

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATIONS (WORKTRIBE ETHICS) –POLICY AND PROCEDURE ON APPEALS

1. POLICY

This Policy and Procedure was approved by University Research Committee on 12 September 2023.

The University is committed to providing a high level of support to its students and staff at each stage of the research ethics application process. In that context, it is recognised that on occasion, research ethics applicants (staff and students) may wish to appeal against a decision made by one of the University's internal Ethics Boards.

2. SCOPE

This appeals policy covers ethics applications submitted to the Worktribe Ethics process for the following **internal** Ethics Boards/Committees:

- Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business (CREGASSB);
- Physical Sciences & Engineering Ethics Board (PSEEB);
- School of Psychology;
- School of Biological Sciences;
- School of Medicine, Medicinal Sciences & Nutrition (SERB);
- Rowett Ethics Board

(For appeals relating to decisions made by the Ethics Review Board (animal welfare) or the clinical research ethics approval process, further guidance should be sought from the appropriate Board.)

3. DEFINITION OF GROUNDS

The internal Ethics Boards may decide not to approve an application for ethical approval (deemed an 'Unfavourable Opinion' for applications submitted via the Worktribe Ethics process) if the research project is considered to be in contravention of the University's research governance framework and associated policies and procedures on ethical conduct in research (including Board level guidance, etc).

An applicant may appeal against the decision of one of the internal boards to not approve an application for ethical approval of research. **Applicants should in the first instance discuss the matter with the Chair of the appropriate Ethics Board.** In the main, it is expected that agreement will be able to be reached by maintaining a supportive dialogue between applicants and the Ethics Board. It is expected that all possible means of informal resolution have been exhausted **prior** to the submission of an appeal, including wherever possible/appropriate (e.g. in relation to subject expertise if this is material to the original decision), by the Ethics Board Chair asking another internal Ethics Board to review the ethics application.

In exceptional cases (where discussion fails to resolve the issue satisfactorily), an appeal may be submitted to the University's [Ethics Advisory Group \(EAG\)](#).

Appeals against decisions reached in relation to ethics applications will only be permitted under the following circumstances:

- (i) It is believed the University's review procedures were not followed, and the failure would cause reasonable doubt as to whether the Ethics Board would have reached the same decision had these irregularities not occurred;
- (ii) It is believed that the Board making the decision did not have the authority to do so;
- (iii) It is believed that the Board making the decision did not act impartially (i.e. there is demonstrable evidence of prejudice, bias or inadequate review).

4. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

The University is committed to promoting equality and diversity in all its activities. Further information can be found in the University's Equality & Diversity Policy Statement. Any appeal which involves any allegation of discrimination (*see Glossary of Terms*) against another student or a member of staff will be taken very seriously. Any allegation must be substantiated with evidence and will be investigated. Unsubstantiated claims will not be considered. Any allegation of discrimination that is found to be vexatious (*see Glossary of Terms*) may result in disciplinary procedures.

The University will monitor appeals to ensure that no discrimination exists either in the actions of the University which have resulted in the case being brought, or in the manner in which the case is handled by the University.

5. THE APPEALS PROCESS

5.1 Stage 1: Submission of Appeal

The applicant (henceforth known as 'the appellant') will be required to submit (via email) to the Clerk of the Ethics Advisory Group or the Chair of the Ethics Advisory Group (normally within 10 working days of receipt of the Ethics Board's final decision, i.e. after all attempts at informal resolution have been exhausted):

- A completed appeals form (see Appendix), together with any additional information that may be relevant;
- If the appellant is a student, the appeal must be co-signed/co-submitted by their Supervisor.

5.2 Stage 2: Appeal Panel

The Chair of the Ethics Advisory Group will identify two other members of staff with appropriate expertise and with no conflict of interest to form a panel to consider the appeal. An external member may be appointed where it is not possible to constitute an appropriate panel within the University.

The appeals panel will consider whether the grounds for appeal are consistent with those stated in Section 3. If the panel determine that the grounds are not consistent, the appellant (and their supervisor, if the appellant is a student) will be informed that the appeal has not been upheld and the reasons for that decision.

If the panel determine that the grounds for appeal are consistent with those stated in Section 3, the Chair of the Ethics Advisory Group will obtain relevant information from the Chair of the relevant Ethics Board and, if necessary, may also request further clarification or additional evidence from the appellant. The Chair of the Ethics Advisory Group will share this information with the other panel members. Normally up to 15 working days will be allowed for this stage.

Each panel member will independently consider the appeal and record their recommendation (i.e. 'upheld' or 'dismissed'). Where differences of opinion arise, the panel will meet in person to discuss the case. Where differences of opinion persist, the majority view will prevail. Normally up to 10 working days will be allowed for this process.

5.3 The Decision

The Chair of the Ethics Advisory Group will inform the appellant (and the supervisor where the appellant is a student) and the Chair of the appropriate Ethics Board of the panel's decision and any remedial action required. Such actions may include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following:

- Where procedural irregularities are determined to have occurred but have not impacted on the outcome of the ethics application, the appeal will not meet the grounds for appeal in Section 3 and will therefore not be upheld;
- Re-submission of the ethics application for review by the appropriate Ethics Board by members not involved in the original assessment of the ethics application;
- Where there is insufficient subject expertise available within the appropriate Ethics Board, or otherwise review by that board is not possible, a review will be undertaken by members of another internal Ethics Board.

The decision of the Appeals panel, which is not subject to further appeal within the University, shall normally be communicated in writing to the parties to the Appeal within three working days of the decision being reached.

6. DISCIPLINARY AND STUDENT PROGRESS MATTERS

If any appeal raises any issue which is appropriate for review under the relevant University codes of practice, policies covering student or staff discipline or undergraduate student progress, these issues will be considered taking account of the relevant policy. Separate proceedings may be triggered as a consequence of such an appeal. The applicant who initiated the appeal will be informed that other procedures have been engaged.

Where separate procedures are started, e.g. a staff or student disciplinary process, any evidence (or findings) from the appeal that is relevant to the other process may be submitted.

7. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR APPELLANTS

The Aberdeen University Students' Association ([AUSA](#)) can provide independent advice, assistance or support to students at every stage of the appeals process (see Glossary of Terms). Initial enquiries can be directed to the AUSA Student Advice Centre in the Student Union Building in person, by telephone to 01224 274200 or by email to ausaadvice@abdn.ac.uk.

Supervisors may also be able to provide further support and guidance on student appeals.

For staff appeal, Academic Line Managers and/or Campus Trades Unions may be approached.

APPENDIX

APPEAL AGAINST AN ETHICS APPLICATION DECISION MADE BY AN INTERNAL UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN ETHICS COMMITTEE (WORKTRIBE ETHICS APPLICATION PROCESS)

1. Applicant Details

Applicant Name	
School	
University email address	
Title of Ethics Application	
Project Start Date	
Project End Date	
Funder (where relevant)	

For Students Only	
Name and email address of Supervisor	
Degree registration (e.g. MRes, MSc, PhD etc)	

2. Grounds for Appeal

Tick as appropriate	
It is believed the University's review procedures were not followed, and the failure would cause reasonable doubt as to whether the Ethics Board would have reached the same decision had these irregularities not occurred	
It is believed the Board making the decision did not have the authority to do so	
It is believed that the Board making the decision did not act impartially (i.e. there is demonstrable evidence of prejudice, bias or inadequate review)	

3. Summary of appeal

Name of University Ethics Board	
Date of Ethics Board's Decision	
Worktribe Ethics Application ID ¹	
Additional Documentary evidence attached (if applicable e.g. including correspondence relating to any informal attempts at resolution)	

¹ Available under the 'Scope' tab within the Worktribe Ethics application. This will enable the panel to access the relevant ethics application

Please provide a brief description of the reasons for this appeal (no more than one side of A4)

4. Declaration

I declare that I have read the **Research Ethics Applications – Policy and Procedure on Appeals** and that the grounds for my appeal are compliant with Section 3.

Principal Investigator/Student

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor (for student appeals)

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor's Comments

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Related	Research Governance Handbook
Subject / Description	This policy and procedure provides information on the process to be followed by Worktribe Ethics applicants for ethical approval if they wish to raise an appeal against an Ethics Board's decision to award an 'Unfavourable Opinion' against an ethics application.
Equality Impact Assessment	
Section	Research Knowledge & Exchange
Theme	Research Governance
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