

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE
UNIVERSITY ETHICS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2013

INTRODUCTION

The University Ethics Committee (UEC), together with its associated Departmental Ethics Committees (DECs) and School Ethics Committees (SECs) in the HASS Faculty, was established to consider general ethical issues relating to the University's teaching and research when such activity involves investigations on human beings. It aims to provide impartial advice to participants and investigators and to protect the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of all actual and potential participants. The UEC is the body responsible for giving ethical approval for investigations. Ethical approval, together with insurance cover and sponsorship approval, must be in place before any such investigation can start.

This paper represents the annual report from the UEC for 2013. Information on policy developments, approval of applications, monitoring of projects, training, and risk management is provided in the report. Research and Knowledge Exchange Services (RKES) took over the UEC Secretariat role for the UEC from Corporate Services in February 2010. During the period covered by this report, Helen Baigrie and Murray Dickson of RKES undertook the UEC Secretariat role.

The UEC was supported with respect to insurance by Tim Faenrich and Aileen Stevenson in the Finance Office.

The Convener of the UEC is Dr Steve Kelly, who has undertaken this role since 1 August 2012.

This report will be considered by Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee at its meeting on 9 September 2014.

1. Progress against targets

The UEC does not have specific targets, but there are a number of areas of activity which are essential to the effective and efficient operation of the UEC and which are monitored.

2. Code of Practice

The 'Code of Practice on Investigations Involving Human Beings' was significantly revised in 2009. In 2011 a sub-group of the UEC was formed to undertake a further revision to the Code of Practice to incorporate changes to legislation, University processes and other relevant issues. The current Code of Practice, the sixth version, was finalised in September 2013. Subsequently, a re-launch event was held in March 2014. Departmental and School conveners and members were invited and many attended.

3. Website

The UEC website continues to be regularly updated by the UEC Secretariat with useful advice, submission deadlines and key documents. The UEC website is the principal source of information for applicants and is promoted as the key source of information on ethics to staff and students. The UEC also has a presence on the R&KE Portal.

4. Training

The following training activities were undertaken:

AREC's (now AfRE, Association for Research Ethics) Annual Conference and AGM took place on 15th November 2013 in London. Strathclyde is a member. UEC Convener Dr Steve Kelly and Lay Member Dr Barbara West attended.

Training supplied: Two half-day training sessions were run by UEC, in February and November, under the Research Development Programme, for all researchers. They were undertaken by Dr Steve Kelly, UEC Convener. An additional training event for the Business School was run by Dr Calvin Burns, UEC member from SBS.

Further training events are planned for 2014 and it is intended that Departmental and School Ethics Committee Conveners will be invited to attend UEC as observers.

5. Association for AfRE (Association for Research Ethics)

The University has continued its membership subscription to AfRE. The UEC Secretariat has arranged electronic access to AfRE documents, including the Research Ethics Review Journal, for all UEC members.

6. Approval of Applications

52 applications were submitted for UEC approval in 2013. Three were withdrawn and 49 approved. Of the three withdrawn, one was referred to the relevant DEC/SEC. Additionally, five NHS applications were endorsed by the Convener on behalf of UEC during 2013, following approval from NHS itself.

The UEC Secretariat in RKES approved sponsorship for 14 externally-funded applications that had obtained ethical approval through their DEC/SEC

On average, applicants received feedback on their initial application within six working days of the UEC meeting at which they were reviewed. In all cases the feedback included requests for further information and amendments to the application form or supporting documentation – no applications were approved at first review.

On average, excluding outliers (applicants who took several months to respond to the UEC feedback), applications were approved within 23 working days of the UEC meeting. Please note that this figure includes the time taken for applicants to resubmit their amended documentation, or the subsequent requests from the Convener for further clarification in response to amendments (at least half of the resubmissions required further work). The majority of final amendments, once received, were approved by Convener's Action within two working days.

These turnaround times are well within the guidelines stated on page 23 of the Code of Practice, "From the time of receipt of an application, it would normally be hoped that the Committee will make its decision within 60 days. However, if the Committee seeks further information from the investigators then the timescale is suspended until the Committee is satisfied that all its points of concern have been answered."

7. Monitoring of Projects

The UEC monitors the progress of each of the applications which is approved by it, both annually and at the end of each protocol.

8. Monitoring of Departmental/School Ethics Committees

The UEC also monitors the activities of all the DEC's and SEC's on an annual basis. The DEC's/SEC's are required to provide an annual report to the UEC each year summarising the progress with individual applications and providing a formal opportunity to raise relevant issues with the UEC. This allows the UEC to keep abreast of any concerns that DEC's/SEC's may have.

9. CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Some researchers have reported difficulty in obtaining appropriate Protection for Vulnerable Groups (PVG) clearance from Disclosure Scotland. Lorna Dougall is the university's PVG liaison and noted that Disclosure Scotland were not considering research posts to be regulated work and therefore not requiring PVG though further discussion on this matter was planned. In order to ensure that the Code of Practice offers the most accurate advice on PVG, a working party consisting of Steve Kelly as Convener, Laura Steckley, Vice-Convener and involved in child protection issues at CELCIS and Shirley Andrews, bringing expertise from Police Scotland has been formed. The remit of the working party is to liaise with Lorna Dougall, HR and Disclosure Scotland in order to formulate the most appropriate amendment for the Code of Practice.

10. UNIVERSITY ETHICS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

UEC continues to have a wide range of expertise and knowledge across its membership.

Dr Steve Kelly (Psychology) has been Convener of UEC since August 2012.

There are currently (August 14) four Vice-Conveners supporting the work of the UEC: Professor Niamh Nic Daeid (P & A Chemistry), Dr Phil Riches (Biomedical Engineering), Dr Laura Steckley (School of Applied Social Science) and Mr Douglas Blyth. Mr Blyth is a solicitor and a Lay Member.

Mr Nicholas Shearer, an IT and business management consultant currently employed by J.P.Morgan, joined UEC in March 2014 as a Lay Member.

Ms Shirley Andrews, Head of Training at Police Scotland, joined the committee in May, 2014 as an Expert Member, having also held posts in local authority departments of education.

Professor Nic Daeid will be leaving Strathclyde for a new post in October 14 and will be replaced as Vice-Convener by Dr Helen Marwick (Education).

There will then be two vacancies for internal members.

Professor John Blackie (Law School) will be leaving UEC at the end of 2014 and will be replaced by Professor Kenneth Norrie of the Law School.

Alexander Cameron CBE, a former Director of Social Work, has expressed an interest in becoming an External Member, possibly from the beginning of 2015.

The current (August 14) membership of the UEC is included as Annex 1.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT

The UEC takes risk management very seriously and risk assessment is a constant part of its work, as members evaluate potential risks to human participants and the potential benefit of the research in their consideration of each application. Individual risk assessments for each ethics application are carried out by the UEC Secretariat in RKES, who also confirms if the University will sponsor each project. A representative from Finance reviews all applications to UEC and liaises with the University's insurers to establish whether sufficient cover is in place for each application. Researchers must not commence their work until all aspects of this process are confirmed. This is confirmed in email contact with researchers.

The UEC Secretariat consulted Safety Services on which, if any, changes to references to Health and Safety and Risk Management were required in the Code of Practice. Safety Services provided useful advice in relation to current recommendations on risk assessment as well as Health & Safety. The Code of Practice and Application Form have been updated to include, amongst other points, information for applicants that the University's Risk Management Framework document should be consulted and use of the risk-rating tool within it applied.

12. BUDGET

The UEC has a running costs account with the budget currently (in August 2014) standing at £518.28. The main uses of the budget are:

Cost of AfRE membership

Cost of travel and attendance by Convener and members of UEC at Ethics training events

Travel of lay and external members to attend UEC meetings

Admin costs – printing, copying, stationery

Catering (tea/coffee) for UEC meetings and training events

One annual lunch for members

Savings were made in the current year by opting to headhunt potential Lay/Expert members with appropriate expertise rather than paying for advertising in the local press, which cost £2000 during the last recruitment round. It is anticipated that this method of recruitment will be used where possible in future given its current success.

As the UEC budget has not been credited with funds for some years and the balance is low, the Convener has consulted with Professor Bedford on what action is needed to arrange future funding.

13. NEXT STEPS

A copy of this report will be provided to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee for approval at its 9 September 2014 meeting.

ANNEX 1

UNIVERSITY ETHICS COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP August 2014

Name	Category/Faculty	Date appointed	Membership ends
Convener			
Dr S Kelly	School of Psychological Sciences & Health	01.08.06	31.07.15
Internal Members			
Professor J Blackie	Law School (Emeritus)	01.05.05	31.12.14
Dr C Burns	HRM	01.08.08	31.07.14
Dr L Steckley (VC)	School of Applied Social Science	01.09.09	31.07.15
Professor N NicDaeid (VC)	Forensic Science	01.09.03	31.09.14
Dr P Riches (VC)	Biomedical Engineering	01.08.07	31.07.16
Dr James Windmill	Electrical & Electronic Engineering	01.06.10	31.05.16
Dr Helen Marwick	Education	01.01.12	31.12.14
Ms K Ross	Biomedical Engineering	02.08.12	31.07.15
Dr S Rasmussen	School of Psychological Sciences & Health	02.08.12	31.07.15
Dr L Chamberlain	SIPBS	02.08.12	31.07.15
Vacancy			
External Members			
Mr J Wallace	Pharmacist (Retired)	01.08.13	31.07.16
Dr G Hamilton	Occupational Health Physician/ Honorary Senior Lecturer (GU)	06.09.12	31.07.15
Ms Shirley Andrews	Head of Training, Police Scotland	01.05.14	30.04.17
Lay Members			
Mr D Blyth (VC)	Lay (Solicitor)	01.11.06	31.07.16
Dr B West	Lay (Retired GP)	02.08.12	31.07.15
Mr N Shearer	Lay (IT Consultant)	01.03.14	28.02.17