
HUMAN ETHICS & LOW RISK COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

1.0 Introduction

Human Research is conducted with or about people, their data or tissue. Southern Cross University is responsible for ensuring the ethical review of human research undertaken by SCU staff, students and affiliates.

The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – Updated 2018 [National Statement] provides for review of low-risk research outside of a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

SCU has established a panel of peers based in the faculties to review research that is of low risk. Low risk research, as per the National Statement, is defined as:

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3.2 The LR Committee operates under the guidance of, and is administratively supported by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability)

3.3 The LR Committee Chair or members bring to the attention of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability) or delegate issues of significant concern.

3.4 The LR Committee reports annually to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability).

4.0 Membership

Membership comprises academic representatives from Faculties and Colleges from across the University. At a minimum the LR Committee will include:

- a) HREC Chair (who is appointed by default as the LRC Chair)
- b) LRC Chair (Health)
- c) LRC Chair (Education; Law, Business and Arts; Science and Engineering; SCU Colleges; Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples)
- d) At least six reviewers drawn from research active staff (3 staff representing the Faculty of Health and 3 staff representing Education; Law, Business and Arts; Science and Engineering; SCU Colleges; Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples).

4.1 Members are required to:

4.1.1 Become familiar with the National Statement and consult other guidelines relevant to the review of specific research proposals.

4.1.2 Review applications in accordance with the National Statement.

4.1.3 Provide opinions and feedback on the ethical acceptability of research proposals in a timely manner.

4.1.4 Participate in review or monitoring of research if required.

4.1.4 On appointment, attend an induction session and observe one meeting of the LRC before formally undertaking their role as reviewer.

4.1.5 New members may be partnered with the LR Committee Chair (or nominee) during the initial stages of their tenure to assist in their learning and development, depending on their experience and expertise.

4.1.6 A requirement of continuing membership is attendance at 75% of LRC meetings in a calendar year. If members are unable to attend a meeting due to extenuating circumstances, this needs to be provided in writing to the Ethics Office in advance.

4.1.7 Attend continuing education or training programs in research ethics.

4.1.8 Disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest.

5.0 Appointments

5.1 LRC Chairs

5.2 LRC members

5.2.1 Members are appointed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability) or delegate on recommendation of the LRC Chair.

5.2.2 Committee members are recruited by direct approach, nomination or by advertisement through an open and transparent selection process.

5.2.3 The letter of appointment includes the date of appointment, length of tenure and indemnity.

5.2.4 Membership of the LR Committee, including member name and school/institute affiliation, may be made publicly available on SCU's web site.

5.2.5 All members are required to complete the University conflict of interest declaration.

5.2.6 Members are appointed for a maximum initial period of 3 years. Subsequent reappointment will occur subject to committee requirements.

5.3 Membership review and lapsed appointments

5.3.1 The Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability) and LRC Chair will continually review membership. New and renewed appointments allow for continuity, development of expertise within the committee

7.2.5 The LRC will return approval decisions to researchers within two weeks of receipt of applications for review.

7.3 Declaration of interest

7.3.1. LRC review members must declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest prior to undertaking a review of an LR application.

7.3.2. If there is a conflict of interest the application will be assigned to an alternate reviewer.

7.4 Confidentiality

7.4.1 All LR human research applications remain confidential, unless agreed to by the applicant.

7.5 Records

7.5.1. The LRC will comply with the National Statement requirements for record keeping (5.2.25-5.2.29).

7.5.2. The proceedings of LRC meetings will be documented as per 5.2.28 of the National Statement.

8.0 Complaints

8.1 Action regarding LR rejection

Where the review committee has rejected an application, the investigator has the discretion to submit a new application taking due account of the reviewers' concerns.

8.2 Complaints on the basis of process

If an applicant has a complaint to raise about the conduct of the LRC and considers that the LR Committee has failed to follow due process, they have the discretion to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability). All complaints will be administered in a timely manner.

8.3 Complaints about the conduct of LR committee members

Complaints about the conduct of an LR committee member are managed by the Ethics Office who informs the LRC Chair of the complaint. Complaints about the conduct of the LRC Chairs are managed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability) or delegate.

8.4 Complaints about the conduct of an approved research project

Complaints about the conduct of an approved research project, including allegations of research misconduct, are managed in accordance with SCU's complaint handling procedures.

9.0 Review of Terms of Reference and Termination

9.1 These Terms of Reference will be reviewed every three years.

9.2 Where the LRC is to be adapted, closed, or has ceased to function as per section 3, SCU will amend the Terms of Reference.