Appendix 20 – University Ethics Committee

Terms of Reference

Purpose / role:

- To facilitate the highest standard of ethics in the conduct of research, including as part of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, across the University's research and teaching community.
- To advise researchers and teachers on ethical matters and support and advise the research and teaching community on ethical matters related to research, including research undertaken as part of teaching activities.
- Such advice is primarily achieved through the review of applications to the University Ethics Committee seeking a Favourable Ethical Opinion (FEO). An FEO is proof that the design of a project upholds the expected ethical standards of research practice at the University of Surrey.
- Matters pertaining to reputational risk and ethical choices concerning what types of research the University is prepared to undertake are determined elsewhere. Such determinations may be enacted by this committee.

Working methods:

- Applications for ethical and governance review are submitted throughout the year by members of the research community and those engaged in teaching-related research. Such applications are classified as either Higher, Medium or Lower risk, as determined by an applicant's response to the SAGE-Health Data Research tool. A risk-based approach is used to determine the level of review each application receives. This process is managed by RIGO. In Higher risk applications, three reviewers are normally assigned, and a consensus meeting held to ensure there is collective agreement on any issues raised from the review. In Medium and Lower risk applications, one or two reviewers may be assigned depending on the particular application and the expertise/capability/training needs of available reviewers. At least one experienced reviewer is assigned to all applications. In exceptional cases the Chair may refer a Higher Risk application to the Steering Group for comment prior to review, or direct to the Executive Board to determine the University's appetite for risk in a particular case.
- All applications to the University Ethics Committee are subject to a parallel Governance review to ensure that all policy, regulatory and legal obligations have been met.
- For Amendments to Applications of an existing FEO, where a researcher wishes to amend data collection schedules, inclusion/exclusion criteria, or to supplement/amend a protocol, a review will either provide feedback in order to meet the ethical requirements of the amended research study or protocol or provide an updated FEO.

Applications to the UEC are coordinated by RIGO (currently via SharePoint and University email). The Chair meets with members of the RIGO team each week to monitor UEC submissions, the status of on-going reviews, and to resolve issues as they arise. Major items are to be recorded in an Action Log and a Concerns Tracker. These are made available to members of the Executive Board and relevant others as needed.

Membership

The University Ethics Committee (UEC) comprises the UEC Steering Group and UEC Review Panel.

The UEC Steering Group comprises:

Ex officio members:
Chair of University Ethics Committee
Head of Research Integrity and Governance Office (RIGO)
Director of Health and Safety, or nominee

Appointed members:
Deputy Chairs, appointed by the Chair, one per Faculty
The Chair can co-opt additional members as required for specific purposes.

UEC Review Panel:

Ex officio members:
Chair of University Ethics Committee
Head of RIGO

Appointed members:
Deputy Chairs
University Review Panel members
Lay Review Panel members

In Attendance:
RIGO Administrator, *Secretary*
RIGO coordinators/officers, as requested by the Chair

Terms of appointment

Nominated members shall serve an initial term of three years and shall be eligible for continuation for one further term of two years, following which there must be a break of one year before any further re-nomination.

Deputy Chairs (one per Faculty) are drawn from within the University Ethics Committee membership based on relevant experience and appointed by the Chair.

University Review Panel members are drawn from the University research community comprising postgraduate research students, early career researchers, academics, and research-related staff. Members either volunteer their services or are appointed by Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Executive Deans or Associate Deans for Research and Innovation.

Lay Review Panel members with relevant expertise are drawn from the community and appointed by the Chair.

The number of review panel members and overall composition of the University Ethics Committee each year depends on anticipated demand for UEC reviews, as determined by the Chair. In the academic year 2020-21, there are circa 40 active members of the review panel.

Operation

Meetings

- The UEC Steering Group meets once per semester to consider strategic issues, review proposals to change processes, review on-going operational issues and assist the Chair in running the UEC, for example, where there are problematic cases that require expert input.

- The University Ethics Committee Review Panel meets once per semester to consider operational issues associated with the running of the UEC and to discuss any proposed changes or other issues put forward by the Steering Group. At times of peak demand, the Panel Meeting may also include a Live Review session where applications to the UEC are reviewed by groups of reviewers in order to ensure timely responses to applications.
- Agenda topics for Steering Group or Panel Meetings to be forwarded to University Ethics Committee Chair for inclusion.
- Papers to be circulated 10 working day prior to Steering Group and Review Panel meetings.
- Non-members to be invited to University Ethics Committee Steering Group meetings as requested by the Chair.

Information sharing of information and resources

- Information and guidance for applicants available on RIGO webpages.
- University Ethics Committee SharePoint area: management aspects restricted to University Ethics Committee Steering Group members.
- Confidential items: refer to University Ethics Committee Chair
- Items of relevance: informed via University email to University Ethics Committee membership
- The Chair will, from time-to-time as needed, inform the research community of developments of process or any other issues via articles on NetNews and via Faculty Research bulletins.

Definition of terms

- UEC: University Ethics Committee
- RIGO: Research Integrity & Governance Office
- EGA: Ethics & Governance Application
- SAGE-HDR: Self-Assessment tool for Governance & Ethics: Human & Data Research

Quoracy

The quorum for the University Ethics Committee shall be half of current members. In the case of an equal vote, the Chair shall have a casting vote.

Decision making outside of meetings

Decisions of the University Ethics Committee may exceptionally be taken by Chair's action. At the discretion of the Chair, decisions of the UEC may also be passed by email circular, or similar electronic means, provided all members are copied into the electronic exchange. A copy of the decision signed by the Chair shall be treated as properly passed by a meeting duly convened and held.

The date of the decision shall be the date upon which the Secretary confirms to all members that it has been passed. The Secretary shall be responsible for ensuring that decisions made by email are reported to the next meeting and for retaining an appropriate record.

Reports to

Research Integrity & Governance Committee (RIGC).