



**University Research Ethics Committee  
Annual Report 2016-2017**

**December 2017**

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## Foreword



Sheffield Hallam University is committed to the promotion of excellent research practice and to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research. The University Research Ethics Policies and Procedures ensure good practice and that research undertaken at the University will be subject to appropriate ethical scrutiny.

The University continues to invest in developing staff and student researchers with further additions of high quality resources. Completion of research ethics training is mandatory for all new research students. This is delivered initially via a Virtual Learning Environment. All research students complete the online Epigeum training package Research Ethics 1, and students using humans or human bi-products in their research are also required to undertake the Research Ethics 2 module. In addition subject-specific workshops and drop-in sessions are run for students. Specific training is provided for supervisors of research students with annual updates occurring. A suite of training packages is provided including online training programmes on Research Integrity, Professional Skills for Research Leaders, Statistical Methods for Research and Developing Research Impact, which are available for staff and research students. Further training is delivered in workshops so all our researchers can maintain the currency of their skills to produce high-quality research that meets the highest ethical standards.

The University's commitment to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers has been acknowledged by receiving the HR Excellence in Research Award from the European Commission: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/researchers-concordat>.

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Head of Research Ethics  
Chair of University Research Ethics Committee

## Introduction

This Research Ethics Report provides a summary of Sheffield Hallam University's Research Ethics Committee business for the 2016-2017 academic year. The aim is to provide a snapshot of the research ethics data presently available and present this in an accessible format using both numerical and descriptive information.

### What is Research Ethics?

Research that involves human participants or human artefacts raises unique and complex ethical, legal, social and political issues. Research ethics in the University mainly focuses on the analysis of ethical issues that are raised when people are involved as participants in research studies. The *first* and broadest objective is to protect human participants. The *second* objective is to assure the integrity of university research by ensuring that the methods used are verifiable, that research is conducted and reported honestly to the highest standards with due regard to legal, professional and university regulations and codes of practice. The third objective is to ensure that university research serves the interests of individuals, groups and/or society as a whole. This is achieved by ensuring specific research activities and all research projects are reviewed for their ethical soundness, looking at issues such as the management of risk, protection of confidentiality, the process of obtaining informed consent and the management of the research data collected.

Most research involving human participants is directed towards advancing human welfare, knowledge and understanding, and/or towards the study of social or cultural dynamics. Such work is undertaken for many reasons, for example: to alleviate human suffering, to validate social or scientific theories, to dispel ignorance, to analyse or evaluate policy, and to understand human behaviour and the evolving human condition. Such research is primarily driven by the desire for new knowledge and understanding and may have a number of benefits. It may, for example, benefit research participants (e.g. improved treatments for disease/illness); research may also benefit both particular groups and society as a whole. That said, care must be taken to ensure that the benefits outweigh the risk of harm to research participants and it is for this reason – amongst others – that ethical frameworks have been developed to underpin research practice. Ethical frameworks are, however, developed within a continuously evolving social context which includes the need for research, moral imperatives and ethical principles, and the law meaning that they are, subject to change.

### Framework for Research Ethics

Under the revised Framework for Research Ethics (FRE), Research Councils only fund research where consideration has been given to ethical implications and in those institutions where appropriate arrangements to undertake this systematically are in place. The Framework therefore has implications for applicants to the Research Councils, research ethics committees within HEIs and for those assessing research proposals. The University's Research Ethics Policies and Procedures are aligned to satisfy the framework in full.

### Concordat to Support Research Integrity

In launching the Concordat to Support Research Integrity in July 2012, Universities UK sought to provide a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and governance. The Concordat was developed in collaboration with the Funding and Research Councils, Wellcome

Trust and various government departments. It was revised following a period of public consultation in which more than 40 Universities and UK members participated and responded to the concerns that had been raised regarding the mechanisms that were in place to support the integrity of UK research.

The Concordat sets out five commitments that will provide assurances that research in the UK continues to be underpinned by the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

- Maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research.
- Ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.
- Supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers.
- Using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise.
- Working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

The University is committed to supporting the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

### **Sheffield Hallam University**

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) was established in the academic year 2001/02 as a sub-committee of the Research and Business Development Committee (now Creating Knowledge Board) in response to increasing internal and external pressures regarding the ethical conduct of research.

The UREC is responsible for developing and implementing policy and for providing guidance on research governance. Each Faculty has a Research Ethics Committee that advises on and oversees procedures for research projects at the Faculty level. The University has an effective research ethics policy to ensure that the highest standards of research are met. It aims to promote good practice through the assessment of ethical issues and compliance with legal requirements.

Research ethics issues have received increasing attention in recent years, particularly from research sponsors and as a result of developments within the National Health Service and Social Care bodies. Our ethics policy complies with guidance and recommendations given by national bodies and ensures that research at the University upholds the highest standards of integrity, impartiality and respect for data. Furthermore, it ensures that the interests, confidentiality and anonymity of volunteers in research activities are maintained and that processes are in place to assure the integrity of research undertaken at the university.

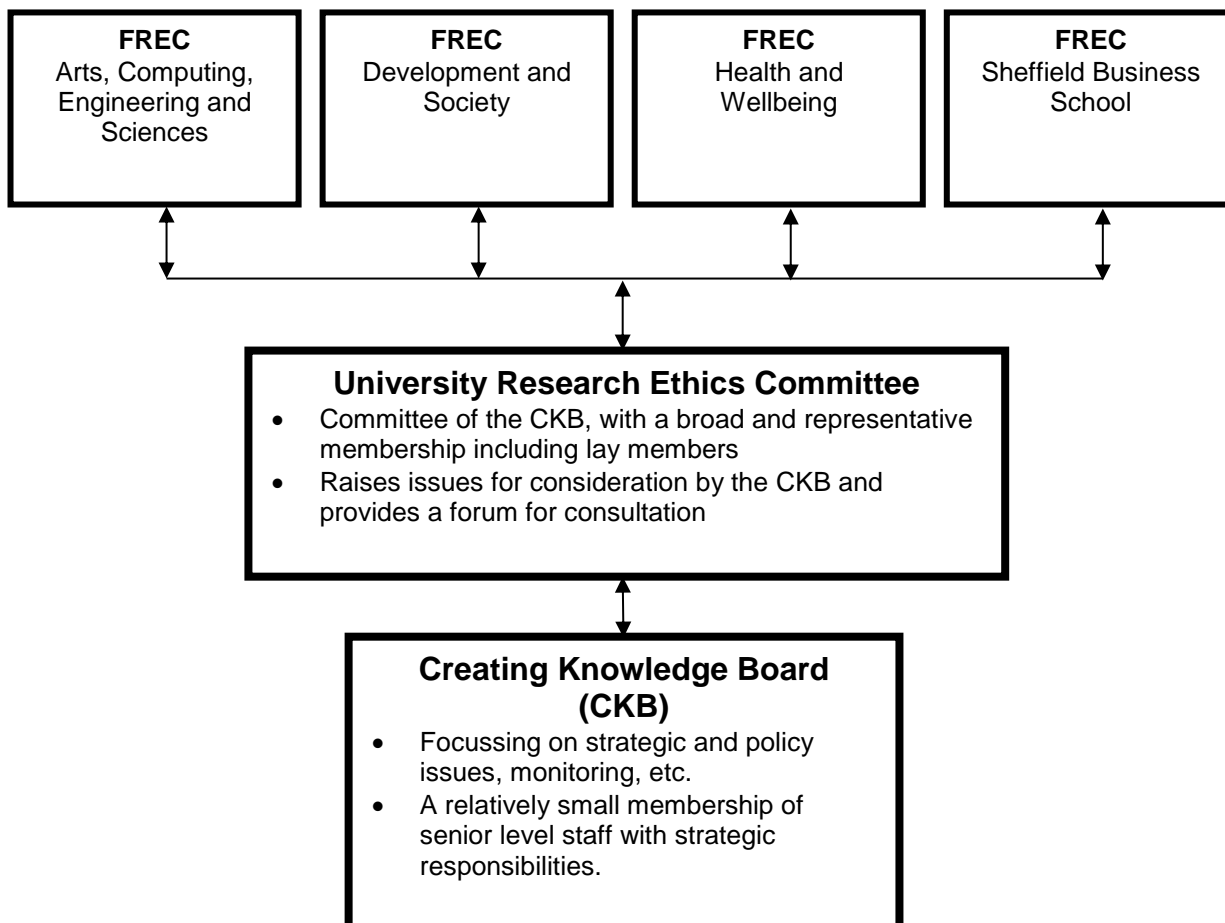
Our approach to promoting research integrity is recognised by the European Science Foundation (Fostering Research Integrity in Europe, ESF, December 2012).

### **University Research Ethics Governance**

The Creating Knowledge Board has ultimate legal accountability for compliance and receives annual progress reports on research ethics matters.

Strategic leadership is provided by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, who is Chair of the Creating Knowledge Board. The Head of Research Ethics exercises delegated responsibility on behalf of and accountability to the Creating Knowledge Board.

### Reporting Structure and Engagement



UREC held four meetings in the Academic Year 2016/17 in cycle with those of the Creating Knowledge Board. Average attendance by members is sixty-six percent.

UREC membership includes the four Faculty Research Ethics Committees' chairs, plus representatives from: the Research and Innovation Office, Library, Health and Safety Services, the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy, early career researchers, a statistician, external lay members and a secretary.

The committee is represented on the Health, Safety and Welfare Committee to promote closer links between the two committees and on the Research Degrees Committee to ensure that ethical considerations are prioritised in research training.

### Faculty Research Ethics Committees

The University's four designated faculties are managed as single academic and business units and do not have multiple layers of organisation and management.

- Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Sciences (ACES)

- Faculty of Development and Society (D&S)
- Faculty of Health and Wellbeing (HWB)
- Sheffield Business School (SBS)

All four faculties are involved in research, consultancy and continuing professional development, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, although the balance of activities varies. They have strong and numerous regional, national and international links with professional bodies, industry, commerce and the voluntary and public sectors.

All the faculties are led and managed by a Pro Vice-Chancellor, have a number of faculty-wide senior management posts, operate common services, and encourage and facilitate interdisciplinary activities and approaches. Within each faculty there are academic departments which are responsible for a number of related subject areas, foster common academic identities and provide a recognisable external academic profile. There are also research institutes and centres which lead and co-ordinate related research and innovation activities.

Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FRECs) continue to operate in accordance with policy and procedures established by the University Research Ethics Committee and in agreement with University governance structures. Membership includes: a chair who has knowledge and experience of research ethics, representatives from the disciplines, members external to the University with detailed knowledge of ethics and moral behaviour, a safety co-ordinator, additional members as necessary and a secretary.

Each Faculty has a single Research Ethics Committee, which with the addition of lay members, meets the ESRC guidelines for effective ethics committees.

The numbers of FREC meetings vary between Faculties and it is the aim that they should be held every two months. Faculties now operate devolved reviewing systems overseen by their committees, which allow for expedited ethical review of research proposals. This system allows for the utilisation of the expertise of a wider staff group than simply the Faculty Committees, guarantees a business focussed response, and ensures that researchers with appropriate methodological knowledge are available to review projects.

Each FREC produces an Annual Report for discussion by UREC.

The numbers of research projects reviewed by Faculty Research Ethics Committees are shown in the following table.

<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Taught courses</b>	<b>Doctoral</b>	<b>Staff</b>
<b>ACES</b>	Data unavailable	26	31
<b>D&amp;S</b>	c.1400-1500 + 38 category approvals	31+ 6 complex taught reviews	124
<b>HWB</b>	968	122	
Sport & Exercise	730	63	
Biomedical Sciences	179	4	
Health & Social Care	64	55	
<b>SBS</b>	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable

Because of ongoing special measures in SBS, their data is currently unavailable. For 2017-18, all staff and doctoral applications will be systematically recorded on the University's research management system for research. Undergraduate and Masters numbers are difficult to capture because review is undertaken locally by supervisors and designated sub-groups, and only problematic or complex cases are escalated to faculties.

## **Research Misconduct**

Sheffield Hallam has been implementing a research misconduct policy since 2005. The levels of verified research misconduct are low. In 2010-11, before the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, we undertook more training on research integrity and publicised the research misconduct policy, widely emphasising that failure to report misconduct constituted a breach of university policy. For research misconduct policies to work, researchers within an institution are required to take collective responsibility and police each other, thereby protecting the reputation of the University and ensuring that we have the highest standards of research integrity. The reporting of allegations since we provided training has evidenced that this is happening. We also have a research misconduct policy for doctoral students.

There were no allegations of Research Misconduct during the year 2016-17. This compares to two in 2015-16 and two in 2014-15. Historic issues relating to staff research in Sheffield Business School remain an ongoing concern, and are being actively addressed. Doctoral research in SBS is now compliant with research ethics policies and procedures.

## **Public Engagement with Research**

The Committee continues to monitor the role of lay members to ensure that the role is fulfilling and provides significant contributions to the mutual benefit of both parties. The university is fortunate in having close relationships with the local University of the Third Age (U3A) who are a good source of lay members for the ethics committees across the University. We also advertise for lay members with an interest in research ethics and the University has lay members on every research ethics committee and they are also involved in reviewing applications. Training is provided for lay members.

The lay members on the ethics committees across the University are happy to be consulted about research funding applications where it would be advantageous to have public perceptions represented. Individual members are also willing to serve on steering groups for research projects where public or user representation is desirable.

## **Training**

A number of training sessions and seminars dedicated to, or including, Research Ethics elements have been held throughout the University. These events have had various targeted audiences and over the year, staff (researchers, supervisors and administrators), students and lay members have been catered for, along with open events. These are in addition to a range of e-learning courses to support the development of researchers and research students.

Of particular prominence were training sessions on making and reviewing applications through the University's new online research management system. Through spring and early summer 2017

approximately 20 sessions were delivered by members of the UREC and the Research and Innovation Office. Regular sessions are scheduled through autumn and winter 2017.

The University will support lay members to attend seminars organised by external bodies. Lay members are also given access to ethics training via the Virtual Learning Environment.

## **Key Achievements**

### **ELECTRONIC SYSTEM FOR RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW MANAGEMENT**

UREC has worked with the Research Support Team in the Research and Innovation Office (RIO) to develop the University's research management system as a tool for facilitating the electronic review of research ethics applications and documentation for staff and doctoral projects. The new module will improve on the previous process in the following ways:

- a) Creates a record of all research (funded and unfunded) taking place in the University
- b) Simplifies the process for researchers by guiding them through each step of the process, removing the need for multiple forms (and potential human error)
- c) Automatically triggers emails to alert relevant internal staff, such as Health & Safety, insurance and data management, based on the information provided
- d) Reduces the burden on the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FRECs), who can move away from undertaking routine reviews and concentrate on strategy and training, alongside arbitration and sampling for quality.

The broadening of the ethics reviewer pool has reduced the burden on a few (mainly the FRECs) and opened opportunities to more. One doctoral researcher had said that undertaking an ethics review had made her feel that she 'belonged more' to the University and she found it useful to hear about other research.

Training took place during the summer of 2017, tailored for three specific groups; ethics administrators, FREC chairs/deputies, and reviewers (including lay and other FREC members). The module launched in September 2017.

### **RAISING THE PROFILE OF RESEARCH ETHICS: LINKS WITH THE WIDER UNIVERSITY**

The Chair has presented on ethics-related topics at the Academic Continuing Personal Development (ACPD) day, *The Hallam Academic: Developing your Teaching and Research under the New Strategy*, which was attended by 150 staff; and a number of Faculty away days throughout the year.

### **RESOLVING ISSUES WITHIN THE FACULTIES**

#### **Sheffield Business School (SBS)**

Following concerns regarding certain areas of the School's engagement with research ethics policy and procedures, a review was undertaken and a phased approach to resolve the issues and raise the profile of research ethics in the School was implemented. Measures included:



- a) A requirement that every research project must have appropriate review and compliance with policies and procedures. Doctoral programmes were compliant by December 2016, and phase two was started to address staff research.
- b) Staff training sessions, which resulted in a culture change recognising the importance of ethics review.
- c) A review of misconduct for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students.

In March 2017, the Faculty confirmed that a Faculty Research Ethics Committee was being established. The requirement for 2-3 dedicated faculty ethics administrators in SBS was raised with the PVC for Research and the University's Chief Operating Officer. Discussions on resourcing are ongoing.

## **Arts, Computing, Engineering and Sciences (ACES)**

### *RF2 Process*

A review of the RF2 process for the confirmation of a PhD took place. As a result, an outline of reviewers' responsibilities is now included in guidance documentation. It was established that in future, ethical approval will be reviewed before any post-RF2 transfer from another Higher Education Institute (HEI) is approved, with particular regard to non-UK HEIs.

## **Development & Society (D&S)**

### *Performance Art*

Following a meeting with researchers in this area, it was now recognised that ethics review is necessary. In particular there was acceptance that there are necessarily some restrictions for those opting-in to doctoral/REF-able research, as oppose to standalone artistic practice. It was seen as positive that an area such as this, which has not traditionally engaged with ethics, is now doing so.

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH CENTRAL DIRECTORATES**

### **Research Ethics Protocols (Guidance to Students)**

The Chair was asked to provide this guidance regarding the ethics process for undergraduate (UG) and post-graduate taught (PGT) students undertaking research. The PVC for Student Experience is keen to re-implement an ethics process as part of teaching and the Chair's guidance will be included in all module handbooks. The responsibility for the enforcement will be with Teaching & Learning as an academic conduct matter.

### **Accessing Normally Prohibited Web Content for Research Purposes**

Clarification was sought from Digital Technology Services (DTS) regarding the protocol for staff or students accessing websites with sexually explicit material for research purposes. The Head of Digital Architecture at SHU attended a committee meeting to advise on procedure.

### **Research Ethics External Website**

Following significant delays in updating information on the SHU external website, which created issues regarding the currency of material, the marketing department provided dedicated support to

ensure research ethics updates were actioned in a timely manner. This issue appears to have been resolved and there have been no further problems.

## **Institutional Research and Evaluation**

UREC reviewed a paper from Student Engagement, Evaluation and Research (StEER), to outline current and best practice with regard to institutional research (IR). The paper outlines where ethical approval is required, as it had been discovered that approval had not always been obtained for this type of research due to the complex distinction between IR and service evaluation/audit activity.

## **RESPONSE TO AND ENGAGEMENT WITH EXTERNAL BODIES**

### **Science and Technology Committee (Commons) Research Integrity Inquiry**

The UK Parliament's Science and Technology Committee (STC) conducted an inquiry into the role of university self-regulation and whether it is effective in ensuring integrity. The Chair replied in response to a request from the STC, promoting the good procedures in place at SHU and the benefits of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. The response also highlighted the lack of scrutiny applied to organisations other than universities which undertake research, such as commercial businesses and voluntary organisations. Because of the high-quality of Sheffield Hallam's response, the Chair was invited to address the STC in person, although this was later postponed because of other parliamentary developments (a General Election).

### **Misconduct Procedures - Updates to Policies**

The Research Councils UK (RCUK) updated their guidance for misconduct procedures. The RCUK should now be notified as soon as a misconduct allegation has been raised, so they have the right to attend the hearing if a complaint becomes formal. The two related University policy documents were updated accordingly.

### **Sheffield Hallam University's Commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity**

There is a HEFCE requirement each year to produce a statement on how the University is approaching ethics and integrity. REF funding is only released if this is approved.

## **POLICIES / PROCEDURES**

The following policies/procedures were added to, or updated on, the external ethics web pages:

### **Ethics, Integrity and Practice**

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice#this-section>

- Principles of Integrity in Research and Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct (*updated, in response to RCUK changes*)
- Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct against Doctoral and Masters Research Students (*updated, in response to RCUK changes*)

### **Research Ethics Approval Procedures**

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/research-ethics-approval-procedures>

- Guidance for research ethics reviewers (*developed and added*)

- Application for research ethics approval staff and postgraduate doctoral research students (SHUREC2A) (*updated*)
- 'Participant Consent Form', 'Participant Information Sheet' and 'Sample participant consent form for images' (*updated*)
- Research ethics protocols (guidance to students) (*developed and added*)

### **NHS, Social Care and Criminal Justice Policy and Procedures**

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/nhs-social-care--criminal-justice-policy-and-procedures>

- Research passport process documentation (*updated and simplified*)
- Training for Good Clinical Practice for Researchers (*made available online*)
- Reporting of Serious Adverse Events (SAE) in Research Trials (*developed and added*)

### **GUIDANCE FOR RESEARCHERS**

The following guidance was added to, or updated on, the external ethics web pages:

#### **Guidance and Legislation**

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/guidance-and-legislation>

- Developing a personal publication strategy (*developed and added*)
- Insurance notification required (*updated*)
- Research activities in USA and Canada (*developed and added*)
- Medical research involving children (*added*)
- Research ethics guidelines for internet-mediated research (*developed and added*)

## **Ongoing Issues**

### **Recruitment and Retention of Lay Members**

Two lay members stepped down from UREC/FREC committees at the end of this year and will be replaced. One retiring lay member stated how much he had enjoyed his membership of UREC and ACES FREC, and had found it 'thoroughly worthwhile'. The recruitment of replacement lay members is ongoing.

### **Ethical Review of Knowledge Exchange and Consultancy**

Discussions are ongoing about introducing a light-touch process to look at the ethical issues of lower financial value knowledge exchange and consultancy projects, which are not otherwise scrutinised (unlike higher value projects).

### **Future Training Provision**

IRAS - basic training will be provided for completing IRAS forms. HWB have requested a half-day retreat to train key individuals, who can then deliver training to their colleagues.

Working with vulnerable participants - training has been requested on working with vulnerable participants, to back up the guidance provided on the website. Training around safeguarding issues is also anticipated.