

The University's Ethics Review Procedure ('UERProcedure')

Introduction

Research projects that involve human participants either directly (e.g. being interviewed, answering questionnaires) and/or indirectly (i.e. providing access to personal data) should be ethically reviewed via the University's ethics review procedure unless:

- i. the research involves the NHS, in which case the NHS ethics review procedure applies – please refer to the other fact-sheet;
- ii. the research takes place in another country/countries and/or is being led by another organisation (e.g. another university) in which case the 'alternative' ethics review procedure applies – please refer to the other fact-sheet.

Comprehensive information about the review system is available on: www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/gov_ethics_grp/ethics/system.html

Academic departments administer the UERProcedure but, in practice, on a day to day basis administration of the UERProcedure falls to the department's designated Ethics Administrator. The University's Research Ethics Committee ('U-REC') sets the minimum requirements for how academic departments can operate the UERProcedure. However, departments may go beyond these requirements (e.g. may create discipline-relevant guidance, operate a modified version of the University's standard research ethics application form that includes discipline-relevant questions).

Minimum requirements of the UERProcedure:

- i. **Ethics reviewers:**
 - A minimum of 3 ethics reviewers are required to ethically review either a staff-led or a supervised postgraduate researcher application. The ethics reviewers must not have any conflict of interest with the applications;
 - A minimum of 2 ethics reviewers are required to ethically review potentially 'high risk' research applications from supervised postgraduate-taught students and from supervised undergraduate students. One of the ethics reviewers must not have any conflict of interest with the applications. However, one of the ethics reviewers may be the student's Supervisor, but this option is left to the discretion of an individual academic department;
 - Only 1 ethics reviewer is required to ethically review 'low risk' research applications from supervised postgraduate-taught students and from supervised undergraduate students. This ethics reviewer may be the student's Supervisor. * However, if an academic department does not feel comfortable with enabling Supervisors to ethically review low risk research ethics applications from UG and PGT students, then it can set as departmental policy the requirement that even low risk applications are reviewed by more than one ethics reviewer and/or that the ethics reviewer cannot be the Supervisor.
 - An academic department's Ethics Review Panel must ethically review 'generic' research ethics applications (i.e. applications that cover a number of sufficiently similar research projects).
- ii. **Ethics Review Panel to review contentious applications:**

In exceptional cases where there is a *significant, fundamental difference of opinion* between the ethics reviewers about the ethics of a proposed piece of

research, and where a consensus between them cannot be reached, then the academic department's Ethics Review Panel will ethically review the application.

iii. **U-REC to review very contentious applications:**

If members of the Ethics Review Panel cannot reach a consensus then the U-REC will ethically review the application.

iv. **Appeals:**

If an application is not approved, as a result of an initial ethics review, the applicant may appeal against the initial decision by contacting the department's Ethics Administrator. If an applicant wishes to appeal against the decision of an Ethics Review Panel then s/he should contact the Secretary to the U-REC. The U-REC's decision is final.

Obtaining approval via the departmental system

To obtain approval an application form should be completed and sent electronically to Judy Torrington (j.m.torrington@sheffield.ac.uk) The form will be reviewed by 2 or 3 ethics reviewers, and recommendations made either to approve the application or to make minor changes (with no resubmission) or major changes. The review panel consists of Judy Torrington, Stephen Walker and Steve Fotios

A relatively straightforward ethics review should take approximately 10 working days. However, delays can occur if a research ethics application form is not fully completed, if the ethics reviewers request more information, if an application is judged contentious or if the applicant appeals against the ethics decision.