



**Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics
Committee (UREC) Annual Report
2022-2023**

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1 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 and a suite of training courses. 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 byproducts 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. As working practices return back to normal post the Covid-19 pandemic, workshops are being delivered both online and in person. All academic staff undertaking or supervising research are required to undertake research ethics or integrity training. Directors of Research Institutes and Centres are 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 which was updated in August 2023 can be found [here](#). Researchers, Directors of Research Institutes and Centres, and Heads of Department are 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 Mayur K. Ranchordas

Head of University Research Ethics

Chair of University Research Ethics Committee

26th November 2023

2 Introduction

This annual research ethics report provides some background and a summary of Sheffield Hallam University's Research Ethics Committee business for the 2022-2023 academic year. It provides a summary of the ethics and integrity training delivered, the volume of ethics applications we handle each year, and an update on our policies and procedures.

2.1 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 wider society. 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.

2.2 Framework for Research Ethics

Under the revised Framework for Research Ethics (FRE), United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) only funds 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 UKRI research ethics committees within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and for those assessing research proposals. The University's Research Ethics Policies and Procedures are aligned to satisfy the framework in full.

2.3 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 in 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.

1. Maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research.
2. Ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.
3. 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.
4. Using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise.
5. 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 have published our [commitment to the concordat](#), which was updated in August 2023, on the University's Ethics and Integrity [website](#).

The following eight actions have been updated to the document to reflect our development and ongoing responsibilities to our research and innovation staff, participants, and users for the 2022/3 academic year:

1. The UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) updated the Policy on the Governance of Good Research Practice in March 2022 and SHU have updated its version of [The Research Ethics Policy and Procedures](#) to ensure it is compliant.
2. Annual statement sent to all researchers and teaching staff outlining their responsibilities under the Concordat. Includes links to the policies and training resources. Annual statement sent to all Heads of Department, Directors of Research Institutes and Research Centre Managers outlining their responsibilities under the Concordat. Includes links to the policies and training resources.
3. A curriculum of ethics training delivered to staff and doctoral students with additional training on Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) delivered across the 2022/3 academic year.

4. [The Rights Retention Statement](#) regarding researchers to retain key rights over their peer reviewed manuscripts was communicated to all staff and doctoral students via newsletters and emails to remind them of their responsibilities.
5. Teaching staff who supervise UG and PG research projects were reminded of the ethics policies and procedures that students must adhere to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal, and professional frameworks, obligations, and standards.
6. One research misconduct allegation was made this academic year which was screened by the Head of University Research Ethics. The allegation was made against a Doctoral student and was found to be unsubstantiated and therefore dismissed. As per the Misconduct Policy, this did not proceed to formal investigation.
7. An additional “live” ethics application auditing action was implemented in 2022/3 whereby some high risk ethics applications were reviewed by members of the University Research Ethics Committee who reviewed these applications at the same time as auditing them.
8. Doctoral students entering their 2nd and 3rd year of study were also provided with ethics reviewer training so that they could act as lay reviewers on applications that required 3 ethics reviewers. SHU see this an important part of trying to strengthen the integrity of research by providing Continuing Professional Development for Doctoral students.

3 Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee

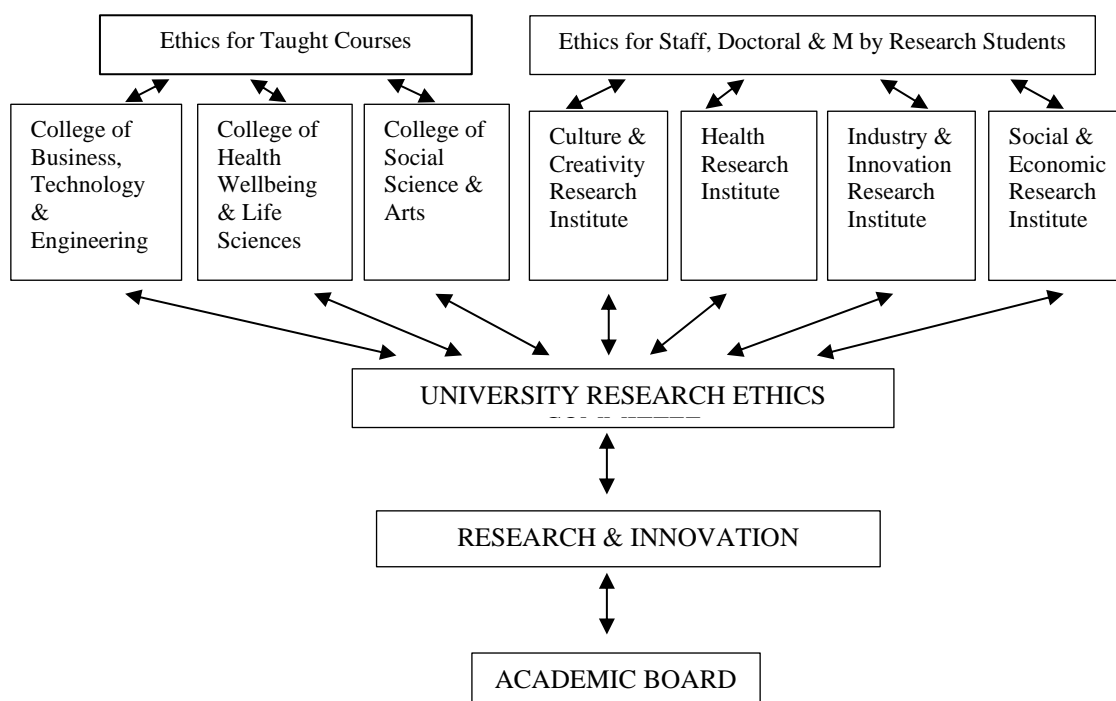
The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) was established in the academic year 2001/02 as a sub-committee of the Research and Business Development Committee (subsequently re-constituted as the Research and Innovation Committee) in response to increasing internal and external pressures regarding the ethical conduct of research. The UREC is responsible for developing, updating 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).

3.1 University Research Ethics Governance

The Academic Board has overall responsibility for academic matters and regulation of taught and research provision. The Research and Innovation Committee, as a sub-committee of the Academic Board, has responsibility for issues of research policy, regulation and compliance, including oversight and assurance of the Ethics Committee.

Strategic leadership is provided by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), who Chairs the Research and Innovation Committee. The Head of University Research Ethics exercises delegated responsibility on behalf of and accountability to the Research & Innovation Committee (RIC).



3.2 Ethics for Taught Courses

Research ethics related to all taught provision is managed through the College Teaching Programme Research Ethics Committees (CTPRECS). The reorganisation provided the opportunity to enhance the provision, by ensuring standardisation of processes across the three colleges and thereby 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

UREC3 Higher risk social science projects

UREC4 Higher risk Bio-medical, food, sport and health projects.

All the proforma include a health and safety risk assessment for the student and participants.

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 ensures 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 (DREWG) 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.

3.3 Ethics for Staff, Doctoral & Masters by Research Students

Each Research Institute has appointed Research Ethics Leads who disseminate policy and procedures across the institutes as well as deliver ethics training to staff. Research Centres also have ethics leads, who can support staff and doctoral student ethics applications. A dedicated pool of reviewers have committed to providing expedited ethics reviews for contract research or bids being undertaken within tight deadlines.

Staff, doctoral & masters by research students' research projects are reviewed using an online system called Converis. Low risk studies are reviewed by one researcher with possible escalation to the chair, while all other research is reviewed by three researchers, one of whom is a subject expert (the lead reviewer), one a methodology expert with the third acting 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 to three weeks but is dependent on the responsiveness of reviewers.

4 Summary of the University Research Ethics Committee Business for 2022/23 Academic Year

The UREC held four meetings in the Academic Year 2022/23 plus one away day with an average attendance by members of 70%. 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 Research and Innovation Services, 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.

4.1 Volume of Staff and Doctoral Ethics Reviews

The numbers of Staff and Doctoral student research projects reviewed between 1st August 2022 and 31st July 2023, are shown in the following table along with the figures for the previous years to allow comparisons.

Table 1. Number of ethics applications at SHU over the last 3 years

Year	No human participants , human tissue or personal data	Very low risk human participants studies	All Other Research with Human Participants	IRAS Projects	Approval given Elsewhere	TOTAL
Aug '22 to Jul '23	111	200	165	13	13	502
Aug '21 to Jul '22	90	219	197	11	17	534
Aug '20 to Jul '21	67	233	186	7	7	500

The total number of research ethics reviews during the 2022/23 academic year dropped by approximately 6% (502 in 2022/23 vs 534 in 2021/22). In 2020/21 to 2021/22 the number of reviews carried out via the online review system had increased by approximately 7%. The increase in ethics applications in the “all other research with human participants” category reflected the return to face to face data collection after the Covid-19 pandemic. The UREC were proactive that academic year in training researchers that do not use human participants. Indeed, the increase in the number of applications in that category suggested a higher level of engagement from this community of researchers.

There are robust procedures in place for ethics review on taught courses and these were carried out by the academic teaching teams assisted by departmental ethics advisors and overseen by the College Teaching Programme Research Ethics Committees.

4.2 Data Protection Impact Assessments

Data protection laws apply to any processing of personal data carried out by the University. This includes data processing for research activities. A suite of data protection guidance documents has been developed for researchers to support the University's compliance with data protection legislation. The Head of Research Ethics, the Head of Information Governance and Data Protection Officer have outlined a process whereby researchers need to complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) screening checklist for researchers. This ensures that researchers have considered the risks related to their intended data processing and have met the broader data protection obligations. Training on DPIA was delivered to Doctoral students and staff across the 2022/3 academic year.

4.3 Research ethics mapping with La Trobe University

In early 2019 La Trobe and Sheffield Hallam decided to strengthen their relationship and create a strategic partnership. By establishing this partnership, we recognise opportunities to provide students with an international learning experience, to work collaboratively on research and innovation projects with global impact, and to share good practice and innovative approaches to higher education.

In order to reduce any unnecessary duplication of ethics approval the UREC at SHU initiated a mapping exercise with La Trobe University's ethics committee. The aim of this mapping exercise is to ensure that getting ethics approval in one institution.

4.4 Ethics Guidance on Collecting Blood for Research

It had been identified throughout the 2022/23 academic year that additional guidance was needed for researchers who collect blood. Therefore, the UREC drafted a guidance document on collecting blood for research. This document is being finalised and will be on the University's ethics and integrity website after it has been approved.

4.5 Research System Update to replace Converis

An internal assessment confirmed that our current research system lacks business efficiency, user engagement and experience. As research management systems are a critical enabler to help achieve growth, the University launched the Research and Innovation Research Systems Project in 2023. The aim of this project is to identify and procure an integrated research management system to increase operational effectiveness and efficiency across the research lifecycle to enable our planned research and innovation strategic growth.

An important part of the new research system is the ethics module that can reduce administrative burden, enhance user engagement and accelerate the completion of ethics reviews. These aspects can directly enhance the research culture at SHU. Once a suitable research system has been identified, the UREC are planning to deploy the system for research ethics reviews for staff, doctoral and taught UG/PG research. Currently, taught UG and PG research projects complete Microsoft Word ethics forms which significantly increase the administrative burden for students, supervisors, module leaders, and course leaders. The UREC are planning to deploy the new ethics module for taught courses to bring them in-line with the staff and doctoral research ethics process. It should be noted that in order to implement this important change successfully, some additional administrative support will be required.

4.6 Training Doctoral Students as Ethics Reviewers

During the 2022/23 academic year the UREC trained Doctoral students in their 2nd year or above to act as lay reviewers for ethics applications that require 3 ethics reviewers. Doctoral students are assigned as the 3rd lay reviewer and are mentored during the ethics review process. The rationale for this project was to 1) increase the ethics reviewer pool across the university to help accelerate ethics reviews and reduce the burden across research active staff; 2) to ensure that doctoral students are engaging with academic citizenship during their studies at SHU; 3) to train and mentor

Doctoral students in research ethics and integrity. The UREC will run workshops every academic year, which will help train the next cohort of students and gradually increase the ethics reviewer pool.

4.7 Research Misconduct Cases

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 [here](#).

One research misconduct allegation was made this academic year which was reviewed by the Head of University Research Ethics. The allegation was made against Doctoral student and was found to be unsubstantiated and therefore dismissed. As per the Misconduct Policy, this did not proceed to formal investigation. A key learning point from this case was the Doctoral student received poor and conflicting supervision and thus some ethics and integrity training for supervisors was included as part of the training curriculum.

This compares with one research misconduct investigation in 2021-22, three research misconduct investigations in 2020-2021, three in 2019-20, two in 2018-19, and zero in 2017-18. Research staff regularly seek advice suggesting that the system is seen to be accessible, and that research integrity has a high priority with our researchers.

Lessons learned from misconduct cases are discussed and published on the University's external ethics website.

4.8 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) for the recruitment of lay members for the ethics committees across the University including the review of 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 is 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. The UREC appointed one lay member to the committee for the 2022-3 academic year but is seeking for one more lay member.

4.9 Ethics and Integrity Training

Numerous online 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 is delivered by the Head of University Research Ethics, the Research Institute Leads, the College Ethics Leads and the Research Development Manager. A curriculum of ethics training is devised at the start of the academic year where sessions are delivered across the semesters to staff and doctoral students. Ethics training for students on taught programs is delivered by dissertation/project module leaders and project supervisors at Departmental level. Training sessions are delivered using a blend of online and face to face sessions to suit researchers needs. A summary of the ethics and integrity training and resources can be found [here](#).

4.10 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. The University are currently piloting the use of a new Data Protection Impact Assessment Form (DPIA). The form helps researchers identify and minimise the data protection risks of a project. Researchers must complete a DPIA form that involves processing data that is likely to result in high risk to individuals. Once the pilot phase is completed the DPIA form will be added to the online ethics system for researchers to complete.

4.11 Ethics for Students on Taught Courses

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. A blackboard site of teaching and training resources for staff teaching research ethics and supervising student research projects is used to house all the relevant documents. Students also have access to all of the ethics training and resources via their project/dissertation Blackboard sites. The reviewer [checklist](#) was updated to help reviewers appraise ethics applications completed by students on taught programs. The UREC are planning to deploy the new ethics module (that will eventually replace Conevris) for taught courses to bring them in-line with the staff and doctoral research ethics process. It should be noted that in

order to implement this important change successfully, some additional administrative support will be required.

4.12 Human Tissue Act

SHU do not have a human tissue licence, therefore, SHU researchers must store samples at the Sheffield Biorepository at the University of Sheffield located at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital. SHU had two Human Tissue Act leads, Professor Clench and Dr Lynn, who represent the areas of the University where this type of research occurs. Professor Malcom Clench retired in 2023, therefore the UREC are currently looking to replace this vacant role. 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. We also have additional guidance on how to handle, store and manage human tissue on our Ethics webpages [here](#).

4.13 External Website

We update our webpages regularly but also when new or updated guidance/policy is created for researchers. Staff are signposted to our ethics website throughout the academic year. A summary of the new guidance produced this academic year is summarised at the end of this review. The external site can be accessed [here](#).

4.14 University Research Ethics Committee Planning Day

For the 2021/22 academic year an additional planning day was scheduled to discuss the UREC's business for the year and reflect on what worked well and what needed to be improved. Given the success of this activity an additional planning/review day was scheduled for the 2022/23 academic year.

4.15 Category Approval Procedures

On many taught courses there are modules where the students may undertake identical or at least very similar small-scale data collection as part of their learning and teaching and/or assessment e.g., as part of laboratory classes, on research methods modules, on placements in schools or other work settings. Rather than individual applications having to be made to the relevant College Teaching Programme Research Ethics Committee (CTPREC) each year, a category approval can be granted by the CTPREC. This then gives the module Leader overarching Ethical Approval although students undertaking the projects are still required to undertake local ethical review, but this can be lighter touch as long as it ensures that the research is carried out ethically and legally. The Category Approval forms can be found [here](#). A review performed by the UREC found mixed practice and

inconsistencies across the University, therefore, additional training and simplification of the forms is currently underway. These will be deployed for the 2023/4 academic year.

4.16 UKRIO's revised policy for the investigation of misconduct in research

The UKRIO has revised its edition on the [Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research](#). SHU is mostly congruent with the new policy, however, a few recommendations have been identified by the UREC to ensure the updated procedures are followed. The following four actions were updated to SHU's research misconduct policy:

1. Our policy now includes links to SHU's whistleblowing policy and bullying/harassment policy.
2. Our policy has been updated and now includes details of how the accused can get support.
3. Our policy now outlines a clear route for an appeals process.

4.17 Auditing Ethics Applications

Conducting an audit of a sample of ethics applications each year is of paramount importance because it ensures that researchers are following SHU's research ethics policies and procedures. In addition, the audit can check that the reviewers are being thorough and fair, and any risks of litigation are reduced and managed accordingly.

The process for auditing samples of ethics applications was revised for the 2021/2022 academic year. A UREC panel of 9 staff (4 institute leads, 3 college leads, Head of ethics and the Research Development Manager) formed an assessor pool. A sample of approximately 20 ethics applications across the university were audited. As a result of this process a summary of actions was created to help devise better training to address any issues.

For the 2022/23 the UREC followed a similar process to the previous year where 20 ethics applications were audited. One minor change that was implemented was the addition of live audits where members of the UREC were allocated as reviewers for five high risk ethics applications and these were audited at the same of reviewing. We introduced this new process to ensure that audits were being done throughout the academic year to help us inform our ethics training rather than conduct the audit at the end of the academic year.

5 Policies, Procedures and Guidance Updates

The following documents were updated/added to the Ethics and Integrity website:

Concordat to Support Research Integrity

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/excellence/ethics-and-integrity/integrity-concordat>

- Sheffield Hallam University's Commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2023)
- Updated Responsibilities of Heads of Departments and Directors of Research Centres

- Updated Responsibilities of Researchers

Research Misconduct Policy

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/excellence/ethics-and-integrity/policies>

Research Conducted Overseas

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/-/media/home/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/guidance-on-research-conducted-overseas.pdf>