University Policy Statement on Funding from Ethically Difficult External Sources or in Ethically Difficult Cases

It is difficult to develop a policy that can be used in all cases given the broad range of ethical issues which can arise when considering whether or not to accept external funding. However, some guidance is essential, particular since some large donors now insist that specific ethical policies must be in place. For example, some medical charities will not fund research at an institution which also accepts funding from the tobacco industry. This policy is intended as a guide for staff in their dealings with external sponsors. It should be stressed that the intention is not to prevent individual members of the University from undertaking research. However, it is intended to protect the interests of all members of the University where the University acts as a corporate body in accepting funding.

University Policy

Research funds are accepted by the University on behalf of Principal Investigators. The main issues to consider in relation to whether or not external funding is accepted are:

- Is association with the sponsor likely to bring the name of the University into disrepute?
- What are the motives of the sponsor?
- To what extent are these motives in accord with the University’s mission to be a globally competitive, research-intensive, student-focused university that takes seriously its economic, social and cultural responsibilities?
- What restrictions are placed on dissemination and exploitation of the results of the funded research? Why? Are these likely to lead to ethical problems and difficulties?

The policy of the University is not to accept funding if

- association with the sponsor is likely to bring the name of the University into disrepute;
- the motives of the sponsor are in conflict with the University's main aims and objectives;
- the suppression, delay, modification or partial publication of the results of research or scholarship by a sponsor is likely to lead to irresolvable ethical difficulties.

In cases of doubt, the principal investigator must consult with their Head of Department and the Research and Enterprise Office for advice. Queries may be referred to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) if difficulties cannot be resolved.
Examples of situations to which the policy is applicable

1. A number of cancer charities will not fund research in an institution either accepting research funded from the tobacco industry or involved in collaborations with the tobacco industry. As a result, such research would be unlikely to be approved because it would have serious consequences for the research being undertaken by other researchers in the institution.

2. The University does not bar academics from working with the defence sector. However, all research involving potential or actual defence and / or security applications should have a ‘dual use’, that is both military and civilian applications. This is because the University has a worldwide reputation for Human Rights research and education. Working with the defence sector on projects which have only a military application could jeopardise collaboration with departments of the United Nations and Human Rights organisations.

3. The University would not accept funding from individuals, entities and other groups which have sanctions applied by the UN Security Council. The University would consider carefully before accepting funding from countries or regimes with a poor human rights record or those to which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises against all travel or all but essential travel. There could be reputational risks involved in accepting such contracts, for example, the reputation of some universities suffered as a consequence of their links with the Gaddafi regime in Libya.

4. The University would not accept funding from any organisation which either wanted to influence the design and conduct of a research project in order to achieve results which supported its cause or, once a project was completed, wanted to suppress results which did not support its cause. An example of this would be a Trade Association which wanted to commission a social survey which was considered to be biased in order to obtain a result to support the claims of the organisation.

5. The University would not accept funding from governments, regimes or organisations for projects which restricted participation based on protected characteristics such as age, disability, gender, sexual orientation. Examples would be if the contract stipulated that only male researchers could work on a project or female students would not be permitted to attend a workshop.

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