

ARMS 2024 CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Theme: Professional research management as an embedded practice

Title: Optimising the Human Research Ethics Application process with a Decision Support Tool

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Abstract:

Complex changes to national guidelines and the establishment of the 'grant of exemption pathway', present challenges to researchers applying for ethics approval. This has led to increased traffic of enquiries and triaging difficulties for our unit. We have developed an interactive Decision Support Tool. The tool provides a recommendation for the type of ethics application required, the associated review pathway and links to essential resources. Thus, supporting researchers to navigate the ethics application process. Firstly, we applied our university ethics review framework, alongside guidance from the National Statement to develop a dynamic flow-chart. This served as the background branching logic for the tool, that we then built using H5P software. We partnered with university leadership and ethics experts to co-design the tool. Implementation of the tool reduces administrative burden and creates efficiencies in the unit. The tool empowers researchers to make assured decisions, supported by useful resources. This has led to improved quality of applications and faster review times. This process also helped to bridge a gap in understanding the importance of research ethics and has led to a cultural shift in the university. Although a very effective mechanism, due to the complexity of research and the risk continuum, the tool does not cater to every scenario. These findings highlight the value of maximising researcher productivity and the need to invest resources in enhancing research management. It is our hope that the Decision Support Tool may lead the way for other institutions to adopt a similar concept.