

**SENATE (with Board representation)**

**UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (UREC)**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 22 JUNE 2011**

Present: Dr R Chapman (Chair)  
Dr J Cobb; Mr J Francis; Mr D Gobbett; Dr D Lilleker; Dr P Lugosi; Dr R Stillman;

In Attendance: Mr S Beer; Ms S Dowdle (Secretary); G Rayment (Committee Clerk).

Apologies: Prof J Fletcher; Dr M Hind; Dr G Roushan.

**1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (23 February 2011)**

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

**1.1 Matters Arising**

1.1.1 Membership: The Chair welcomed Ms Susan Dowdle who had superceded Dr Dickson as Secretary to the Committee. Dr Lugosi informed the Committee that he would be leaving the University and introduced Mr Beer who would take over as School Ethics Representative for the School of Tourism. The Clerk informed the Committee that Mr Sturdy (Independent Board Member) would be retiring from the Board in Autumn 2011 and that a replacement Committee member would be sought over the Summer.

All other matters arising had been actioned or were dealt with under other agenda items (below).

**2. TERMS OF REFERENCE: ETHICAL ISSUES OUTSIDE OF THE COMMITTEE'S SCOPE**

2.1 The Chair introduced this item and explained that a proposal had been made following the Committee's previous discussion regarding the process for approving or referring ethical issues outside of the Committee's scope. The question had been included in a project currently being undertaken to review the Senate and Executive committee structures. It was proposed that the Committee broaden its Terms of Reference to incorporate any ethical issues which fell within the academic remit of the Senate and that any other, non-academic, issues be referred to the proposed Corporate Social Responsibility Committee (an Executive Committee which was expected to be Chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor).

2.2 Members debated the proposal and it was broadly agreed that it was very difficult to define what additional academic ethical issues might arise and what additional skills or training might be required. It was noted, however, that very few specific cases were referred to the committee for advice or approval (most being handled at School level) so it was not anticipated that the proposal would significantly increase the Committee's workload. Rather it addressed a gap in the governance arrangements by providing a process for handling such cases. The Committee was free to co-opt additional expertise if required (for example, from the Legal Services Team). It was not proposed, at this stage, to attempt to expand the Research Ethics Code of Practice. It was agreed

that the Committee Terms of Reference be amended to reflect that it would provide ethical opinion on other ethical issues as required and that this would be reviewed in 12 months (or sooner if necessary) to assess the impact of the change. The proposed name change of the Committee to 'Academic Ethics Committee' was rejected in favour of maintaining the current committee name which was felt to better reflect the Committee's main focus.

**ACTION 1:** Amend Terms of Reference as above and review in one year. Inform the Policy and Committees Manager of the Committee's response.

**ACTION BY:** Clerk

### **3. REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH ETHICS CODE OF PRACTICE AND INITIAL ETHICS CHECKLIST**

- 3.1 Dr Stillman had sought views from Dr Dickson and School Ethics Representatives on any changes required to the Research Ethics Code of Practice or the Checklist. The only amendment suggested concerned question VIII of the Checklist. The Committee agreed that the two parts of the question should be presented as separate questions.
- 3.2 Dr Cobb tabled a short paper setting out some issues which had been raised in his School. The first concerned potential conflicts of interest which may arise if the project supervisor (who would normally be responsible for approving the checklist) was in receipt of sponsorship. It was suggested that the wording of part 6 of the checklist be amended to 'Affirmation by project supervisor or if reviewed by an ethics panel the School Research Ethics Representative'. Members debated the suggestion and some concerns were expressed regarding whether the School Research Ethics Representatives would be well placed to take on these additional approvals. It was agreed instead that the checklist be amended by the addition of a footnote reminding users of the risk of conflicts of interest and to seek advice from the School Research Ethics representative as appropriate. It was also noted that part 6 should be amended to read 'Affirmation by supervisor/School Research Ethics Representative' (i.e. 'Supervisor' should come first).
- 3.3 Dr Cobb also suggested that an additional sentence be added to the introductory section of the checklist reminding users of the need to comply with the stipulated requirements of the University's insurers. It was agreed to amend the paragraph to add an appropriately worded disclaimer to the beginning of the checklist.
- 3.4 It was agreed to add an additional comment to the checklist to identify any project specific ethical constraints that need to be monitored and observed throughout the project.
- 3.5 Finally, the Committee considered questions around the process for managing and archiving approved checklists. Members also debated whether a final 'sign-off' of the form should be a mandatory requirement, given that some projects might vary in their methodology after the initial approval has been given. It was agreed that the consideration of these questions would need to be informed by the audit of ethical approval practices which the Committee was due to consider now that the Code of Practice had been in use for over a year. It was agreed to add this to the agenda for the next meeting.

**ACTION:** Amend checklist as above and circulate.

**ACTION BY:** Dr Stillman

**ACTION:** Add 'Audit of Ethical Review Practice' to next agenda.

**ACTION BY:** Clerk

**4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING ISSUES: TRAINING FOR SCHOOL ETHICS REPRESENTATIVES**

- 4.1 Full discussion of this item was deferred to the next meeting. Members were reminded that Keele University offered specialist training in ethical issues and full details of courses available were published on their website.

**5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 5.1 There was no other business.

**Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place at 12.30pm on Wednesday 5 October 2011 in the Committee Room, Poole House.

Geoffrey Rayment  
Committee Clerk  
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