THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

RKE ETHICS POLICY:
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Committee 6 June 2012(Minute RK83/11-12) and
ratified by Senate on

RESEARCH & KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE ETHICS POLICY

Introduction

1. This Research and Knowledge Exchange Ethics Policy is founded upon the values of integrity, quality, confidentiality, respect for persons and transparency. These are central to the delivery of the University mission 'to educate, to advance knowledge and to serve the public good' and informed by the University's foundation and its thinking about the educational, social and spiritual character of the University as a whole. The Policy describes how these values are embodied in the conduct of the University's research and knowledge exchange and makes explicit the requirements for the ethical conduct of research and knowledge exchange by the University's staff and students. The Policy should be read alongside the University's policies, codes, guidance and conduct documents, including the Data Protection Policy, the Equal Opportunities Policy, and the Policy on Freedom of Speech.

2. All those engaged in research and knowledge exchange have obligations to the subjects of their study, to sponsors and employers, to colleagues and to the further development and promotion of knowledge. Likewise, the University has obligations to the subjects of any study, to the governing body of any host institution, to the sponsors of the study and the member of staff engaged in the work. All research at the University of Winchester must be designed and conducted in accordance with internationally accepted ethical and professional standards, including the six key ethical principles laid out in the ESRC Research Ethics Framework (Appendix 1), and should comply with the letter and spirit of all relevant legislation.

3. The University has a commitment to considerations of environmental awareness and sustainable development. Researchers working under the auspices of the University are expected to maintain a degree of sensitivity to the potential environmental impacts of their research, to take steps to minimise negative impacts on the natural and the built environments, and to explain such steps in proposals for such research.

4. All Faculties within the University and some Professional Services groups have researchers, research students, taught postgraduate and undergraduate students undertaking research. To meet the requirements of this Research and Knowledge Exchange Ethics Policy all Faculties are required to have procedures in place for the ethics review of research and knowledge exchange projects.

5. In order to ensure that the University is operating within, and according to, current accepted guidelines, a University Research & Knowledge Exchange Ethics Committee is in operation. The University Research & Knowledge Exchange Ethics Committee is independent of any bias and compromise and is accountable to all stakeholders and representatives of the University community.

6. The University Research and Knowledge Exchange Ethics Committee carries out full review of projects where indicated, and supplements and monitors research and knowledge exchange ethics procedures within the Faculties and provides support and guidance to Faculty Research and Knowledge Exchange Committees. Faculties' ethics procedures are subject to scrutiny by the University's Research & Knowledge Exchange Ethics Committee on an annual basis.

Freedom of Speech

7. The University policy on Freedom of Speech enshrines the right of members of staff and students of the University to question and test within the law received wisdom and to put forward controversial ideas without risk to their jobs or position in the University, as is required by the 1986 Education Act. Under the University policy, all staff and students have the right to speak freely, without fear of disciplinary action or any other sanction, provided they do so lawfully, without malice and in the public interest. Challenge to accepted thinking is part of the generation of knowledge and the University upholds the rights of staff and students to publish without hindrance except where a specific written provision has been made with the agreement of all parties. At the same time, all staff and students have a responsibility not to abuse this right so as to bring the name of the University into disrepute.

8. Rather than challenging the right to academic freedom, research and knowledge exchange ethics scrutiny seeks to safeguard the rights, dignity and safety of research subjects and researchers by minimising detrimental risk-related considerations for subjects of research and for researchers themselves. Such risks include risk to a subject's personal social standing, privacy, physical safety or well-being, personal values and beliefs, their links to family and the wider community, and their position within occupational settings, as well as adverse effects of revealing information that relates to illegal, sexual or deviant behaviour.

Legal and Data Requirements

9. All legal requirements pertaining to privacy, health and safety and intellectual property should be met in accordance with the University's policies in these areas. Data supplier access requirements with regard to the secondary use of datasets must be complied with at all times, including any provision relating to presumed consent and potential risk of disclosure of sensitive information.

Ethics release and approval for research and knowledge exchange projects

10. The University subscribes to an ethic of personal responsibility by which individual researchers (and in the case of students their supervisors) should take personal responsibility for their research and knowledge exchange projects.

11. All project outlines or proposals must state whether ethical approval is required and why.

12. Ethics Release will be typically granted to projects that do not involve human or living animal subjects or handle sensitive materials, and to those that draw on documentary material already in the public domain.

13. Prior ethical approval is not required for: routine audit, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing and review within normal education requirements, service evaluations, polling on current public policy issues, and literary or artistic criticism. While data collected and stored as a record at an individual level is considered 'human data', material already in the public domain is not. For example, published biographies, newspaper accounts of an individual's activities and published minutes of a meeting would not be considered 'personal data' requiring ethics review. Nor would interviews broadcast on radio or television or online and diaries or letters in the public domain, or historical records authorised for public access by record offices.

14. Ethics review may not be required for anonymous records and data sets that exist in the public domain. This includes, for example, data sets available through the Office for National Statistics or the ESRC Data Archive. However, where data providers are likely to specify their own restrictions on the access to and use of their data, these must be complied with.

Staff

15. It is the responsibility of individual members of staff to complete an RKE Ethics form for their research and knowledge exchange projects. Where ethics release or approval is indicated, it is their responsibility to ensure that they have gained such release or approval before they commence the proposed activity. Staff will be provided with advice and staff development as appropriate

16. Staff should normally self-certify the ethical propriety of their research and knowledge exchange projects by completing an RKE Ethics form, based on their professional judgement. This should be completed at the start of each project (or where appropriate each project phase) and should indicate whether Ethics Release or Ethics Approval is required. Where full ethics review is indicated, research proposals submitted for approval should specifically address published disciplinary code(s) of practice.

17. Projects and research plans based upon data collected by members of the University while employed by other institutions and engaged on research projects which have previously been subjected to ethical scrutiny in those institutions need not go through further ethics release or approval processes unless the use of the data requires further consent from participants. Copies of ethical release or approval from the previous employer should be appended to research plans lodged with the Faculty RKE Committee.

18. Research proposals developed by members of Professional Services groups should be referred to the Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange, who will advise in which faculty the ethical dimensions of the research can best be scrutinised.

Ethics approval for standard approved procedures

19. Where staff engage in recurrent research and knowledge exchange projects, The University RKE Ethics Committee may grant block ethics approval for the activity, in place of requiring full review for ethics approval for each individual project. RKE block ethics approval of recurrent activities may follow either light touch or full review, dependent on the nature of the projects.

Postgraduate Research Students (MPhil , PhD, Professional Doctorates)

20. Research Degrees Quality Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of all MPhil/PhD/Professional Doctorate proposals to ensure that ethical standards have been upheld, and that candidates understand the ethical issues involved in their research.

21. The University Research Training Programme will include training in the ethical conduct of research.

Undergraduate and Taught Masters Student Research

22. Research undertaken as a part of an undergraduate, or taught masters, programme of study should, where at all possible, not venture into areas requiring more than light touch approval (as outlined in the section 'Ethical approval for research and knowledge exchange projects' above). In these circumstances, scrutiny leading to approval will be conducted by the project or dissertation supervisor on behalf of the programme director within whose programme the research is undertaken.

23. In the case of coursework in modules involving data collection from living subjects undertaken during placements or in the workplace by undergraduate or taught Masters students, an ethics checklist must be provided for students to ensure their attention to principles of ethical research.

24. Failure by a student to comply with the University of Winchester Ethics Policy and procedures is considered academic misconduct, and will incur penalties (see UoW Academic Misconduct policy)

Appeals

25. Where a decision has gone against a proposal or has required significant revisions to its conduct, the principal investigator has the right to request that the Faculty Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee reconsider its decision. Alternatively the principal investigator may appeal to the University of Winchester Research and Knowledge Exchange Ethics Committee, which will review the decision.

Complaints procedure

26. Expressions of concern about the conduct of research carried out under the auspices of the University should be made in the first instance to the Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange of the University of Winchester. The Director of RKE will liaise with the Chair of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Ethics Committee and the relevant Dean of Faculty as appropriate in recommending further action, which may invoke the University complaints procedure.

Staff Development

27. The Dean of each Faculty must ensure that Faculty staff understand this policy and the values that underpin it and are informed of the requirements as they relate to their role.

28. Training sessions are offered to staff through the staff development programme for the University.

Dr Bridget Egan
Chair of RKE Ethics Committee
February 2012

APPENDIX 1: ESRC Ethics Framework

The framework is based on the following key principles:

Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality.

Research staff and subjects must be fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what participation entails and what risks if any are involved.

The confidentiality of information supplied by subjects, and their anonymity, must be respected.

Any participant must do so on a voluntary basis free from coercion.

Harm to participants must be avoided.

The independence of the research must be clear and any conflicts of interest or partiality explicit.