Report to Council from UREC

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) is a sub-committee of the University Research Committee. In addition to 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. Each year around 350 applications from staff and 200 applications from research students are reviewed by UREC (either by the Chair or a full committee). In addition, around 50 applications are received each year for preliminary review prior to submission to an NHS Research Ethics Committee.

In 2012, the higher education sector adopted 'the concordat to support research integrity'. This concordat seeks to provide a comprehensive national framework for good
research conduct and its governance. Signatories to and supporters of the
concordat support research integrity, and are committed to:
• maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
• ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and
professional frameworks, obligations and standards
• supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity
and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development
of researchers
• using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research
misconduct should they arise
• working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress
regularly and openly

One of the requirements of the concordat is that institutions should make a public statement annually to demonstrate that they *have procedures for governing good research practice, and for investigating and reporting unacceptable research conduct that meet the requirements set out in the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2012) and the Research Councils' Code of Conduct and Policy on the Governance of Good Research Conduct (2009) and any subsequent amendments.*
 This document contains the assurance questions that have been agreed by the research councils and a draft response from Lancaster.

Assurance Question 1:
Please confirm that you have policies and procedures in place that meet the above requirements, including processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct. How often are these reviewed and when were they last reviewed?

Draft LU response:
The University's policy and procedures covering good research practice and research misconduct are incorporated in two documents:
  • Research Ethics and Research Governance at Lancaster: a code of practice
  • Research Ethics and Research Governance at Lancaster: Procedures

These documents are reviewed annually by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at the first meeting of each academic year. UREC is a sub-committee of the University Research Committee therefore any proposed amendments to the documents are submitted to Research Committee and finally to Senate which has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of research at Lancaster. The UREC remit and membership are also reviewed annually.

Assurance Question 2:
Please provide the web link to these policies and the name of the senior officer responsible for dealing with cases of misconduct.

Draft LU response:
The documents are available to members of the university from
http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/research/lancaster/ethics.html
The senior officer responsible for dealing with cases of misconduct is the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research or the University Secretary. The first point of contact for external queries regarding research misconduct is the Research Support Office; contact details are publicly available from
http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/research/contacts.html

Assurance Question 3:
How are these policies disseminated to staff? Please indicate if any special provision is made for new employees (including post-graduate students) and also how staff awareness is maintained.

Draft LU response:
The Code of Practice and Procedures documents together with other resources are available to all members of the university from the Research Support Office website. The Code of Practice is sent to all new research and academic staff with their contract of employment.

Staff submitting research proposals for external funding must complete a checklist which signposts the documents. For each awarded research grant the Principal Investigator (PI) must confirm that they have read the Code of Practice and will abide by it with respect to that specific project. The PI must also confirm that they will provide other members of the research team (staff and students) with guidance on the good practice and ethical standards that are expected in accordance with the Code of Practice.

Staff are asked to confirm annually that all the research they conduct (whether externally funded or not) complies with the Code of Practice and is submitted for ethical review where appropriate (including all research involving human participants, risk to the research team or environmental risk).

The Research Support Office runs training sessions on research ethics procedures (including the Code of Practice) for staff and students on an ad hoc basis as required or requested.

Assurance Question 4:
Please outline any actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues (for example, postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews).

Draft LU response:

Lancaster University subscribes to the Epigeum Research Integrity training modules which are being made available to all staff and 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. 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.

Assurance Question 5:
How many formal investigations of research misconduct have been undertaken in the past three years which relate to researchers funded by or responsible for funding from Research Councils (including supervisors of postgraduate awards)?

Draft LU response:

One investigation into a case of alleged misconduct has been undertaken in the past three years; the case was not upheld.

Assurance Question 6:
The Research Councils expect that the research they support will be carried out to a high ethical standard. Please explain the arrangements you have in place for reviewing that any research funded by the Research Councils is planned and conducted in accordance with such ethical standards.

Draft LU response:

Lancaster has different levels of ethical review proportionate to the nature of the research.

- Projects that do not involve any specific ethical risk factors (no human participants, no apparent risk to research team, no apparent environmental risk etc) are self-certified by the PI and counter-signed by the Head of Department (or Dean where the PI is also the Head of Department). The PI must confirm that they have read and will abide by the Code of Practice and that they will give appropriate guidance to their research team.

- Projects that involve human participants but do not raise specific concerns (e.g. adult participants from a group with no specific vulnerabilities completing a questionnaire with subject matter that is not sensitive or contentious) are reviewed through a light touch process. The PI is required to submit a summary of the project together with details of how participants will be recruited and copies of participant information sheets, consent forms etc. This information is reviewed by the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee who may:
  - approve the project;
  - request further information;
  - refer to a small number of UREC members for advice;
  - or request that it is submitted for review by the full committee.

- Projects that have been approved by a recognised external ethics committee may also follow a light touch route to obtain university authorisation.

- The Department of Psychology and the Faculty of Health and Medicine have their own research ethics committees. Projects from these areas are reviewed by the local committee which then submits recommendations for approval to the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee. As the UREC Chair acts as final approver independence from the project's

host department is maintained. The department or faculty committee may also refer projects to UREC for review if they do not feel able to review at local level for any reason.

- Projects that do not fall into any of the above categories are submitted for review by the University Research Ethics Committee. The PI is required to submit a detailed application form, the full proposal and a complete set of supporting documents (advertisements, participant information sheets, consent forms, interview schedules etc).

In addition, any significant changes to the protocol during the life of the project must be submitted for approval through the appropriate route and any ethical issues that arise during the life of the project must be reported to UREC.

UREC also encourages staff to submit projects to UREC at an early stage in their development in order to receive advice on potential ethical issues.

Annex 1 UREC terms of reference

Annex 2 UREC membership

Annex 3 Code of Practice Quick Guide

Appendix 1: Remit of University Research Ethics Committee

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

(a sub-committee of the Research Committee)

Terms of reference

1. To consider all ethical issues arising in relation to the conduct of research in the university, and/or by members of the university, including:

    (i)   research on people or human admixed embryos, referred to it by researchers or officers, and to make recommendations;

    (ii)   guidelines about the use of and access to information of a personal or confidential nature gained as a result of research activity and to monitor their implementation;

    (iii) issues of privacy, confidentiality and ethical behaviour between researchers and human participants, and to make recommendations;

    (iv)   guidance on payments and incentives with particular reference to the Bribery Act;

    (v)   guidance compiled by regional, national and international bodies (e.g. European Parliament Committee on Research; the hospital trusts in the North West); and the university's guidance to researchers in the context of this body of external information;

    (vi)   where necessary, the suitability of funding sources, and to offer guidance;

    (vii) the implications of research which inadvertently provides information about illegal activities or where the contractor offering the research wishes to impose unreasonable constraints, that are manifestly unworkable or ethically objectionable, and to offer guidance;

    (viii) issues related to the ethical responsibilities of the university's researchers, both staff and students, including regulatory and non-regulatory aspects likely to arise from their research, and to draw up guidelines and disseminate them;

2. To assess projects requiring review, including preliminary review of projects where it is requested that Lancaster University acts as sponsor under the terms of the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care;

3. To receive reports on work in progress where appropriate;

4. To receive reports from faculties where appropriate.

5. On behalf of the Senate, to confirm that projects meet the University's ethical standards and requirements as set out in the Code of Practice on Research Ethics and Research Governance.

Membership of the University Research Ethics Committee

Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research
University Secretary
Director of the Graduate School
Associate Dean for Research, Arts and Social Sciences
Associate Dean for Research, Management School
Associate Dean for Research, School of Health and Medicine
Associate Dean for Research, Science and Technology
Two additional members from the Faculty of Science and Technology
Two additional members from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Two additional members from the School of Health and Medicine
Two additional members from the Management School
Director of the Centre for Bioethics and Medical Law
Four lay members including at least one person directly connected with the NHS
Student member

Research Ethics and Research Governance at Lancaster: a code of practice

QUICK REFERENCE DOCUMENT

Individual researchers have a key responsibility and accountability for their research, and for maintaining the highest standards of ethical principles and practices. The University anticipates that all its members will act ethically, but nevertheless has safeguards in place for use in the event of alleged or actual research misconduct.

Legislation	Methodology and Dissemination
- Research must be legal - Comply with national and international ethics codes of practice - Comply with Human Rights Act - Comply with University guidelines for ethical review and approval - The University does not impose restriction on the legal external bodies with whom research can be conducted, but funding from sources that may be controversial should be carefully considered according to guidance in the code of practice	- Uphold moral principles - Open and transparent - Findings presented honestly and accurately without withholding information - Correct attribution of intellectual property - Changes in methodology submitted for review by relevant committee, as appropriate
Responsibility for researchers and students	**Responsibility for participants**
- Appropriate training provided for staff and students involved in the research - Ensure all staff and students involved in the research are familiar with the Code - Protect the rights of fellow workers and society at large - No research shall be undertaken that involves undue risk to the health, safety or well-being of any person involved	- Protect the rights and well-being of participants - No research shall be undertaken that involves undue risk to the health, safety or well-being of any person involved - Procedures should be drawn up in advance where research involves vulnerable participants or animals. - Alternatives to involving vulnerable participants or animals should always be considered

Link to full Code of Practice