School of Psychology (University of Aberdeen)

Research Governance and Quality Assurance Policy (January 2011)

1. VALUES OF SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

The School of Psychology strives to maintain the highest ethical, research and financial standards in all its research activities. Underpinning its work are a number of fundamental values:

* Integrity and honesty
* Openness and accountability
* Fairness
* Respect for individual members' development aspirations
* A desire to produce research that contributes to society, as well as academic kudos

2. SCOPE of QUALITY ASSURANCE

All staff are expected to accept individual and collective responsibilities for the quality of their own work and for personally following the guidelines in the School's Research Governance and Quality Assurance Policy.

While the School of Psychology (through its Head of School and the School Management Group) is responsible for defining quality policy across the School and for ensuring that all staff are aware of this policy, implementation of this policy is the responsibility of PIs.

Staff will be expected to co-operate with all regulatory authorities in the conduct of audits, disclosing of information, confidential or otherwise, requested by legitimate inspectors for quality assurance purposes.

Quality documentation, where needed, is signed for on behalf of the School by the Head of School or, in her or his absence, by the Director of Research.

All staff engaged in research will work to the highest standards and report to the Head of School any occurrence that may affect the conduct of their operations.

To help facilitate a high standard across the School of Psychology, School Management Group personnel will conduct periodic inspection of facilities, audits of studies in progress and checks on staff training and competence. It is the responsibility of PIs to ensure that relevant documentation (e.g. the study protocol and any Standard Operating Procedures) are available to all relevant personnel to enable them to carry out these inspections, audits and checks correctly.

3. HEALTH and SAFETY ACROSS SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

All research and related work will be conducted in compliance with the University of Aberdeen Health and Safety Policy (http://www.abdn.ac.uk/safety/pol.hti).

It is the policy of the University of Aberdeen to take all reasonable and practicable steps to safeguard the health and safety of all employees and students while at work and to protect other persons from hazards to health and safety arising out of the University's activities.

It is incumbent upon all School staff to recognize specific hazards, identify them for each research project and ensure that steps to avoid risk from any such hazard are specified in the protocol. Possible risks and hazards should be discussed with the School Safety Officer (Mr Jim Urquhart, j.urquhart@abdn.ac.uk).

4. STAFF TRAINING AND COMPETENCE

It is the line manager's responsibility to ensure that their staff have the appropriate qualifications, knowledge and training for the type of work they do in order to carry out their tasks in a competent manner.

All new staff will have a job description, and personal specification (setting out essential and desirable skills / qualifications / knowledge required for post). PIs are responsible for ensuring that new research staff within their research groupings receive this detailed job description, an overview of training options, a complete departmental staff list, and all relevant research governance documentation and procedures.

All staff will ensure that their curriculum vitae are kept up to date on a regular basis, which is a requirement of the University's annual staff appraisal process.

Ms Dana Ho (dana.ho@abdn.ac.uk) will be notified by email of any training courses that staff have attended, so that appropriate training records can be maintained.

Records of staff training, curriculum vitae, job descriptions and personal specifications will be reviewed regularly by senior staff to identify additional staff training that may be needed within their research groupings.

5. ETHICAL RESEARCH

All research and related work will be conducted in compliance with all aspects of the University's Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Practice (http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sfre/goodpractice/), which includes important sections on:

* Integrity in Research
* Openness in Research
* Role of Professional Bodies
* Leadership and Supervision in Research
* Management and Ownership of Research
* Ethical Practice in Research
* Research Misuse
* Publication and Authorship Practice
* Guidelines on the Keeping of Research Records

All research and related work will also be conducted in compliance with the School of Psychology Ethics Committee and must receive approval from this committee before it can proceed.

Other relevant guidance, such as the British Psychological Society Code of Conduct (http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct_home.cfm), and, where appropriate, NHS, ESRC and other Research Councils, and ERC guidelines, should also be adhered to.

It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator (PI) to ensure that ethical approval has been obtained and to produce documentary evidence as required for monitoring

or audit purposes. The School of Psychology Ethics Committee should be consulted in any cases where there is doubt about the need for formal ethical approval.

Where the PI is concerned that there may be potential for misuse of research findings, they will contact the Director of Research who will arrange for a risk assessment to be carried out. Such risk assessments will be carried out by the School Ethics Committee. Where risks are identified, staff will contact the College Director of Research for advice about how to minimize these risks (as per the University's Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Practice).

6. REGISTRATION of RESEARCH

A research project is defined as one that is designed to provide new knowledge and address a specific scientific question.

Every research project conducted in the School of Psychology must be approved by the Psychology Ethics Committee and is automatically registered as part of this review process.

7. WORK PRACTICES

Quality Assurance practice can be built into any work activity no matter how complex, by subdividing the activity into manageable portions and by ensuring that, at each stage, the correct work practices are used at all times. In general, the following practices will be adhered to across the School:

* Research data represents the product of a great deal of effort, time and money. Therefore staff must develop systems of record keeping and database management that prevent lost, missing or unreadable information when it is time to analyse and report the study.

* Work records will be cross-referenced (e.g. by means of title, code, file name, date, named person, etc, or some combination of these) so that all records relating to any one study can be found at any given time. The identification and location of these will be recorded, usually in research records / lab-books or project folders, but could also include entries in other logbooks, proformas, and computer files.

* For all studies there will be an accurate primary record kept contemporaneously with the research, for example through the use of University lab books or equivalent. Research records / lab-books or project folders are the property of the University and not the holder. University guidelines on keeping research records are available here: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ppg/uploads/files/69/

* Research data in all forms should be stored in secure locations and archived for an appropriate period of time. Computer drives must be backed up regularly and duplicate copies kept on appropriate storage media e.g. disc, tape, etc. Computers will be password protected and virus-scanning software will be used. University guidelines on good practice for data handling can be found here: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ppg/index.php?id=7

* Where a number of procedures are carried out very frequently, it can be particularly useful to have a written outline of the procedure to hand. Reference can then be made to these written outlines (Standard Operating Procedures) in research notes, without having to repeat full details of the procedure every time. Standard Operating Procedures are of particular value as an aid in staff training. Details of experimental

procedures used for more variable, indeterminate and exploratory activities should be recorded, so that new Standard Operating Procedures can be easily generated when new research procedures have been tested and are in routine use.

* Staff who have concerns about intellectual property rights or licensing should discuss these with the University's Research and Innovation office.

* All projects must involve a nominal role of a permanent member of academic staff in the School.

8. PEER REVIEWED WRITTEN PROTOCOLS

Every research project will have a written protocol detailing the methods and processes to be used that will go through a peer review process before the research is undertaken as part of the ethical review process. All staff are expected to contribute to ethical review, ensuring breadth in this peer review process.

In the case of externally funded research, peer review will also normally have occurred as part of the funding award process.

9. HANDLING PERSONAL DATA

Many of the School's activities involve the collection and holding of personal data, which must be done in a legally responsible manner. All staff and students should comply with the 1998 Data Protection Act. The University's Data Protection Guidelines are here: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/hr/policy/other-information/dataproc/

10. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

The use of faulty equipment, or the incorrect use of equipment can be dangerous, and can compromise the validity of research data. Therefore, all facilities and equipment will be functioning correctly when used. Needless to say, faulty equipment will be removed from the workplace if possible. Alternatively, large immobile items will be clearly labelled, e.g., 'DO NOT USE'. Equipment will be maintained as determined by individual circumstance. Some items may be covered by service contracts with regular preventative maintenance checks. For these a maintenance and service history will be created, and brief details of maintenance and service arrangements will be stated, either as part of the service record or in instructions for equipment use.

It is the responsibility of individuals using equipment to report any faults affecting hardware or software to the School Safety Officer (Mr Jim Urquhart, j.urquhart@abdn.ac.uk).

Staff using equipment must be adequately trained and simplified instructions for equipment use must be available. These are not intended to serve as a guide for use of equipment by untrained persons, but to serve as an aide-memoir for trained staff, and to assist in the training of staff.

Please ensure that all necessary insurance policies are in place for the use of equipment not owned by the University of Aberdeen.

Instrument logbooks will be used to provide a chronological record of the use of some (usually large, complex and expensive) items of equipment, particularly those

functioning in a multiuser environment and/or where the way they are used can have a significant effect on experimental data.

11. MONITORING of QUALITY

If staff follow the principles outlined above, then their work will be of an acceptably high quality. In the main, reliance is placed on staff to judge how well their own work measures up to the principles. However, some form of independent monitoring of conformance with the general principles of quality will be beneficial.

From time to time, staff will get together to discuss quality-related matters. This can be done effectively on an informal basis and also by bringing issues to the attention of the School's Research and Ethics Committees. There is also a system of internal monitoring and auditing, with which all researchers will be required to comply if asked. This programme is intended to be informative, non-punitive and bi-directional, but any serious problems or allegations will be handled according to the University's Statement on the Handling of Allegations of Research Misconduct (http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ppg/index.php?id=69&top=68). Researchers within the School of Psychology may also be subject to quality audits from funding bodies, such as Research Councils.