

SENATE (with Board representation)

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (UREC)

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 9 DECEMBER 2010

Present: Dr R Chapman (Chair)
Dr J Cobb; Dr D Lilleker; Dr P Lugosi; Dr G Roushan; Dr R Stillman;

In Attendance: Dr C Dickson (Secretary); G Rayment (Committee Clerk).

Apologies: Prof J Fletcher; Mr J Francis; Mr D Gobbett; Dr M Hind; Mr G Sturdy.

ACTION

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (23 June 2010)

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

1.1 Matters Arising

Matters arising had been actioned or were dealt with under other agenda items (below)

2. REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1 The Chair invited members to consider and discuss the draft revised Terms of Reference. It was agreed that the reference at point 4 to the Committee maintaining a register of ethical approvals should be deleted for the time being. While it was recognised that this would be desirable best practice, it was felt that the necessary processes and procedures were not yet in place to accurately maintain such a register. This will, however, be considered further as part of the Committees work plan for 2011/12.

2.2 Members discussed the Committee's role in respect of point 5 of the draft in respect of auditing the education and training provided to ensure it was of a good standard. It was agreed that the Committee should act in a supervisory capacity and offer guidance on the training provided by Schools to ensure that they received the necessary quality assurances in respect of training offered and that it was applied consistently. Point 5 of the draft would be amended, therefore, to read "To promote education and training on best ethical practice." and the issues of monitoring training would be considered further as part of the 2011/12 Committee work plan.

2.3 Subject to these two amendments, the draft Terms of Reference were approved for recommendation to the Senate.

GR

3. MATTERS RAISED BY SCHOOL ETHICS REPRESENTATIVES

3.1 Request for clarification or amendment: Initial checklist question 3.1 ('Has a Health & Safety evaluation/risk assessment been conducted?')

3.1.1 Dr Cobb asked the Committee to advise on the implementation of point 3.1 of the Initial Research Ethics Checklist. This asked "Has a health & safety evaluation/risk assessment been conducted?". This has caused some confusion among DEC staff as

Health & Safety and Risk Assessments (for example, of a laboratory) are carried out under a separate process. Staff and Students, therefore, sometimes thought that the checklist introduced a requirement for additional Health & Safety /risk assessments. The Committee agreed that it was appropriate for health & safety/risk assessment to fall within the ethics remit on the grounds that, for example, it would be unethical for a researcher to be allowed to work in an environment that was known to be unsafe. In order to clarify the requirement, however, it was agreed that the checklist be amended to delete question 3.I and expand question VII to explicitly ask whether the researcher or participants would be put at risk (i.e. in addition to the 'stakeholders', 'living creatures', 'the environment' and 'the economy' currently listed in that question).

CD

3.2 Request for clarification: The need for students to have CRB checks if they are just observing experts.

3.2.1 Dr Cobb explained that some School of Design, Engineering and Computing (DEC) students have previously participated in research where they had observed professionals working with vulnerable adults. Recently, however, some professionals had demanded that student observers have CRB checks completed before observing work with vulnerable adults. The Committee agreed that the University's legal team should be formally approached for advice on this issue and to provide specific guidance on the circumstances under which a CRB check is required. The Secretary would also approach the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) for advice on best practice. The advice received will be considered at the next meeting.

CD

3.3 Request for amendment: Checklist item XVI. Add reference to need for enhanced CRB checks in research involving vulnerable groups.

3.3.1 As above, this discussion will be deferred until the next meeting and then considered in light of the advice received from the legal advisers and UKRIO. In the meantime, it would continue to be the responsibility of Schools to decide on the level of CRB checks required.

CD

3.4 Request for clarification: Ethical approval processes at partner colleges

3.4.1 The Committee discussed the roles and requirements for ethical approvals in respect of students at partner colleges and agreed that, as a general principle, students registered with the University would be liable to follow the University's own academic policies and procedures, including those relating to research ethics. It was agreed that School ethics representatives contacts at partner colleges would be invited to attend the Research Ethics Forum planned for next year.

3.5 For information: NHS Research Ethics

3.5.1 Members noted the information submitted by Dr Hind which provided information on NHS Research Ethics Committees.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

4.1 Dr Cobb raised some specific concerns regarding the ethical approval process in respect of DEC and members discussed the issue of research supervisors who were reluctant to approve proposals. This might be because they felt inadequately trained in respect of research ethics or because of a perceived threat of disciplinary action if problems arose. Dr Dickson agreed to consider this further with Dr Cobb outside of the Committee. These issues could also be addressed through the Research Ethics Forum.

CD

4.2 [Confidential minute]

4.3 It was agreed that the Clerk will work with the Secretary to produce a plan of work for the Committee for the coming academic year, to include the issues issued at this meeting.

GR/CD

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place at 12.30pm on Wednesday 23 February 2011 in the Committee Room, Poole House.

Geoffrey Rayment
Committee Clerk
UREC-1011-1Minutes