A Quick-Reference Guide for New Ethics Reviewers

Introduction

This document aims to provide a user-friendly, basic introduction to the ethics review procedure, with links to further information and guidance, for academic or non-academic members of staff who have been asked to be an ethics reviewer for their department.

1. What is research ethics?

Research ethics refers to the concept of undertaking all research activities in accordance with moral principals and values of right or good behaviour in relation to others, particularly in terms of research involving human participants, data or tissue. In practice this means that consideration must be given to the design and methodology of a research project, to ensure that the nature and needs of any participants are taken into account, and that steps are taken to prevent any foreseeable harm.

2. How does this affect the University?

The University is committed to advancing and safeguarding high quality academic and ethics standards in all its activities, in order to meet external expectations (such as the requirements of the funders of our research) and also to maintain and enhance the University's reputation as a world-leading research institution. In order to do this, an Ethics Policy has been developed to underpin how we should be conducting all research involving human participants, data and tissue (a separate University policy exists for research involving animals). For the full Ethics Policy go to:

www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy

3. How is the Ethics Policy put into practice?

A University Ethics Review Procedure has been developed, which sets out a process for the ethical consideration of each research project proposed involving human participants, data or tissue, whether this is to be carried out by undergraduates, postgraduates, or staff at any level who are undertaking research. This allows a consistent process to be applied across the University whilst devolving responsibility for carrying out the review itself to the department concerned and therefore allowing a degree of flexibility. For a full guide to the University Ethics Review Procedure go to:

www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure/review-procedure

4. <mark>**How does the University Ethics Review Procedure apply to my department?**</mark>

Ethical principals apply in different ways for different disciplines; for example, in Biomedical Science, human tissue could be used in the study of a disease and consideration needs to be given to how it is obtained, how it is stored, used and disposed of, and whether/how consent should be obtained to use the material. However, in the School of Education, research involving asking children questions about their school experiences would require consideration of the effect this involvement may have on them, how they and their parents or guardians are to be informed of the project and how their consent is to be obtained. Some departments will be involved in considerably more research involving human participants, data and tissue than others, but the same principals must be applied.

NB. In research involving NHS patients (and a range of other types of research involving the NHS), the project would need to go through a separate NHS ethics review system. In these cases, it is unnecessary to go through the standard University Ethics Review Procedure as well. Similarly, if research is being undertaken outside the University and will be required to undergo ethical approval at another institution or in another country, it may not be necessary to go through the University Ethics Review Procedure as well. More information about the various routes for obtaining ethics approval is available here: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure/ethics-approval/routes

5. <mark>**What does the Ethics Review Procedure involve?**</mark>

The procedure involves the following basic stages:

1. The Principal Investigator or Supervisor of the research project is responsible for deciding whether the project requires ethical approval (guidance is available on the ethics web pages);
2. If ethical approval is required, an application form is completed by the relevant researcher or Supervisor, providing details of the project's aims and methodology, and responses to key ethical considerations;
3. The form is submitted to the Ethics Administrator in the relevant department;
4. The form is passed to the relevant departmental ethics reviewers to consider the application and decide whether to approve the application or otherwise.

There are variations in the Procedure according to who is carrying out the research (i.e. undergraduate and postgraduate-taught students, postgraduate research students or staff) and for undergraduate and postgraduate-taught students, whether the research is particularly high risk or low risk (although this distinction is not made in some departments; you will need to be aware of the particular policy applied in your department). For example, research being undertaken by a member of staff must be ethically reviewed by three departmental reviewers, whereas low risk research being undertaken by undergraduate students may only require approval by the student's supervisor, depending on the policy applied in the relevant department.

6. What does my role as ethics reviewer involve?

As an Ethics Reviewer you will be responsible for ethically reviewing research ethics applications within the University Ethics Review Procedure. These will be distributed evenly amongst the department's Ethics Reviewers by the Ethics Administrator, who will provide you with an electronic copy of all the information that has been submitted relating to any particular projects that you are required to review.

You will be required to confirm that you have no conflict of interest with any applications that are passed to you for review, and to provide your comments on the application using an 'Ethics Reviewer's Comments Form' which you return to the Ethics Administrator. The Administrator will then ask one of the Ethics Reviewers (the 'Lead' Reviewer) to make a decision on the ethics review outcome, taking into consideration the comments from any other Reviewers. The Administrator then makes the applicant and the other Reviewers aware of the outcome. The process generally takes about 10 working days to complete.

7. Where can I get further information to help me fulfil this role?

1. A specific webpage supporting ethics reviewers contains a more in depth guidance document, as well as a link to the Comments Form and information from previous ethics reviewer workshops: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/further-guidance/universityprocedure2/reviewersc;

2. Each department has an 'Ethics Review Panel' comprising other ethics reviewers from the department; you should feel able to consult the Panel for advice on ethical issues concerning research applications, and use them as a 'sounding board' for discussing ethical issues;

3. The central research ethics web pages provide a wealth of background information as well as more specific guidance on particular issues; it would be beneficial to review the contents of the web pages at the outset so that you are aware of the advice and guidance available: http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics;

4. If you feel you would benefit from further advice on the role of an ethics reviewer and cannot find what you need on the University's central research ethics website then please contact the Minute Secretary to the University Research Ethics Committee, Miss Nicola Donkin - N.Donkin@sheffield.ac.uk.