

REPORT TO COUNCIL FROM THE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (2014-15)

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) is a sub-committee of the University Research Committee. In addition to setting policy and reviewing the ethical aspects of research projects UREC provides advice and guidance on ethical issues and encourages individuals, departments and faculties to submit queries for discussion.

At present every application for ethical approval from both staff and research students is submitted to UREC for review by either the full committee, a sub-set of the committee, the Chair or their representative.

Review of current procedures

In 2014-15 the committee has focussed on reviewing all aspects of the internal ethics procedures to ensure that they are as efficient as possible. The aim is to streamline the procedures whilst ensuring that the system is sufficiently robust and meets the expectations of the funding bodies and the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. In particular the following areas have been considered:

Requirements for completion and submission of ethical review forms

UREC recognised that the procedures for ethical approval have evolved over time and have become inefficient. Work has been ongoing to restructure the checklists and application forms with the following aims:

- removing unnecessary repetition;
- removing the requirement to answer questions that are not relevant;
- where possible removing the requirement for signed hard copies of forms;
- ensuring that reviewers receive adequate information to conduct their review.

The majority of the new procedures will be introduced in Autumn 2015, alongside the implementation of the new research costing and pricing tool (Agresso ACP).

UREC sub-committees

The Chair led a discussion and review of the current sub-committee structure, proposing that there should be a call for new committees and that both new and existing committees should have the opportunity to gain delegated authority. At present there are two UREC sub-committees, one in the Faculty of Health and Medicine and one in the Psychology Department. Neither committee has the authority to approve ethics applications. The applications are reviewed at local level and recommendations for approval are referred to UREC for approval by the Chair or their representative.

A working group was set up in order to give this matter further consideration. The group recommended that a framework should be drawn up detailing what is expected of UREC sub-committees and what is required of those local committees that wish to obtain delegated authority. When granting delegated authority UREC will need to have appropriate measures in place to ensure the quality and consistency of review across the university.

Discussions are ongoing, but it is anticipated that Lancaster will move to a devolved system with the majority of ethics applications reviewed and approvals granted at local level. The primary role of UREC will be as an over-arching policy setting and monitoring committee.

Interim ethical review process

Whilst the new structure of ethics sub-committees is being developed and established an interim ethical review process has been introduced for less complex applications. This interim process moves away from a dependence on the Chair or their representatives to conduct these reviews and

the associated bottle-neck in the system. The new process assigns three members per week as a reviewing team who meet during the course of the week to discuss those applications submitted in the previous week. It is hoped that this process provides a number of benefits:

- it provides the consistency of review that is expected by funding bodies;
- members meeting to review applications allows sharing of knowledge;
- having three reviewers from different disciplines brings different perspectives;
- the structured system means that applicants' expectations can be managed and they can be given a clear indication of the expected turnaround time.

In order to facilitate this process and to relieve the pressure on existing members the UREC membership has been expanded.

Training

Training for postgraduate students:

An introduction to ethics forms part of the induction programme for postgraduate research students during which they receive details of a range of ethics and integrity related resources. Research Training Programme modules on ethics are provided by all faculties which provides the opportunity for some of the content to be discipline specific. Research students receive details of the training provided by all faculties and have the opportunity to attend events organised by any faculty. The Research Training Programme Steering Group includes representatives from all faculties and has an overview of the training available and considers where joint training modules are required. Online learning resources in ethics are provided for distance learning students.

Training for staff:

Organisation and Educational Development (an arm of Human Resources that supports the professional and career development of Lancaster staff) periodically runs a half day workshop on Ethical Research and Research Integrity. Other events that take place for staff include away days organised by the Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee and training events within the faculties for new staff.

Training available to staff and students:

- Lancaster University subscribes to the Epigeum Research Integrity training modules which are available to all staff and students.
- The Library organises a Research Bites series of short, informal sessions for the research community (staff and students) aiming to deliver useful information, start discussions and answer questions. A number of the topics have relevance to the understanding and application of research integrity issues.
- A Researcher Ethics Network has recently been initiated which is open to all staff and research students with lunchtime seminars with a mixture of presentations and open discussion.

Research misconduct: allegations and investigations

One allegation of misconduct has been received in 2014-15; this is currently being investigated in accordance with the process outlined in [Research Ethics and Research Governance at Lancaster: Procedures](#).

Sarah Taylor (UREC Secretary) pp Stephen Decent (Chair of UREC)
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