

Research Ethics Committee

CONFIRMED

Wed 26 October 2022, 14:00 - 15:30

Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Board members

John Stevens (Chair), Donald Gobbett (Deputy Chair), Richard Berger (Deputy Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities REP), Sam Hills (Academic Staff Member), Tanya Le Roux (Academic Staff Member), Joseph McMullen (PGR Representative), Andy Mercer (Academic Staff Member), Sam Porter (Chair, Science, Technology & Health REP), Natalie Stewart (Doctoral College Representative), Suzy Wignall (Acting Secretary/Clerk)

Absent: Chris Chapleo, Jamie Matthews, Jonathan Parker, Liam Wignall, Zulfiqar Khan, Sarah Bell

Meeting minutes

1. Welcome and Apologies

John Stevens

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and heard apologies for those absent.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting - Wednesday 2nd March 2022

John Stevens

The committee approved the minutes and confirmed that they were a true record of the meeting.

3. Conflicts of Interest

John Stevens

None were raised.

4. STH REP Report

Sam Porter

There was not much to report apart from thanking the Panel Secretaries for their support. The main issue reported to the committee was the lack of Deputy Chair as noted in the report. Two new members from the Professoriate appropriate to act as Deputy Chair have joined the Panel in order to gain further experience, with another round of recruitment to be undertaken. Professor Porter confirmed that the new system of assigning a lead and second reviewer to each Panel application is working quite well. No questions were posed by committee members.

5. SSH REP Report

Richard Berger

There was not much to report apart from the issue of blanket approval requests that have been received for programmes of research.

Professors Porter and Berger were asked about any issues with researchers, to which Professor Porter highlighted a resolved issue with a complaint received from a researcher. The researcher in question was not satisfied with the quality of feedback given. Both Panel Secretary and Chair discussed the issue and responded in defence of the review, confirming that the quality of submissions should be of a reviewable standard.

6. Clinical Governance Update

Information

Verbal

Suzy Wignall

There was not much to report other than projects and applications continue as usual, with the Compliance and Licensed Activities Committee (CLAC) signing off governance workflows for aspects such as safety reporting, risk assessment and data management. For the next CLAC, a working group for research under the Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (i.e. devices) needs to be compiled. The Chair asked about this working group and whether it would

impact on the REC.

Dr Mercer was concerned that this group would be deciding on matters related to the ethics review, and felt that representation from the REC would be beneficial to ensure there is oversight in case of this.

7. Clinical SOP Update

Decision

The updated SOP was approved.

Suzy Wignall

8. Safety Reporting - SOP/Reporting Form Update

Discussion

Mr Gobbett thought it would improve readability in paragraph 3.1, to remove 'to whom', and replace with 'where'.

Dr Mercer felt that with regard to laboratory tests, equipment failure cover would be beneficial.

In the report form, Mr Gobbett was concerned that the document doesn't cover risk to researcher. The Committee Secretary will check whether this is covered by the BU Health And Safety process.

9. Undergraduate Programmes - ethics review

Decision

An issue was identified for the committee's attention where some teaching units have their own ethics processes in place rather than going through the central process. These are generally level 5 units. The unit flagged consists of an exercise run in teaching time where students go out on campus to collect data and then bring it back to discuss amongst the class.

Currently the Research Ethics Code of Practice does not cover the aspect of data collected not for the purpose of final year dissertation. Professor Berger queried whether REC was happy for the ethics review to be dealt with locally or to ask students to complete an Online Ethics Checklist. There were concerns as students could be asking participants questions that are distressing and in extreme cases there could be harm caused or reputational damage.

Dr Le Roux highlighted that their level 5 unit has a unit leader and there are around 100-150 students enrolled. At the end of the unit these students need to deliver a research proposal which familiarises them with the process. Dr Le Roux agreed that the Online Ethics Checklist is a good pedagogical tool but thought it may not be as practical in the classroom and asked whether it would change considerations if the students simply posed questions to each other. Professor Berger didn't think it would and was conscious of preventing students from doing more in-depth research.

Professor Porter clarified that in the Social Sciences department, for level 5 students only go as far as the proposal stage, then at level 6 an Online Ethics Checklist is completed for their dissertation. Professor Berger queried whether at level 5 the students collect data, with Professor Porter confirming the goal was to create a proposal ready to operationalise at level 6.

Dr Mercer felt that clearer guidance could be created to outline what could be done without an ethical review so that these units can go forward, in turn preventing a large volume of work for reviewers. Dr Mercer highlighted that an abundance of information is available publicly that students may access without needing to gather their own data, with the more in-depth research being undertaken at level 6.

Professor Porter agreed and highlighted that something is required, especially in terms of audit of the BU ethics process and recommended that students are instructed to undertake lower risk research to cut down the work of the Ethics Programme Team. The committee agreed that it is about students learning a skill rather than gathering empirical data.

10. UG/PGT low risk ethics review process

Decision

Dr Hills raised concerns surrounding direct supervisors approving undergraduate dissertations and confirmed that there has been a move within the Rehabilitation and Sports Sciences department for students to do dissertations that align with topics proposed by the supervisors. Consequently, newer staff are uncomfortable signing off their own student's ethics, especially if something was to go wrong, and especially if they are an author on the paper written following completion of the research.

A buddy system was proposed where colleagues may approve the submission rather than the direct supervisor. The committee discussed whether a function in the Online Ethics Committee admin system could be incorporated where another supervisor signs off the submission, making it a reciprocal arrangement. A system change would be required to accommodate this issue, and would have to be planned into the designated update periods allocated by IT Services.

Sam Hills/Suzy Wignall

11. Research Ethics Code of Practice

Decision

Suzy Wignall

Regarding the change to 10.3.3.1 (transfer of projects into BU), the committee felt that this could be conveyed in the chair reports at each REC meeting.

Secondly, section 5.4.4 of the code needs to be amended following earlier discussions as outlined against item 9 as currently it is vague and only seems to apply to level 6 projects. The committee agreed that the following text could be added - 'for a dissertation or project'.

12. Terms of Reference Yearly Review

Decision

John Stevens

The ToRs for the REPs were approved with a lack of training identified which needs to be addressed.

Regarding the REC ToRs, the committee felt it would be beneficial to recruit another independent lay member in the interest of succession planning. As above, an issue around training was identified which needs to be addressed.

A typo was identified with a 'd' to be added to the last 'provide'.

13. Matters Arising

John Stevens

No matters were raised.

14. Any Other Business

John Stevens

None was raised.

15. Date of Next Meeting - Wednesday 1st March 2023

John Stevens