



Building Ethical Research Practices into Institutional Research

Frequently Asked Questions¹

Who is Hallam in this context?

This Hallam Guild Group refers to Hallam as a collective term to encompass the research and evaluation of staff and student within Sheffield Hallam University and Sheffield Hallam Students' Union.

What is IR at Hallam?

"Institutional Research (IR) is a term which describes evidence driven approaches to decision making within organisations. Effective IR requires strategically relevant sources of reliable data which are embedded within the organisation. IR therefore includes research or evaluation conducted by staff or students on their own organisation" (Austen 2018).

The demand for evidence of 'what works' is increasing within higher education due to strategic KPIs, funding agreements and the pressure to obtain charter marks of excellence. In turn, the expectation to research and evaluate institutional practices increases. Institutional research/evaluation is now undertaken by a wide range of academics, practitioners, professionals and students. Although transdisciplinary in nature, all IR can be differentiated by two definitions - knowledge creation (research) and service evaluation. Both approaches have associated and distinct ethical considerations however the depth of ethical reflection, especially in relation to the impact on student samples, is varied and at times concerning.

IR can be conducted by academics and professional services staff within Faculties, Directorates (e.g. STEER, LEAD), Research Centres (e.g. CDARE) and strategic teams (e.g. Widening Participation and Outreach Team, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team, Customer Insight Team), by researchers within the Students Union and by UG and PG students in a variety of disciplines.

Have a look at the *Institutional Research and Evaluation Typology* document for further details and examples.

Is IR the the same as pedagogic research, educational research, and/or the scholarship of teaching and learning?

Institutional research can include all of the above, if the work could provide evidence for strategic decision making and enhancement within Hallam. Examples include evidence of teaching excellence

¹ This is a live document and will be updated as the Group develops

or an improved student experience. Specifically, if the work utilises a Hallam student or Hallam staff sample it could be defined as institutional research.

What types of research at Hallam would not be included in this definition?

- Disciplinary research (by staff or students) which does not provide evidence for strategic decision making and enhancement within Hallam.
- Educational research which is externally funded and focuses on settings external to Hallam.

How much of my time will I be expected to contribute?

The Ethics IR Group will be running monthly workshops from January to June 2019. All members are invited to bring ethical dilemmas to the session for strategies and solutions to be discussed. We also hope to organise an event with external speakers. Members are not obligated to attend all sessions.

You can also engage on Twitter (@EthicsIR), including our 'Ethical Dilemma of the Day'.

Is this Group replacing Faculty/Directorate ethical approval processes?

All university research undergoes ethical scrutiny to ensure that it is conducted to the highest ethical standards. This Group does not intend to replace formal procedures for ethical review and governance as outlined in institutional policy. However, the University Research Ethics Committee [Annual Report 2016-2017](#) acknowledged that institutional research operates within a complex space. It is hoped that this Group provides a supportive environment in which to discuss and debate some of these complexities.

Where can I find further information on ethics for institutional research?

The EthicsIR page on the Hallam Guild website has a number of resources regarding this area of research. There are also a number of guidance documents which already exists and may be of use:

- [Insider research guidelines](#)
- [Research Incentives \(PDF, 51 KB\)](#)
- [GDPR guidelines for researchers](#)

The EthicsIR Group would also like to co-create further guidance for institutional researchers following Group discussions.