

Human Research Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

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1. Definitions

In this Terms of Reference, unless the contrary intention appears:

“ToR” means Terms of Reference,

“RHDC” means Research and Higher Degree Committee,

“National Statement” means the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2025),

“HREC” means Human Research Ethics Committee,

“LRP” means Lower Risk Research Ethics Review Panel

“RET” means Research Ethics Team

2. Composition of the HREC:

2a. The composition of the Committee is as prescribed by the [National Statement](#) and as outlined as per the Human Research Ethics Committee Procedures.

2b. At least two thirds of the ECU members of the Committee should be level D or E. The remaining one third of ECU members must be at least level C. The Chair must be level E or D. Every effort will be made to apply the principles of Athena Swan accreditation.

2c. The HREC will have an executive committee (“Executive”) consisting of the Chairperson and a Deputy Chairperson of the HREC. The Executive, with administrative support of the Research Ethics Team, can form executive panels of HREC members as required.

2d. The HREC has an oversight of the Lower Risk Research Ethics Review Panel (LRPs). The LRPs reports through the HREC to RHDC. The mechanisms governing this process are outlined in the relevant Procedures.

3. Components, Functions and Duties within the Human Ethics Review Process

The HREC has been established by ECU to ensure the conduct of human research is in accordance with the ethical standards articulated in the [National Statement](#). The HREC ToR are to be read in conjunction with Section 5 of the [National Statement](#) which outlines the processes of research governance and ethical review and includes responsibilities of ECU and the Committees.

3a. Functions of the HREC

The HREC reviews, approves and monitors research ethics proposals for:

- Human research to be undertaken by ECU staff and students at, or under the auspices of, ECU,
- AND/OR
- Human research which has received ethics approval from another recognised and accredited HREC to eliminate unnecessary duplication of review.

In particular, the HREC

- Provides competent, expert ethical review of human research projects to ensure the project meets the requirements of the [National Statement](#), and all other relevant Acts and legislative requirements for that type of research.
- Ensures both the privacy and confidentiality of human research participants are protected by only approving projects that demonstrate appropriate management of security, storage and disposal of data and bio-specimens collected during the conduct of the research in conjunction with relevant ECU departments and in accordance with the ECU [Research Data Management Guidelines](#), and/or the Privacy and Copyright Acts.
- Advises researcher applicants whether or not reviewed research applications meet relevant ethical standards and have or have not been approved and provide reasons, linked to the [National Statement](#), for those decisions.
- Undertakes, and is accountable for, the assessing and making recommendations from higher risk review, which has been established by ECU in accordance with the [National Statement](#).

3b. Duties of the HREC are to:

- Ensure that the design and conduct of any human research that it reviews and approves conforms with the [National Statement](#), the relevant national and state codes (the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018](#)), relevant legislation (i.e. [Privacy Act 1988](#), [Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing Act 2024 - \[00-a0-01\].pdf](#)) and the ethical standards to which ECU is committed (ECU values and Code of Conduct).
- Ensure that participants in any human research that the HREC reviews and approves are accorded the respect and protection that is due to them.

- Facilitate and support a culture of research excellence and improved ethics literacy, through involvement in the University's communication, education and training strategies.
- The HREC will provide advice to the ECU's Designated Officer, Research Integrity on potential breaches of the University's research ethics approvals and/or relevant external regulations, codes and guidelines.

4. Procedures

Membership of the Committees, the method of appointment and terms of office of members and all other matters necessary to ensure the effective exercise of the functions of the Committees shall be prescribed in Procedures approved by RHDC for that purpose.

5. Conflict of Interests

The HREC will manage conflicts of interest in line with [ECU's Conflicts of Interest Policy](#). In cases where a real or perceived conflict of interest arises, the involved member must refrain from participating in deliberations or influencing decisions related to the matter. The member disclosing a potential conflict may be asked to exit the meeting during discussions and may be requested to provide a summary of the relevant issue or activity. All conflicts of interest, along with their resolutions, will be documented in the HREC meeting minutes.

6. Reporting

The HREC is accountable to the RHDC, though the Chair being a member of the RHDC and its annual reporting.

7. Approval History

Procedure approved by:	Research and Higher Degrees Committee (RHDC)
Date Procedure first approved:	8 July 2025
Date last modified:	
Revision history:	<p>8 July 2025</p> <p>Full re-draft of procedures following a review of ethics governance at ECU, pertaining to higher and lower risk review, exempt, out-of-scope and executive review pathways to ensure continued alignment and compliance.</p> <p>26 August 2025</p> <p>Minor revisions to reflect nomenclature changes for lower-risk review procedures, and conditions of RHDC approval</p>
Next revision due:	8 July 2028