APPENDIX 4

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

RESEARCH ETHICS FRAMEWORK

1 INTRODUCTION

The University of Aberdeen is committed to the highest standards of corporate governance, accountability and responsibility and seeks to conform to all relevant governance guidelines and codes of practice, including those issued by the various research funding councils and the Scottish Funding Council.

The University expects the highest standards of integrity to be adhered to by its researchers. It has a Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Practice (Appendix 3 of the Aberdeen Framework for Research Governance) which indicate the standards of good practice required to be adopted by researchers throughout the University, and which are intended to satisfy the requirements of the various funding authorities. Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Practice should be accompanied by the Statement on the Handling of Allegations of Unacceptable Research Conduct (also Appendix 3).

In addition to the requirements of the various funding bodies, the University has a responsibility to protect the rights of human subjects involved in research projects and to protect them from harm, and to ensure that data and other information about research and research subjects is handled with due consideration to legislation and institutional guidelines, and is not used without the consent of the individuals concerned. The University's Guidelines on Keeping of Research Records are included at Appendix 9 of the Framework for Research Governance. The University also has a responsibility to avoid the use of animals in research unless absolutely necessary (see para.6).

Good research practice is promoted and promulgated throughout the University by Senior Managers, and is ultimately overseen on behalf of Senate and Court by the University Advisory Group on Research Ethics and Governance, which was established in January 2005.

2 UNIVERSITY ADVISORY GROUP ON RESEARCH ETHICS AND GOVERNANCE

The remit of the University's Advisory Group on Research Ethics and Governance is:

(i) To develop policy and guidance on research governance and ethical issues.
(ii) To have oversight of all research-related ethical issues within the University and to ensure that appropriate structures are in place to encourage best practice.
(iii) To maintain an interaction with the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) Committee North of Scotland (formerly the NHS Grampian Research Ethics Committee).
(iv) To report to the University Committee for Research, Income Generation and Commercialisation on research governance and ethical issues.

The Advisory Group will monitor the University's research governance and ethical performance regularly to ensure that it remains consistent with the requirements of the various funding bodies, and will seek to promote best practice across the institution. It will also co-ordinate the annual return of the Research Council UK (RCUK) Research Conduct Survey.

The Group will also consider questions of principle and difficult cases, and provide policy and quality assurance guidance. Any serious research-related ethical concern that is not covered by the remit of local ethical review groups / arrangements should be referred to the Group.

3 RESPONSIBILITY OF COLLEGES

The institutional Advisory Group provides overarching guidelines on the scope and operation of ethical approval processes to ensure that the University is addressing its research governance responsibilities consistently across the institution. This will also facilitate interface and sharing of experience between the Colleges. However, it is expected that each College will manage its own Local Ethical Review Process (LERP) in accordance with all guidelines provided by the Advisory Group, the requirements of relevant funding and professional bodies, and taking account of all related University policies, codes, and guidance documents (see Appendix 1 of the Framework for Research Governance for a comprehensive list of University policies, codes and guidance documents that relate to research ethics and governance).

Each College has in place formal arrangements to ensure the ethical scrutiny, to whatever extent required, of all research proposals before a research project can commence. Further information on local ethical review processes in place can be found on the College websites, as follows:

- College of Arts and Social Sciences: www.abdn.ac.uk/cass
- College of Life Sciences and Medicine: www.abdn.ac.uk/clsm
- College of Physical Sciences: www.abdn.ac.uk/cops

Each College is required to provide a report to each meeting of the institutional Advisory Group on the activities of the LERP and on any significant issues that have arisen.

Colleges must ensure that staff and students are alerted to the need to consider any requirements for ethical approval relating to research to be undertaken. Colleges and schools should also seek to raise research ethics awareness in general. A checklist of issues relating to research which would require ethical approval is included at Appendix A of this document.

The University should not delegate its institutional responsibility for ethical matters to external bodies; however, for some types of research, separate ethical approval arrangements are in place which means that it may not be necessary for the University to repeat an ethical review process. Some of these arrangements are described below, otherwise, advice should be sought from the College Research Directors, or from the University Advisory Group on Research Ethics and Governance.

4 NHS NORTH OF SCOTLAND RESEARCH ETHICS SERVICE

The University works closely with the North of Scotland Research Ethics Service (NOSRES). As required under the Framework established by the Secretary for State, NOSRES considers all research projects involving NHS patients, staff or premises, including studies falling within these categories done by students. NOSRES is part of the national Central Office of Research Ethics Committees (COREC) which allocates ethical review applications around the country. NOSRES is also willing to consider other projects such as those involving community-based studies, which might not strictly need its approval. Where ethical approval has been given by the NOSRES, further ethical approval consideration of the same project by the University will not normally be required.

5 UNDERTAKING RESEARCH OUTWITH THE UNIVERSITY OR THE UK

Some research projects involve work outwith the University or the UK. Where research involving human participants is being undertaken at another institution or outwith the UK, and has already been ethically approved where necessary, formal evidence of such approval will normally be accepted as sufficient to meet the University's requirements. However, the primary responsibility for securing relevant ethical approval lies with the institution that

employs the researcher, and it must be satisfied that appropriate ethical review and approval has been undertaken.

The University respects the traditions and cultures with which it has dealings, however, where there is conflict between local customs and the ethical principles and values set out by the University this should be brought to the attention of the relevant College Director of Research or the institutional Advisory Group on Research Ethics and Governance.

6 RESEARCH INVOLVING THE USE OF ANIMALS

As required by the Home Office and the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, the University has a central Ethical Review Process (ERP) and Committee for research involving the use of animals. Information on the Ethical Review Process can be obtained from Policy, Planning and Governance.

The University website has a statement regarding its use of animals in research which indicates that the University is committed to avoiding the use of animals in research unless absolutely necessary. It also indicates that the University is committed to the widespread promotion and implementation of the 3Rs in all research involving the use of animals. The 3Rs are defined below:

- Reduction - this refers to the development of methods which facilitate reducing the number of animals used in research, by improving experimental design or by sharing data.

- Refinement - this refers to improvements to scientific procedures and husbandry which minimise actual or potential pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm and/or improve animal welfare in situations where the use of animals is unavoidable.

Replacement – this refers to methods that avoid or replace the use of animals defined as 'protected' under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in an area where they would otherwise have been used.

7 WHISTLEBLOWING

Staff and students and lay members of the University are expected to report actual or potential infringements of research ethics and research misconduct. The University's Code of Practice on Whistleblowing (Appendix 12 of the Framework for Research Governance) sets out procedures for reporting concerns and how allegations will be investigated.

The Advisory Group for Research Ethics and Governance is responsible for ensuring that all reported breaches of the University Research Governance or Ethics Frameworks are investigated, and that remedial and/or disciplinary action is taken if appropriate.

- *First approved by Senate and Court May 2008*
- *Updated November 2010*
- *Updated May 2011*

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

RESEARCH ETHICAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Research ethics refers to the moral principles underpinning research at all stages, from developing a project grant application, data collection, to writing up and dissemination of findings. The University is committed to promoting and facilitating the ethical conduct of research conducted by all of its staff and postgraduate and undergraduate students.

This checklist (or an equivalent college, school or discipline specific checklist) should be used for every research project that involves human participants. This includes surveys or interviews, focus groups or observation techniques. It must be completed before potential participants are approached to take part in any research. Where a college, school or discipline specific ethics approval process has already been undertaken, completion of this checklist should not be required.

The checklist aims to identify whether or not a full application for ethics approval needs to be submitted, and should be used in conjunction with appropriate college, school or department ethical review guidelines. The Principal Investigator, or where the PI is a student, the supervisor, is responsible for ensuring that the checklist review is undertaken, and for exercising appropriate professional judgement. Where a research project is being undertaken outwith a College (e.g. by staff within the University Administration), the checklist should be completed and signed off by a relevant line manager.

Name and status of applicant (e.g. staff/postgraduate or undergraduate student) and **relevant School/Department:**

If student – name of supervisor:

Title and brief description of proposed research project and intended participant group:

Declaration: I have read the relevant college/school/department and funding council guidelines for conducting research with Human Participants. YES/NO

If the answer to any of the questions 1 – 13 below is YES, further information should be provided and guidance sought. In **all** cases involving research by students, whether or not any question is answered YES, the form should be submitted to your supervisor for signature.

1. (i) Is the study externally funded? If Yes, (ii) please state which funding agency and; (iii) whether the funding agency requires proof of Ethical approval	(i) Yes/No (ii) (iii) Yes/No
2. Does the study involve clinical populations (i.e. have participants been identified as a result of their status as a patient)?	Yes/No
3. Does the study involve children (under 18 years)?	Yes/No
4. Does the project involve vulnerable adults such as individuals with mental health problems or learning disabilities, or prisoners or young offenders up to the age of 21?	Yes/No
5. Does the study involve participants who are unable to give informed consent?	Yes/No
6. Does the study involve any clinical procedure?	Yes/No
7. Are drugs, placebos or other substances to be administered to participants, or will the study involve invasive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?	Yes/No
8. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety, or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	Yes/No
9. Is pain or more than mild discomfort for subjects likely to result from the study?	Yes/No
10. Does the project involve the collection of material that could be considered of a sensitive personal, medical or psychological nature?	Yes/No
11. Does the project involve the use of animals and procedures not covered by the Animal Scientific Procedures Act 1986?	Yes/No
12. Does the project use covert research techniques?	Yes/No
13. Will the subjects of the study include staff or students of the University?	Yes/No

Where you have answered "YES" to any question please provide further information in the box below. If you wish to make a fuller response please submit this on a separate sheet

Further information:

If you are a member of staff and have answered "NO" to **all** of the questions, then no further action will required, and the completed checklist should be filed with your research records.

In **all** cases involving research by students (i.e. whether or not any question is answered YES) the form should be submitted to your supervisor for signature. If you are an **undergraduate student** the form together with your project proposal should be submitted to your supervisor in the first instance. **You should also retain a copy for your own reference.**

If you have answered "YES" to any of the questions, you may have to apply to a relevant Ethics Committee for approval and the form should be sent to the relevant School or College Research Ethics Committee and guidance sought.

Principal Investigator

Signed _____

Date _____

Supervisor (where appropriate)

Signed _____

Date _____