Dissemination of good practice arising from UREC visits to departments

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) conducts a rolling series of visits to academic departments (approximately eight per year), in order to verify that the University Ethics Review Procedure is operating effectively and to explore the nature of the ethical issues faced by departments. One key objective of this visit is to identify good practices in how departments foster ethical conduct in research and operate the procedure.

The aim of this document is to communicate the good practice that has been identified during the visits that take place each year to other departments who may find it useful. This information is intended as a series of suggestions and ideas which a department may wish to consider adopting within their particular research culture. There is no obligation for departments to implement them.

Visits to departments in the academic year 2017/18 identified the following good practice, which the UREC wishes to highlight:

Department	Activity
Chemistry (visit)	The inclusion of staff from another University department [as ethics reviewers] to contextualise cultural considerations and make relevant comments/recommendations within an application
Department for Lifelong Learning (AU)	The following steps have been taken to improve student awareness of research ethics in the Department: 1. We are introducing references to ethical research at an earlier stage and across more modules, and 2. We have introduced an assignment cover sheet which requires students to confirm that they understand when ethical approval is required and have obtained it if necessary.
Education (AU)	Development of a set of video vignettes outlining common ethical dilemmas and scenarios, with UREC approved responses to these
English (AU)	Asking BA and MA students to submit a mock ethics application form as part of their Research Methods units.
Law (visit)	An annual meeting for ethics reviewers to enable discussion of issues and sharing of good practice, and inclusion of updates relating to research ethics on the School's weekly bulletin
Materials Science and Engineering (AU)	A new requirement for PIs to confirm whether ethics issues have been considered and applied for, if relevant for submission of proposed UG projects.
Medical School (AU)	A new ethics amendment form has been introduced to standardize the requests for amendments. This amendment form also highlights the GDPR requirements. (*NB. an automated amendments process within the ethics system is under development.*)
Music (visit)	The intention of the Department to adapt existing ethics applications to provide discipline specific exemplars

Psychology (AU)	New guidance documents on a number of issues - e.g., open access data. See https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/psychology/research/ethics
ScHARR (AU)	New Information Governance arrangements - a member of the School's Information Governance Committee is asked to review each ethics application from an Information Governance perspective in addition to the two ethics reviewers. This is even more relevant since GDPR has come in to force as it helps to ensure the security of data. All ScHARR staff also have to complete Information Governance training as a matter of course when commencing employment at ScHARR. The Ethics Administrator has started to record all ethics applications in an excel spreadsheet. As the School has a high volume of applications in ScHARR, this makes it easier to oversee what applications are live, what stages they are at and what action needs to be taken, rather than checking the online system which can be unreliable, as applications can disappear if an applicant is making amendments.
Sociological Studies (AU)	Has set up working groups to review aspects of research ethics review policies and processes in the Department with the view to improving, clarifying and updating our these. These included three relevant working groups focusing respectively on: Social work research ethics governance, BA dissertations and MA dissertations. The working groups are reporting in 2018/19 to the Department.
Urban Studies and Planning (AU)	Introduction of a UREC-approved option for a two-stage ethics approval for co-produced research, i.e. a first application for initial engagement with project partners as research questions are being finalised, and second application before substantive fieldwork commences. For PhD students, the latter would be completed post-Confirmation Review.