webpages for use by researchers. Research Services

8. **PROPOSED POSITION STATEMENT RELATING TO REQUESTS TO ETHICALLY REVIEW EXTERNAL RESEARCH**

The Secretary introduced the paper and explained that the need for this guidance had arisen from several recent enquiries in which an external organisation which is not affiliated with the University has asked for projects to be ethically reviewed

by the University. The Chair and Secretary had discussed this previously and noted that such arrangements could pose a reputational risk to the University given that the University will have no input or control over the project. The Committee were advised that currently there is one such arrangement in place, but this is with a publicly funded organisation and is appropriately governed via contracts. However, the normal position would be to refuse such requests.

The Committee noted that if external organisations work collaboratively with the University, then it would be appropriate for the research to be ethically reviewed by the University. As such, it would be helpful to include reference to this in the position statement (i.e. emphasising that the University is keen to work in a collaborative way with external individuals/organisations where appropriate, and researchers can be approached in this regard individually). The Committee **recommended** the adoption of the position statement subject to the above addition, and suggested it should be added to the University website in a suitable location. Research Services

9. **INCREASING ENGAGEMENT WITH DEPARTMENTAL ETHICS CONTACTS**

The Chair invited the Faculty Representatives to report on any activities which had taken place since the last meeting.

The representative for the Faculty of the Arts and Humanities, Dr Levick had been obliged to leave the meeting early.

Apologies had been received from the representative for the Faculty of Engineering and as a new member of the Committee had not, as yet, arranged any events.

The representative for the International Faculty also confirmed that there had been no formal activities, and that new ethics contacts had been identified with whom she would be discussing their role and any support they may require.

Apologies had been received from the representative for the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health, Dr Cooper. The Minute Secretary advised that a meeting had taken place and that Dr Cooper would report on this at the next meeting.

The representative for the Faculty of Science, Dr Webb, advised that he has sent an email to Ethics Leads and Administrators in departments introducing himself and asking for suggestions as to what would be useful to them, and he was currently awaiting responses.

The representative for the Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr Bates, reported that as a result of the recent ethics meeting in the faculty that she was liaising with Research Services to arrange ethics drop in sessions.

10. **ISSUES ARISING ON REPORTS OF UREC VISITS TO DEPARTMENTS**

The Chair noted that in the report of the visit to the Department of Politics (provided under item 13), it is recorded that the Department does not specifically provide guidance for undergraduate and postgraduate-taught students via their webpages. The Committee **recommended** that the Department should be contacted and asked to include guidance for all levels of students on their webpages. Research Services

The Chair raised a question with regard to section 3, 1.i of the report on the visit to the Sheffield Methods Institute (provided under item 16), in relation to why the UREC team advised that ethics approval may not have been required. The Minute Secretary advised that the applicant was analysing anonymised data. The Committee **recommended** that the reason ethics approval was not required should be added to the report, and the report should be re-circulated to the Institute and the UREC team.

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11. **FINANCIAL REVIEW 2017/18**

The Committee briefly commented on the Financial Review. The Secretary confirmed that the 2018 budget had been confirmed at £10,000 and that the balance from the previous year would be carried over to the current year.

12. **REPORT ON RESEARCH ETHICS PROJECTS FUNDED BY UREC IN 2017/18**

The Committee noted that reports had been received in relation to each of the small projects that the Committee had funded in 2018 (four of these were included in the papers; the final one had been provided just prior to the meeting and would be circulated to members in due course).

The Committee discussed the reports and expressed its thanks to all those involved in making them a success, and **recommended** that they be named in the Senate Report. It was noted that some but not all of the workshop leads had sought feedback from attendees via feedback forms. The Committee **recommended** that this be made a requirement for future UREC-funded projects that involve running events. It was also **recommended** that guidelines be developed for future applicants based on experiences from the pilot year. This could include general information about why applications were unsuccessful, and examples of outputs from previous successful projects (e.g. the blog post of the 'refugees' workshop), assuming the applicants gave consent for this.

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The Committee noted that a call for applications for the next round of funding would be send out shortly; it was **recommended** that the Chair and Secretary consider these and decide which projects to fund, as in the pilot year. However, the Committee noted that Dr Burr expressed a willingness to join the panel if required (e.g. should there be a conflict of interest).

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13. **REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS**

The Committee noted the content of the report and discussed a point raised under Item 10.

14. **REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE ENGINEERING IPO**

The Committee noted the content of the report and that there were no issues arising that required further discussion.

15. **REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL AND STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING**

The Committee noted the content of the report and that there were no issues arising that required further discussion.

16. **REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE SHEFFIELD METHODS INSTITUTE**

The Committee noted the content of the report and discussed a point raised under Item 10.

17. **UPDATE ON ETHICS QUERIES RECEIVED**

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

- An enquiry had been received regarding requirements for consent and what is expected in terms of a consent form. The Committee **recommended** that it should be made explicit within the Ethics Policy what is meant by the term "Gold Standard" (i.e. that the consent form should be signed by the participant giving their consent). The issue of how long consent forms should be kept was also discussed at some length by the Committee. It was noted that from a data protection perspective, consent forms include personal data and therefore careful consideration should be given to how long to keep them. It was noted that it would be useful to develop further guidance on this in due course. Research Services

- An enquiry has been received regarding a project being funded by the British Academy. It is a requirement set out in the terms and conditions of the project funding that research undertaken outside the UK must have both UK and respective country ethical approvals. The research team are aware that there is no process for obtaining formal ethics approval in the country where the majority of the research will be carried out. It was noted that Research Services has approached the British Academy and requested further clarification on how it will be possible to meet this requirement if no ethics process is in place. The Committee **recommended** that the response should be reported back to the Committee in due course. Research Services

18. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

14 November 2018.

19. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was raised.

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