



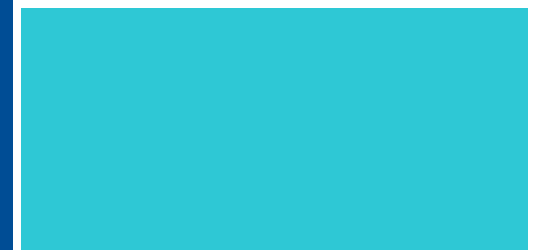
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# Teaching Ethical Awareness and Developing Engagement in Ethical Issues

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# The 'ethics guidebook' project

- Funded by ESRC (Researcher Development Initiative)
- Developing a web-based guide to ethics regulation for social science researchers
- The team:  
*Sean Jennings; Virginia Morrow; Tim Neumann; Will Gibson; Priscilla Alderson*
- Due to launch site late 2009

# The context

- Until quite recently, social science research was predominantly self-regulated, through guidelines of professional associations
  - *e.g. SRA, BPS, BERA, BSA*
  
- BUT... rapid and continuing growth in
  - governance of social science research
  - the regulation and scrutiny of research ethics



# Funder and gatekeeper requirements *for example...*

- ESRC Research Ethics Framework
- RCUK Policy and Code of Conduct on the Governance of Good Research Conduct (implemented autumn 2009)
- Department of Health Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care
  - NHS Research and Development departments & Councils with Social Services Responsibilities
- Government Social Research Unit and Scottish Government working on Ethical Assurance in Social Research
- DCSF looking at governance of research in children's services
- Scottish Government ethics framework for social care research

## Growth in legislation (UK and European) *for example...*

- Mental Capacity Act
- Data Protection Act
- Human Rights Act
- Freedom of Information Act
- Human Tissue Act
- Health and Social Care Act
- Education Act
- Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act
- Exceptions Order to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act
- The Adults with Incapacity (Ethics Committee) (Scotland) Regulations
- European Clinical Trials Directive

## Ethics committees

- NHS committees (NRES system)
- University ethics committees
- Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC)
- Independent research organisations increasingly setting up their own ethics committees
- Some local authorities have their own ethics committees

## Formal requirements create a need for researchers to engage with ethics

*‘To achieve high standards, social research ethics requires greater recognition as a public, social, negotiated and political matter, as well as a personal and private one. The growing interest, activity and literature concerning social research ethics provide a start.’*

Alderson and Morrow (2006, p414)

# Concern about the impact of bureaucratic processes on research...

- For example...
  - Study timescales
  - Time spent on ethics applications
  - Response rates and representativeness of samples
  - Innovative methodological approaches
  - Impact for funding (and funders)
- ***Approval bodies (e.g. NRES) are seeking to address some of these issues***

# Do approval systems impact on our understanding of ethics in research?

- Ethics as a 'hoop' to jump through?
- Ethical issues are dealt with once you have your approval?
- Ethics approval is a pass/fail, not a dialogue?
- Shortcuts (cutting and pasting)
- Rigidity in understanding what's appropriate:
  - *e.g., the need for consent forms, information sheets*

# Awareness and engagement – the challenges

## **For researchers**

- To see ethics as embedded throughout the research process
- To encourage reflection and learning
- To see ethics as relevant to *all* research
- What counts as research?
- Principles not rules

## **For ethics committees**

- Principles not rules (cf. AREC)
- Recognising methodological diversity and innovation
- Being facilitative

# Ethics as an elephant? *(big and full of grey areas)*



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