POSITION STATEMENT RELATING TO THE STATUS OF ETHICS APPROVAL GRANTED BY THE UNIVERSITY AFTER THE RESEARCH IS TRANSFERRED ELSEWHERE

The University’s Ethics Review Procedure is designed to provide ethical review and approval for research projects that are undertaken by University of Sheffield staff and students. Whilst this Procedure may be used to seek approval for projects that are undertaken collaboratively with external researchers/organisations, it does not extend to research that is carried out by individuals or organisations not affiliated to the University (as per the UREC’s ‘Position statement relating to requests for the University / its departments to ethically review external research projects’).

Therefore, if a member of staff leaves the University and wishes to continue a research project for which they have University of Sheffield ethics approval, they should be aware that the approval granted by the University will no longer be valid after the date they leave the University. In addition, if approval needs to be sought for amendments to the project after the research has been moved elsewhere, it is no longer appropriate for the University to consider these amendments. This is because the University no longer has any oversight of the research and no control over how it is carried out: it would be a potential reputational risk to the University to continue to approve such projects.

This means that when a member of staff moves to a new institution, they should seek ethics approval from that institution (in accordance with the procedure that operates there); this process could be carried out in advance of the transfer date to ensure that the research can be continued seamlessly following the move. This will also ensure that there is an appropriate route for seeking approval for any amendments to the project as the research progresses at the new institution.

If the member of staff leaving the University is a member of a research team that is continuing to lead the project at Sheffield, then the University of Sheffield ethics approval will normally continue to apply, even if some minor elements of the project are continued by the departing researcher. However, if the project (or significant elements of it, such as whole work packages) will be led by the departing researcher, ethics approval should be sought from their new institution before any work on the research recommences: the University of Sheffield approval is no longer valid.

In the case of researchers moving to the University of Sheffield and bringing research with them which has ethics approval from another institution, clarity should be sought from that institution regarding whether they consider the approval to continue to be valid, and if so, how the consideration of any amendments to the project should be dealt with.

If the other institution confirms that the approval will continue to be valid, then the researcher would be required to follow the ‘Alternative Ethics Review Procedure’, as set out in the University’s ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’ (https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure/alternative). This aims to ensure that the process of ethical review undertaken in the other institution is sufficiently robust for the University to rely on, and that copies of the relevant approval documentation are uploaded to the University’s online Ethics Application System.

If the other institution indicates that the approval granted by that institution will no longer be valid, or if the procedure operating at that institution is not judged to be sufficiently robust,
then the researcher is required to obtain ethics approval from the University of Sheffield before any further work on the research is undertaken at the University of Sheffield.

In all such cases, the researcher will need to give consideration to the requirements of the relevant data protection legislation. If personal data is to be transferred from one institution to another, this is likely to mean a change in the Data Controller, and research participants should be informed of this and other relevant information relating to the transfer of the research project (for example, new contact details, Privacy Notice, complaints procedures etc.)

Any queries regarding this position statement should be directed to the UREC’s Secretary (Mrs Lindsay Unwin, LV.Unwin@sheffield.ac.uk, extn. 21443).

University Research Ethics Committee
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