



Manchester
Metropolitan
University

ACADEMIC ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

AUGUST 2004

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out a framework through which staff and students of the University give consideration to the ethical implications associated with any academic activities with which they engage. The Academic Board's Ethics Committee will keep the framework and its application under review and, where considered necessary, further Guidance Notes consistent with the principles and requirements of the framework will be produced so as to inform and disseminate good practice.

2 Preface

- 2.1 The Board of Governors approved the establishment of the Academic Board's University Academic Ethics Committee (UAEC) in February 1999. The key functions of the Committee are to propose ethical guidelines which will inform the work of the University and to advise the Academic Board on policies in relation to ethical issues.
- 2.2 This framework has been informed by practices and processes operating within the University, many of which themselves draw from the principles and requirements of external bodies.
- 2.3 This ethical framework must be read and operated in conjunction with such other policies of the University's Board of Governors or Academic Board as may have a bearing on the matters raised herein.
- 2.4 This framework does not attempt to define or alter the obligations of staff or students under English law (please refer to Appendix 1).
- 2.5 The framework points to a set of obligations to which all staff and students should normally adhere as principles for guiding their conduct. The purpose is to make staff and students aware of the ethical behaviour. The framework does not, therefore, provide a set of answers to all ethical dilemmas, and the researcher is required to make specific decisions on the basis of careful consideration of all contributing factors.

3 Ethical Statement

- 3.1 In its vision the University aims to "behave professionally and ethically in all [its] activities." The University therefore requires that its staff and students engaged in scholarly and other activities are aware of the ethical implications of such activities and are committed to discharging their responsibilities to the University in an ethical manner conforming to the highest professional standards of conduct.
- 3.2 Issues of morality, safety and personal and institutional liability affect the University at many levels. The University must be seen to be acting with propriety and care for the welfare of staff, students and the wider public.

- 3.3 The practice of ethics is about conducting one's business in a disciplined manner within legal and other regulated constraints and with minimal impact on and detriment to others.
- 3.4 It is the responsibility of staff within the University to consider the ethical implications of all academic activities using the framework as a guide to fulfilling their obligations.

4 Definitions of Terms

In the context of this framework the following definitions of terms apply:

- 4.1 **Academic Activity**
Research, project, investigation, enquiry, survey, placement, or any other interaction with sentient beings, including the use of data derived from that interaction.
- 4.2 **Researcher**
A member of staff or student engaged in academic activity.
- 4.3 **Participant**
Individuals and/or organisations that come into contact with the University through academic activity.

5 Principles for the Consideration of Ethical Issues

- 5.1 Staff and students shall be made aware of their responsibilities and obligations to consider ethical issues arising from their activities or study at or on behalf of the University.
- 5.2 The ethical implications of academic activities shall be assessed through, inter alia, a consideration of:
- Any sensitive data that may be collected, with particular regard to matters such as age, colour, race/ethnicity, nationality, disablement, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, personal medical records and political beliefs
 - The arrangements for the security of data, participants and confidentiality
 - The arrangements for ensuring the anonymity of participants
 - Whether any payments are to be made to the participants or other rewards granted and the integrity of that provision
 - Whether any special indemnification arrangements may be required
 - The desirability of an objective assessment being conducted of the ethical implications of the proposed academic activity by a competent person who has no direct association with it or the researcher(s) involved
 - The ethical issues/guidelines of any third party involved in the University's activities e.g. as a provider of research funding.

- 5.3 Where applicable, academic activities must comply with the following requirements:
- The size of sample proposed for any group enquiry shall not be larger than justifiably necessary
 - Lines of enquiry must be pertinent and must not cause undue distress
 - Any relationship, other than that required by the academic activity, between the researcher(s) and the participant(s) must be declared and shall not normally result in approval of the academic activity
 - Participants shall be made fully aware of the true nature and purpose of the study except where there is satisfactory justification (such as the likelihood of the end results being affected) for withholding that information
 - Participants shall have given their explicit consent except where there is satisfactory justification for not obtaining this consent
 - Participants must be informed at the outset that they can withdraw themselves and their data from the academic activity at any time and they must not subsequently be put under any pressure to continue
 - Due processes shall be in place to ensure that the rights of those participants who may be unable to assess the implications of the proposed work are safeguarded
 - Risks to the researcher(s), the participant(s) or the University shall be assessed
 - Any potential risk to the University must be outweighed by the value of the academic activity
 - If any academic activity is concerned with studies on activities which themselves raise questions of legality there must be a persuasive rationale which demonstrates to the satisfaction of the University that:
 - The risk to the University in terms of external (and internal) perceptions of the worthiness of the work has been assessed and is deemed acceptable
 - Arrangements are in place which safeguard the interests of the researcher(s) being supervised in pursuit of the academic activity objectives
 - Special arrangements have been made for the security of related documentation and artefacts.
- 5.4 Effective procedures to consider ethical issues within the University shall be established at the Faculty/ Department/ Group or Unit level which shall comply with any specific requirements by the Academic Board or the UAEC on its behalf. Such procedures shall provide for:
- An Ethics Check Form for affirming that ethical issues have been satisfactorily addressed and, where appropriate, granting assent (a common university proforma is to be used for this purpose)

- Published requirements which describe the approvals process to which each academic activity is to be subject
- Published information on designated staff with responsibilities for managing the procedures
- Procedures for intervention where breaches of guidelines are alleged
- The need to submit to the UAEC statistics relating to academic activities which have been subject to such procedures
- The review of mechanisms for considering ethical issues to ensure their currency, effectiveness and consistency with best practice.

6 Mechanisms for the Consideration of Ethical Issues

- 6.1 An appropriate entry to be included in the Staff Manual drawing the attention of every member of employed/contracted staff to their obligations and, if and when approved by Academic Board, associated University policies.
- 6.2 The incorporation within faculty handbooks of a statement informing students of their ethical obligations and responsibilities.
- 6.3 Faculty Research Degrees Committees to affirm that ethical issues in relation to each individual research degree application have been satisfactorily considered. Such affirmation may require the assent of a committee (which may be an ad-hoc one) established by the relevant Faculty Board to consider ethical issues across the faculty.
- 6.4 The Academic Board's Research Degrees Committee to affirm that ethical issues in relation to each individual research degree application for the PhD by published work have been duly addressed
- 6.5 Where individual students propose to undertake an academic activity as an element of assessment within a taught programme of study, procedures must operate to ensure that the relevant Board of Examiners shall be apprised that ethical issues have been satisfactorily addressed. Such confirmation may require the assent of a committee (which may be an ad-hoc one) established by the appropriate Faculty Board to consider ethical issues across the faculty.
- 6.6 Where a course team proposes to introduce an element of curriculum or assessment which gives rise to ethical issues, such issues shall be considered by the committee or group charged with considering the academic validity of the proposal, i.e. the Programme Approval/ Review/ Modification Panel or faculty Academic Standard Committee or other relevant body as determined by the University's quality assurance procedures.

Appendix 1

1. This ethical framework does not attempt to define or alter the obligations of staff or students under English law, for example:

Data Protection Act 1998

Children Act 1989

Human Rights Act 1998 (Amended 2001)

Race Relations Act 1976, The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Disability Rights Commission Act 1999

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001

Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Sex Discrimination (Indirect Discrimination and Burden of Proof) Regulations 2001

Freedom of Information Act 2000

2. Staff and students should also be cognisant with, and abide by, the published codes of conduct, ethics principles and guidelines of those professional bodies associated with their discipline