



HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Contents

Part 1	Introduction	2
1.1	Purpose and application.....	2
1.2	Commencement	2
1.3	Interpretation	2
Part 2	Membership	2
2.1	Membership composition.....	2
2.2	Benefits	3
2.3	External expertise	4
Part 3	Functions and Responsibilities	4
3.1	Human Research Ethics Committee responsibilities.....	4
3.2	Member responsibilities	5
3.3	Chair and Deputy Chair responsibilities	5
3.4	Human Research Ethics Committee Executive	6
3.5	Governance and administrative support.....	6
Part 4	Meetings.....	6
4.1	Quorum	6
4.2	Schedule	6
4.3	Agendas and minutes	7
4.4	Conflicts of interest.....	7
4.5	Confidentiality	7
Part 5	Document Administration	7
5.1	Variations.....	7
5.2	Rescissions and replacements.....	7
5.3	Amendment history.....	7
Notes		8

PART 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and application

- (1) The University of Sydney (the University) has an obligation to ensure that human research is designed and conducted in accordance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018 and the ethical aspects of the research are reviewed and monitored in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2025 (National Statement).
- (2) The University established the Human Research Ethics Committee to review human research conducted by staff, students and affiliates of the University in accordance with the National Statement. The Human Research Ethics Committee reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) via the Human Ethics Manager; Director, Research Integrity and Ethics Administration; and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research).
- (3) These Terms of Reference have been informed by the National Statement, which describes four key values of ethical research: respect, research merit and integrity, justice, and beneficence.

1.2 Commencement

These terms of reference commenced on 10 September 2026.

1.3 Interpretation

- (1) Words and phrases used in these terms of reference and not otherwise defined in this document have the meanings they have in the [University of Sydney Research Code of Conduct 2023](#).

National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement)

means the agreed set of principles and guidelines published by the National Health and Medical Research Council that provide a common reference for decisions about the ethical nature of human research.

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)

means the main statutory authority of the Australian Government responsible for medical research.

Committee

means a University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) assembled to review human ethics applications.

Subcommittee

means a body established by the Human Research Ethics Committee/s to expedite effective ethics review of specific matters, e.g. amendments, lower risk human ethics applications and exemptions.

Human research

means research involving human participants, or their data or tissue.

Research

means the creation of new knowledge and/or the generation of new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings from existing knowledge, contributing to the body of knowledge - typically through publication. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it is new and creative.

myResearch Ethics

means the online research information management system.

PART 2 MEMBERSHIP

2.1 Membership composition

- (1) The membership of each University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee is determined by the requirements of the National Statement.
- (2) Each Committee consists of a minimum of eight (8) members, including:

- (a) A Chair, with suitable experience, including previous membership of an HREC, whose other responsibilities will not impair the Committee's capacity to carry out its obligations under the National Statement.
 - (b) Two community members - People who bring a broader community or consumer perspective and who have no paid affiliation with the institution.
 - (c) A professional carer - 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 pastoral carer - 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 lawyer - 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 researchers - People with current research experience relevant to research proposals considered by the Committee.
- (3) As far as possible:
- (a) The membership present at each Committee meeting should manifest diversity, including gender diversity.
 - (b) At least one third of those participating in each meeting should be external to the University.
 - (c) One or more members who have knowledge of research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples or are familiar with relevant cultural knowledge should be appointed to Committees that review research about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or communities, if such a person has not already been appointed in the membership category described in 2.1(2)(d).
 - (d) One or more of the members listed in 2.1(2) above should be experienced in reflecting on and analysing ethical decision-making.
- (4) Members are appointed as individuals for their knowledge, qualities, relevant experience and expertise, and not as representatives of any organisation or group.
- (5) To equip each Committee to competently address all relevant considerations arising from the diverse University research disciplines, there may be more than one member in any membership category listed at 2.1(2) above.
- (6) No individual may represent more than one of the categories listed at 2.1(2) above 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.
- (7) Appointment and membership term details are set out in the Human Ethics Procedures.

2.2 Benefits

- (1) Committee members who are not continuing or fixed term University staff can receive a financial benefit to recognise their contribution, as outlined in the Human Ethics Procedures.
- (2) Chairs will receive payment for the additional commitment required to both chair meetings and perform executive duties. This payment will be provided to the Deputy Chair when acting in the capacity of Chair of a Human Research Ethics Committee, and/or when chairing an Amendment Subcommittee. The details of benefits are outlined in the Human Ethics Procedures.
- (3) Committee and Subcommittee members who are academic staff members of the University will receive a workload allocation from their School (or unit) as detailed in the Human Ethics Procedures.

2.3 External expertise

- (1) In order to ensure that each Committee has access to the expertise necessary to address the ethical issues arising from the research it is likely to consider, consultation may be required outside the Committee membership. Advice may be sought from external experts to assist in the review of a research proposal, subject to:
 - (a) the same confidentiality required of University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee members; and
 - (b) the disclosure and management of any conflict of interest.

PART 3 FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Human Research Ethics Committee responsibilities

- (1) The Human Research Ethics Committees aim to:
 - (a) Protect the mental and physical welfare, rights, dignity and safety of participants in human research (research).
 - (b) Promote ethical standards of research.
 - (c) Facilitate ethical research through efficient and effective review processes, in accordance with the National Statement.
 - (d) Ensure that proposals are informed by the human research regulatory and legislative frameworks.
- (2) Each University Human Research Ethics Committee will:
 - (a) Review proposals for research, to determine whether they are ethically acceptable and in accordance with relevant standards and guidelines.
 - (b) Grant approval for research proposals and recruitment materials, where this review has determined that they are ethically acceptable and in accordance with relevant standards and guidelines.
 - (c) Withhold ethics approval for research proposals where this review has determined that they are not ethically acceptable and/or are not in accordance with relevant standards and guidelines.
 - (d) Grant exemptions from ethics review for research that satisfies the conditions for exemption. See the Human Ethics Procedures for definitions and details.
 - (e) Approve or ratify progress reports and final reports for research protocols approved by the HREC or Subcommittees.
 - (f) Withdraw ethics approval for research projects where a review has determined that a project is not being conducted in an ethically acceptable way and/or not in accordance with relevant standards and guidelines.
 - (g) Remain alert to emerging ethics issues in any areas of human research that warrant an increased level of ethics review.
 - (h) Delegate particular powers and functions to expedite effective ethics review of research proposals and relevant applications. Where a delegation is in place, the corresponding Human Research Ethics Committee remains responsible and accountable for delegated activities and recommendations.
 - (i) Maintain oversight and authority for Subcommittees established under the Human Research Ethics Committee.
 - (j) Provide advice to University researchers on the ethical aspects of their research proposals and projects.

- (k) Provide advice to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) or their nominee on ethics issues, including the ethical aspects of complaints raised about researchers, research projects or teaching protocols.
- (l) Review research proposals submitted by external organisations or researchers external to the University, at the discretion of the Human Research Ethics Committee/s.
- (m) Formalise mutual acceptance/recognition agreements with another institutional Human Research Ethics Committee where a concurrent agreement has been established between the institution and the University. Where such an agreement exists, the ethics approval procedure will be set out in the agreement.

3.2 Member responsibilities

- (1) Each member of a Human Research Ethics Committee is responsible for deciding whether, in their judgement, a proposal considered by the Committee meets the requirements of the National Statement and is ethically acceptable.
- (2) To fulfil their responsibilities, each member of a Human Research Ethics Committee should:
 - (a) Complete relevant induction and training programs;
 - (b) Become and remain familiar with the National Statement, and consult other guidelines relevant to the review of specific research proposals;
 - (c) prepare for and attend scheduled meetings of the Committee or, if unavailable, provide opinions on the ethical acceptability of research proposals before meetings;
 - (d) adhere to University policies, procedures and review processes; and
 - (e) attend continuing education or training programs in research ethics at least once every three years, or more frequently if provided by the University.
- (3) Members and observers of a Human Research Ethics Committee must sign a statement undertaking:
 - (a) that all matters of which they become aware during their involvement with a Human Research Ethics Committee will be kept confidential; and
 - (b) that any conflicts of interest that exist or may arise during their tenure on a Human Research Ethics Committee will be declared.

3.3 Chair and Deputy Chair responsibilities

- (1) The Chair is responsible for:
 - (a) Familiarising themselves with applications included on the agenda ahead of a Committee meeting.
 - (b) Leading Committee meetings by guiding the Committee orderly and efficiently through the agenda and guiding respectful debate.
 - (c) Leading the determination of an outcome for each application on the agenda.
 - (d) Reviewing draft minutes before outcomes are sent to researchers.
 - (e) Reviewing responses from researchers and actioning approvals where delegated authority has been given to do so by the Committee.
 - (f) Attending and participating in meetings of the Human Research Ethics Committee Executive.
 - (g) Deciding on any changes needed to the meeting schedule together with Ethics Office staff.
 - (h) Strategising and networking on behalf of the Committee.
 - (i) Other duties as set out in the Position Description for the role.
 - (j) Taking actions on behalf of a Human Research Ethics Committee where needed and reporting those actions to the next meeting of that same Human Research Ethics Committee.

- (2) The Deputy Chair is responsible for chairing an Amendment Subcommittee and acting in the role of the Human Research Ethics Committee Chair in their absence. This may include the duties listed in 3.3(1) above, as well as chairing individual items during a meeting when the Chair has a conflict of interest and must exit the meeting for discussion of the item.
- (3) When the Deputy Chair is not available to chair a Committee meeting, the Committee will appoint another member as an Interim Chair in consultation with the Ethics Office.
- (4) When the Deputy Chair or another member is acting as Interim Chair, the minimum membership category filled by this member, if any, should be filled by another Human Research Ethics Committee member. Where there is less than full attendance of the minimum membership at the meeting, see 4.1 below.

3.4 Human Research Ethics Committee Executive

- (1) The Human Research Ethics Committee Executive consists of the Chairs of each Human Research Ethics Committee.
- (2) The Human Ethics Manager is the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee Executive.
- (3) The Human Research Ethics Committee Executive has the same functions and responsibilities as the Human Research Ethics Committee, with the exception of reviewing new human research applications for projects involving factors listed in 4.4 (1) of the Human Ethics Procedures, which must be reviewed and approved by a fully constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
- (4) Human Research Ethics Committee Executive membership terms are commensurate with each Chair's appointed term on their respective Human Research Ethics Committee.
- (5) The Human Research Ethics Committee Executive meet monthly, or as required.

3.5 Governance and administrative support

- (1) The Research Integrity and Ethics Administration will provide administrative and secretariat support to each Committee, to the extent required for the Committee to discharge all its obligations under the National Statement and can be called upon for protocol and procedural advice. The role and responsibilities of administrative and support staff are set out in the Human Ethics Procedures.

PART 4 MEETINGS

4.1 Quorum

- (1) A Human Research Ethics Committee meeting is quorate when the minimum membership in Part 2.1 above is represented. Where there is less than full attendance of the minimum membership at a Committee meeting, the Chair must be satisfied that the views of absent members across the breadth of membership categories have been received and considered by the Committee before any decision is reached. The cancellation of a meeting due to insufficient numbers is at the discretion of the Chair.
- (2) Committee members who are unable to attend meetings must send through their apologies and are encouraged to submit their comments on applications via myResearch Ethics prior to the meeting, for consideration during the meeting.
- (3) Procedures for making decisions when a quorum cannot be present at a Human Research Ethics Committee meeting are detailed in the Human Ethics Procedures.

4.2 Schedule

- (1) The frequency of meetings is set out in the Human Ethics Procedures.
- (2) Meeting dates and agenda closing dates are published on the University Human Ethics intranet site.

4.3 Agendas and minutes

- (1) Preparation and distribution of agendas and minutes will be as per the Human Ethics Procedures.

4.4 Conflicts of interest

- (1) Any member of a Human Research Ethics Committee or Subcommittee, who has perceived or material interest in an application or other agenda item to be considered, should as soon as practicable, declare such interest to the secretary and Chair before the review and discussion of the item commences.
- (2) Members with a conflict of interest may provide clarification on an item but will not participate in the discussions or decision-making process for that item. If the member is present at the meeting at which the relevant project will be discussed, the member must withdraw from the meeting while the matter is considered.
- (3) All declarations of interest and absence of members during discussions will be minuted. The withdrawal of members from the meeting due to a conflict of interest will be disregarded in the calculation of a quorum.

4.5 Confidentiality

- (1) Matters discussed and papers considered during a Committee or Subcommittee meeting are confidential to members and those invited with the approval of the Chair.
- (2) Specific papers considered during a meeting and records of specific meeting discussions may be shared by the Chair or Ethics Office staff, with other staff of the University who can demonstrate a need to access the relevant information for the performance of their duties. Recipients of ethics records must also keep them confidential.

PART 5 DOCUMENT ADMINISTRATION

5.1 Variations

- (1) These Terms of Reference may be amended in consultation with the Human Research Ethics Committees and the Ethics Office.

5.2 Rescissions and replacements

This document replaces the following, which are rescinded as from the date of commencement of this document:

- (1) The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee(s) Terms Of Reference, which commenced on 23 Feb 2024.

5.3 Amendment history

Version	Effective date	Amendment / Description	Approved by
2011/1.0	31 Mar 2011	- Original document	Margaret Faedo, Human Ethics Manager
2022/2.0	6 May 2022	- Intro: Refined content and formatting. - 2. Amended wording and order of sub-clauses, adding 2.6 relating to awareness of emerging human research issues. - 4. Additional details included regarding appointment of members.	Human Research Ethics Committees

		- 6. Removal of University Executive Committee section - 10. Updated staff roles and responsibilities. - 11. Updated complaints and review information.	
v240223	23 Feb 2024	- Full review and update of content and formatting. Relocated procedural information to the Human Ethics Procedures.	Dr Susan Maastricht, Director, Research Integrity and Ethics Administration
v260702	2 July 2026	- Letterhead and formatting updated. - References to 2023 National Statement updated to 2025 National Statement. - 2.1.2 (a) HREC chair previous membership requirement added. - 2.2 - Source of workload allocation included. Benefits and payments terminology updated. - 3.1 (2) (e) added - responsibility to approve/ratify reports. - Part 4 - Removed duplication about benefits. - Notes: Links updated.	Dr Susan Maastricht, Director, Research Integrity and Ethics Administration
V260910	10 Sep 2026	- Public document references updated to support NHMRC HREC registration requirements - Internal and restricted-access hyperlinks removed and replaced with public references where available	Dr Susan Maastricht, Director, Research Integrity and Ethics Administration

NOTES

Human Research Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

Approved by:	Dr Susan Maastricht, Director, Research Integrity and Ethics Administration
Date approved:	10 September 2026
Date commenced:	10 September 2026
Administrator:	Human Ethics Manager
Review date:	28 February 2027
Rescinded documents:	All previous versions of the Human Research Ethics Committee Terms of Reference
Related documents:	National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2025 Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018 University of Sydney Research Code of Conduct 2023 External Human Ethics Approval Procedures 2024 Human Ethics Procedures