Sheffield Hallam University

**Research Ethics Report
2015- 2016**

SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS SUB COMMITTEE
REPORT 2015-2016

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 ensures good practice and that research undertaken at the University which involves direct contact with patients or healthy participants, whether clinical, biomedical or social research, or the secondary use of existing human and animal materials or specimens, or where there may be other ethical issues, will be subject to ethical review.

The University continues to invest in developing staff and students researchers with further additions of high quality resources this year. 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 for students using humans or human bi-products in their research, they 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 of 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 http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/researcher-concordat.html.

Professor Ann Macaskill
HEAD OF RESEARCH ETHICS
Chair of University Research Ethics Committee

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Introduction

This Research Ethics Report provides a summary of Sheffield Hallam University's Research Ethics Committee business for the 2015-2016 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

This year saw a revision to the Framework for Research Ethics (FRE) which was originally introduced in 2006 by the Economic and Social Research Council. Since then Research Councils have only funded 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 ESRC, research ethics committees within HEIs and for those assessing research proposals.

The revisions were noted and it was agreed that the existing University Research Ethics Policy did not require amendment as it already met the framework in full.

The 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 responds to the concerns that have been raised regarding the current mechanisms that are 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 Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee (SHUREC) was established in the Academic Year 2001/02 as a sub-committee of the Research and Business Development Committee (now Research and Innovation Committee - RIC) in response to increasing internal and external pressures regarding the ethical conduct of research.

The Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee (SHUREC) 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.
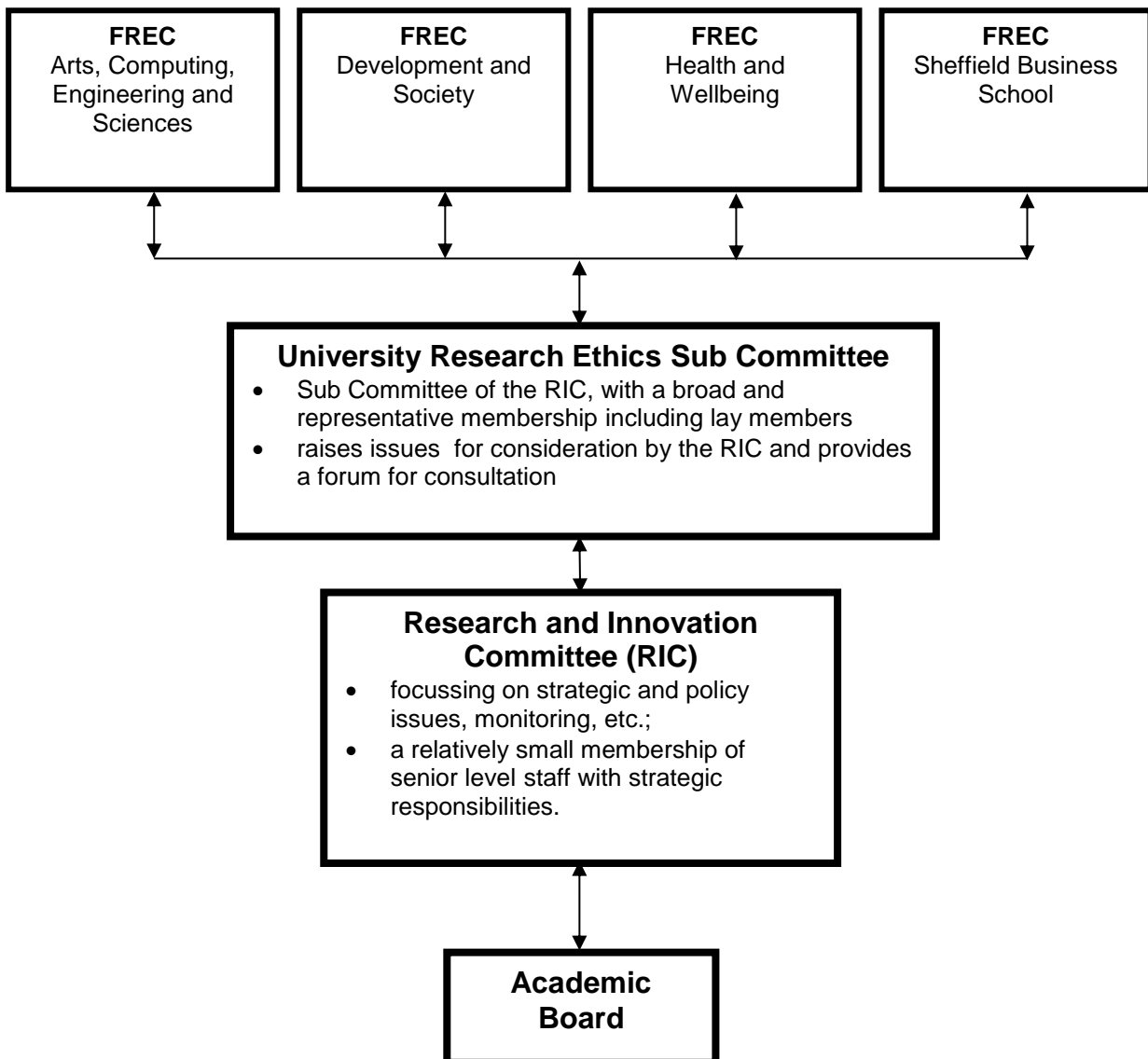
Our approach to promoting research integrity is recognised by the European Science Foundation (Fostering Research Integrity in Europe, ESF, December 2012) and we are participating in the UK universities research ethics network to establish quality kite marking for research ethics committees.

University Research Ethics Governance

The Academic Board has ultimate legal accountability for compliance and through the Research and Innovation Committee receives annual progress reports on research ethics matters.

Strategic leadership is provided by the Pro Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation who is a member of the Academic Board. The Head of Research Ethics exercises delegated responsibility and accountability to the Research and Innovation Committee.

Reporting Structure and Engagement

FREC Arts, Computing, Engineering and Sciences	**FREC** Development and Society	**FREC** Health and Wellbeing	**FREC** Sheffield Business School

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

Research and Innovation Committee (RIC)
- focussing on strategic and policy issues, monitoring, etc.;
- a relatively small membership of senior level staff with strategic responsibilities.

Academic Board

SHUREC held four meetings in the Academic Year 2015/16 in cycle with those of the Research and Innovation Committee. Average attendance by members is fifty one percent.

SHUREC membership includes: three research active representatives from each Faculty; representative from the Multi-faith Chaplaincy, the Research and Innovation Office; 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 Sub-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 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 coordinate 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 Faculty Academic Board Sub-committee structure (AB/4/04/7). 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 representative from the technical support staff; additional members as necessary and a Secretary.

Each Faculty has a single Research Ethics Committee, which with the addition of lay members, meets the Economic and Social Research Council 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. Most Faculties now operate departmental 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.

Minutes from FRECs are noted at each SHUREC meeting and each FREC produces an Annual Report for discussion by SHUREC.

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

Faculty	Taught courses	Postgraduate	Staff
ACES	data unavailable	60	15
D&S	1438	26	119
HWB			
Sport & Exercise	579	24	30
Health & Social Care	data unavailable	12	33
Biomedical Sciences	213	61	
SBS	15	63	27

Despite several discussions with teaching administrators, it has proved difficult to get accurate data on the numbers of undergraduate and taught masters research dissertations that are undertaken and receive ethical review each year. The Research Ethics Committee has discussed the introduction of online ethical review for taught courses via the Virtual learning Environment in future. However, this would require more accurate data on numbers for project planning.

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.

Unfortunately there were two allegations of Research Misconduct during the year. The first concerned a member of staff in Psychology who was shown to have been involved in aspects of duplicate publishing and slicing up the same data set in different publications with old data sets. The journal editors of the papers produced while he was employed at the University were notified and have taken appropriate action. In the researcher's defence there was clear evidence that he did not fully understand the ethical implications of doing this. He received a written warning, further training, mentoring and his work is being closely monitored. The second serious incident related to the failure of a number of research supervisors and staff in Sheffield Business School to comply appropriately with research ethics policies and procedures. There was also a lack of sufficient administrative support for research ethics which has contributed to the problem. Work is ongoing to rectify this situation. Whilst it is not pleasing that such cases have been raised, the manner and timeliness in which they have been dealt with signals that the University Policy and Procedures and robust and rigorous and staff are actively engaged in maintaining research integrity across the university. It also highlights that there is a continuing need for vigilance, education and engagement throughout the research community which the University Committee will continue to address.

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. The recently established Graduate School These are in addition to a range of e-learning courses to support the development of researchers and research students.

There was one event of specific note this year. This was a national training workshop hosted by the University in conjunction with the Association for Research Ethics (AfRE) aimed at those who are involved with health service research, whether a REC member, student making an application or supervisor. The training day was a refresher to ensure that those involved would be fully equipped to make, and review applications with confidence.

The University has been pleased to support lay members to attend seminars organised by external bodies. Lay members were also given access to ethics training via the Virtual learning environment.

Key Achievements
Raising the Profile of Research Ethics: Links with the Wider University

Human Tissue Act and Storage of Human Tissue
The working group successfully completed the review and standardisation of documentation and processes to allow Sheffield Hallam staff to use the University of Sheffield Biorepository. This success was marked by a launch event in September 2015 to highlight the processes and documentation that was available on the Research Ethics webpages. Work continues to be done to disseminate the necessary information and embed standard practice throughout the University to ensure maximum benefits from this development.

Guidance Produced for Researchers
Revised guidance on Ethical Issues to Consider in Relation to Observational Research was developed and approved by the committee.
A Safeguarding Code of Practice was produced for researchers working with vulnerable participants.

Engagement with Central Directorates
The Committee was consulted on and assisted with the development of new guidance on health and safety in research.
In conjunction with Faculty administrators and the Doctoral School Manager a revised process for supporting Doctoral Students obtain an NHS Research Passport was agreed and implemented.
The Committee was consulted on and assisted with the development of new guidance on the use of student data for research purposes.
Guidelines on the procedures for reimbursing research participants for their time were produced after consultation with Finance.
In conjunction with Faculty Assistant Deans for Research and Innovation a review of faculty process for approval of Consultancy and Knowledge Transfer projects in relation to the Research Ethics Policy was undertaken.
In response to the Prevent agenda, the ethics policy and procedures were reviewed and included in the report as part of the steps that the University takes to ensure that researchers do not behave in ways that could threaten national or international security

Response to External bodies
The Chair of SHUREC, through working with the Research and Innovation Office, has responded to the following external consultation, documents, surveys and requests on behalf of the University:
1.   A number of requests from external bodies for access to staff and students were approved
2.   Four Freedom of Information requests relating to research practices.

UK Universities Research Ethics Committees Working Group
The University has continued to be represented on the UK Universities Research Ethics Committees Working Group by the chair of SHUREC. The Chair was asked to share details of the University provision for staff development of research staff and research students with some members of this group. This was received as an example of good practice.

Ongoing Issues

Electronic System for Research Ethics Review Management
The University has committed to developing the Converis system as a tool for facilitating electronic review of research ethics documentation for staff and postgraduate research projects. As preparation for this, the committee has agreed to review and update existing proforma. Existing directories of reviewers are being revised and new reviewers recruited to ensure that a sufficient and competent number of reviewers is available to populate the new system. As part of this, guidance on responsibilities and training will be established and disseminated through the Faculty Research Ethics Committees.

Research Ethics External Website
The University website refresh and the required embargo on updating information took longer than anticipated and created some issues with the currency of material available on the Research Ethics pages. The need for a dedicated support person with direct access for the purpose of updating Research Ethics material has been highlighted with the marketing department and the Research and Innovation Office and is intended to address this issue.

Continuing Work with Sheffield Business School
The committee membership is to be refreshed to ensure good representation across the School. Training and auditing of work related to research ethics will continue according to an agreed plan.

Recruitment & Retention of Lay Members
The Committee continues to monitor the role of lay members to ensure that the role is fulfilling and provides significant contribution to the mutual benefit of both parties. Further adverts continue to be placed to encourage additional lay members to participate.

Future Planning for Online Review of Research Ethics Proforma on Taught Courses via the Virtual Learning Environment.
Work is to be done with Central Departments to produce accurate records of the numbers of students undertaking research projects on taught courses. This would then allow a business case to be made for any necessary development work.