

Evaluation of the Ethics Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

This report marks ten years since the University of Sheffield first introduced an Ethics Policy, and seeks to evaluate the impact that this Policy has had over that period.

A number of sources of information are drawn upon to offer evidence for the impact that the Policy has had. This is presented in a number of sections throughout the document.

The report gives a timeline of key events relating to the development of the Ethics Policy and Procedure. The report then looks at some of the features of implementing the Ethics Policy and Procedure – training offered by the UREC, Departmental Annual Ethics Reports, Quality Assurance visits to Departments, ethics web pages, and problem cases and queries received over the years. Each section outlines the key impact that this factor has had in the process of embedding ethics into research practices at the University of Sheffield.

2. Timeline of Key Developments

Sept 2002	University held workshop to review research ethics procedures
2003	Working group of academics from across Departments work to develop an Ethics Policy
Oct 2003	'Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue' ('Ethics Policy') approved by Senate
April 2004	First Meeting of UREC
April 2004	The UREC agreed a model for Research Governance Scientific and Ethics Review Panels across the University, with departments managing their own process using the guiding principles provided by the UREC.
Jan 2005	A number of Departments established their own administration procedure for the University's Ethics Review Policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Archaeology and Prehistory - Architecture - Computer Science - East Asian Studies - Electronic and Electrical Engineering - School of English - Geography - Human Communication Sciences - Information Studies - Management School - Mechanical Engineering - Nursing and Midwifery - Politics - Probability and Statistics - Psychology - Sociological Studies - Town and Regional Planning
Feb 2005	Ethics Review Procedure goes 'live' for all staff and students; ethics approval becomes a requirement for all projects involving human participants, personal data or human tissue.
Oct 2005	Further Departments accredited to operate their own administration procedure for the University's Ethics Review Policy:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Animal and Plant Sciences - Biblical Studies - Biomedical Science - Chemical and Process Engineering - Economics - Education - Engineering Materials (also administering for Chemistry) - Journalism - Landscape - Law - Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (in part) - Music - Philosophy - School of Modern Languages and Linguistics (SOMLAL) - School of Health and Related Research (SchHARR) (also administering for Dentistry)
Jan 2006	ESRC Research Ethics Framework introduced. This raised discussion around some elements of the University of Sheffield Procedure, including whether the Policy needed to differentiate between emergent and fixed research, and how changes to the research should be dealt with, and how the University model worked with the ESRC requirements for lay members.
Feb 2006	Departmental Ethics webpages operating
Feb 2006	Department Ethics Annual Reports introduced
June 2006	UREC Quality Assurance visits to Departments began – Information Studies is the first Department to be visited
Sept 2006	University of Sheffield Corporate Ethics Policy adopted to ensure an ethical approach is underwritten into all of the University's policies and work.
Sept 2006	Ethics procedure amended to allow 'low risk' and 'high risk' assessment of UG and PGT research with different Ethics assessment processes for each
Jan 2007	First Departmental Ethics Annual Reports completed
2007	Joined AREC (Association of Research Ethics Committees)
Sept 2008	The UREC has a designated budget for activities of £10,000
Sept 2008	'Research Ethics and Integrity' booklet disseminated to staff and students and external stakeholders
Feb 2009	Full-scale Review of the Ethics Policy began, with a Working Group established to undertake the review.
June 2009	Professional Services research to be subject to the University's Ethics Review Policy, assessed by UREC
Sept 2009	International Faculty (CITY College, Thessaloniki) accredited to operate their own administration procedure for the University's Ethics Review Policy
May 2010	The revised Ethics Policy was sent out for external peer review by two expert consultants
Oct 2010	Updated Ethics Policy approved by Senate and communicated to all staff and students
2012	As part of the Review of the Ethics Policy, a number of supporting guidance papers were produced by experts in the various fields. These included: Mental capacity Research abroad Auto-ethnography Human tissue research Undertaking research with people with learning disabilities

	Ethical considerations in research with children and young people Participatory action research and participatory research Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection Audit and evaluation Research involving older people Managing post-research relationships with participants Use of students as research subjects
April 2012	Good Research and Innovation Practices (GRIP) Policy introduced, offering overarching context for the Ethics Policy
Nov 2012	Reviewed Ethics website launched within a more prominent position on the University website.
2013	A University-wide online ethics review system is developed in response to departmental interest

IMPACT

The timeline shows clearly that significant progress has been made over the ten year period, with all departments engaging with the Ethics Review Process, including central Professional Services departments and the International Faculty (CITY College, Thessaloniki). The Ethics Policy was reviewed and updated in 2009-10 to ensure it remained in line with current recommendations and issues (taking into account developments such as online research). The web pages were also updated in line with this. The breadth and depth of the information provided to members of the University to assist their compliance with the Ethics Policy and Procedure (for example through guidance documents) has increased over the years significantly, and this has been in response to demand.

3. Training

Events

2005	<i>Training for Ethics Reviewers (April/May - 4 sessions)</i>	<i>82 attended</i>
2006	<i>Surgery for Ethics Administrators (Jan)</i>	<i>15 attended</i>
	<i>Medical Ethics Reviewers Workshop (June)</i>	<i>-</i>
	<i>Training for Ethics Reviewers (July)</i>	<i>-</i>
2007	<i>Dentistry: Ethics, Research Governance and Clinical Trials Workshop (March)</i>	<i>-</i>
2008	<i>Social Science Research Ethics Workshop (March)</i>	<i>25 attended</i>
	<i>Human Tissue Research Ethics Workshop (April)</i>	<i>50 attended</i>
	<i>Ethics Reviewer Training Workshop (February/June - 2 sessions)</i>	<i>19 attended</i>
	<i>Biologies Research Ethics Workshop (July)</i>	<i>14 attended</i>
2009	<i>Ethical Issues for Research in Arts and the Humanities (June)</i>	<i>29 attended</i>
	<i>Professional Integrity and Ethics of Engineering Research (June)</i>	<i>-</i>
	<i>Ethical Considerations for Autoethnographers (October)</i>	<i>42 attended</i>
	<i>Workshop for new Ethics Reviewers in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health (November)</i>	<i>29 attended</i>
2010	<i>Teaching Research Ethics to Undergraduate Students (February)</i>	<i>28 attended</i>
	<i>Workshop for new Ethics Reviewers in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health (March)</i>	<i>22 attended</i>
2011	<i>Anticipating and Managing Risks: An Ethics Workshop for Researchers (January)</i>	<i>22 attended</i>

	<i>Research Involving Adults Lacking the Capacity to Consent (May)</i>	<i>21 attended</i>
	<i>AREC Workshop: Research Involving Children (September)</i>	<i>-</i>
	<i>Ethical Internet Research: Challenges and Solutions(December)</i>	<i>36 attended</i>
<i>2012</i>	<i>Good Authorship Practices: Facilitating Collaborations across Disciplines (July)</i>	<i>38 attended</i>
<i>2013</i>	<i>Workshop for Ethics Reviewers in the Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences and Professional Services (June)</i>	<i>33 attended</i>
	<i>Workshop for Ethics Reviewers in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health, Faculty of Science and Faculty of Engineering (July)</i>	<i>22 attended</i>

Feedback from Workshops

Following a number of the workshops, participants were asked to give feedback, and those responses received have been collated to offer some sense of how far the workshops have been successful in promoting the ethics policy and procedure and ethical research more generally.

The vast majority of participants felt the workshops had met their expectations in terms of the content of the session, with 40.4% selecting 'excellent', and 54.1% selecting 'good'. Only 1.8% felt the sessions were 'poor'. Some respondents gave very positive feedback about the workshop they had attended:

"It was great and it should be compulsory for all ethics reviewer to attend the course."

"I am in the Medical school and we had to do an ethics DDP module this year. One of the sessions was on authorship. This was much better as the DDP module just put a lot of very junior researchers in a room together with no-one who was capable of giving answers to the problems. This workshop had practical use as it allowed me to hear from the experts and ask them questions."

Almost all participants felt the workshops were at the right level, with 91.0% selecting just right /appropriate level of detail. Only 9.0% felt there was insufficient detail in the sessions. Some respondents suggested they would have enjoyed dealing with less straightforward issues:

"Wanted to grapple with more complex cases, where issues were not as clear cut as they were in the samples chosen"

The length of events was generally felt to be appropriate. Many respondents felt they would have benefitted from more time available for discussions, but some respondents also felt that the time commitment for the event was a lot, so there is clearly a balance to be struck. Venues on or near campus appear to be a preference for the majority of participants, presumably for convenience. Provision of lunch was commented on by a number of participants, so seems to be a draw for some.

Both the presentations and discussions were felt to be beneficial by the majority of attendees, as the tables below show:

Presentations

Excellent	40.3%
Good	54.8%
OK	4.0%
No response	0.8%

Discussion session

Excellent	36.6%
Good	44.8%
OK	11.0%
Poor	3.4%
No answer	2.8%

82.5% of respondents felt there was sufficient opportunity to participate in the workshops, and many commented that they had found the discussions the most useful aspect of the workshops. Some elements of workshops that respondents mentioned as useful included:

"Discussing the applications with people from different backgrounds and hearing alternative points of view"

"Reviewing the forms and the scenarios were very helpful. Good to have a representative from the Ethics Committee on each table to help keep the discussions on track and answer any other general questions that arose from the discussion"

"Group discussion, finding that others had similar views was confidence boosting"

"Feedback from the URES representative(s) on how the actual ethics reviews compared with the case studies from the discussions."

"Other views on particular ethics applications, highlighting areas that I'd not thought of."

"The most useful bit was having the opportunity to listen to someone else's work about ethics, from a philosophical point of view. I also found it useful to have the opportunity to 'break out' and discuss research with other people from my own subject discipline because this is something missing from the usual culture of my Department."

"The possibility of asking researchers to explain terms used in their form and considerations of who is funding research on information provided to participants. The advice to put yourself in participants' shoes was also helpful, as was advice not to be worried about not approving projects."

98.6% of participants felt the event organisation was clear, and 95.7% of participants felt the format of the event was appropriate. One respondent indicated that the purpose of the event may have been unclear to some participants:

"I think perhaps a good number of people were there to find out how to do this, whereas the event was more about issues - not a problem for me, but could be for some."

All feedback on question and answer sessions was positive, with 23.1% selecting 'excellent' and 76.9% selecting 'good' for these. In general 98.6% of respondents had enjoyed the workshop they attended (55.9% said very enjoyable, and 42.7% said reasonably enjoyable). There was also a general perception that the workshops were relevant to attendees, with 72.0% of respondents saying they felt the workshops were very relevant, and 26.6% saying that they were quite relevant.

50% of respondents felt they would benefit from further guidance on ethics matters. 65% of respondents felt that another event was the best way for them to gain further guidance on ethics matters (with web and email other possibilities).

"Very happy that the slides will be available. That's excellent! Would love to hear more about the progress of this initiative."

Some respondents mentioned areas for future workshops that they would find useful. These included internet research and training around specific vulnerable user groups, for example.

A number of those attending the workshops suggested ways in which they intended to change their working practises as a result of the event:

"Yes as I intend to implement most of the University of Sheffield rules on authorship practices at my home university."

"Yes, I'm more likely to disclose things to editors, more likely to keep records of meetings, more aware of guidelines for author inclusion/order."

"Yes, I'm going to consider writing a risk management strategy to be complete transparent and forward thinking."

Some participants were concerned that influences beyond their control would prevent them from making changes to their working practises:

"How to go about implementing said strategies especially when others are resistant."

"This is hard to say. Following strictly the good authorship practice means one has to argue with other authors in the unfair situation. To keep harmony it may be better to just accept the current practice."

General comments gave a number of ideas that participants would find useful in the future. Amongst these was guidance with regard to benchmarking or good examples.

"I think that following the discussions etc which I found helpful, a final checklist of what paperwork etc we would need to complete as reviewers would have been helpful, i.e. what happens next"

"It would have been good to see an example of a model successful application to see the level of detail required"

"It's not altogether clear when it is appropriate to approve and application subject to compulsory amendments, and when to not approve an application. I understand that this has to be inherently flexible, but at least some guidance on this would have been useful."

Some other feedback received from respondents gave ideas for ways to improve future events:

“Perhaps ask participants to submit a very brief outline of ethical issues in their work when they register for the course or to bring to the session? I wonder whether this might encourage people to have things ready to say in the Questions and Answers on the day, and ensure a range of questions? However, once people ‘warmed up’, some interesting questions were asked...”

“Presentations. Putting us all together by discipline just reiterated the same discussion we have in our units. Some cross-disciplinary perspectives would have been useful.”

IMPACT

22 events have been held, involving over 527 participants, which is equivalent to roughly 11% of staff across the University (although attendees have also included postgraduate research students). Slides and information from many of the events are made available through the Ethics website, so it is possible that a greater number of individuals have benefitted from the information provided through the training.

Overall, feedback from events has generally been extremely positive, with respondents keen and enthusiastic. The feedback shows clearly that some individuals intend to make changes to their working practises as a result of the workshop they attended. Satisfaction with the events was generally high, and attendees felt they benefitted from these events. It is likely, however, that those who sign up to attend such events are those that already have an interest in research ethics, some may have attended more than one of the events (i.e. the same group of people may be benefitting rather than reaching new individuals), and the workshops are unlikely to reach those who are more critical/cynical about the ethics requirements.

4. Annual Reports

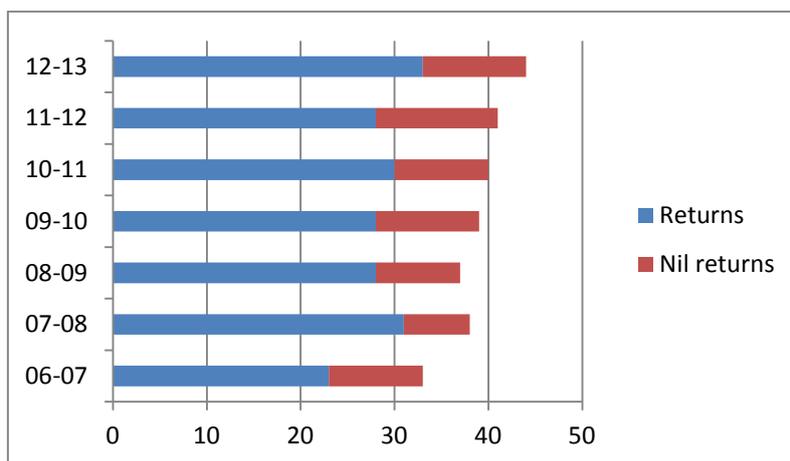
Annual Reports of Ethics Decisions have been returned by departments since 2007, and capture the decisions made over the twelve month period February-January. The following charts show some of the trends that have emerged through collation of the Annual Reports.

Number of ethics applications reviewed:



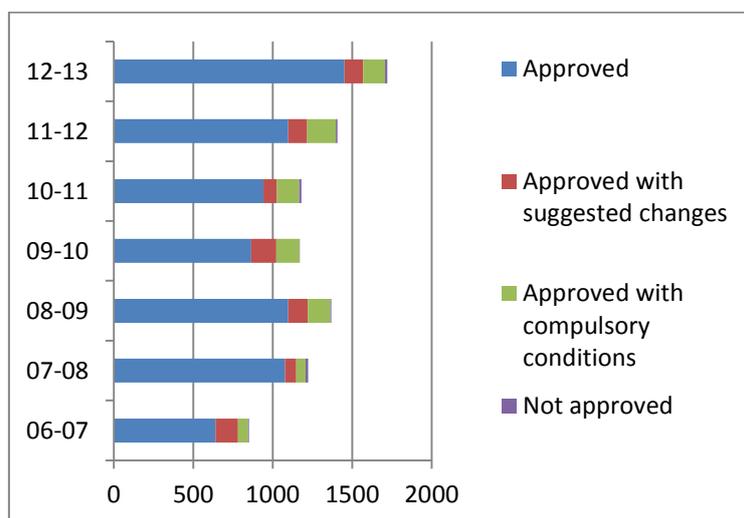
The chart shows that the number of applications reviewed has tended to increase gradually since the introduction of the ethics review process. This may reflect a growth in the volume of research involving human participants, and also may imply a growing awareness and adherence to the ethics review process over time. There appears to have been a faster rise in ethics applications since 2010-11, which may be linked to the awareness-raising activities that took place during the launch of the revised Ethics Policy.

Number of departments providing Ethics Annual Reports:

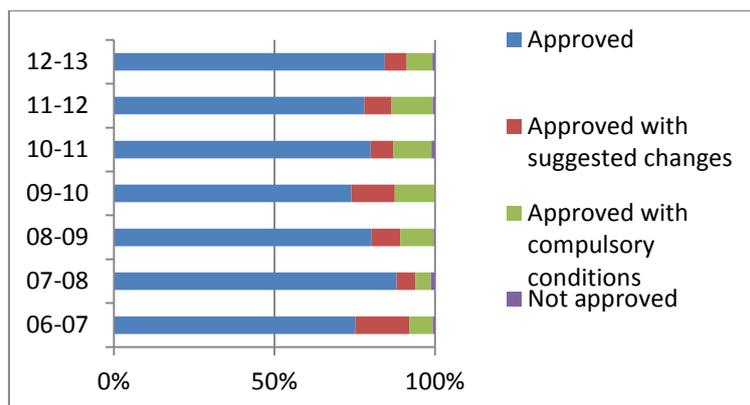


The number of Ethics Annual Reports has increased gradually as the departments independently managing the ethics review process has grown. Departments with nil returns are those who have had no ethics applications over the twelve month period, and these are often the same departments which engage with little research involving human participants.

Decisions on ethics applications by year:

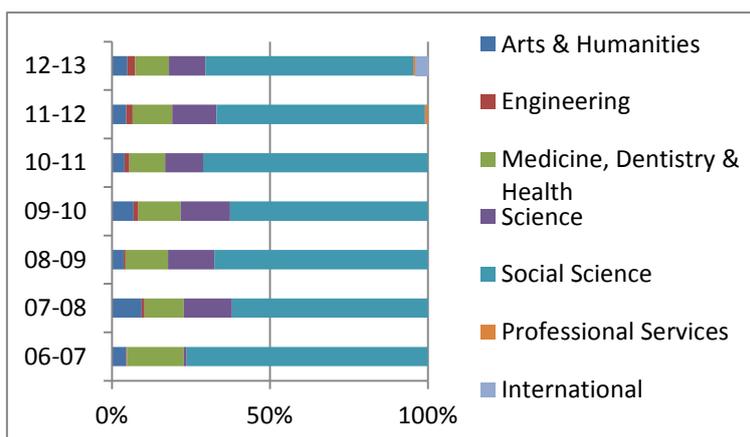


Decisions on ethics applications proportionally:



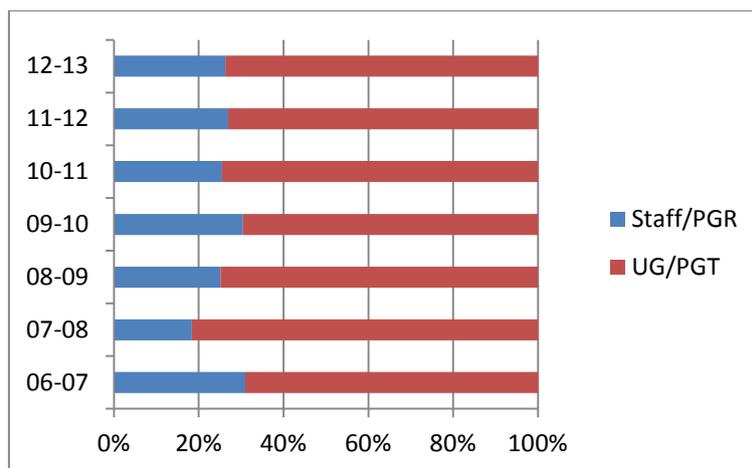
These two tables show that, although the number of applications tends to increase over time, the majority are approved with no changes suggested or required. Few applications are not approved. Over recent years there appears a slight trend towards increasing approvals with no changes suggested or required, which may imply that the quality of applications is improving.

Proportion of submissions by faculty:



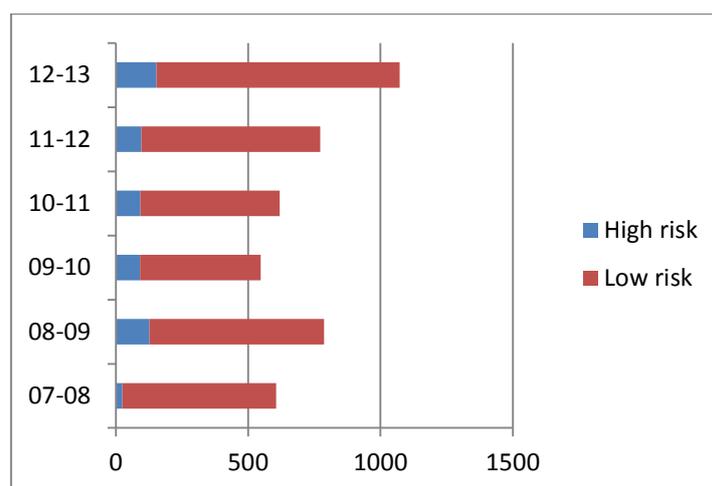
The majority of applications were submitted in the Faculty of Social Sciences (increasing from 649 in 06-07 to 1211 in 12-13). Although the chart appears to show some volume of applications within the Faculty of Science, these are predominantly submitted only within the Department of Psychology, with few applications across the rest of the Faculty. The distribution of applications has remained relatively consistent across the Faculties over time.

Proportion of applications submitted by staff/PGRs and UG/PGTs:



The proportion of staff/PGR ethics applications to UG/PGT ethics applications remains fairly consistent at roughly between 20% and 30%. In the past few years this has remained very consistent, with around 26% of submissions coming from staff/PGRs.

High risk and low risk UG and PGT applications:



UG and PGT applications can be ranked as high or low risk, with low risk requiring a less staff intensive review process. The vast majority of these (around 85%) are ranked as low risk, indicating that this two-level system is likely to be saving departments considerable time in the administration of UG and PGT ethics applications.

IMPACT

These charts show that, although the number of ethics applications continues to increase, the general trends apparent in applications (decisions on applications, applications by Faculty, staff/PGR or PGT/UG applications, low/high risk applications) have become more stable over time. This suggests that the processes have become embedded effectively, and are being applied consistently.

5. Quality Assurance Visits

First Phase:

- 06-07** Information Studies / Town and Regional Planning / Human Communication Science / English
- 07-08** Law / Nursing and Midwifery / Animal and Plant Sciences / Chemistry / Music / Civil Engineering
- 08-09** Archaeology / Sociological Studies / Computer Science / Psychology / Education
- 09-10** Engineering Materials / ScHARR / Clinical Dentistry / History / Politics / Mechanical Engineering / Molecular Biology and Biotechnology / Medicine / Management / Biomedical Science
- 10-11** Landscape / Journalism / Chemical and Biological Engineering / Management (second visit) / Geography / Modern Languages and Linguistics / Philosophy / School of Mathematics and Statistics / Automatic Controls and System Engineering
- 11-12** Architecture / Biblical Studies / East Asian Studies / Electronic and Electrical Engineering / Physics and Astronomy

Second Phase:

- 11-12** English / Human Communication Sciences / Information Studies / Town and Regional Planning
 - 12-13** Animal and Plant Sciences / Chemistry / Civil and Structural Engineering / Law / Music / Nursing and Midwifery / Politics
 - 13-14** Archaeology / Computer Science / Education
- 13 departments have now been visited twice.

The Visits

The first phase of visits explored the way in which each Department was implementing the University's Ethics Policy and Procedure. Through talking to the Ethics Administrator and Principal Ethics Contact, as well as other members of the department in many instances, the UREC was able to get a feel for the way that the Department worked. The Department had an opportunity to discuss the nature of the ethical issues they deal with, and the way that these are addressed. The Department also had the opportunity to ask questions, to ask for support from the UREC and to make suggestions.

In each visit, a number of ethics applications made to the department were examined, along with the reviewers' comments and outcomes. This allowed the UREC to identify any discrepancies in the way that applications were managed, and to highlight any issues around the process and its administration.

The visits have been successful in correcting a number of misinterpretations of the Ethics Policy and Procedure within Departments, and in building stronger and closer relationships with the staff representing the Ethics Policy and Procedure at departmental level. In some instances the visits have led to the development of bespoke practices for certain departments to deal with particular ethical issues.

Second Visits

A number of Departments have now had a second visit from the UREC, a number of years on from the first visit. The second visit has been an opportunity for the UREC to assess how far the Department has progressed since the first visit. Frequently the issues that had been raised were minor, and had been addressed to the satisfaction of the UREC.

During the visit, any issues highlighted during the first visit are re-examined. Frequently the majority of these issues have been addressed, although this has not consistently been the case. The Department of Music in particular had issues raised at the first visit (2008) that had not been addressed by the second visit (2013). These were around the maintenance of a robust paper trail and developing a suitable process for the nature of research in the department. One of the reasons for this was a need for greater support for the Principal Ethics Contact/Ethics Administrator. This Department was also found to have passed an application that the UREC felt to be lacking in information and misleading. To address this, the UREC asked the Department to review this project again if it was still ongoing. The UREC team also asked for an audit of the ethics reviews of all ongoing research within the Department, to ensure that the process has been followed correctly, and that the information from this be sent to the UREC.

In some instances the recommendations made by the UREC at the first visit have led to increased workload for the Department. For example, Human Communication Science were recommended to use letterheaded paper for letters to participants and gatekeepers, but students are not able to have access to letterheaded paper, so therefore the Department must produce these themselves. In instances such as this the UREC discussed the issues with the Department to try to find appropriate solutions. In the majority of cases however, the recommendations made by the UREC have made the ethics review process more straightforward for Departments. For example, the Department of Nursing and Midwifery were given a recommendation to not use anonymous reviews, and the Department of English were recommended to use a spread of reviewers from across the Department. Both of these changes have allowed for a more smooth operation of the Ethics Review process.

One second visit (Department of Politics) was prompted by an incident concerning a student project on pornography. This raised some concerns over the Department's implementation of the Procedure. The visit ensured that the issue giving rise to the concern had been dealt with and the Department had matters under control regarding their administration of ethical reviews.

The second visits have shown some issues common to many Departments. They have demonstrated that in the majority of Departments the reviews appear to be of good quality and that there is a widespread awareness of the need for ethics review. However, the management of the process, including the paper trail and the maintenance of records for the annual report, is difficult for many departments. This is an issue that will be resolved by the introduction of the online ethics review system, as these are features inbuilt to the system.

The visits have highlighted problems with the maintenance of departmental ethics web pages. These are often found to contain out of date information or links (or for the web page itself to be untraceable due to absent links). These are issues of concern and were drawn to the attention of the departments by the UREC. Another issue common to many departments is the shortage of ethics reviewers. This has led to conflicts of interests in some instances, with supervisors reviewing their own students' projects. This again is a concern which has been drawn to the attention of departments, and the suggestion to expand the pool of ethics reviewers made.

Good Practice

Since 2008/09, a summary of good practice identified from the visits to departments has been shared with all departments to offer ideas for ways of working. This names the department in which the example was found, and so also encourages innovation and good

practice and celebrates success. This also highlights a number of ways in which the Research Ethics Policy and Procedure has impacted on departments, by inspiring innovative and relevant responses. It is split into four areas: Developing an ethical research culture; Teaching and learning; Operating the University ethics review procedure; and Departmental ethics web-pages.

IMPACT

Looking at the reports of departmental visits, there are many clear examples of feedback given to the UREC by departments where the UREC has made changes (for example, developing a low-risk application process, questions added to the application form, advice available via the website). Equally, Departments have made changes where the UREC has pointed out that their processes were not ensuring the required standards. The visits serve as an ongoing way for the UREC to ensure the Ethics Policy and Procedure is being met across the University in practice. Through discussion with Departments the visits have a strong impact in the way that they maintain the necessary level of quality, and also promote good practice and innovation in the application of the Ethics Policy and Procedure and wider ethical behaviour in research. Certain common issues arising from the second round of visits may suggest areas of concern for the UREC to consider in future.

6. Web Pages

Central Web Pages

The University's central Ethics Policy and Procedure web pages were updated in 2010, in response to the development of the Ethics Policy. The pages contain policy information and guidance. The Research Ethics Policy is included in full along with a series of specialist guidance papers and other guidance giving information on particular issues that may arise within ethical considerations, and these are regularly added to as queries suggest other areas of concern. A download of frequently asked questions gives further information, as do slides from previous training events, and links to other available resources. The web pages outline the process of applying for ethics approval, and include the standard University application form.

Additionally, the web pages provide background information on the UREC (including terms of reference and members), and edited minutes of the meetings. Contact details are also provided for the Quality and Governance team, departmental Principal Ethics Contacts, and departmental Ethics Administrators.

There has been feedback from departmental contacts that suggests the web pages can be difficult to navigate. The proposal from the UREC that the web pages are given a shortened URL outside of the R&IS pages may alleviate this to some degree. A number of other suggestions have also recently been made by members of the UREC, which will be considered carefully over the coming months.

Departmental Web Pages

Of 40 academic departments, the majority (33) have clear information on the ethics policy and procedure available on their web pages. Those whose web pages could not be identified were: Archaeology; Biblical Studies; Biomedical Science; Management; Mathematics and Statistics; Mechanical Engineering; The Institute of Lifelong Learning; and the three Faculties of the International Faculty. These are typically found under research, and available to outside individuals (one department has information stored within the intranet pages, and

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one on MOLE, and this is for the convenience of staff and students). All of these web pages offer information relating to the department specifically, links to the central University information, and links to the forms required. 12 departments (Clinical Dentistry; Computer Science; Education; Human Communication Sciences; Information Studies; Landscape; Medicine; Nursing and Midwifery; Politics; Psychology; SchHARR; Sociological Studies) offer more detailed information, with some including flow charts of the review process, template consent forms, example applications, or information on alternative review processes.

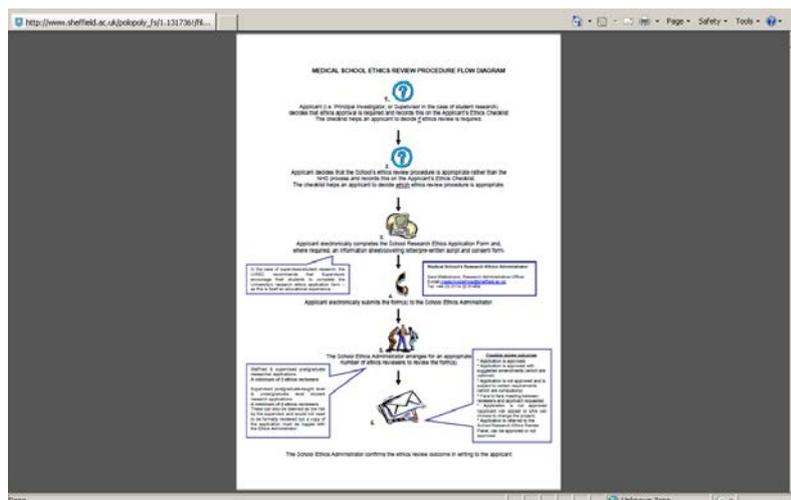
Some examples of departmental web pages are shown here:

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'SchHARR's Research Ethics Review' page. The page has a blue header and a left-hand navigation menu with categories like 'Prospective students', 'Research', 'Health Economics and Decision Science', 'Health Services Evaluation', 'Public Health', 'Clinical Trials Research Unit', 'Events and Seminars', 'Publications', 'SCHARR Research Ethics Review', 'Research ethics for UG/PGT', 'Research ethics for staff/PGR', 'Health Research Governance Procedures', 'Consultancy, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer', 'Current students', 'Short Course Unit', 'Staff & PGRs', 'Sections in SCHARR', and 'Contact Us'. The main content area is titled 'SCHARR's Research Ethics Review' and contains several sections: 'The main purpose of the ethics review procedures...', 'SCHARR Ethical Review Procedures', 'Research ethics procedures for staff and postgraduate research students', and 'Please see the download - Dates for the SCHARR ethics committee meeting...'. A right-hand sidebar contains 'See also' (Guidance to best practice, Example Applications), 'Useful information' (Health Service Research of Evaluation, A Guide to Research Ethics for Online Survey Design, Safe Working Practices), and 'SCHARR Committee Dates'.

School of Health and Related Research

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'School of Education Ethical Review Policy' page. The page has a blue header and a left-hand navigation menu with categories like 'The School of Education', 'Courses & Programmes', 'Research', 'Research Centres', 'Seminars, Conferences & Lectures', 'Ethical Review Policy', 'Foucault and Education', 'People', 'International Students', 'Current Students', and 'Contact Us'. The main content area is titled 'School of Education Ethical Review Policy' and contains sections for 'ETHICS PROCEDURES FOR STAFF AND STUDENT RESEARCH IN THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION', 'Aim', 'Objectives', and 'Policy'. A right-hand sidebar contains 'More details' (Guidance for completing application form, Flow diagram - ethical review procedure for staff / an hour research, Flow Diagram - ethics review procedures - student research), 'Ethical Guidance' (Safety and well being, Consent, Anonymity, confidentiality and data-protection, Frequently asked questions), and 'Forms' (Applicants Checklist, Staff/En Bloc Application Form, Student Application Form, Information sheet, Ethics Reviewer's Consent Form).

School of Education



Flowchart from the School of Medicine

IMPACT

The widespread implementation of departmental ethics web pages shows that the Ethics Policy is taken seriously across the University. The development of bespoke and in-depth information by some departments indicates that they place importance on the Ethics Review Process. A number of those departments without web pages had been asked at their Audit visit about the website, and those who did not have a website (some departments have lost the links in website updates) were given recommendations on the information they should include.

7. Problem Cases and Queries

The Quality and Governance team deal with a number of day-to-day queries from staff across the University on a variety of ethical issues and enquiries about the Ethics Policy and Procedure. However, some queries are of such a nature that they necessitate the attention of the UREC. These may lead to development of the guidance offered to applicants.

- May 07** Query raised about ownership of audio and video recordings and subsequent use of these.
- May 08** Query raised about the addition of CRB checks to Ethics Review forms.
- May 09** Refused application within SchARR taken to another Department (Psychology) rather than to UREC appeal.
- Oct 09** Complaint about names of individuals who are not the subjects of research and have not given consent included in ethnographic research published online. UREC suggested that these issues must be given consideration in granting ethics approval to ethnographic/autoethnographic research
 - Led to guidance whereby consent is required from anyone named in research outputs
- Sept 10** PGT Student conducted research (observations and interviews) with children without prior ethics approval
 - Led to guidance on how Departments can address research conducted without Ethics Approval
- Nov 10** ERASMUS Students unclear whether Ethics Approval required from University of Sheffield as well as other University when conducting research on year abroad

- Led to guidance that University of Sheffield Ethics Approval is required when this contributed to degree accreditation
- Feb 11** PGR Student research project where anonymity (of location) is compromised by the need to reference documents which name the place

 - Led to guidance that the limitations of anonymity needs to be made clear to participants
- Feb 11** Queries regarding the definition of anonymised secondary data and the requirements for ethics approval – truly anonymised or aggregated data does not require ethics approval, as long as the original research was conducted according to ethics policy and participants agreed to allow data to be used for future research
- Sept 11** Query regarding the use of data gathered before the introduction of Ethics Approval

 - Led to guidance that this does not require Ethics Approval, but care should be taken to ensure anonymity
- Jan 12** Concerns raised about Journalism Studies students and the need for ethics approval for day-to-day journalistic activities. Proposals for a bespoke 'generic' ethics application process to be put into place for this. This was approved by Senate later in the year.
- June 12** A student based at the University of Sheffield and another European university was found to have conducted research towards her dissertation without gaining ethics approval from the University of Sheffield. UREC amended academic guidelines to ensure these were clear to all staff and students, including those not based at University of Sheffield. The student was given support to resubmit using new data collected with ethics approval and the data collected without ethics approval was destroyed. Instances of student research proceeding without ethics approval research will be halted immediately and the consequences will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- Mar 13** An academic proceeded with a research project without ethics approval, having previously conducted the same research whilst based at a university in Sweden where there was no requirement for ethics approval. All data gathered prior to approval was discarded.
- Apr 13** An undergraduate research project was undertaken with ethics approval as a low-risk project, but was felt by UREC to be high-risk, and to require amendments. The research data was permitted for use as the student had been granted approval, and further guidance given to departments and supervisors on the distinction between high and low risk applications.
- May 13** An MA supervisor in Music was found to have been allowing students to conduct research without ethics approval as he was unaware that approval was necessary. All ongoing research was suspended when this was discovered until ethics approval was gained, and all data gathered without approval discarded.
- May 13** A request for information from funders revealed that a research project conducted in 2011 without ethics approval. This oversight has been addressed by the department changing procedures which should prevent any reoccurrence in the future. The department were advised by UREC to be honest with the funders regarding the situation.
- May 13** Query regarding research conducted within the university but by external researchers (for example, using participants recruited through an email sent by the university system) and whether this requires ethics approval

 - Led to guidance that research of this sort should have ethics approval of equivalent robustness to that of the University ethics approval, or would be

required to also gain ethics approval within the department that is endorsing the research.

IMPACT

Whilst the increase in incidents over time may be perceived as a failing of the Ethics Policy and Procedure, in fact this is likely to be misleading. The increase in incidents brought to the attention of the UREC is instead likely to imply a greater awareness, as many of the issues may have previously passed without comment.

8. Conclusions

This report shows the breadth of activity undertaken by the UREC in promoting and embedding the Ethics Policy and Procedure over the period since its introduction.

Over a ten year period the University has gone from the beginnings of an Ethics Policy to an established and active process embedded across the departments. The UREC keeps informed of standards and innovation in research ethics across the sector through membership of the AREC and engagement with other Universities and the wider ethics community (e.g. epigeum).

The UREC has put into place a variety of arrangements and activities to support awareness and uptake of the Policy and Procedure across the University. These include web pages with the Policy in full, alongside guidance, further information and resources. Audit visits to departments are undertaken to ensure the quality of the review procedure implemented at departmental level. Annual reports from the departments maintain a regular check that processes are operating as they should.

There is clear evidence for the widespread endorsement of the Ethics Policy and Procedure through the ways in which the wider University has responded to the Ethics Policy and Procedure. There have been good levels of attendance at events organised on behalf of the UREC, and very positive feedback about the events. The majority of departments have web pages to inform their own staff, students and interested parties about ethics. The queries and enquiries received from across the University show a strong level of engagement with research ethics issues generally, and a motivation to comply with the Ethics Policy. Anecdotally, however, there may be some way to go to ensure that all researchers engage fully with the Ethics Policy and Procedure rather than seeing it as a 'hoop to jump through', and to ensure that all staff and students are fully aware of their responsibilities under the Policy.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and agree whether any actions are necessary as a result of the information provided.

Peggy Haughton
Research & Innovation Services