

REC Activity Report 2006-07

(Note: covers REC activity from February 2006 to September 2007)

Committee Membership

In the period of activity from February 2006 to September 2007, there have been six retirements, and six new appointments:

Current Members:

- Mr. Brian Trench (Chair)
- Dr. Donal O'Mathuna (Vice-Chair)
- Dr. Declan Raftery (Secretary)
- Ms. Fiona Brennan (Rapporteur)
- Dr. Donal O'Gorman
- Dr. Mary Shine-Thompson
- Dr. Peter Nowlan
- Ms. Cathy Fowley (appointed May 2006)
- Ms. Chanel Watson (appointed May 2006)
- Mr. Deiric O'Broin (appointed May 2006)
- Dr. Gabriel Flynn (appointed April 2007)
- Dr. Finbarr O'Sullivan (appointed April 2007)
- Dr. Michael Parkinson (appointed April 2007)

Retired Members:

- Ms. Eve Merton (April 2006)
- Ms. Grainne Healy (May 2006)
- Dr. Jane Horgan (October 2006)
- Fr. Paul Tighe (January 2007)
- Dr. Robert O'Connor (February 2007)
- Dr. Adam McAuley (from April 2007)

At end September 2007, there are two vacancies to be filled - one law expert, one scientist.

Meetings

The full committee met twelve times during the period in question. In addition, a subcommittee comprised of the REC Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Rapporteur met between full meetings to discuss procedural issues.

Ethical Reviews

The REC processed 97 applications for ethical review. Full committee review was required for 21 of those applications, 40 were processed by expedited review, 30 were processed via the notification procedure and the remainder were noted by the REC (already approved by an external REC).

Procedures

The following procedural adjustments were made:

Notification Procedure

The REC introduced a procedure for notification to the committee of

1. low-risk social research projects, and
2. dissertations on undergraduate programmes in all disciplines.

In respect of low-risk social research projects, in which personal information that is deemed not sensitive is being collected by interview, questionnaire, or other means, the committee requires researchers to state in one page, before the project starts:

- ☐ the purpose of the research
- ☐ the information being sought
- ☐ how potential participants will be made aware of the research
- ☐ the form of consent being used, if any
- ☐ the approval/s sought or secured from other sources, if any
- ☐ the risk to which researchers or participants are exposed, if any

It is anticipated that this notification procedure will apply to many of the types of projects that are currently given expedited review. The original REC Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures will be updated to reflect developments in the review processes of the committee.

Research Ethics Advisers

Schools and research centres were asked to nominate a Research Ethics Adviser to fulfil the following functions in their respective units

- ☐ Act as point of contact for the Research Ethics Committee, and for colleagues on research ethics issues
- ☐ Inform themselves on common issues of research ethics and on the procedures of the Research Ethics Committee
- ☐ Provide advice, as they see themselves able to, to colleagues on these issues and procedures
- ☐ Oversee arrangements for notification to the Research Ethics Committee on dissertations on undergraduate programmes (see above)

An information session for these individuals took place in March 2007. A shared mailing list was also set up to facilitate the discussion of ethics issues that have arisen within schools and centres, and to ascertain whether there was any discipline-specific assistance required - e.g. additional documentation/guidelines not currently available on the REC website.

Guidelines on Best Practice in Research Ethics

All DCU research should be guided by a set of fundamental ethical principles. These principles were illustrated in a document entitled "Guidelines on Best Practice in Research Ethics" which was made available to staff via the REC website.

Standard Protocols and Templates

In order to streamline the application process, the REC, in conjunction with the School for Health and Human Performance, agreed standard protocols for common medical procedures undertaken in the course of research projects. The REC also introduced a template of ethical justification for blood sampling associated with studies conducted within DCU. It is anticipated that similar protocols will be developed for other disciplines, in association with the relevant Schools.

Ethical Awareness

Following the success of previous workshops on research ethics issues, the REC decided to focus activity on particular themes. The first workshop in this series took place in November 2006 and addressed ethical issues in research with children and young people. This workshop was held in association with the Research Ethics Committee of St Patrick's College Drumcondra. The second workshop took place in June 2007 and addressed ethical issues in research sponsorship. Both events were well received by the research community. The guest speaker presentations were made available to staff via the REC website.

As part of the Researcher Development Programme organised by the Office of the VP for Research and the Training and Development department in Human Resources, the REC Chair presented a session on DCU research ethics policies and procedures to DCU researchers.

With regard to relations with Research Ethics Committees in associated colleges, representatives from the DCU associated colleges attended a DCU REC meeting in April 2007. Each college proceeded to give a short oral presentation, outlining their REC experiences to date, and the difficulties or dilemmas encountered en route. A detailed discussion ensued. It was agreed that it was beneficial for the REC's to keep in regular contact regarding ethical issues, and that future joint training initiatives would be desirable.

Future Work

- Working with Research Liaisons in Schools and Centres to raise ethics awareness in DCU, providing them with the appropriate support materials and training.
- Further liaison with the ethics committees of DCU's associated colleges, to explore the benefit of common policies and procedures and the value of joint training sessions.
- Liaison with REC's elsewhere in Ireland with a view to joining a shared programme of REC member training
- Ongoing development of the REC website, including links to research ethics reference material.