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2S: Southampton Solent University Ethics Policy

Introduction

1. The University's Ethics Policy is set out in the list of Principles shown below. The implementation and monitoring of this Policy is the responsibility of the University Ethics Committee, as detailed in Section 3 of the Academic Handbook. Each ethics standing/specialist panel shall promote procedures for ensuring the implementation of the policy and report annually to the University Ethics Committee.
2. To support the University's Strategic Plan in respect of social justice, the Ethics Policy aims to promote values that underpin an inclusive community which recognises openness and respect within all aspects of University life. In relation to ethical considerations all members of the University have the right to raise issues with their standing/specialist panel representative on the University Ethics Committee.

PRINCIPLES

Policy Statement

3. These Principles are applicable to all staff and students of Southampton Solent University and any limited companies set up under its auspices. It is a fundamental principle that all staff and students engaged in teaching, research, and innovation adopt a continuing personal commitment to act ethically, to encourage ethical behaviour in those with whom they collaborate and follow the standing/specialist panel and University Ethics Policy and procedures.
4. Should a conflict arise between the SSU Ethics Policy and that of a relevant professional or statutory body, the SSU Ethics Policy will prevail. A request may be put forward to the University Ethics Committee, including a rationale, for any deviation from the University Policy. The decision of the University Ethics Committee will be subject to appeal to the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Committee.
5. The University believes staff at programme, and subject level, (or equivalent staff working in professional services), are in the best position to interpret the ethical guidelines in line with established good practice in their area (including meeting the requirements of the professional and statutory bodies where relevant).

6. As a Higher Education establishment the University adheres to the relevant concordats and guidelines for research and ethics, for example: the British Educational Research Association (BERA), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and British Medical Association (BMA).

Operation of the Ethics Policy

7. The standing/specialist panel will be responsible for the overseeing and implementing the ethical policy and referring cases, where they feel unable to make a decision, to the University Ethics Committee. In addition, staff who are unhappy with a standing/specialist panel decision can appeal to the University Ethics Committee (either about their own work or the work of colleagues and students).
8. The University will endeavour to ensure that staff can exercise as much academic freedom as possible, subject to the decisions of the University Ethics Committee and, in the case of appeals against its decision, subject to the final decision of the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Committee.
9. Appeals would normally be heard by a sub-group, appointed by the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Committee.
10. Decisions about the merit of a project proposal or other suggested teaching, research and innovation will be measured on the content of the work and the anticipated benefits rather than on the organisation which is sponsoring the work. However, those with the responsibility of attracting outside funding should be mindful of potentially conflicting ethical considerations.

General Responsibilities

11. All staff and students have a responsibility to ensure, as far as possible, the physical, social and psychological well-being of those involved in any teaching, research, and innovation they carry out. In doing so, they should aim to anticipate and guard against potential harmful consequences wherever possible.

Good Practice

12. Staff and students should undertake teaching, research, and innovation activities in accordance with established good practice in their subject area.
13. In addition, all research and innovation must comply with the UK legislation concerning, for example, Human Rights; Data Protection; Freedom of Information; Obscenity and Public Decency (this is not an exhaustive list). Where standing/specialist panels and the University Ethics Committee wish to seek advice in this regard, they should, in the first instance, contact the Clerk to the Governors and the University's Legal Officer.
14. In addition, all scholarly activity must comply with all other policies and guidelines as approved under the procedures of Southampton Solent University.

Informed Consent

15. Ethical conduct in research and innovation demands respect for the rights of others directly or indirectly affected by the research. For human participants, both their physical and personal autonomy should be respected. However whilst it is recognised that much scientific research involving the use of human participants will, by its very nature, often conceal from participants the true purpose of the enquiry or experiment, this concealment should be at the minimum level essential to conduct that research. There should also be no reasonable expectation that harm would come to participants and that it should conform to the requirements of relevant professional bodies and any legal requirements. Additionally, participants should be fully informed and briefed upon completion with opportunities to be informed of the findings. Other than these circumstances, participation in the research and innovation should be on the basis of fully informed consent and participants' rights to privacy should be guaranteed. Written consent should be obtained where appropriate. There should be no coercion of any kind and, where remuneration is offered, this should be carried out in an ethical manner. Care should be taken that it is not offered as an inducement to surrender ethical rights or accept risk of physical or psychological harm. Any remuneration should therefore only be at a rate appropriate to recompense the individual concerned for their time and expenses.
16. At the onset of the investigation, investigators should make plain to participants their right to withdraw from the research at any time, irrespective of whether or not payment or other inducement has been offered.
17. Persons carrying out the research and innovation should consider the ethical implications of that activity, including the physiological, psychological, social, political, religious, cultural and economic consequences of the work for the participants, possible observers and society prior to its commencement.
18. Where participants are not in a position to give informed consent the person carrying out the scholarly activity should have regard to the advice of the appropriate body. English law does not currently permit guardians/parents to give consent on behalf of mentally incapacitated adults. In such cases a declaration from a court is required which declares that the procedure adopted for the research and innovation is lawful.

Deceptive and Covert Scholarly Activity

19. While it is recognised that there is a continuum of covert - overt research and innovation whereby the person carrying out the research and innovation is required to keep the content of the research and innovation to him/herself, the person/s carrying out the research and innovation should endeavour, wherever possible and practicable, to avoid the use of deception in their research and innovation.
20. The withholding of information or the misleading of participants is unacceptable if the participants are typically likely to object or show unease once debriefed. Intentional deception of the participants over the purpose and general nature of the investigation should be avoided whenever possible,

Confidentiality and Anonymity

21. The anonymity and privacy of participants in research and innovation should be respected. Personal information relating to these participants must be held in a confidential and secure place.
22. In the event that confidentiality and/or anonymity cannot be guaranteed, the participant must be warned of this in advance.
23. Should the investigator find themselves in the position where they are required by law to break any undertaking of confidentiality, they should seek guidance from the Chair of the University Ethics Committee.

Children's Rights

24. All research and innovation involving children under the age of 16 years requires the informed consent of parents or from those in loco parentis. This does not include the single consent of a person in loco parentis for a group of children without the parents' knowledge. In addition, where possible, the informed consent of all children and vulnerable adults over the age of 16 should be obtained. Where real consent cannot be obtained due to impairments in understanding or communication, advice must be sought from the appropriate standing/specialist panel representative of the University Ethics Committee.

Scholarly Activity involving Animals

25. Research and innovation involving animals may not be undertaken without prior authorisations and relevant permissions.

Freedom of Information

26. Where the nature of the scholarly activity is such that informing participants before the work is carried out would render the results invalid, there must be appropriate explanations following the study.

Research and innovation undertaken in public places

27. Persons carrying out research and innovation in public places should comply with the Law (see paragraph 13 above) and local by-laws. They should also consider the impact of that research and innovation on passers-by who are not involved in the work, particularly in terms of religious and cultural sensitivities.

The Environment

28. All research and innovation should be conducted in a sustainable way with regard to the environment. Any research and innovation activity which may cause detriment to the environment, habitats or species must carry out an environmental impact assessment and a statement as to how any detrimental effects will be mitigated.

Responsibility to and/or of Sponsors, Employers and Employees

29. The terms of the research and innovation activity being undertaken on behalf of a sponsor must be agreed in advance. Wherever the work is undertaken in collaboration with other institutions, either in the UK or abroad, it is essential to ensure that the policies of those institutions meet the standards of the University's Ethics Policy. The terms will usually include the specification of the research and innovation, the roles and responsibilities of the person/s carrying out the activity. The need for confidentiality or non-disclosure agreements must be negotiated in advance.
30. The agreement on intellectual property should be made clear at the outset when writing the terms of the agreement and in line with the Southampton Solent University's Intellectual Property Rights Policy, which can be found on the Staff Portal (under the section 'Policies, Procedures and Guidelines').
31. The constraints of the contract must not compromise the overriding principles of non-maleficence and beneficence, legal obligations and any pre-existing rights.