SCHOOL OF INFORMATICS

Ethics Committee

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Guiding principles for Ethics and Integrity

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Background
At the Ethics Committee meeting in November 2019, members agreed to include a statement on the Ethics website to communicate clearly how long approved Ethics applications are valid.

Action requested from the committee
Ethics committee is asked to review drafted School statement on "Valid duration of ethics approval" (Annex A) for discussion and approval. The document is expected to be discussed in detail at the committee meeting.

Main subject text
The Ethics committee have over the past few months received a number of applications which refer to continuation or replication of projects previously reviewed by the (then) Ethics panel.

Committee members and researchers in the School have expressed the need for clarity on whether, and for how long, a previously reviewed application can be referred to as the basis of ethics approval in continued research or new projects with the same methodology.

Given the restructured School ethics process, previously approved applications may still require more thorough review by committee members in reference to updated procedure.

Equality and diversity implications
There are no equality and diversity implications.

Resource implications (staff, space, budget)

If approved by the Ethics committee, the statement on "Valid duration of ethics approval" will be added to the School Ethics pages, which is within the Officer's remit. Clarity on the process is expected to reduce workload for committee members, researchers and student project supervisors.

Annex A: Draft School "Valid duration of ethics approval"

The duration for which approved ethics application can be referred to as valid basis for the ethical conduct of a project depends on 1) the project type and 2) the identified risks associated with the project.

Staff and PhD projects

For personal research, grant-funded research and PhD projects, the expectation is that the original ethics application will suffice to cover the entirety of the project, provided the established methodology and the research team stay the same. The principal investigator (PI) is required to advise the Ethics committee via the original ticket (or, alternatively, with clear inclusion of the reference number) should there have been any meaningful change to the project. The change will be logged against the original reference number, and the assigned Ethics committee member will advise if additional documents (updated consent forms or participant information sheets) are necessary. The latter is only expected to be the case where the communicated change brings about higher risk to the research participants (such as, but not limited to, increased likelihood of data linkage and/or physical/emotional harm).

Undergraduate and MInf projects

For staff-led undergraduate/MInf projects, the expectation is that the original ethics application will suffice to cover several iterations of the project, provided the established methodology and staff PI stays the same. The staff PI is required to advise the Ethics committee via the original ticket (or, alternatively, with clear inclusion of the reference number) when new students are involved in the project. This will be logged against the original reference number, and no further action is expected to be required. In cases of a meaningful change to the project's methodology, the PI is required to notify the Ethics committee as above, and the assigned committee member will advise if additional documents (updated consent forms or participant information sheets) are necessary. As for staff/PhD projects, the latter is only expected to be the case where the communicated change brings about higher risk to the research participants (such as, but not limited to, increased likelihood of data linkage or physical/emotional harm).