



Human Research Ethics Committees Terms of Reference

1. Definitions

[National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(The National Statement\) \(NS\)](#)

The National Statement has been jointly developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the Australian Research Council (ARC) and Universities Australia (UA).

This joint undertaking is Australia's principal human research guideline and sets out the requirements for ethical design, review and conduct of human research in Australia. It is intended for use by researchers conducting human research, ethical review body members, those involved in research governance and research participants. All human research conducted in Australia must conform to this document.

[AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research \(The AIATSIS Code\)](#)

The AIATSIS Code sets national standards for the ethical and responsible conduct of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research, across all disciplines and methodologies

[Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018 \(The Code\)](#)

The Code establishes a framework for responsible research conduct that provides a foundation for high-quality research, credibility and community trust in the research endeavour.

2. Acronyms

The University	The Australian National University (ANU)
DVC-RI	Deputy Vice Chancellor - Research and Innovation
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
DERC	Delegated Ethics Review Committee
REO	Research Ethics Office

3. Purpose Statement

Section 5 of the National Statement sets out the governance responsibilities of institutions conducting of human research. It indicates that 'all research should be developed reviewed, authorised, conducted and monitored in accordance with a research governance framework as described in an institution's policy'.

The establishment and maintenance of ethics review processes and processes for assessing the risk level of the research are part of an institution's overall governance responsibility.

3.1 Scope of Responsibility

The responsibilities of the University are to ensure:

- a. All ethics review processes and the criteria that are used for determining the appropriate process are clear, transparent and publicly available through the publication of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines.
- b. Information is available on:
 - i. the acceptance criteria for prior ethics review conducted external to the institution, including ethics review conducted overseas (NS 5.5)

- ii. how the risk profile of a research project is assessed and how review of lower risk research is conducted
- iii. eligibility for exemption from ethics review
- c. The timely completion University reporting as required by the National Statement and other relevant bodies
- d. Adequate secretariat support is provided to the HREC and delegated review processes.
- e. A written report on committee activities is submitted annually to the University Executive
- f. Alleged non-compliance and grievances, are reviewed and escalated where required following ANU policies and procedures (including referral to the DVC-RI and the associated external bodies, as required)
- g. Timely distribution of agendas, applications for review and minutes for every formal HREC meeting
- h. Researchers, staff and students are provided with training, responses to enquiries and preliminary review of applications prior to committee review

The responsibilities of the Committee are to ensure that on behalf of the University it:

- a. Operates in accordance with its operating procedures
- b. Ensures all research activities involving human participants meet the requirements of the Code, the National Statement and the AIATSIS Code (where applicable) prior to approval.

3.2 Objectives and Functions

The objectives of the ANU human research ethics committees are to:

- a. Facilitate ethically defensible research involving human participants through efficient and thorough review processes developed in accordance with the National Statement.
- b. Minimise the risk of harm arising from research involving human participants by ensuring adequate monitoring processes.

The functions of the committees are to:

- a. Provide independent, sound and timely review of protocols involving human participants that fall within the jurisdiction of ANU
- b. To approve the ethical aspects of human research projects that meet the requirements of the National Statement and other relevant codes and guidelines
- c. Ensure that proposed research complies with the relevant guidelines on the conduct of human research, including but not limited to the National Statement, the Code and the AIATSIS Code, as required in the submission of their applications (and amendments) prior to approval
- d. Ensure ethical standards are maintained through the implementation of monitoring processes
- e. Provide ethics related advice to academic staff, students, visiting and honorary staff and administrators involved in the support of research.
- f. Review required approved project reports, including annual, final and adverse event reports
- g. Take appropriate action regarding complaints and/or non-compliance following the ANU Complaints and Non-Compliance Procedures
- h. Suspend or withdraw the approval of any project not being undertaken in accordance with the approved protocol and/or the National Statement and/or relevant codes and guidelines

4. Organisational Structure and Accountability

4.1 Establishment and Structure

The University operates one HREC¹ for the review of applications assessed as higher risk research (NS 2.1). To enable efficient and proportionate review of lower risk research, the University has also established delegated review pathways which meet National Statement requirements (5.1.10-5.1.14). This arrangement allows for the timely review of research protocols that involve human participants.

The University reviews ethics protocol applications from ANU affiliated researchers and does not charge a fee. The University does not review submissions from unaffiliated researchers.

These committees and the associated governance review processes are supported by the REO within the Research and Innovation portfolio.

4.2 Delegated review and Advisory Bodies

The University operates the following delegated review pathways and advisory bodies;

- a. College based Delegated Ethics Review Committees (DERCs) review applications of low risk (with or without foreseeable burden)
- b. Chairs of the DERCs review applications assessed to be of minimal risk (with no risk of harm or discomfort, potential for minor burden or inconvenience)
- c. Scholarly Information Services provides advice on the development of data management plans (DMPs)

Additional review bodies may be used or established to support University requirements as necessary.

4.3 Accountability

The HREC and DERCs are accountable to the DVC-RI. The HREC reports to the University executive at least annually. The Chair of the HREC meets with the DVC-RI at least twice a year.

The Chair will advise the DVC-RI and other appropriate stakeholders on aspects of research involving human participants that fall within the jurisdiction of the ANU. The advice will cover policies and practices for the review, approval, monitoring and administration of such research.

5. Membership

5.1 Mandatory Membership

The minimum membership of the HREC is eight and will include the following categories:

- a. a chairperson with suitable experience, including previous membership of an HREC, whose other responsibilities will not impair the HREC's capacity to carry out its obligations under the National Statement
- b. two people who bring a broad community or consumer perspective and who have no paid affiliation with the institution
- c. a person with knowledge of, and current experience in, the professional care or treatment of people; for example, a nurse, counsellor or allied health professional
- d. a person who performs a pastoral care role in a community including, but not limited to, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander elder or community leader, a chaplain or a minister of religion or other religious leader
- e. a qualified lawyer, who may or may not be currently practising and, where possible, is not engaged to advise the institution on research-related or any other matters
- f. two people with current research experience that is relevant to research proposals to be considered at the meetings they attend

No individual may represent more than one of the categories at any individual meeting but they may fill a different category at a separate meeting, so long as all minimum membership categories are represented at each meeting (NS 5.1.31).

¹ The ANU HREC is registered with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), registration number: EC00104.

The University will appoint a Deputy Chair to fulfil the chair responsibilities when the Chair is not available, where a conflict of interest is identified or to manage workload. In situations where the Deputy Chair usually holds another category this should be filled by another HREC member.

DERCs should have no less than 14 members, including chairs, per committee, reflecting the discipline specific expertise of the college they service. DERCs will have two Co-Chairs where possible.

5.2 Other Membership

The HREC may seek advice from external experts to assist with the review of research proposals. Experts are bound by the same confidentiality requirements as the HREC members. Any interests they may have should be disclosed and any conflicts of interest identified and managed appropriately (NS 5.2.6).

Any invited observers will not be considered members and cannot be involved in deliberations or decision making. They will still be bound by the same confidentiality and disclosure of interest requirements as HREC members.

5.3 Committee Executive

The HREC may delegate some of its responsibilities to the Chair, one or more of its members, a sub-committee or administrative officers. (NS 5.2.9). The ANU HREC delegates the following:

- a. Review of amendments to the HREC Chair and/or Deputy Chair/s
- b. Post meeting review of responses to meeting feedback to the HREC Chair (if nominated at a meeting)
- c. Expedited review of low-risk projects to the DERCs
- d. Expedited review of minimal risk projects to the DERC Chairs
- e. Monitoring responsibilities to the Ethics Office
- f. Preliminary review of applications to the Ethics Office and designated College representatives

5.4 Appointment of members and chairs

Committee members may be appointed by the DVC-RI for an agreed period, of up to three years, with the option of appointment renewal, if deemed suitable by the Chair. Trial periods and shorter membership appointments may also be agreed upon between the Member and the Chair, if necessary.

Chair and any paid Deputy Chair appointments will be made by the DVC-RI. Chairs and members will be provided with a formal notice of appointment that specifies:

- a. their responsibilities related to membership, including participation, training, confidentiality and disclosure of interests (see 5.2.22 to 5.2.24)
- b. the categories of membership that they may represent at meetings
- c. their term of appointment
- d. any remuneration or other benefits with which they will be provided, and
- e. that they are assured legal protection for any liabilities that may arise during the bona fide conduct of their duties as reviewers of research

Members will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Membership to ethics committees may be terminated by the DVC-RI at any time during the period of appointment. Any such decision will be advised in writing where possible.

5.5 Remuneration

Chairs will receive a responsibility loading that is applied in accordance with the [Procedure: Academic staff loadings and allowances](#). Members of academic staff may be recognised by their local area in their workload allocation and service indicators for academic promotion.

External members (volunteer members with no paid affiliation with the university) may, if resources permit, receive an honorarium payment at the end of a calendar year. If offered, the amount is determined by available

resources and the number of external members. External member honoraria are discretionary, nominal, and not guaranteed to occur

5.6 Liability and Coverage

During bona fide deliberations as a Member/Chair of the Committee, members are covered by University insurance policies.

6. Meetings

6.1 Frequency

The HREC will meet monthly where required, between January and November (inclusive). Meetings will be conducted in accordance with the Committee operating procedures. Additional meetings can be called for urgent business.

DERCs meet fortnightly, where possible. DERC review may be conducted out of session where required.

6.2 Quorum

As far as is practicable, each meeting will be arranged to enable attendance of all members of the minimum membership categories and other relevant appointed members, either in person, via available technology, or through remote review and submission of feedback.

Where there is less than full attendance of members from the minimum membership categories at a given meeting, the Chair must be satisfied that the views of the members who are not present have been received and considered, before a decision is made.

As far as is practicable, the HREC will ensure that:

- a. membership at each meeting has diversity, including gender diversity, and
- b. at least one third of those participating in each meeting are from outside of the University. (NS 5.1.36)
- c. at least two members with current research experience relevant to the research proposal(s) to be considered, to be present.

6.3 Conduct of meetings

Meetings are to be conducted in accordance with the operating procedures.

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3.0	November 2025	REO, Research Services	DVC-RI	
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