Sheffield Hallam University

University Research Ethics Committee
Annual Report 2018-2019

December 2019

Contents

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 our research. The University Research Ethics Policies and Procedures are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure good practice and that research undertaken at the University is subject to appropriate ethical scrutiny.

The University continues to invest in developing staff and student researchers with the provision of appropriate 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. Directors of research centres and heads of department are supported to ensure the research occurs with a culture which values honesty, rigour and transparency with open communication; which ensures that research participants and the environment are treated with due care and respect.

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/quality/ethics-and-integrity/the-concordat-to-support-the-career-development-of-researchers

Professor Ann Macaskill
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 2018-2019 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.
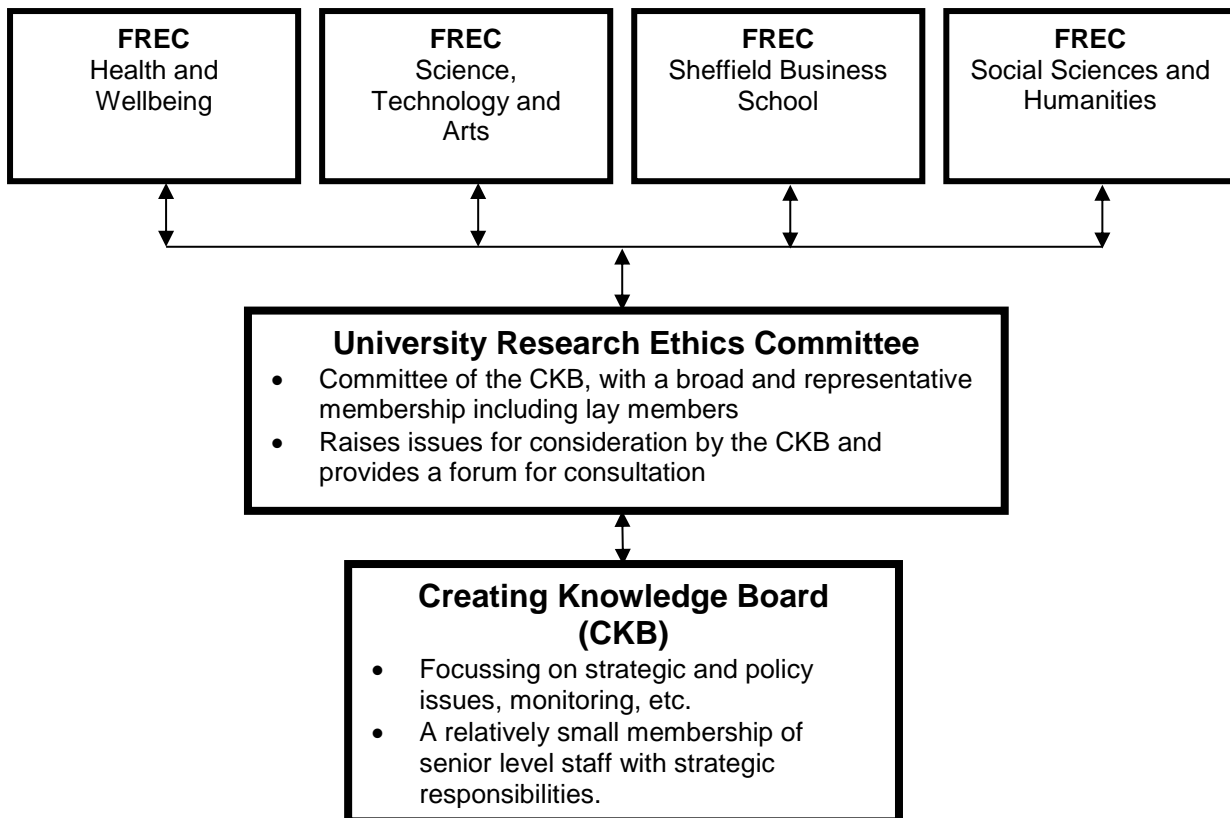
Our approach to promoting research integrity is recognised by the European Science Foundation (Fostering Research Integrity in Europe, ESF, December 2012).

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

FREC Health and Wellbeing	FREC Science, Technology and Arts	FREC Sheffield Business School	FREC Social Sciences and Humanities

University Research Ethics Committee
- Committee of the CKB, with a broad and representative membership including lay members
- Raises issues for consideration by the CKB and provides a forum for consultation

Creating Knowledge Board (CKB)
- Focussing on strategic and policy issues, monitoring, etc.
- A relatively small membership of senior level staff with strategic responsibilities.

UREC held four meetings in the Academic Year 2018/19 in cycle with those of the Creating Knowledge Board. Average attendance by members is ninety-three 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 Health, Safety and Welfare Committee is represented on the University Research Ethics Committee to ensure close links between the two committees. UREC is represented 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 Health and Wellbeing (HWB)
- Faculty of Science, Technology and Arts (STA)
- Sheffield Business School (SBS)
- Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)

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 inter-disciplinary 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 2-3 months. Faculties now operate devolved online 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, while FREC minutes are also scrutinised by UREC.

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

Report Period 2018-19

Faculty	Type	No Human	Low Risk	All Other	Other HEI	IRAS	Total
STA	Staff	1	30	7	1	1	40
60	Doctoral	7	8	4	1	0	20
SSH	Staff	15	53	49	4	5	126
169	Doctoral	6	18	18	0	1	43
HWB	Staff	9	49	31	1	6	96
141	Doctoral	12	11	19	2	1	45
SBS	Staff	9	34	11	2	0	56
72	Doctoral	2	8	5	0	1	16

= 442

Report Period 2017-18

Faculty	Type	No Human	Low Risk	All Other	Other HEI	IRAS	Total
STA	Staff	2	26	5	1	4	38
60	Doctoral	5	14	3	0	0	22
SSH	Staff	23	84	43	5	0	155
201	Doctoral	9	9	25	2	1	46
HWB	Staff	9	35	28	2	7	81
134	Doctoral	11	21	14	2	5	53
SBS	Staff	6	27	5	1	0	39
53	Doctoral	0	14	0	0	0	14

= 448

Application numbers have remained stable, and appear appropriate for the volume of research activity in each area.

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. There are however robust procedures in place which have been approved by the FRECs.

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 five allegations of research misconduct during the year 2018-19, three against members of staff and two against doctoral researchers. All were substantiated and appropriately resolved. This compares to two allegations in 2017-18, zero in 2016-17, two in 2015-16 and two in 2014-15.

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.

Training sessions on making and reviewing applications through the University's online research management system continued to run.

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 Outcomes

Online Application and Review System Improvements
A series of improvements to the online ethics application and review system were made. These were the final set of feasible 'wish list' improvements, and the system has subsequently entered a 'solid state' stage. The changes made during the year included:
- Low risk projects are now assessed by one reviewer
- Automatic email reminders are sent out on outstanding reviews after one week
- Amendments to ethics reviews are sent to only the lead reviewer of the original application (or the FREC Chair), rather than all reviewers
- A streamlined/better automated process for applications referred back for resubmission
- New access rights for co-investigators and secondary supervisors
- PDF browse templates for easier reviewing
- The ethics administrator's role has been restricted to just assigning reviewers and ensuring the timely progression of the reviews - all other checking roles have been automated

Concordat Consultation

Universities UK consulted on a draft revision to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. The UREC fed into the consultation and considered the implications of the changes, if carried into the final version, on the University.

Ethical Scrutiny of Service Evaluation Work

A new process was devised for ethical scrutiny of institutional service evaluation within the University (e.g. Advanced HE surveys, module evaluation surveys etc.). This mirrors the category approval process for taught courses, but is submitted to UREC for approval.

Category Approvals

Category approvals are used to review small research projects for taught courses where students are tasked with collecting data on a standard research question. These projects are important for the student experience and should be ethically reviewed, but to reduce administrative burden, a category approval can cover this course activity for 5 years. Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FRECs) undertook a review of existing category approvals and have responsibility for reviewing future applications.

Ethics in Teaching & Learning

Guidance for students regarding ethical approval for research in taught courses has now been added to module handbooks. Guidance for supervisors regarding publication procedures for taught courses was also produced and disseminated by Assistant Deans Teaching & Learning (ADT&L) have agreed to disseminate this information and will emphasise its importance.

In the new University structure, each College to have its own T&L research ethics committee.

Ethical Approval for Research Impact Activities

New guidance was written to advise researchers on ethical and GDPR considerations when undertaking research impact activities.

Visual Research Guidance

New guidance was produced on the use of photographs, film and video and the particular ethical challenges when identifiable or potentially identifiable material is produced.

HRA Site Audits

A new process and document for conducting site audits of Health Research Authority (HRA) projects was developed and introduced.

Q Drive Access

Discussions were held with Digital and Technical Services (DTS) to ensure the Q drive custodian arrangements are linked in with doctoral enrolment, to ensure there is a University-wide process to automatically give all doctoral researchers access to the Q drive, so they can store working documents and data in a secure place.

Policies, Procedures and Guidance Updates

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

Policies
https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/quality/ethics-and-integrity/ethics-policies
- UREC Annual Report 2017-18

Procedures
https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/quality/ethics-and-integrity/ethics-approval-procedures
- Converis User Guide v.9 (July 2019)
- Amendments Guidance
- Investigator Site File

Guidance and Legislation
https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/quality/ethics-and-integrity/guidance-and-legislation
- Universities UK Protocol regarding Tobacco Industry Funding
- Researching Own Children Guidance

HRA Governance
https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/quality/ethics-and-integrity/nhs-social-care-criminal-justice-policy
- N/A

Concordat to Support Research Integrity
https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/quality/ethics-and-integrity/commitment-to-the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity
- Sheffield Hallam University's Commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity v.6 (2018)

Ongoing Issues

Ethical Review of Knowledge Exchange and Consultancy

Commitments have been made to introducing a light-touch process to look at the ethical issues of consultancy, knowledge exchange and CPD projects.

Review Misconduct Policies

The research misconduct policies were scheduled for updating in June 2019, but this was delayed in anticipation of the UK Research Integrity Office's review of its guidelines on the subject, which will be used as a basis for updating the University's guidance.