

ACU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) – Terms of Reference

Purpose

The ACU HREC is responsible for ensuring that research conducted by ACU staff or students and involving humans as subjects or participants is in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007), the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (2007) and associated legislation and guidelines.¹ In collaboration with the University's research community, the HREC will promote ethical standards of research through:

- Protecting the mental and physical welfare, rights, dignity and safety of human research participants, their data or human tissue.
- Engaging in supportive and respectful dialogue with researchers.
- Protecting the reputation of ACU as a place of ethical research by reviewing research undertaken by its staff and students through efficient and effective review processes.

The HREC will:

- Review human research ethics applications submitted by staff and students in terms of their ethical acceptability and adherence to relevant standards and guidelines.
- Review and ratify human research ethics applications involving ACU staff or students which have been granted ethics approval by another accredited HREC.
- Undertake expedited review of negligible or low risk human research projects.
- Maintain a register of proposed research projects involving human participants and communicating information on request to appropriate national bodies.
- Develop and publish Human Research Ethics Policies and Guidelines for researchers and students.
- Promote an understanding of and appreciation for the importance of ethical research conduct by staff and students of the University.
- Monitor the conduct of approved research through the receipt of progress, annual and completion reports.
- Undertake initial investigation of complaints relating to the conduct of research by ACU staff or students.
- Provide advice to the University, through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) on ethical issues relating to research, including the ethical aspects of complaints against researchers or research projects.

Membership

Membership should reflect a balance of experience, views, expertise and gender, as well as representation from the different University campuses.

Members will be appointed in the following categories:

- Chairperson, who may be either external or internal to the University
- Deputy Chairperson, appointed from one of the internal members of the HREC

¹ As amended from time to time.

- Laywoman² (not associated with the University)
- Layman (not associated with the University)
- A lawyer (not associated with the University)
- A minister of religion or person involved in pastoral care (either internal or external to the University)
- A person with experience in the provision of health care or counselling (either internal or external to the University)
- At least one representative of each faculty as nominated by the relevant Associate Dean (Research) and approved by the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor (Research)
- Convenor, Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel (IREAP)

Date of Establishment: 1995

Meeting Frequency: 11 times per year

Responsible Officer: Dean of Research

Executive Officer: Research Ethics Manager, ODVCR

Revised: 13 March 2015

Review date: March 2018

Approved by Academic Board³: 28/7/95

Approved by Senate: 12/10/95

² A layperson is defined by the [National Statement](#) as a person unaffiliated with the institution who does not currently engage in medical, scientific, legal or academic work (Section 5.1).

³ Originally established as the University Research Projects Ethics Committee. Reconstituted as the University Human Research Ethics Committee from 1 January 2000. Renamed the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) with revised Terms of Reference approved by the Research Management Committee, 6 September 2000.

Guidelines for the conduct of HREC meetings

Values

The HREC will be guided by the following values outlined in the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#):

- Respect
- Justice
- Beneficence
- Research merit and integrity

The HREC will promote these values by ensuring that:

- the rights and interests of research participants/subjects take precedence over the expected benefits to human knowledge, the community or to the researcher
- every realistic attempt is made to balance potential risk and benefit arising from research
- research is of an acceptable standard, in accordance with recognised internal and external peer review procedures
- local culture, practice and social attitudes are taken into account when making decisions
- decisions are in accordance with the principles and values of the National Statement
- communication with researchers is open and respectful
- no members of the HREC adjudicate on proposals in which they may be personally involved

Accountability

The HREC reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) through the Chair of the HREC.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) shall:

- receive the Minutes of each meeting
- be briefed by the Chair no less than twice a year but more often if deemed necessary by either the Chair or the DVC(R)

Complaints

Complaints relating to the conduct of research

Complaints relating to the conduct of research by ACU students or staff will initially be investigated by the HREC Chair and the Research Ethics Manager, in line with University policies relating to responsible conduct of research.

In the event of such a complaint being received, the researcher shall immediately be informed and the protocol suspended until the complaint is resolved.

Complaints relating to the decisions of the HREC

Complaints about any decisions of the HREC that cannot be resolved by the Chair and Research Ethics Manager will be referred to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research). However, every attempt should be made to resolve such complaints and to address concerns before making such a referral.

Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel (IREAP):

Research with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples component will be referred to the Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel (IREAP) for additional review and advice.

Membership:

When appointing members, every effort should be made to ensure a balance of experience, views, expertise and gender, as well as representation from the different University campuses.

Appointment of HREC members

- All appointments will be made by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research).
- The Chair and the Deputy-Chair of the Committee will be appointed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research).
- Members of the HREC will hold membership until 31st December closest to three years from the date of their appointment.
- Members will be appointed in their own right and not as representatives of any group, organisation or opinion.
- Committee members will normally serve a maximum of two consecutive terms unless otherwise approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research).
- Prospective members of the HREC will be sought through open and transparent means, including nomination, advertisement and direct approach.
- Any interested person may indicate their willingness to serve on the HREC by completing an Expression of Interest and submitting it to the Ethics Secretariat⁴.
- A register of prospective members will be maintained by the Ethics Secretariat.
- Appropriate induction and support will be provided for all new members according to the requirements of the National Statement.
- Ongoing education and training will be provided for all HREC members.

Liability coverage

The University will provide indemnity for members of the HREC for any liabilities that arise as a result of the member exercising his or her duties as a member in good faith.

Responsibilities of HREC Chair

The Chair of the HREC is responsible for:

- initial review of all applications to determine the degree and likelihood of risk and the level of review necessary
- overseeing the conduct of the meetings
- ensuring that discussions are held in a calm and respectful manner, and that all members are given the opportunity to express their opinion
- advising researchers on the ethical issues associated with their applications
- responding to complaints about the conduct of research by ACU staff or students
- providing regular briefings and reports to the DVC(R) in relation to research ethics and advising the DVC(R) of contentious issues

The Chair of the HREC is expected to:

- be familiar with the relevant documents, in particular the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct*

⁴ The Ethics Secretariat refers to the professional staff who provide administrative support and management of the Human Research Ethics Committee. See:

http://www.acu.edu.au/research/support_for_researchers/contact_us/research_ethics

in Human Research (2007) and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research

- be familiar with the relevant legislation and guidelines, in particular those relating to Privacy and Child Protection

Responsibilities of HREC members

Members of the HREC are expected to:

- review applications prior to the meeting
- attend meetings in person whenever possible or provide an apology prior to the meeting
- contribute to the discussion in a respectful and inclusive manner
- participate in relevant training and induction
- become familiar with the relevant documents, including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*

Meeting conduct

Confidentiality

Members and those in attendance are asked to respect the confidentiality of meetings.

Conflict of interest

Members and those in attendance are asked to declare any conflict of interest at the commencement of each of meeting, and to absent themselves from the meeting for the discussion of the relevant item(s).

Decision making

All committee members should have the opportunity to express their opinion. Decisions should ideally be reached through consensus but are not required to be unanimous.⁵

Decisions should accord with the principles and requirements of the National Statement.

Meeting frequency

Meetings will normally be held once a month (except January).

Meeting quorum

A meeting shall be held in quorum when a minimum of seven members including the Chair (Deputy-Chair or Acting Chair) and at least three external members are present either in person or by telephone/video conference.

Membership

Appointment

Members are appointed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research). The term of appointment will normally be up to 3 years. The period of appointment will normally cease on the 31st December 3 years after the commencement of membership. All positions are renewable.

Shared membership

Members may be appointed jointly in a shared capacity. It is the responsibility of such members to ensure that one or other is able to attend a meeting of the HREC.

Termination of Appointment

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) may terminate the appointment of any member of the HREC if he or she believes it to be necessary for the proper functioning of the Committee.

Reporting

The Ethics Secretariat, in conjunction with the Chair of the HREC, is responsible for the preparation

⁵ In accordance with NS 5.2.31.

and dissemination of internal and external reports.

Reporting (external)

The HREC will provide annual reports to the NHMRC, the Privacy Commissioner, and any other external reports, as required.

Reporting (internal)

Minutes of each HREC meeting shall be forwarded to the University Research Committee through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research).

The HREC will provide annual reports to the University Research Committee through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research).

Review of applications

The Ethics Secretariat will “triage” applications to assign the level of review appropriate for the risk and complexity of the research. The Ethics Secretariat will also allocate applications to a particular reviewer as required.

Expedited Review

Research involving low or negligible risk, including ratifications of external applications and amendments, may be considered by the Chair and members of the Executive and ratified at the next full meeting of HREC.

Full HREC review

Research which involves greater than low or negligible risk will be reviewed at the next full meeting of HREC. Each such application will be allocated to a particular HREC member for in-depth review but HREC members are normally expected to have read all applications prior to the meeting.

IREAP review

Research which involves Indigenous peoples⁶ will be referred to the Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel (IREAP) for additional review. IREAP will provide advice to the HREC as to any additional measures or information required to ensure the appropriateness of the research.

Retrospective approval

The HREC cannot provide retrospective approval.

Related legislation, policies and guidelines (external)

- *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*
- *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007)*
- Privacy Legislation
- SERAP⁷

Related policies and documents (internal)

- Code of conduct
- Research Data Management Policy
- Child Protection Policy

Review

The HREC Terms of Reference will be reviewed every 3 years in accordance with ACU policy.

⁶ This does not apply for research which includes Indigenous peoples incidentally but neither focusses upon nor is likely to impact upon them.

⁷ SERAP is the NSW State Education Research Applications Process - www.serap.det.nsw.edu.au