

University of Sheffield
Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering
Ethics Review Procedure

The Department confirms that its ethics review procedure accommodates and adheres to the following principles:

(i) Remit of the University's ethics review system and ethics review procedures

All members of staff within the Department and supervised-students who are registered with the Department and who plan to undertake research which involves human participants (participants) or their data or tissue, should ensure that their proposed research is ethically approved via the appropriate ethics review procedure, prior to commencing the research which involves the participants or their data or tissue:

- Research projects that involve the NHS should be ethically reviewed via the NHS's ethics review system, administered by COREC: www.corec.org.uk, and such projects should not be additionally ethically reviewed via the University.
- Research projects that involve participants or their data or tissue, but which do not involve the NHS, should be ethically reviewed via the Department's ethics review procedure.
- Should a project's Principal or Chief Investigator plan to seek ethics review via an alternative route (e.g. via an ethics review procedure within another University or within another country) then, in the first instance, s/he should contact the Secretary of the University Research Ethics Committee (U-REC) who is presently Mr Richard Hudson (ext. 21448). The U-REC will need reassurance that the ethics review procedure in question is sufficiently robust. Once approved, a database of these arrangements will be built up for ease of reference.

The appropriateness of ethics review and appropriateness of ethics procedure is more precisely defined in the 'Applicant's ethics checklist' (see ii below).

(ii) University standard ethics forms

Where ethics approval is required via the Department's ethics review procedure, the following University standard forms will be used (though these forms can be modified by inserting additional information):

1. 'Applicant's ethics checklist': *applicant to complete*
2. 'University research ethics application form': *applicant to complete*
3. 'University participant information sheet': *applicant to complete if appropriate*
4. 'University participant consent form': *applicant to complete if appropriate*
5. 'Ethics reviewer's comments form': *ethics reviewer to complete*

These University standard forms are available from:
www.shef.ac.uk/r/researchoffice/RO/ethicsreviewssystem.html

(iii) **Department's ethics review panel**

The Department has in place an ethics review panel, designed to act as a forum in which ethical issues can be raised and discussed and which reviews contentious research ethics applications – see vii below.

The members are:

Dr Peter Rockett
Prof Nigel Allinson
Dr Richard Tozer
Dr Chee Hing Tan
Mr Ian Moulson

(iv) **Ethics administrator**

The Departmental member of staff who is designated as the 'ethics administrator' is **Dr Peter Rockett**. The role of the ethics administrator is to administer the department's ethics review process, and key duties include:

- receiving applications from applicants (i.e. from members of staff and supervised-students) and forwarding them on to the appropriate number of ethics reviewers (see vi below).
- choosing the ethics reviewers, including 'lead' ethics reviewer (see vi below) for each ethics review of an application.
- in exceptional cases, to administer the review of contentious applications (i.e. in exceptional cases where an application has to be reviewed by the ethics review panel - see vii below), in liaison with the Chair and members of the ethics review panel.
- informing the applicant and the University's Research Office of the ethics review outcome.

(v) **Ethics reviewers**

Only Departmental members of staff who have been nominated as ethics reviewers may ethically review research projects.

Ethics reviewers must be independent of the applications that they review (i.e. they must not have a conflict of interest with an application).

A minimum of **3** ethics reviewers are required to ethically review either a staff-led application or a supervised postgraduate researcher application.

A minimum of **2** ethics reviewers, one of whom is expected to be the Supervisor, are required to ethically review applications from supervised postgraduate-taught level and from undergraduate level students. In respect of such applications, normally the Supervisor is the 'lead' ethics reviewer (see vi below).

In principle, the U-REC supports the option of approving particular groups of projects 'en bloc', in cases where the nature of the research, participant

information sheet and consent form used are sufficiently similar (i.e. they fall within an acceptable parameter) to warrant 'en bloc' review. U-REC guidance on this and other subjects will be made available at:

www.shef.ac.uk/r/researchoffice/RO/ethicsreviewssystem.html

(vi) **'Lead' ethics reviewers**

Each individual ethics review of an application should include a 'lead' ethics reviewer, who has been chosen by the Department's 'ethics administrator' (see iv above) to 'lead' the ethics review. The role of the 'lead' ethics reviewer is to decide the ethics review outcome, having considered the comments of the different ethics reviewers involved in a review of an application (see v above for the number of ethics reviewers required). The 'lead' ethics reviewer may ask the ethics review panel to ethically review an application if s/he has concerns about the nature of the research.

(vii) **Review of contentious applications**

In exceptional cases where there is a *significant, fundamental difference of opinion* (e.g. about the ethics of a proposed piece of research) between the ethics reviewers involved, and it has not been possible to reach a consensus through dialogue between the ethics reviewers (i.e. the application is contentious) then the application should be ethically reviewed by the Department's ethics review panel.

In very exceptional cases (i.e. the ethics review panel cannot itself reach a consensus about an application) the application can be ethically reviewed by the U-REC.

(viii) **Appeals process**

If an application is not approved, as a result of an ethics review, the applicant may appeal against the decision by contacting the ethics administrator. The ethics administrator will arrange for the Department's ethics review panel to ethically review the application. If the ethics review panel also decides not to approve the application then the applicant may appeal against the decision to the Secretary of the U-REC. The U-REC's Secretary will arrange for the U-REC to ethically review the application and the U-REC's decision is final.

(ix) **Reporting ethics review outcomes to the University's Research Office**

Following each individual ethics review (i.e. on an ongoing basis), the ethics administrator will send an electronic copy of the record of the ethics review outcome to the University's Research Office (a special email address will appear on: www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/RO/ethicsreviewssystem.html for sending copies of records of ethics review outcomes).

(x) **Monitoring of the University's ethics review system by the U-REC and provision of an annual report to the U-REC**

The U-REC reserves the right to monitor the Department's ethics review procedure as and when required and, as a minimum, will contact departments on an annual basis for an annual report of key activities and findings over the preceding twelve months (this is expected to be a light-touch process).