ABS ETHICS GUIDE - 2012

ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

PRESENTED BY: THE ABS RESEARCH COMMITTEE, HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMY & THE BRITISH ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Business and management studies are a central component of the learning, teaching, research, enterprise and administrative work of nearly all 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 countless 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 it is 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 their 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 ethics procedures and on occasion codes of practice which inform decisions about research and related matters. Notwithstanding these developments there are few guides available from UK based academic and scholarly associations.

This Guide is intended to provide advice and guidance about the ethical questions and issues that may need to be taken into account when considering a range of learning, teaching, research and enterprise issues. This guide is not intended to be a strict code or point of prescription. It is intended instead to be a point of reference and to inform debate about our work. It is addressed to all members of the Business School community – students, teachers, researchers, managers and external clients – and sets out the standards to which we aspire in our work. In setting out these aspirations, we jointly acknowledge that the process is one of continuous improvement and that part of the role of a Business School is to inculcate ethical behaviours in its students.

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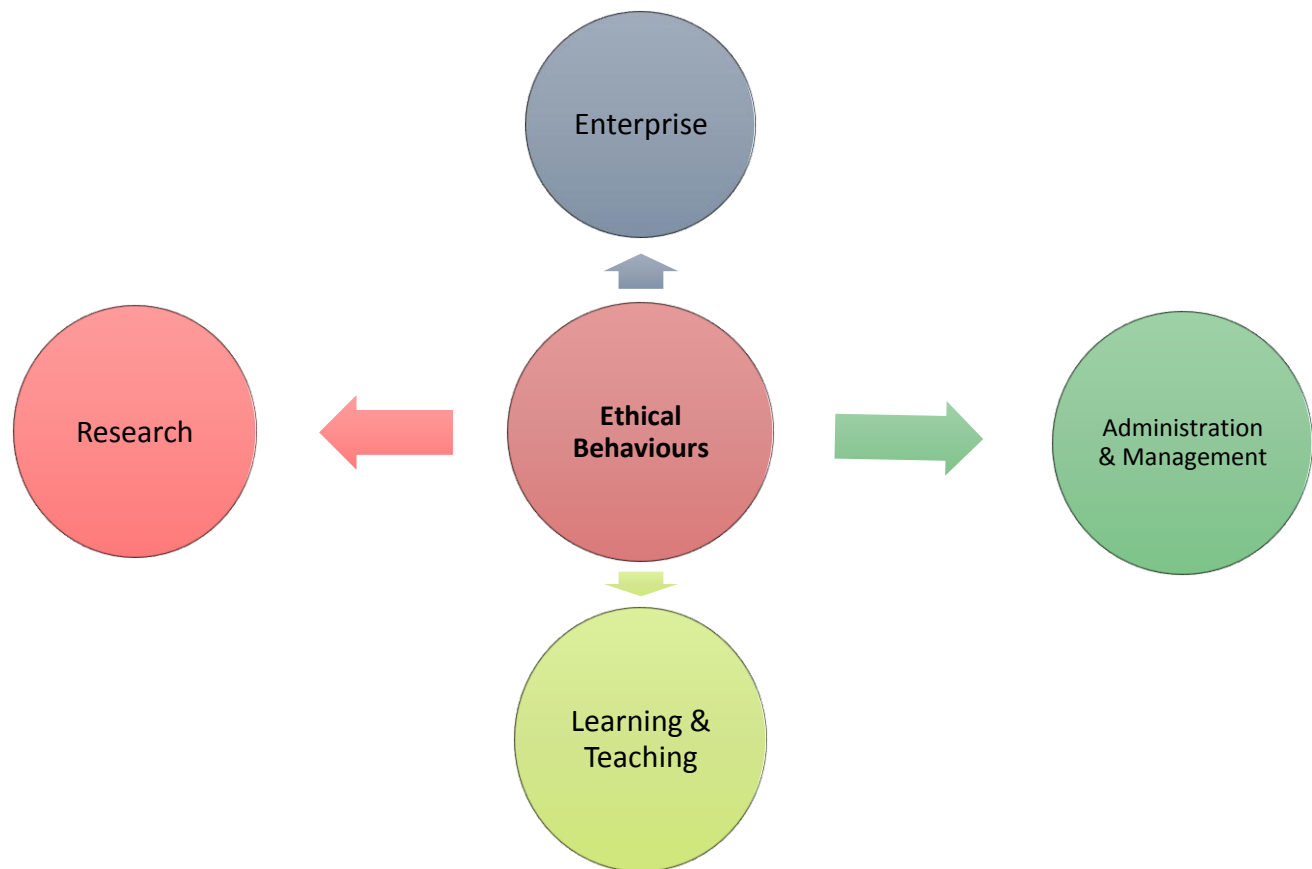
Fig. 1 Four Key Business School Activities

AIMS

This Guide is intended to provide guidance to staff, students and other stakeholders in UK university business schools. The word 'Guide' is used to reinforce the advisory nature of this document.

The approach adopted recognises that there are many stakeholders involved in research, education, administration and learning whose views are pertinent to this work and therefore whose views may need to be considered, if not always actively sought.

The Guide offers a practical framework to help individuals make informed and transparent decisions and to help them communicate these ethical choices to others. It encourages people to take personal responsibility for these choices in the fields of business and management and related specialisms.

It 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 teachers,

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 these individuals to engage in conscious 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.

SCOPE, FOCUS AND STYLE

This Guide is intended to be of use to university business school staff and students engaged in research, enterprise, administration and learning.

It focuses on the four principal components of the work listed in Figure 1: (a) research, (b) enterprise, (c) administration, and (d) learning. These areas of activity are referred to collectively by the acronym REAL. The Guide has been written for people working or studying in the UK. The Guide assumes compliance with UK and European Union law and relevant regulations in other countries as appropriate. It has been written in a personal and informal style and focuses on outlining principles.

METHOD AND DEVELOPMENT

The Guide was developed by representatives listed in Appendix I from the Association of Business Schools (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 of this document. A full list of these sources is contained in Appendix II.

GENERAL CATEGORIES OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

1.   Integrity, honesty and transparency *(open-mindedness, truthfulness, accuracy and clarity without distortion)*:

1.1   Scholarship

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

- Be explicit about your intellectual preferences and inclinations in your work. This may include being prepared to consider your own biases through debate with others.

- Fairly assess the quality of the work of others in terms of the cogency of their reasoning rather than whether it fits with your own views.

- Do not misrepresent your skills or the results of your work.

- Conduct an ethical review of research and scholarship in an open and appropriate manner.

- Always uphold the integrity of data and analysis and ensure that data, analysis and evidence are the basis of your research.

1.2 Learning Experience

- 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.

- Make clearly-specified offers in respect of places on programmes of study; ensure that offers are only made when there is reason to expect that an applicant will be able to benefit from the course of study to which they are applying.

- Set assessments that represent a fair opportunity for demonstration of the achievement of learning outcomes for units/modules; maintain marking and verification processes that are designed to ensure fairness and objectivity in marking; in any group assessments, ensure that individual achievements are fairly rewarded.

- Through the curriculum, encouragement and effective vigilance on the part of teaching staff, guard against the risk of cheating in assessments; foster a shared culture of honesty in assessment

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

2. Respect for persons; prevention of harm.

- Do not discriminate 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.

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

- Consider and evaluate the potential risk of harm to others arising from your work. Within this it is useful to consider harm to self, participants and the wider community. Harm may be physical, psychological or
- Where there is a risk of harm, make arrangements to mitigate this risk.

- Where work involves interaction with people who may be perceived as vulnerable, seek expert advice, e.g. from the relevant research ethics committee.

- Give due consideration to sustainability and environmental issues.

3.   Authorship and respect for intellectual property

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

- Discuss questions of authorship and achieve consensus among participants in any publication or dissemination. In this discussion, consider the order of authors and agree the order according to the level of contribution. All listed authors bear responsibility for the contents.

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

4.   Consent

- Consent cannot be taken as the default position and must be sought from participants in and others closely affected by your research or scholarship.

- 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 taking part , including what their participation entails, why their participation is necessary, how data will be used, and how and to whom findings will be reported.

- In exceptional circumstances, the requirements for prior informed consent may be set aside if in the view of an institution's ethics committee it is neither feasible nor desirable to obtain this consent. In such situations, seek permission from a senior member of staff within the organisation who is responsible for the people or place being studied.

- Do not infer consent from a non-response to a communication such as a letter or invitation to participate.

- Where consent has been given or implied, observe the original commitments given. Only implement changes to what was originally planned once further consent has

been obtained. Researchers remain responsible for the well-being of respondents throughout the research, whatever consent has been obtained.

- Approach covert research with considerable caution. Where it is planned, subject it to independent ethical review and, if necessary, seek legal advice.

5.   Protecting privacy, ensuring confidentiality and maintaining anonymity

- 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.

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

- Carefully consider the importance of confidentiality and anonymity to potential participants in research and scholarship.

- Recognise that there is no need to make promises regarding confidentiality or anonymity where participants have agreed to their comments being made public.

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

- Take care when using any online media. Ethical standards relating to the use of the internet 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.

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

- Articulate all processes used clearly and unambiguously.

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

- 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 recognizing and responding to potential ethical issues that may arise in their work.

- Conduct all financial dealings with probity.

7. Avoiding misleading, misreporting, misunderstanding and unjustified deception

- Collect and use data without fabrication or inappropriate manipulation.

- Report the results of work honestly and transparently (see category 1.1 above).

- For covert research, see category 4 above.

- 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.

8. Governance, Management and Administration

- Always uphold the principles of integrity, honesty, equality, diversity and fairness in the course of conducting business, managing and performing your function.

- Identify and declare interests in any business, management and academic dealings that you are involved in.

- If you observe corrupt and/or illegal business dealings you must report it to the relevant authorities. This may include bodies outside your institution.

- If you observe practices that damage the long term interests (whether intended or unintended), it is your duty to present the evidence and highlight this to the relevant governing bodies of your organization.

- All administrative and managerial processes should be conducted to support the educational values and objectives of the institution.

- All branding, marketing and promotional activity reflects the truth and reality of the situation within the institution.

- Continue to develop your own and others' professional knowledge, skills and practices.

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

- Advance higher education through the robust application of professional knowledge, skills and practice.

- Maintain the highest standards of fair, ethical and transparent professional behavior.

APENDIX 1

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APENDIX 2

Academy of Management Code of Ethics (2005)

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