

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Sheffield Hallam University

Research Ethics Review - Appeals Procedure

A. Background

The University is committed to producing high quality research and has developed review procedures which contribute to this. All university research undergoes ethical scrutiny, to ensure that it is conducted to the highest ethical standards, to safeguard the physical and psychological wellbeing of research participants and researchers, and to protect their rights. An appeals procedure against the decisions of Faculty Research Ethics Committees has been developed as part of this commitment. The University Research Ethics Committee deals with appeals against review decisions made by reviewers assigned by Faculty Research Ethics Committees. While ethics review now occurs virtually via the Converis Ethics Review system, the decisions arrived at are the responsibility of the Faculty Research Ethics Committees who oversee and quality assure the process.

The procedure applies to all University staff, Doctoral and Masters by Research students seeking ethical approval through the University's ethics review procedure.

B. Grounds for Appeal

A researcher may appeal against a decision of a Faculty Research Ethics Committee concerning their application on any of the following conditions:

1. There appear to have been procedural irregularities in the review process which may have impacted on the decision reached.
2. Demonstrable evidence exists of inadequate review, prejudice or bias in the process.

Dissatisfaction with the Ethics Review decision alone is not sufficient ground for appeal. Members of the University Research Ethics Committee will scrutinise appeals independently and, if the above conditions do not apply, they will dismiss the complaint.

C. Appeal Procedure

Initial Scrutiny

1. The researcher must submit a written appeal detailing the grounds on which the appeal is based. This should be received by the UREC Secretary (ethicssupport@shu.ac.uk) within 10 working days of receiving the ethics review decision. The appeal must include the Ethics Review number, the title of the project, the name of the Faculty Committee, the date of the review decision and - for student appeals - the name of the supervisor.
2. Receipt of an appeal will be acknowledged within 5 working days normally.
3. The appeal will be scrutinised independently by three members of the University Research Ethics Committee nominated by the Secretary. These individuals will not belong to the same faculty as the appellant. Their role is to decide if the conditions of appeal have been met. Five working days are allowed for this process. Independently arrived at decisions will be submitted to the Secretary by email. The decision may be to reject the appeal, or agree that the appeal merits further scrutiny, or that there is a strong case to uphold the appeal. The majority decision will hold.
4. The Head of Research ethics will be notified of the outcome of the initial scrutiny and will communicate the decision to the appellant. Where appeals are rejected full

explanations will be provided. If all the reviewers agree that there is a strong case to uphold the appeal, after consultation with the Head of Research Ethics this may be done without the need for an Appeal Meeting. When the decision is that an appeal merits further consideration a meeting will be arranged and the appellant notified.

5. The University Research Ethics Committee Secretary will make the necessary arrangements for a meeting, normally within 15 working days of the scrutiny decision and notify all concerned.
6. The appellant is required to submit any additional material relevant to their appeal three days before the meeting date. Where the appellant is a student, they may be accompanied to the meeting by their supervisor.

University Research Ethics Committee Appeal Panel

1. The panel will consist of 5 members of the University Research Ethics Committee plus the Secretary and will be chaired by the Head of Research Ethics or the deputy Chair. Up to two of the initial scrutineers may be on the panel to ensure the initial review process is fully understood. The Secretary will obtain all relevant material relating to the review and circulate it, along with the material from the appellant, before the meeting.
2. The Committee can, if necessary, call on additional expertise if this is deemed desirable.
3. After discussion of the issues raised with the appellant, the panel may decide that:
 - 1) The appeal is upheld and ethical approval for the project is given; OR
 - 2) Changes to the application are required which will be reviewed by the University Appeal panel members and if deemed satisfactory, ethical approval for the study will then be given; OR
 - 3) The appeal is rejected, and this will be accompanied with a full explanation for the appellant.
4. The decision of the Appeal panel will be communicated in writing to the appellant within five working days.
5. The Head of Research Ethics will ensure that, if there are any institutional or contractual issues related to research funding or research partners, these are dealt with as appropriate.
6. A decision to reject an appeal will not prejudice the review of future ethics applications from the appellant. However fundamental changes to the design will be expected if the same or a similar project is resubmitted.
7. Should any evidence of research misconduct emerge from the process this will be dealt with under the Principles of Integrity in Research and Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct (v9) for staff or the Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct against Doctoral and Masters Research Students (v3) for research students.

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