

Social Sciences Research Ethics Framework: towards a national Guideline

Regional Consultation Meetings 2004

Presentation 3: Cross-Boundary Research



Context for growth in Cross-Boundary Research

Increasing interdisciplinary research – encouragement by sponsors

Growth in social science of substantive areas that explore contemporary health, science and technology

New ESRC centres/programmes – e.g. Genomics centres

OST's policy for RCUK

EU FP6 locates social science *within* other programmes

Methodological issues:

- what is the status of, and relationship between, different types of data?
- what assumptions are held by different research teams about the core issues under scrutiny?
- how are different assumptions to be translated across teams?
- what ultimately is the ‘problem’ to be ‘solved’?



Refining ethics provisions?

Generic code – universal ethics

Discipline-specific?

Growing cross-boundary research should work against any methodological reductionism:
shared learning

Mutual extension of field-specific approaches?

Move towards an interdisciplinary ethics?

The DH Research Governance Framework

Researchers, employers of researchers, NHS care providers, funders and the 'sponsors' of research

Covers medical research and social care research

A 'model for the governance of research in other areas' especially if these 'impact on the health or well-being of the public'

Though...RGF recognises some key difference in research context of social care research.

Some concerns raised *within* RGF's constituency:

From *social care researchers*:

- more bureaucratic delay and overlap
- a lack of understanding of qualitative research methods
- ethics review procedures that were geared only to high risk biomedical research
- problems with multi-site projects/honorary contracts

From *clinical researchers*:

- NHS Trusts and framework agreements with *multiple* partners – cumbersome, time and resource intensive.

The RGF and Key Concerns Raised by Social Science researchers:

- form and level of vigilance properly required for medical risk management will be inappropriate in social science research
- notion of consent needs to be redefined: the path taken by much social science (and social care) research means consent needs to be revisited along the way, especially in qualitative, participatory or action-oriented types of research
- concern over research sponsor role
- impact on social science postgraduate research?

Recommendations for Cross Boundary Review I

- need for dialogue relating to the determination of 'risk' and benefit' of the research
- process of ethics scrutiny and governance be managed by the principal, lead disciplines *initiating* the research
- foster dialogue between fields that could lead to a shared *learning*

Recommendations for Cross Boundary Review 2

- Ensure that the proposals are reviewed independently (not necessarily by an LREC) [see RGF footnote 2.2.8]
- Linkage/archiving of data goes beyond the immediate confines of the strictly ‘ethical’ domain to the wider demands of research governance.



Conclusion – the ESRC REF Objective:

The new ESRC Research Ethics Framework will offer a robust, complementary not competing, parallel framework to that of the RGF

www.york.ac.uk/res/ref/

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Research Ethics
Framework