UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH ETHICS & GOVERNANCE
IN ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES & BUSINESS**

**SCHOOL ETHICS OFFICERS:
BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE AND DESCRIPTION OF DUTIES, 2023-24**

Best Practice Information for Research Ethics Officers

The following guidance has been produced to reflect the duties and workload commitments of School Ethics Officers, including guidance from the Standard Operating Procedure.

The guidance is not intended to be exhaustive, however it should be useful for both Ethics Officers and Heads of School when considering the requirements of the role. Heads of School have committed to ensuring that the commitments of School Ethics Officers are reflected in workload allocation.

School Ethics Officers

Each School will designate an Ethics Officer and, normally, a Deputy[1]. The responsibilities of the School Ethics Officer are to:

- Be a member of the Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business and participate in discussions of the Committee[2];

- Complete the University's online research ethics training course (and the mandatory online Research Integrity training course). If required, provide training on research ethics to colleagues and students across the institution (Deputy Ethics Officers will not be expected to provide training);

- Ensure that there are effective mechanisms to bring any policy, guidelines or procedures developed by the University concerning the good conduct of research and research ethics to the attention of staff and students in the School. Mechanisms must make it clear that it is a University requirement that policies, guidelines and procedures are followed;

- Ensure that the Standard Operating Procedure and any additional guidance developed by the Committee or the institutional Ethics Advisory Group or the University Research Committee are communicated to all staff and students within the School (this includes ensuring that all colleagues are aware of their own responsibility to apply for ethical review of research proposals as required by the Committee Policy);

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[1] The decision on whether or not to appoint a Deputy Officer will lie with the Head of School. The Deputy Officer will represent the School at Committee meetings, share the responsibilities of the review process and help raise awareness of research ethics at School level.

[2] The Committee will meet on two occasions per year.

- Be aware of relevant professional guidelines and other external guidance relevant to all disciplines within their School, and bring details of developments to the attention of staff and students within their School and to the Committee[3];

- Advise faculty and students on matters relating to ethical scrutiny;

- Keep ethical issues in the School under review, and normally be members of School Research Committees or equivalent;

- Manage and monitor the implementation of research ethics procedures within the School;

- Liaise with School staff to ensure that appropriate records of applications and decisions for ethical review of UG and PGT research activity are kept by the School[4];

- Report to the Head of School and the Committee where appropriate, on research ethics issues;

- Undertake the review of applications for the ethical approval of research activity[5,6];

- Provide advice to colleagues on matters relating to research ethics (including advising on the completion of the application form for the ethical review of research).

Period of Office

The period of office will normally be four years, with the opportunity to renew/extend the appointment by agreement with the Head of School and the Chair of the Committee.

Additional Support

Newly appointed School Ethics Officers will receive mentoring from a Committee member. Further support and guidance will also be available from the Chair of the Committee.

School Ethics Officers will be required to familiarise themselves with the University's Research Governance Handbook, which provides a framework for research ethics and governance at the University and applies to all academic disciplines.

School Ethics Officers should also be aware of the requirements of the Research Data Management Policy and associated guidance. Further information on Research Data Management can be obtained from the Research & Knowledge Exchange webpages on Staffnet, or contact the Information Governance Office (dpa@abdn.ac.uk) or the Digital Research Team (digitalresearch@abdn.ac.uk).

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[3] Each School Ethics Officer must ensure that the Committee is informed of ethical expectations specific to research areas in their School. This will ensure that reviewers are aware of any potential inconsistencies/differing research methods between research areas.

[4] These records should be retained by the School for a period of six years following the end of the student's programme of study.

[5] This includes full review of Staff/PGR applications from within the School and full review of applications from colleagues/PhD students in other Schools associated with the Committee. Occasionally this may involve reviewing applications submitted from other disciplines, as a reciprocal agreement has been reached with the other Ethics Committees that applications for ethical review of research should be submitted to the Committee with the most appropriate knowledge of the ethical issues specific to the research project.

[6] Ethical review of UG/PGT applications from within the School will normally be undertaken by the Supervisor, with the SEO available to provide further guidance where necessary.

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