Research Policy Group : Ethics
Note of Meeting
7 April 2014

Present: J Seckl (Chair), D Bruce (External Member), S Cranston, B Fisher, M Frame, A Jackson, H Macandrew, K Melia, S Monro (Court Representative), S Riley, T Slaven
In attendance: S Cooper, L Forsyth, P McGuire, J McMahon, J Stapp
Apologies: R Williams

1a. Note of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

The Group agreed the note of the previous meeting.
D Bruce requested that all abbreviations and acronyms be explained in full.

2a. Report from the College of Humanities and Social Science

The Group discussed the report from HSS.

It was acknowledged that this year’s Report was significantly more detailed and comprehensive than previous years’. There was however some variance in Schools’ submissions and it was suggested that Schools be asked to follow a template while still allowing for School-specific variations.

S Monro asked whether there had been any convergence issues surrounding the merger with the Edinburgh College of Art. A Jackson advised that there were some umbrella policies that steered the merger talks and that there had been no ethics issues arising.

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<td>For next year, J McMahon to develop a suitable template which follows a ‘free-text’ as opposed to ‘tick box’ format.</td>
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3a. Report from the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

The Group discussed the report from MVM.

J Seckl commented on the recent negative publicity surrounding animal research at Imperial College London, and the need to be vigilant, ensuring that all research is carried out to the highest standards. P McGuire added that there had been a recent special meeting of the College’s Animal Welfare Ethics Review Body (AWERB) to see what could be learned from this episode.

S Riley noted that there had been quite a lot of student research activity of late, which had highlighted some issues including inconsistencies surrounding research passports, difficulties surrounding access to patient records, and changes in the regulations surrounding biobanks and repositories. S Monro and K Melia highlighted the importance of ensuring that research does not fall between NHS and University procedures, and that it was clear whose procedures were being followed.

4a. Report from the College of Science & Engineering

The Group discussed the report from S&E.

D Bruce indicated that he found the table very useful and the fact that the Report separated integrity from ethics. He asked how much training the key ethics contacts in the Schools had, to which B Fisher responded that the College had organised a recent meeting on research integrity and ethics, attended by the Chief Executive of the UK Research Integrity Office. Further, the Institute for Academic Development had also made some material available.
T Slaven recommended that there should be single points of contact for Chemistry and Engineering.

T Slaven advised that she had been responding to audit queries from the Research Excellence Framework team at HEFCE, specifically surrounding attribution in publications with multiple authors. B Fisher indicated that he was not aware of any reported malpractice in the past year, but clearly it was important to continue to raise awareness.

K Melia emphasised the importance of training with a view to creating a culture of integrity. J Seckl added that all staff should be aware of their contractual obligation to conduct research to the highest standards, in accordance with Universitas 21 principles.

| Action | B Fisher to approach Directors of Research in Chemistry and Engineering with a view to them nominating single points of contact. |

5a. Report from the Student Survey Ethics Committee

The Group noted the report from SSEC.

B Fisher asked at what level student surveys need approval. J Stapp replied that all surveys circulated at College or above should be approved by the SSEC. School-level surveys do not require authorisation. Both undergraduate and postgraduate surveys required approval.

S Cooper remarked that she had found SSEC very helpful advising on survey design. K Melia replied that more resource was available, enabling a more proactive, useful service.

J Seckl asked whether the approval of 5 surveys per year was about the right number. J Stapp noted that it depended on the nature of the survey and the questions being asked. He added that the University might already have the required data without the need for a further survey.

6a. Any Other Business

i. S Monro indicated that he was encouraged by the way the University had raised the profile of ethics issues over the past year, and how it had developed a culture where all activities are being looked at from an ethics angle. This view was endorsed by D Bruce.

ii. S Riley underlined the importance of ethical training at undergraduate level. He was encouraged by how students are taking ethical issues seriously.