

UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA, QUALITY ASSURANCE CENTRE

The University Grants Commission has recommended, by letter dated 7 May 2015 (ref no UGC/AC/QA/ Gen) that all universities adopt an internal circular on Ethics and Academic Accountability for Academic Staff. Since the University of Kelaniya has already adopted '*Academic Staff Work Norms and Work Loads*' (Senate meeting no 280 held on 26.11.2014) it is recommended that the QAC MC considers a separate internal circular on *Ethics for University Teachers*. This document is based on that circulated by the UGC.

ETHICS FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

The word 'ethics' is defined as a set of moral principles, and the word 'ethical' relates to morals, especially those concerning human conduct (Oxford Dictionary). Basic ethical behavior is learned from the family environment and from acquaintances, school friends and teachers.

Ethics in the profession

In addition to basic ethical behavior, we need to respect certain ethical issues and standards inherent to academic staff in universities. These issues and related standards apply to all university teachers, regardless of their chosen subject discipline.

Ethical principles in teaching

1. **Content competence:** university teachers should strive to continuously improve and maintain a high level of their subject knowledge and ensure that it is up-to-date in a rapidly advancing world. They should ensure that course contents are current, accurate, relevant and appropriate to the level of the study programme, and that it covers the minimum requirement defined in the subject benchmark statements.
2. **Pedagogical competence:** university teachers should improve their pedagogical skills through development of their teaching methods. They should communicate the course objectives to the students at the beginning of the course, and align them to the objectives of the degree programme. They should select appropriate methods of instruction and ensure that such methods are effective in helping student to achieve the course objectives. They should also be aware of alternative instructional methods or strategies that may be more effective in enabling students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
3. **Student development:** student development is the primary outcome of teaching. Therefore, teachers should design their methods of instruction and assessment to facilitate learning, encouraging autonomy and independent thinking in students. Teachers should always treat every student with respect and dignity, and avoid any action that could impede student development.
4. **Dealing with sensitive topics:** some course may contain topics that are likely to be sensitive or cause discomfort to students. In dealing with such topics, teachers should first explain

why such topics have been included in the course and then discuss them in an open, honest and positive manner.

5. **Valid assessment of students:** since student performance is greatly determined by assessment policies and strategies of degree programmes, it is imperative that teachers select assessment techniques that are consistent with the objectives of the course. They should be as reliable and as valid as possible. Assessment methods should be communicated to students at the beginning of the course.
6. **Dual relationships with students:** university teachers' relationships with students should be based on pedagogical goals and academic requirements. Teachers should not enter into dual role relationships with students that could lead to actual or perceived favouritism. Neither should they engage in activities that are likely to discriminate against, or marginalize any student.
7. **Confidentiality:** university teachers should ensure that student grades, attendance records and private communications are treated as confidential material. Thus, they should be released only for legitimate academic purposes or only with the student's consent. Release of study information should be beneficial to the student, or prevent harm to others.
8. **Respect for colleagues:** teachers should respect the dignity of their colleagues and work cooperatively with them in the interest of fostering student development. Teachers should maintain professionalism in order to maximize student attainment.
9. **Respect for the institution:** university teachers should be aware of, and respect the educational goals, policies and standards of the University. They should always share a sense of collective responsibility to work for the good of the University.

Ethical principles in research

All university teachers are expected to conduct research in their fields of specialization. Ethical issues related to funding and conflicts of interest could sometimes arise in conducting research. Further, ethical issues could arise in the conduct of human and animal research, genetic research as well as in ethnic, religious and gender studies. Ethics must be considered in the following situations, in research undertaken by university teachers.

1. **Identification and justification of research problems:** after an extensive literature review, the proponents should be able to highlight the gaps in current knowledge and how the intended study would bridge the gaps. Due reference should be made to all relevant publications. Suppression or non-referencing of literature unfavourable to one's own proposed research is unethical.
2. **Conflicts of interest / funding:** researchers should maintain transparency at all times. The actual outcome of the project should be stated clearly. Self-interests including financial benefits, one's own firm beliefs and other gains in kind should be avoided. In reporting research findings, quoting studies that only support the researcher's outcomes, and failure to include negative results should be also avoided.
3. **Utilization of funds, resources and methodology:** use of methods that are unlikely to achieve the objectives is unethical because valuable resources in the form of time, effort and

funds will be wasted. Hence, methods that are appropriate for the achievement of objectives should be selected, and funds allocated accordingly.

4. **Ethical issues in social and biological research:** in biological research as well as research in humanities and social sciences, where information of an intimate nature is sought, certain guidelines have to be followed. Some ethical issues have legal and human (and animal) rights implications. In all such cases, researchers should seek approval from the Ethics Review Committees in the University of Kelaniya.
5. **Reporting of results:** all relevant results should be reported. Suppression or non-reporting of unfavourable results is unethical. Likewise, failure to mention the limitations of the methods used in the study is unethical.
6. **Publication:** only information that is based on solid scientific principles and ethically conducted research should reach the wider society, because university teachers also have a social responsibility
7. **Duplicate publications:** the outcome of research should be published as an article only once. Duplicate publications in the form of publications in another source under a different title, fragmented and published as several separate papers, or extension of an already published paper by adding data, are unethical and should be avoided.
8. **Authorship:** this is an important ethical issue in scientific publications. Authorship of a publication should be restricted to those who were directly involved in the study. These involvements could include conceptualization, design, collection and management of data, discussion and writing of the paper.
9. **Research fraud:** intentional dishonesty in research is unethical. Such acts include fabrication or invention of data, falsification or deliberate distortion of data and plagiarism. Copying large amounts of material without acknowledgement is also a form of research fraud.