Sheffield Hallam University

**University Research Ethics Committee
Annual Report 2019-2020**

November 2020

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Foreword

Sheffield Hallam University is committed to the promotion of excellent research and to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of our research practice. The University Research Ethics Policies and Procedures are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure currency with legal and other external body requirements and that all 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 to develop their understanding of research ethics even if they are not planning currently to undertake research with human participants. Students undertaking research with humans or human bi-products are required to undertake additional online training. 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 Ethics, 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. Workshops have continued but moved to online delivery since March as a response to the Covid-19 safety requirements. Directors of research centres and supported to ensure research occurs with a culture which values honesty, rigour and transparency with open communication to ensure that research participants and the environment are treated with due care and respect. The University complies with the Concordat for Research Integrity and our commitment can be found here. Researches, Directors of Research Centres and Heads of Department and notified of their responsibilities under the Concordat each year. |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.

Professor Ann Macaskill
Head of Research Ethics
Chair of University Research Ethics Committee

Introduction

This Research Ethics Report provides some background and a summary of Sheffield Hallam University's Research Ethics Committee business for the 2019-2020 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
The Concordat to Support Research Integrity launched in July 2012 by 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. A revised **Concordat to Support Research integrity**, was published on October 2019. This version addresses the recommendations

in the Science and Technology Committee's report on **research integrity** that was published in July 2018.

The Concordat sets out five commitments to 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 and we publish our response on the University website annually.

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. 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. The policy applies to all research at the university including student projects.
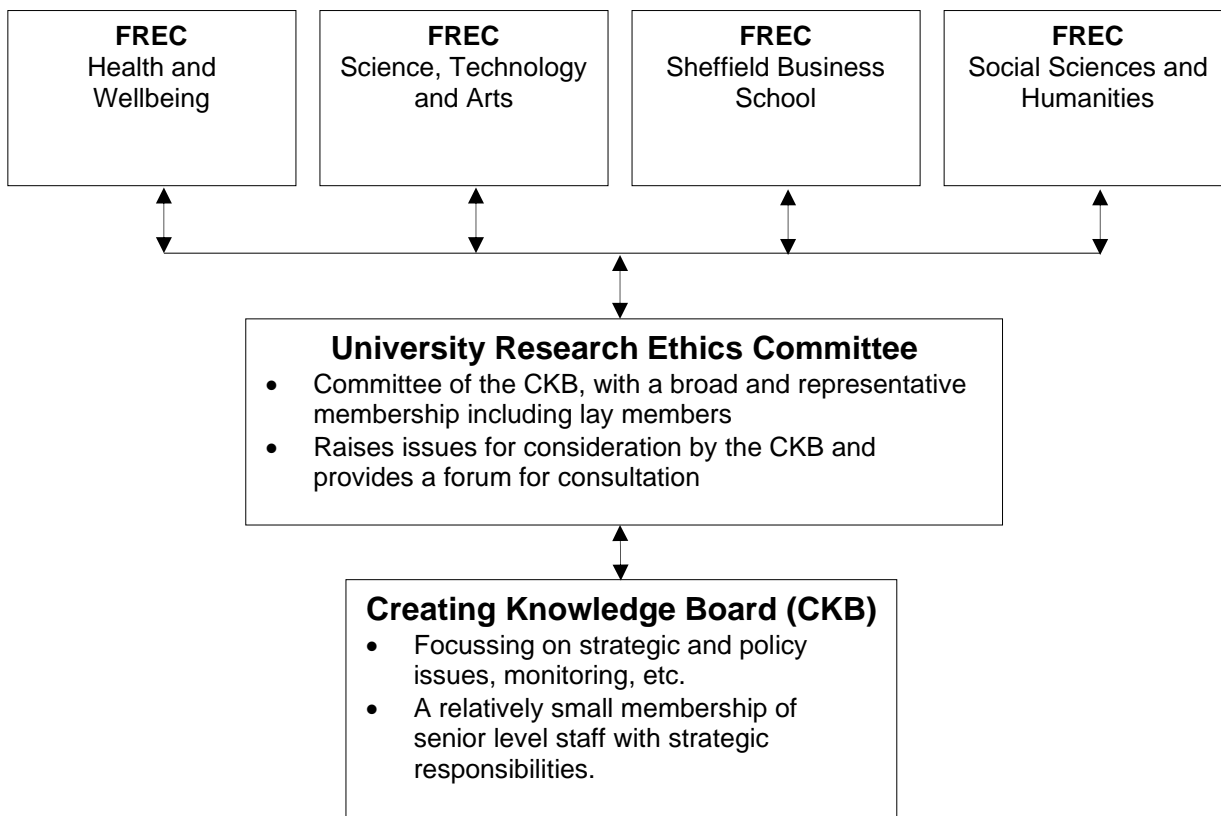
Research ethics issues have received increasing attention in recent years, particularly from research sponsors and as a result of developments within the National Health Service and Social Care bodies. Our ethics policy complies with guidance and recommendations given by national bodies and ensures that 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 as an exemplar of good practice by the European Science Foundation (Fostering Research Integrity in Europe, ESF, December 2012).

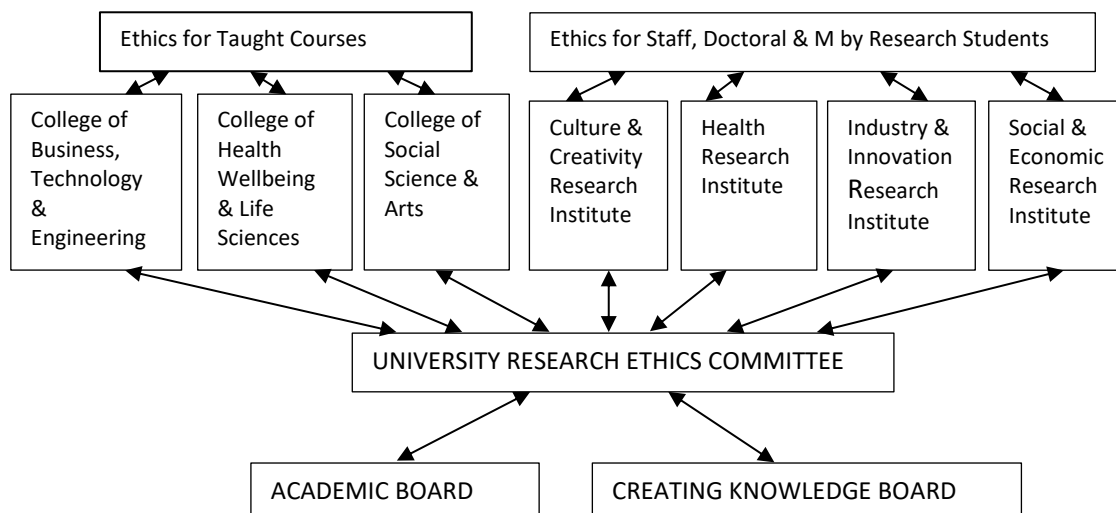## University Research Ethics Governance

The Creating Knowledge Board has legal accountability for compliance in research and receives annual progress reports on research ethics matters while the Academic Board oversees research ethics as they relate to research on all taught courses.

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 till the end of December 2019

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.

The structure above operated for the first semester in 2019 with new structures implemented from January 2020. Taught courses are now located in three Colleges while staff and doctoral student research is managed via four research institutes as shown in the diagrams below.

Ethics for Taught Courses			Ethics for Staff, Doctoral & M by Research Students			
College of Business, Technology & Engineering	College of Health Wellbeing & Life Sciences	College of Social Science & Arts	Culture & Creativity Research Institute	Health Research Institute	Industry & Innovation Research Institute	Social & Economic Research Institute

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

ACADEMIC BOARD   CREATING KNOWLEDGE BOARD

Ethics for Taught Courses

Research ethics related to all taught provision is managed through the College Teaching Programme Research Ethics Committees (TPRECS). The reorganisation provided the opportunity to enhance the provision and improve efficiency. The existing ethics proforma were revised and new versions produced to simplify the process. This has resulted in four ethics proforma for taught students:

UREC1 No Human participants
UREC2 Low risk human participants

UREC 3 Higher risk social science projects
UREC 4 Higher Risk Bio-medical, food, sport and health projects.
All the proforma include a health and safety risk assessment for the student.

New procedures were implemented in each College to ensure consistency of delivery across the University. Each College has a Teaching Programme REC Chair who oversees the review processes in the College, works with departments to disseminate policy and ensure that the correct procedures are being utilised and manages the review of Category Approvals on taught courses. TPREC chairs are members of UREC and are involved in identifying training needs and delivering training for College teaching staff. Each Department has an undergraduate and a postgraduate Departmental Research Ethics Working Group (DERWG) chaired by the departmental ethics lead. The chair oversees the ethics review process for student work, liaises with modules leaders and represents the department on the CTPREC. The minutes from each TPREC meeting are presented at UREC and each College also will produce an annual report for UREC. The additional work caused by the pandemic and the lack of administrative support resulted in verbal briefings being produced at the end of this year.

Ethics for Staff, Doctoral & Masters by Research Students

Each Research Institute has appointed Research Ethics leads who disseminate policy and procedures across the institutes. Research Centres also have ethics leads, a maximum of 5 per Institute who can support staff and doctoral student ethics applications. The research ethics leads and the Head of Research Ethics (HRE) also provide expedited ethics reviews for contract research or bids being undertaken within tight deadlines. There are Professors who provide advice for Contract Researchers and for Doctoral Student Research to supplement that provided by the Head of Research Ethics.

Staff, doctoral & masters by research students' are reviewed using an online system. Low risk studies are reviewed by one researcher with possible escalation to the chair, while all other research with human participants is reviewed by three people, one of whom is a subject expert, one a methodology expert and the third acts as a lay reviewer. Lay reviewers are either members of the general public who sit on UREC or researchers from a different discipline to the study being reviewed. Ethics reviews aim to be completed within two weeks but is dependent on the responsiveness of researchers.

University Research Ethics Committee

UREC held four meetings in the Academic Year 2019/20 in cycle with those of the Creating Knowledge Board. Average attendance by members is seventy-four percent.

UREC membership includes the three College Teaching Programme Research Ethics Committees' chairs, the Research Ethics Leaders from the four Research Institutes, the Human Tissue leads, 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.

The numbers of Staff and Doctoral student research projects reviewed between 1st September 2019 and August 31st 2020 are shown in the following table along with the figures for the previous year to allow comparisons.

Application type	Other Research institutes			Health Research Institute			University Total 2019-2020	University Total 2018-2019
	Staff	PGR	Total	Staff	PGR	Total		
All other research with human participants (higher risk)	68	43	111	40	16	56	**167**	123
Very low risk human participants studies	118	31	149	50	16	66	**215**	230
No human participants, human tissue or personal data	17	15	32	9	9	18	**50**	65
Approval given elsewhere - another UK HEI	6	0	6	0	0	0	**6**	13
IRAS - projects requiring NHS or HMPPS ethics	2	1	3	2	4	6	**9**	17
Total	211	90	**301**	101	45	**146**	**447**	448

The number of staff and doctoral student reviews carried out via the online review system has remained the same, the distribution between the categories has changed somewhat. There have been a large number of amendments submitted to the system in response to Covid-19 restrictions on research and these are still continuing. The system does not record these separately hence the lack of figures.

Undergraduate and Masters numbers could not be produced this year due to the lack of administrative support for research ethics in the Colleges. There are, however, robust procedures in place for ethics review on taught courses and these were carried out by the academic teaching teams.

Research Misconduct

Sheffield Hallam has been implementing a research misconduct policy since 2005. The levels of verified research misconduct are low. In line with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity

training on research ethics and integrity is promoted and the research misconduct policy is publicised widely emphasising that failure to report misconduct constitutes 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 training has become widespread for staff and mandatory for doctoral students has evidenced that this is happening. We also have a research misconduct policy for doctoral students.

There were 3 allegations of Research Misconduct during the year 2019-20 all concerning staff, one involved a research project and was relatively minor and the other involved failures in research supervision of one student and was more serious. All were substantiated and appropriate remedial action was taken. This compares to three in 2018-19, zero in 2017-18, two in 2016-17, two in 2015-16 and two in 2014-15. Typically, more allegations are made but found to be groundless or are issues that can be dealt with via other processes.

One allegation of research misconduct in a study circulated to staff at the University by researchers at Manchester Metropolitan University was reported to the Head of Research Ethics by a good number of staff indicating pleasing awareness of how research should be conducted. The matter was reported to the University concerned by the HRE. They stopped the study immediately and instigated an investigated. The HRE was later informed that the allegations were upheld and necessary disciplinary actions had been taken.

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. Lay members are also involved in reviewing applications. Training is provided for lay members and expenses are covered.

The lay members 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. Since the Covid-19 restrictions, the e-learning resources have been used heavily, especially by doctoral students and what would have been face-to-face training has also moved online since March. This appears to have been beneficial with the Epigeum courses being the most used online resource by doctoral students. Taught courses were reminded that their students can access the Epigeum online courses and this has led to an increase in uptake. Attendance at the online internal courses have also been high. The University supports 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

General Data Protection Regulation

Work has continued to deliver training and support in relation to compliance with GDPR regulations and this is now included in all ethics and integrity training events. Changes to the Information provided to research participants were also required under the Act and this continues to be disseminated across the University research community. This year a small working group has been working on creating a range of examples of GDPR compliant information sheet suitable for different groups of research participants. The aim is to ensure the information provided for research participants Is age, literacy and understanding appropriate.

Teaching Provision

A College Research Ethics Newsletter was produced and disseminated to the teaching community specifying the requirements for student projects in relation to undertaking research and the ethics review process. This has resulted in a standardised procedure now being implemented across the University and ensures equity of treatment for students. Having clear guidance should also reduce the number of student complaints.

Online Ethics Application and Review System

The Converis online application and review system continues to operate. The technical support for the system was transferred from RIS to the University Digital Technology Services (DTS). This has led to some delays in desired developments of the system but the review process has not been interrupted. Training on the Converis system is not offered by DTS and this is having to be addressed. The HRE has provided training for the new doctoral students with a detailed guidance document having been produced but a longer term solution is required.

On the online Coveris ethics review system, an audit of the 'no human participant route' and the 'low risk human participant' routes, indicated that a small number of researchers were claiming their projects were low risk when this was not the case. Previously this route received a check by administrative staff. The administrative check is still in place for projects with no human participants, but the low risk human participant route is now reviewed and can be escalated to the chair. This sets a higher standard for the University in that all research with human participants is reviewed.

Since the reorganisation of the University, administrative support for Converis has been reorganised through the Research Institutes and very effective support is currently being provided, with the administrators each covering two Institutes. The administrative staff have coped very well with an online review system that is still organised in terms of the previous faculties. It is hoped that this will be addressed by DTS in the near future.

A Research Ethics Newsletter was circulated to all the Institute researchers informing them of the new procedures and introducing the staff with responsibilities for research ethics.

The UREC now oversees the operation of the online review system and now regularly audits a random sample of reviews from the system to ensure the quality of reviews being undertaken. While

this system is still in its early stages, the feedback to date is positive. A training session to support reviewers was held before lockdown and was well attended.

Internal Governance

Changes to UREC membership were made as a result of the University reorganisation. While administrative support for staff and doctoral research is excellent, there are concerns about the lack of administrative support for research ethics in the Colleges. The HRE has been trying to address this without much success to date. There have also been serious difficulties getting research ethics work in the Colleges appropriately work planned as a result of changes to the provision due to Codiv-19. In response, the research burden on students and their supervisors has been reduced wherever possible. Assurances have been given that in the next academic year support levels will return to normal. In the meantime, academic staff are taking on this work to ensure that standards are maintained in relation to research ethics and integrity.

NHS and Social Care Governance

To reduce the burden on students in some health related areas, students can now undertake audit or service evaluation on research modules as these require University Ethics review not NHS research ethics review and the former can be delivered much more quickly for students. The Social Governance IRAS route no longer accepts ethics reviews of taught student or doctoral research in social care so these are now being undertaken with the University. The speedier University review process again advantages these students.

Human Tissue Act

On the retirement of the Human Tissue lead, Professor Woodroofe, two new leads were appointed , Professor Clench and Dr Lynn to represent the areas of the University where this type of research occurs. Audits were undertaken on compliance with the Human Tissue Act, specifically regarding the documentation and correct storage of tissue and contacts were made with the Biorepository to ensure efficient collaboration. A list of researchers who have recently or are likely to use the biorepository have been established and training is provided.

External Website

Keeping the University's ethics webpages current is a continuing issue as the relevant RIS staff to not have editing rights and all required changes have to be submitted to Marketing for implementation. Some navigational issues cannot be remedied because they are integral to the whole University site, but efforts continue to be made to better highlight key documentation. This was very important for managing research during the pandemic

Guidance Produced and Covid-19 Responding

The UREC made judgements on several matters that were escalated to it, including on the topics of research with illegal aspects and research involving researchers' own children. Relevant guidance was then produced for the website

Post Covid-19 lockdown a range of guidance related to moving research projects online for data collection where appropriate were produced and disseminated to staff and students. There was a large increase in enquires related to changes in research projects in response to the Covid situation.

An expedited ethics review system for research ethics amendments was set up to allow researchers to transfer their studies to online methods in response to the Covid -19 situation. In consultation with DTS revised guidelines or the safe use of Zoom for online data collection were produced and disseminated to staff and students.

Policies, Procedures and Guidance Updates

Major revisions to the University Research Ethics and Integrity Policy and the Research Misconduct Procedure for Staff and revised the Research Misconduct Procedures for Doctoral and Masters by Research Students were completed and taken through the approval processes including consultation with the trade unions These revisions ensure compliance with current national and international guidelines.

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
- Research Ethics Policy and Procedures 4th Edition (2020)

Research Ethics Approval Procedures
https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/research-ethics-approval-procedures
- Converis User Guide (Revised)
- Research Ethics Review - Appeals Procedure
- Participant Information Sheet (incorporating GDPR updates)

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service Research
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/her-majestys-prison-and-probation-service/about/research

Guidance and Legislation
https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/guidance-and-legislation
- GDPR Guidelines for Researchers
- Privacy notice for research participants

Concordat to Support Research Integrity
https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/integrity-concordat
- Sheffield Hallam University's Commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity v.8 (2020)
- Updated Responsibilities of Heads of Departments and Directors of Research Centres
- Updated Responsibilities of Researchers