

SENATE (with Board representation)

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (UREC)

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2011

- Present: Dr R Chapman (Chair)
Mr S Beer; Dr M Hind; Dr G Roushan;
- In Attendance: Prof M Bennett (PVC R,E&I) (for Item 3); Ms S Dowdle (Secretary); G Rayment (Committee Clerk).
- Apologies: Dr J Cobb; Mr J Francis; Mr D Gobbett; Dr D Lilleker; Dr R Stillman;.

The Committee noted that the meeting was not quorate.

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (22 June 2011)

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record, subject to the correction of Mr Beer's title.

1.1 Matters Arising

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

2. AUDIT OF ETHICAL REVIEW PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

This item was deferred to allow time for discussion of an additional item 3 (below).

3. RESEARCH GOVERNANCE AND ETHICS: FUTURE STRUCTURE AND REMIT OF THE COMMITTEE

- 3.1 The Chair welcomed Prof Bennett and invited him to share his thoughts with the members regarding the future structure and role of the Committee. Prof Bennett explained that consideration was currently being given to the effectiveness of research governance across the institution, including matters relating to ethics. It was suggested that the Committee, whilst having delivered positive benefits to date, should review its remit and membership with a view to becoming more pro-active and evangelical in its approach. This would help to ensure that the University was fully compliant and that ethics was embedded within the University's research culture. The Committee were asked to consider what would be needed in order to achieve this. Issues for consideration might include whether it remained feasible to have an independent Chair, given that such a person might not have the necessary authority to progress matters within the organisation.
- 3.2 He also explained that a dedicated post was being created to manage research governance and ethics (although as an administrative post it would not be appropriate for this person to chair the Committee). He invited initial comments on the proposals.
- 3.3 The Chair noted that it had taken a long time for the Committee to finalise the Research Ethics Code of Practice and Checklist. If constrained by the present resources and infrequent meetings, it could prove difficult to resolve these issues quickly. It would almost certainly be necessary to have more than three meetings per year.

- 3.4 Members asked Prof Bennett if he could be more explicit about any current gaps in provision that had been identified and he responded that there were no specific instances regarding failures of the research ethics process. Rather there was a general agreement that stronger and more pro-active arrangements would be beneficial to ensuring good governance.
- 3.5 Members also noted the variation in culture and practices across Schools and Prof Bennett agreed that this diversity of approaches was perfectly acceptable, but that it was important to ensure that the governance system was sufficiently robust and flexible to cope with this. Members noted that the Committee was content that the processes were in place to ensure adequate ethical consideration in Schools but acknowledged that currently the resources and systems were not in place to allow them to audit compliance with these processes. It was also agreed that a system was needed to follow-up the initial checklist, for example to take account of any variations from the original proposal which emerged as the project progressed. Members felt that this lack of 'post-checklist' oversight presented a potential risk.
- 3.6 Members debated the lack of a national standard model for good research governance. They also noted that there was sometimes a lack of clear lines of responsibility within the University in respect of complex issues. For example, it had proved difficult to obtain definitive expert opinion on issues regarding data storage.
- 3.7 The Committee noted that it received very few actual research proposals for consideration because these were dealt with at School level in accordance with the Code of Practice. Prof Bennett pointed out that this prevented any shared learning across Schools and it might be resolved by, for example, the Committee receiving an agreed number of sample projects for consideration. The Committee should consider broadening its remit to address such issues.

Prof Bennett withdrew from the meeting.

- 3.8 Members discussed the Chairing of the Committee and there was strong agreement among those present that it was beneficial good practice for the Chair to be independent of the University. Although they agreed that, as an external party, an independent Chair might lack the authority to progress issues within the University, this could be addressed through other internal Committee members and staff. The independence of the Chair was felt to provide a greater degree of objectivity and the ability to ask 'difficult' questions if necessary. The Chair informed members that, irrespective of the final decision on this point, he was aware that his involvement with a future NHS/HSC partnership may create a potential future conflict of interest. He would also have limited time available to Chair the Committee if its workload were to increase, particularly given that he gave his time voluntarily in order to undertake this role.
- 3.9 Members briefly discussed their experience of research governance models within other organisations, including the NHS and Local Authorities. They agreed that it was important to consider ethics within the broader context of research governance. Possible options for revising the membership of the Committee were considered. In addition to the Chair it was felt essential that the School research ethics representatives and the PVC (R,E & I) attend, together with the new research governance post-holder. In addition, sufficient lay representatives would be required in order to meet best practice requirements. These might be drawn from other governance bodies or other Universities. It was suggested that a source of legal advice (particularly on matters such as data protection) would be helpful for the Committee. In terms of numbers, it was noted that in some local authority ethics committees the lay membership was in the majority. Such a model would require the recruitment of 8 or 9 lay members and it was recognised that this could prove difficult.
- 3.10 In summing up, the Chair proposed that, in order to effectively monitor School's compliance with the Code of Practice it would be essential for the Committee to be notified of all research proposals (that is, anything which requires ethical review –

including dissertations). A database would be required to hold records of all ethical reviews and checks for compliance. The database itself would have to be reviewed to ensure that it was current and fit for purpose. It was suggested that a full research governance database would be required, of which ethical checks would form one part. Given the need for further discussion and the fact that the meeting was not quorate, it was agreed that an extraordinary meeting would be arranged for early December. This meeting would focus on proposals to revise the membership upwards and expand the Committee's remit as per Prof Bennett's suggestions, and also the resources required to achieve the desired outcomes.

ACTION 1: To arrange a further meeting for early December to progress the matters raised, and to inform absent members of developments through the circulation of these minutes.

ACTION BY: Committee Clerk

ACTION 2: All members are asked to consider the suggestions arising from the discussion and formulate their thinking in preparation for the December meeting.

ACTION BY: All members

4. **MATTERS RAISED BY SCHOOL RESEARCH ETHICS REPRESENTATIVES**

- 4.1 Dr Hind noted the new NHS ethics policy which had taken effect from 1st September and the Chair confirmed that, in essence, this changed the requirements in respect of research undertaken in non-NHS premises. This could now be undertaken in accordance with local requirements and permissions.

5. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 5.1 There was no other business.

Dates of future meetings

Early December 2011	Tbc.	
Wednesday, 8 February 2012	12.30 – 14.00	Committee
Wednesday, 30 May 2012	12.30 – 14.00	Committee
Wednesday, 3 October 2012	12.30 – 14.00	Committee
Wednesday, 6 March 2013	12.30 – 14.00	Committee
Wednesday, 12 June 2013	12.30 – 14.00	Committee

Geoffrey Rayment
Committee Clerk
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