



Policy Document Administrator	Edwina Murphy, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Policy Document Approver	Board of Directors
Responsible Body/Person	Board of Directors
Next Review date	October 2028
Superseded documents	
Related documents	Low Risk Ethics Committee and Approval Rules Research Data Management Policy Ethics Protocol Research Integrity Policy Research Misconduct Procedure Report of Research Misconduct
Related National Code Standards	

1. PURPOSE

To establish the Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures of the AUT's Human Research Ethics Committee.

2. DEFINITIONS

Definitions for any words in **Bold** in this document can be found in the [Policy Glossary](#). The first instance of each defined term has been outlined in bold.

3. FUNCTIONS

- 3.1 HREC has the overall responsibility for the ethics review of human participant research conducted by AUT affiliated researchers and students.
- 3.2 On request, HREC may review ethics protocols from unaffiliated researchers at the discretion of the Chair.
- 3.3 HREC will establish rules for the establishment of **Low Risk Ethics Committees**, the approval of low risk research, and the requirements for research to be exempt from review (*Low Risk Ethics Committee and Approval Rules*).
- 3.4 All ethics protocols from affiliated staff and HDR candidates, regardless of the level of risk, must be submitted to HREC for review. Low risk proposals may be approved by the Chair and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and reported to the following meeting.
- 3.5 HREC will approve a standard ethics protocol form for use by researchers to submit their proposals to HREC, allowing for review in accordance with the **National Statement**. It may also approve templates and other resources to support researchers in preparing their ethics protocols.
- 3.6 There is no remuneration for HREC members.
- 3.7 HREC does not charge any fees for ethics review, even for unaffiliated researchers.

4. MEMBERSHIP, DECISION MAKING AND REPORTING

- 4.1 The minimum membership of HREC is eight, including the following categories as per the **National Statement**, although additional members may be appointed in categories (b)-(f):
- (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 broader 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 practicing and, where possible, is not engaged to advise the institution on research-related or any other matters; and
 - (f) two people with current research experience that is relevant to ethics protocols to be considered at the meetings they attend.
- 4.2 No individual may represent more than one of the categories listed in 4.1 at any individual meeting but may fill a different category at a separate meeting, so long as all minimum membership categories are represented at each meeting.
- 4.3 The Chair is appointed by the Board of Directors on an ongoing basis. Other members are invited after consultation between the Chair and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) with regard to the qualifications of the potential member and the requirements of the **National Statement**. There are no fixed term limits.
- 4.4 Membership of HREC (and affiliated college LRECs) is published in the Ethics section of the Graduate School of Research (GSR) website and provided to the Board of Directors at least annually.
- 4.5 In order for members to determine whether an ethics protocol is acceptable according to the National Statement, they should:
- (a) undertake AUT induction training;
 - (b) become and remain familiar with the **National Statement**.
 - (c) prepare for and attend scheduled meetings of HREC or, if unavailable, provide opinions on the acceptability of ethics protocols before meetings; and
 - (d) undertake continuing education in research ethics at least every three years.
- 4.6 If additional expertise is required in order to review particular ethics protocols (including research or cultural knowledge with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities), the Chair or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) may invite suitably qualified people to review the material for and/or attend, a given meeting.

- 4.7 At the discretion of the Chair, researchers may be present for the discussion of, but not deliberation about, their proposed research. Observers may be invited to attend, although they may not be involved in deliberations or decision making.
- 4.8 Members, and anyone else in attendance, must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest related to the research under consideration before discussion of the relevant agenda item.
- 4.9 Members, and anyone else in attendance, must maintain appropriate confidentiality regarding the content of applications and the deliberations surrounding them.
- 4.10 Ethics protocols, templates, links to the **National Statement** and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, as well as HREC contact details, are available on the Graduate School of Research website.
- 4.11 Ethics protocols will be reviewed in accordance with the **National Statement**, including the principles of research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence, and respect.
- 4.12 The Executive Officer, appointed by the Dean, will prepare the agenda in consultation with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and the Chair, as required. Usually, it will include consideration of ethics protocols submitted by the relevant due date, in addition to other standing items.
- 4.13 Usually, papers will be distributed a week before the scheduled meeting.
- 4.14 The Executive Officer will take minutes which will be reviewed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and the Chair before distribution to HREC members.
- 4.15 HREC may approve, request modification of, reject or withdraw approval of a research proposal, giving reasons for the decision in case of the rejection or withdrawal of a proposal.
- 4.16 Decisions should preferably be made by agreement or consensus, taking into account the views of any members who were unable to be present, especially if the minimum membership categories at a meeting are not met.
- 4.17 Dissenting opinions should be included in the minutes, in addition to the reasons for dissent, if requested by the dissenting member.
- 4.18 Decisions may be made by email, allowing sufficient time for all members to consider the ethics protocols or other agenda items. There may be an opportunity to gather feedback before a final motion is presented to the members.
- 4.19 Decisions should be communicated to researchers in a timely manner, in writing, generally within a week of the review of the minutes by the Chair and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research). If appropriate, a subset of HREC members may meet with a researcher (and their supervisor, in the case of an HDR candidate) in order to discuss the proposed research and any modifications required.
- 4.20 HREC may appoint a subset of its members to approve any modifications it requests. In general, the Chair and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) may approve minor amendments to already approved ethics protocols and these will be reported to the following meeting.

- 4.21 Research will be monitored on at least an annual basis through Annual Progress Reports (HDR candidates), reports from LRECs (when they have granted approval), and on progress reports from researchers (HREC approvals).
- 4.22 For the purpose of reporting, coursework projects and HDR theses will be considered complete on the submission of the project or thesis. Research not conducted by students or HDR candidates will be considered complete upon completion of analysis of project data.
- 4.23 Adverse events must be reported to HREC at ethics@aut.edu.au as well as to the LREC, if any, involved in approving the research.
- 4.24 Where HREC or the AUT has reason to believe that continuing a research project will compromise participants' welfare or if the conditions of ethics approval for the project are not met, it should immediately seek to establish whether ethics approval should be suspended or withdrawn.
- 4.25 If required, the instruction to suspend research will come from AUT management and should be adhered to promptly. Where ethics approval is suspended or withdrawn, the researcher and, where possible, participants should be informed. Any resumption of research will be subject to the researcher satisfying HREC that participants' welfare will not be compromised, which may involve modification of the research. Where ethics approval has been withdrawn, continuation of the research project is subject to re-application to and re-approval by HREC.
- 4.26 HREC will keep records of all applications for ethics review, including, but not limited to the:
- (a) name/s of the institution/s for which the approval is applicable;
 - (b) project identification number/s;
 - (c) title of the project;
 - (d) name of the principal researcher/s, as listed on the research proposal at institutions for which the approval is applicable;
 - (e) correspondence between the review body and the researcher about the review/s;
 - (f) advice of approval or rejection of the proposal and any amendments to the project;
 - (g) terms and conditions, if any, of the approval of any proposal or amendment;
 - (h) duration of the approval;
 - (i) proposed date of completion of the project;
 - (j) name of any other review body whose opinion was considered;
 - (k) mechanisms to be used to monitor the conduct of the research; and
 - (l) record of assessments required by the Commonwealth, State or Territory legislation or guidelines relating to privacy of personal or health information.
- 4.27 HREC will submit an annual report to the NHMRC and send both the report and the

response to the following meeting of the Board of Directors.

- 4.28 Concerns regarding the conduct of human participant research may be reported through the contact form on the AUT website, by completing the *Report of Research Misconduct* available on the Graduate School of Research website, or by emailing ethics@aut.edu.au (provided on all Participant Information Statements). These will be handled in accordance with the Research Misconduct Procedure.

5. MEETING FREQUENCY AND STRUCTURE

- 5.1 HREC meetings will be scheduled four times per year, and generally conducted via Zoom. Meeting dates will be available on the AUT calendar and the GSR website.
- 5.2 Additional meetings may be convened in order to facilitate the timely consideration of ethics protocols, as required.
- 5.3 In addition to the consideration of new ethics protocols, agenda items may include a report from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) (including the annual report to NHMRC), reports on research proposals approved by LRECs and/or the Chair and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), monitoring of approved research, amendments to approved research, review of policies, procedures and templates, complaints, and other matters, as required.

6. RELATED LEGISLATION AND REFERENCES

[National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023](#)

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

7. VERSION HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Approval date	Effective date	Changes made
1	Board of Directors	14 October 2024	14 October 2024	Initial, consolidating existing policies and procedures.

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