ETHICS GUIDE 2015

ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Ethics guide 2015

INTRODUCTION

Business and management studies are a central component of the learning, teaching, research, enterprise and administrative work of universities in the United Kingdom. This work contributes to the development of hundreds of thousands of students each year as well as to the activities of companies and other organisations. The economic, social and cultural contribution of this activity is considerable, and the initiation, design and conduct of each of these strands of work, as well as its subsequent review, raises significant issues which are incumbent on university staff, students and their managers to reflect upon.

Recent debates within academic circles and the popular press, as well as legislative and regulatory changes governing access to information have, raised concerns and questions about the extent to which universities prepare their students and staff to meet the ethical challenges posed by research, learning, teaching, enterprise and administrative work.

Many professional bodies in the field of business and management have codes of ethics which inform the work of their members. In addition, most UK universities have ethical codes of practice and ethical review committees which review ethical issues and make recommendations about research and related matters. We do not see this Guide as a substitute for these university procedures. Members of the business school community should familiarise themselves with their institutional guidelines.

This Guide is intended to provide advice and guidance about the ethical questions and issues that need to be taken into account when considering a range of learning, teaching, research and enterprise issues. It is addressed to all members of the business school community – students, educators, researchers, managers and external clients. For professionals in the field, it sets out the standards that one should aspire to enact. For other stakeholders, it sets out a framework of expectations of ethical practice that should be expected of institutions and individuals. However, this Guide is not intended to *enforce* compliance to a series of normative ethical obligations. It is intended instead to be used to encourage and support members of the business school community in taking responsibility for their own ethical practice by providing a framework, and signposting to additional resources to enable ethical decision-making (see Appendix II). In setting out these aspirations, we acknowledge that the process is one of continuous improvement and that part of the role of a business school is to create an environment that enables ethical behaviours.

Ethical issues therefore need to be actively considered as a central component in all business school activities, including those outlined in Figure 1, rather than something that is only relevant at certain points or when undertaking certain types of work.
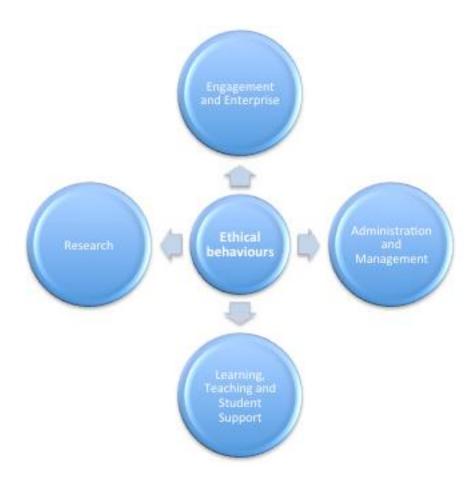
Fig. 1 Four Key Business School Activities

AIMS AND SCOPE

This Guide is intended to be of primary use to university business school staff and students engaged in research, enterprise, administration and learning, but also to be relevant to the broader range of stakeholders alluded to earlier. It focuses on offering a practical framework to help individuals make informed and transparent decisions and communicate these ethical choices to others. It encourages people to take personal responsibility for these choices in the field of business and management and related specialisms. The Guide focuses on the four principal components of the work listed in Figure 1: (a) research, (b) engagement and enterprise (including consultancy), (c) administration and management, and (d) learning, teaching and student support. These areas of activity are referred to collectively by the acronym REAL.

This provides a framework within which issues and dilemmas can be considered. It is not intended to provide a prescriptive recipe for dealing with ethical issues. It is important that educators, researchers, managers, students and their sponsors think about these issues, debate them and confront difficult and contentious matters throughout the process of their work. The aim is to encourage members of the business school community to engage in conscious and ongoing ethical reflection.

The Guide is intended to be used alongside and to complement an individual's own organisational or professional code of ethics rather than to replace them. It is not intended to substitute for processes and procedures already in place. It also acknowledges that many business schools are subject to accreditations which place upon them expectations of ethical behavior and the evidencing thereof. In addition, it recognises that the corporate, public and third sector fields to which business schools contribute also maintain, or are developing, standards for ethical practice.

The Guide has been written for people working or studying in the UK. It assumes compliance with UK and European Union law and relevant regulations in other countries as appropriate.

METHOD AND DEVELOPMENT

The Guide was developed by representatives listed in Appendix I from the Chartered Association of Business Schools (Chartered ABS); British Academy of Management (BAM); Business, Management, Accounting and Finance (BMAF, Higher Education Academy Subject Centre); Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism (HLST, Higher Education Academy Subject Centre). A wide range of ethical codes and guidelines were consulted in the compilation and subsequent revisions of this document. A full list of these resources is contained in Appendix II. The current version was revised in 2015 by a working group convened by and reporting to the Chartered ABS Research Steering Committee (see Appendix I).

GENERAL CATEGORIES OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

1 Integrity, honesty and transparency in scholarship

Members of the business school community have a responsibility to:

a. Be self-critical about the extent and limits of their ability and expertise to undertake work in a competent, diligent, timely and professional manner and reflect self-critically throughout all learning and scholarly activity. This may involve the help of a mentor or critical friend as a sounding board.

b. Be explicit about their intellectual preferences and political and social inclinations in their work. This may include being prepared to consider their own biases through debate with others.

c. Exercise self-awareness of their own views so as to fairly assess the quality of the work of others.

d. Avoid misrepresenting their skills or the results of their work.

e. Consider the ethical implications of their research at all stages of the research process, from initial planning to data archiving and impact.

f. Uphold the integrity of data and analysis and ensure that data, analysis and evidence are the basis of their research.

    g. Ensure that research findings are disseminated and shared as freely as possible, consistent with funder requirements and in balance with copyright considerations.

2.   Integrity, honesty and transparency in learning

Members of the business school community should endeavor to:

    a. Be aware of the role of business schools in educating future business leaders and ensuring they have an awareness of the ethical dimensions and responsibilities of business.

    b. Make clear statements in any publicity material or written and spoken communications concerning the programmes of study on   offer, the content of those programmes and the mode of study.

    c. Make clearly-specified offers in respect of places on programmes of study and exercise transparent admissions procedures that are based on the principle of fairness to all applicants.

    d. Set assessments that represent a fair opportunity for demonstration of the achievement of learning outcomes; operate marking and verification processes that are designed to ensure fairness in marking; and seek to ensure that individual achievements in any group assessments are fairly rewarded.

    e. Through the design of the curriculum, and with the encouragement and vigilance of teaching staff, guard against the risk of cheating and malpractice in assessments. Staff should seek to foster a shared culture of honesty in assessment.

    f. Disclose and make clear the reasoning behind assessment decisions to colleagues, students, clients and other relevant stakeholders.

3.   Respect for persons and prevention of harm

Members of the business school community have a responsibility to:

    a. Avoid discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, social background, age, religion, disability, political beliefs or other aspects of personal identity which are not relevant to the work being undertaken.

    b. Ensure interactions take into account the implications associated with the power or authority that they hold or may be perceived to hold.

    c. Consider the physical, social and psychological safety and well-being of others who might be affected by their work - including students, colleagues and research participants - and evaluate the potential risk of harm to others arising from their work. Within a research context it is important to consider harm to self, participants and the wider community. Where there is a potential risk of harm, they should make arrangements to mitigate this risk.

Where work in any context involves interaction with people who may be perceived as vulnerable, they should seek expert advice, e.g. from a research ethics committee.

d. Ensure that any advice and consultancy services provided to clients does not cause harm and that any political or social biases in such advice are made explicit.

4. Authorship and respect for intellectual property

Members of the business school community have a responsibility to:

a. Acknowledge all substantive and identifiable contributions to work undertaken, and to be clear about and respect intellectual property.

b. Discuss questions of authorship and achieve consensus among participants in any publication or dissemination. In this discussion, they should consider the order of authors and agree the order according to the best practice of the discipline. All listed authors bear responsibility for the work.

c. Identify any material drawn from the work of others and attribute it appropriately to the original authors. The only exception to this general principle would apply when the original author intends to remain anonymous.

d. Avoid listing as an author an individual who has not contributed substantively to the work.

e. Avoid citation or recommending citation for reasons other than to improve the work, for example to improve the impact factor of a journal to which the work is submitted.

5. Consent

Members of the business school research community should:

a. Ensure that participants in research and scholarship, from within or outside the University, understand enough about the process to be able to make an informed decision about whether to take part. This includes being informed about what their participation entails, why their participation is necessary, how data will be used, and how and to whom findings will be reported. Consent cannot be taken as the default position and must be sought from participants in and others closely affected by research or scholarship. Consent should not be inferred from a non-response to a communication such as a letter or invitation to participate.

b. Appreciate that in exceptional circumstances, the requirements for prior informed consent may be set aside if it is neither feasible nor desirable to obtain this consent and if a strong public interest case can be made for undertaking the research without such consent. In such situations researchers should follow additional procedures and safeguards mandated by their institutional ethics committee.

c. Appreciate that where consent has been given, the original commitments given are observed. Material changes to what was originally planned should only be made once further

consent has been obtained. Researchers have a responsibility to ensure the well-being of respondents is not adversely affected by the research, whatever consent has been obtained.

d. Approach covert research with considerable caution, recognising that it breaches the principle of informed consent. Plan to use covert research only in exceptional circumstances and where informed consent would otherwise make the research impossible to conduct. Subject any planned covert research to independent ethical review in accordance with the host research institution's procedures.

6.   Protecting privacy, ensuring confidentiality and maintaining anonymity

Members of the business school community have a responsibility to:

a. Respect individual and collective rights to privacy in compliance with UK and European Union law and relevant regulations in other countries as appropriate. Criminal Records Bureau checks must be carried out when working with children and vulnerable people.

b. Ensure that administrative processes are designed to preserve the privacy of personal data, for example in the consideration of mitigating circumstances for student assessments.

c. Carefully consider the importance of confidentiality and anonymity to potential participants in research and scholarship and ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants is maintained where a prior commitment to do so has been made.

d. Consider the implications of using participant pseudonyms rather than real names to ensure anonymity. In some cases, it may be appropriate to use real names, for example when the revealing of identities does not pose a significant risk to participants, or when participants express a preference for the use of real names.

e. Recognise that there is no need to ensure confidentiality or anonymity where participants have agreed to their identities being made public, provided that informed consent procedures have been duly followed.

f. Make any provision of confidentiality or anonymity clear and, preferably, agree it in writing prior to data collection.

g. Take care when using online media as a data source. Ethical standards relating to the use of the Internet – for instance as a source of data - are not yet well developed and so there is a need to ensure continuing familiarity with current debates. Be aware of the potential abuse of online media in communicating with others and refrain from any such abuse.

7.   Declaring professional and personal affiliations and sources of funding and support

Members of the business school community should:

a. Declare any and all potential conflicts of interest relating to commercial contracts and other connections. Ensure that such declarations are regularly updated.

b. Make others, e.g. staff, students, clients and contractors, aware of any ethical issues or concerns that are felt to be important and that relate to work being undertaken. Provide briefing and training to staff and students in recognising and responding to potential ethical issues that may arise in their work.

c. Conduct all financial dealings with probity.

8. Avoiding misleading, misreporting, misunderstanding and unjustified deception

Members of the business school community have a responsibility to:

a. Collect and use data without fabrication, falsification or inappropriate manipulation.

b. Communicate the results of their work honestly and transparently.

c. Avoid deception, either through lies, misleading behavior, misrepresenting or false reporting of their work

d. Acknowledge the work of others, explicitly reference the author of any prior work which is used verbatim and avoid self-plagiarism of one's own prior publications.

e. For covert research, see 5 d. above.

f. Where there is any significant doubt about the probity of a particular approach or action, seek advice from the relevant body or committee charged with overseeing ethical issues in the individual's employing organisation.

g. Notify the relevant parties (for example funding bodies or journal editors) in a timely and explicit manner if mistakes, false reporting of data or other breaches of accepted standards are subsequently discovered in previously published or submitted research works or reports.

9. Governance, management and administration

Members of the business school community should:

a. Uphold the principles of integrity, honesty, equality, diversity and fairness in the course of conducting business, managing and performing their work.

b. Identify and declare interests in any business, management, political, and academic dealings they are involved in.

c. Decline to engage in any suspected unlawful activity and report any suspected unlawful activity to the relevant regulatory authorities. This includes activities conducted within as well as outside their institution.

d. Present evidence of practices that potentially damage the reputation of their institution (whether intended or unintended) to the relevant governing bodies of their organisation or sector.

e. Support the educational values and objectives of the institution.

f. Ensure that all branding, marketing and promotional activity appropriately reflects the situation within the institution.

g. Actively champion the equality and diversity of the educational and professional community.

h. Maintain the highest standards of fair, ethical and transparent professional behaviour.

i. Refrain from sacrificing, or pressuring others to sacrifice, professional ethical responsibilities and duties of the kind outlined in this Guide to financial or other forms of expediency.

APPENDIX I: CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks are noted to the following for their help in developing the 2008 version of this Guide:

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APPENDIX ii: RESOURCES

Academy of Management (2006) *Code of Ethics.*
http://aom.org/uploadedFiles/About_AOM/Governance/AOM_Code_of_Ethics.pdf

Academy of Management (2010) *Code of Ethics: Policies and Procedures for Handling Charges of Ethical Standards Violations.*
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British Sociological Association (2002) *Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association.*
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Economic and Social Research Council (2015) *Framework for Research Ethics.*
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