



Doctoral Researcher Development Programme

The Ethical Researcher

CONTENTS

Research Integrity Case Study.....	2
Ethics Case Study 1.....	3
Ethics Case Study 2.....	4
Ethics Case Study 3.....	6
Intellectual Property Case Study	7

Integrity Case Study

You are the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) of a university. A formal complaint has been made to you by Dr Y, a lecturer in the School of Music.

Dr Y joined the university six years ago, just after being awarded his PhD, to carry out teaching and research duties. Initially employed on a three-year temporary contract, he performed well in the role and was retained on a second three-year contract. That second contract is about to end and Dr Y has recently been informed that his employment will not be renewed. The decision was made by a small panel of senior staff from the School of Music. Dr Y claims that the panel chair, Professor B, is biased against him and that the panel's decision must be overturned.

Professor B and Dr Y carried out a small joint research project three years ago. The project, which was externally funded, has been completed and a paper was published in a peer-reviewed journal last year. Professor B and Dr Y are listed as the joint authors of the paper but Dr Y tells you that he had to fight for this.

He claims that when Professor B submitted the draft paper for publication, he removed Dr Y as an author and added a friend as the other author instead. Dr Y says he complained to his Head of School, who looked into the matter informally. According to Dr Y, Professor B was ordered to write a letter of apology to him. In this letter, the Professor admitted to the improper changes to the paper's authorship and said that he would not act in such a manner again.

Dr Y says it is clear that his contract 'has not been renewed because Professor B is out to get me' and demands that you take action. He also says that the university did not act properly when it looked into the authorship complaint; he has always felt that Professor B's actions deserved a more serious penalty than simply being told to write a letter.

- **How would you respond to Dr Y?**
- **Could anything have been done to prevent this situation from occurring in the first place?**
- **Are there any wider issues to consider?**

Ethics Case Study 1

You are a PhD student.

In your viva, your external examiner asks you the following:

“How did you approach the design and conducting of your PhD study to take account of ethical issues?” “When analysing your data, how did you ensure the integrity of your data?”

“If you plan on publishing your research, how would you go about demonstrating to a journal editor that your work was conducted to the standards of integrity that are expected?”

- **How would you respond to the external examiner?**
- **If you supervise PhD students, how would you advise your students to respond if they were asked these questions in their viva?**

Please note that this case study is fictitious. Any similarity to actual persons, organisations or events is coincidental. Used with permission of Dr Andrew Rawnsley, Research Governance & Training Manager, Graduate Research School, Teesside University; UKRIO Adviser.

ETHICS CASE STUDY 2

Two social historians at your university have been conducting research into squatting, focussing on large squatting movements involving ex-service personnel and their families following World War II. Their next piece of research will compare these movements with present day squatting movements. Interviews with homeless families currently (illegally) occupying empty properties will be compared with oral histories of squatting in the years after World War II.

The researchers have submitted their research proposal for ethical approval and are awaiting the decision of their Faculty's Ethics Committee. The project does not involve any external funding.

The Head of the School of History becomes aware that the researchers have begun recruiting participants to their study before the ethics committee has made its decision – i.e., the researchers have commenced the study without having ethical approval for the research. She discovered this when several members of the public contacted the university with questions about a consent form which they had signed for the study.

It appears that the researchers became aware that a rally was to be held in support of families occupying a large, disused local authority property in a nearby city. They felt that this would be a good opportunity to find participants for their study, so they attended the rally and began recruitment. All potential participants were provided with a detailed information sheet describing the research and everyone recruited to the study has completed and signed a consent form.

When approached by the Head of School, the researchers admitted that they had begun recruiting participants before the ethics committee had given its approval for the research. They defended their actions, saying that the rally was too good a recruitment opportunity to miss. They also felt confident that the committee would grant ethical approval for their work, and neither reject it nor request any changes. As the researchers are saying this to the Head of School, an email arrives in their inboxes with the decision of the ethics committee...

- **How should the university address this situation?**
- **Does it make a difference if the ethics committee has just granted ethical approval for the study?**
- **Does it make a difference if the ethics committee has just rejected the study or asked the researchers to significantly change the research design, participant information sheet, consent form, etc.?**

Ethics Case Study 3

Dr Roberts, a new post-doc, is planning a study of the alcohol drinking habits of young people in the North-East. Assisted by two PhD students in his department, Dr Roberts plans to use a questionnaire to determine how often, how much, and where, a representative group of young people aged 18-24 consume alcohol.

The questionnaire will be followed up by a small section of the original group being involved in one-on-one interviews about their drinking habits. Dr Roberts intends to publish the results of the study as a series of papers in academic journals and a concise report will form a fundamental aspect of a Department of Health consultation document for which Dr Roberts has received funding.

Case Study Questions

- Broad questions (recognition, ethical priority)

"What are the ethical issues in this case?"

- Targeted questions

"How should consent be obtained in this case?"

- Decision questions

"What action should be taken

Case Study: Intellectual Property

A month before her viva, a doctoral student files an invention disclosure with her university intellectual property officer on a novel widget developed as part of her doctoral research. The intellectual property officer meets with the doctoral student and her Director of Studies, and discusses the invention disclosure. When asked about inventorship, the Director of Studies responds that both he and the graduate student are the inventors.

After the meeting, the doctoral student calls the intellectual property officer. She explains that when she joined her Director of Studies' laboratory, she conducted a thorough review of the literature and developed a hypothesis that she felt was not addressed in the literature. Even though the hypothesis represented a deviation from most of the research ongoing in her Director of Studies' laboratory, he allowed her to pursue it and provided funding from one of his grants for her work. Over the course of her research in her Director of Studies' laboratory, the doctoral student independently developed her research project to test and analyze her hypotheses. The nature of the project meant that her Director of Studies was not always able to provide much assistance, and so she sought expertise from others when required, particularly for data analysis. Although the doctoral student performed most of her own research, she noted that she did require the help of a technician to overcome a technical hurdle in one small, but ultimately significant, area.

The intellectual property officer in the Research and Knowledge Exchange Office feels that the university should file a patent application on the novel widget. Further, the application should be filed before the viva in order to protect worldwide patenting rights. The doctoral student agrees. She does not feel, however, that her Director of Studies is truly an inventor, but she doesn't want to create any problems with her Director of Studies before her viva.

- Whose does the potentially patentable invention belong to?
- What should the RKEO advise?
- Should the student go ahead with the viva?
- What might the doctoral student have done differently to avoid this situation?