

# **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/](http://www.york.ac.uk/res/ref/)

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