

COMMUNICATING ETHICAL ISSUES TO STUDENTS

Guidance produced by Learning and Teaching Services and the University Research Ethics Committee (Feb 2011)

The three universal ethical principles of **rigour**, **respect** and **responsibility** apply to all research carried out by staff and students at the University.

- All University research that involves human participants, personal data about individuals and/or any human biological materials must be ethically approved prior to the participants' involvement in the research, via the most appropriate ethics review procedure. Departments should make sure that appropriate processes are in place to ensure that ethics approval for undergraduate and postgraduate taught student research is obtained whenever necessary. As a first point of contact, all departments have designated Principal Ethics Contacts, who provide a valuable source of experience and/or knowledge of research ethics issues. Each department also has an Ethics Administrator, who is able to offer advice and support on the University's ethics review procedure.
- Research ethics are not simply a matter of compliance with codes and guidelines. Ethics in the broad sense of 'rigour, respect and responsibility', suggested above, should routinely inform all aspects of research. There is a wealth of generic information on research ethics and integrity available on the University's Research & Innovation Services website.
- Academic departments are expected to inform undergraduate and postgraduate taught students about the ethical aspects of conducting research that involves participants, though it is accepted that this will be proportionate to how relevant the matter of ethical issues in research involving human participants is to the students' programme of study.
- Departments should make guidance on research ethics issues and procedures available to all students via Student Handbooks or other online means of communication. This is particularly important as a means of introducing new students to the principles of ethical research operating across the University.
- Where appropriate, academic departments are also encouraged to develop teaching/supporting material for students that takes account of the discipline-specific context and approach to research ethics and integrity. The following are some examples of activities departments may wish to consider:
 - Incorporation of a discussion on research ethics within induction events;
 - Incorporation of a lecture/seminar on research ethics within appropriate modules (e.g. covering issues such as 'safety and well-being', 'informed consent', 'anonymity, confidentiality and data protection');
 - Training sessions/workshops on research ethics for students;
 - Development of an online tutorial on research ethics;
 - Production of a department-specific leaflet on research ethics.

Further Information

- Customisable resources for teaching ethics across a range of disciplines – <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/further-guidance/educationresources/teaching-resourcesc.html>
- University Research & Innovation Services – research ethics & integrity website (including details of departmental Ethics Administrators, Principal Ethics Contacts and the 'Research Ethics and Integrity' leaflet): <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/system.html>.
- The University's Ethics Policy web pages including details on how to obtain ethics approval (with specific information about the approval process for undergraduate and postgraduate-taught students), and a range of guidance about key issues such as informed consent: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/index.html>