

## UNIT LICENCE

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## THE UNIT LICENCE

### **What is the Unit Licence?**

The Unit Licence is designed to manage data collection by undergraduate students and some postgraduate students to fulfil the requirement of a unit.

A Unit Licence may be granted where information, data or samples are collected as part of the teaching or assessment of a unit. This information may be gathered by students undertaking tasks for assessment, or where the aim is to assist in the teaching of aspects of data collection, research design and methodology. In each case, students will be undertaking data collection as part of the requirements of a unit. Where these criteria are met, the University does not consider the collection of data as research and as such, remains outside of the scope of Human Research Ethics. For further information, please consult Booklet 17 of the ECU Research Ethics Manual.

### **Which activities do not require a Unit Licence?**

A Unit Licence is not required for the following activities:

- teaching activities within ECU classes;
- laboratory-based teaching;
- professional practice; and
- Analysis of secondary publicly available data.

### **Is the Unit Licence ethics approval?**

The Unit Licence is not ethics approval. It is a licence issued to a specified Unit Coordinator, who undertakes to ensure that the data collection from participants by students enrolled in the unit is conducted in an ethical manner.

### **What is covered by the Unit Licence?**

- Data collection for the purposes of learning activities in undergraduate and some postgraduate units;
- Data collected from participants that will be recruited by the students enrolled in the unit;
- Data that is collected, analysed, written up and presented by students as part of the unit;
- Data collection for the purposes of assessment within a unit. Examples of data collection include work samples, audio/photographic/video recording, interviews, and observational reports;
- Data collection with the purpose of teaching research design and methodology. Students may be required to undertake a very small project (project less than 6 months and/or report not exceeding 10,000 words) as part of the unit requirements. The projects may be identical for all students or may be projects undertaken on an individual or small group basis. Examples of data collection within a project may include observation, questionnaires, surveys, interviewing, audio/photographic/video recording, or administration of tests or stimuli; and

- The Unit Licence can cover the following projects:
  - data collection is identical for all students in the unit; or
  - data collection is undertaken by students on an individual or small group basis.

### **What is not covered by the Unit Licence?**

While the information below may be helpful in determining what is not covered by a Unit Licence, it is recommended that each Unit Coordinator uses the Proportional Review Pathway (insert link) to test the proposed data collection for its human research risk level (negligible risk, low risk or greater than low risk). In general, data collection that involves any of the following will not be covered by a Unit Licence.

- data collected for the purposes of later publication or data collected for a research project (other than those eligible for a Unit Licence as described above);
- students undertaking a research project for the purposes of an Honours or Master's by Research degree. This will require an application for ethics approval to be submitted;
- data collection involving observation in a public setting;
- secondary source data not in the public domain;
- data collected from vulnerable populations including:
  - Women who are pregnant;
  - Children;
  - Dependent people
  - Highly medically dependent people;
  - People with an impaired capacity;
  - People engaged in illegal activities;
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
  - People living in other countries.
- data collection only for the purpose of being later used as part of the student ePortfolio.

Further information describing what a Unit Licence does and does not cover can be found in Booklet 17 of the ECU Research Ethics Manual.

## **UNIT COORDINATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY**

### **What is the Unit Coordinator's responsibility?**

Data collection from human participants recruited by students raises ethical issues.

Unit Coordinators should read and understand the NHMRC *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, and Booklet 17 of the ECU Research Ethics Manual to ensure that the ethical principles contained in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and University policy and procedures are taken into consideration when planning and conducting data collection. This may affect the type of learning activities and assessment tasks that are part of a unit.

Responsibility of the Unit Coordinator includes:

- Being aware of the principles contained in the National Statement, and University policies and procedures relating to data collection from human participants and the possible ethical issues that may be raised;
- Considering these principles when setting the requirements for the unit;
- Ensuring that the objectives of the unit are clearly outlined and that data collection from human participants is necessary to achieve the aims of the unit;
- Being clear the data collection is not a research project and avoiding the use of this terminology throughout the Unit Outline and assignment guidelines;
- Ensuring that the proposed data collection does not involve more than minor risks to the participant; and
- Providing information to students to ensure that data collection from participants is conducted in an ethical manner.

### **What information needs to be provided to students by the Unit Coordinator?**

Students need to be aware that collection of data from human participants raises ethical issues. Students need to be aware of the principles behind informed consent:

- **Competence**  
The participant must be competent to give consent. This is particularly important where data is to be collected from children.
- **Voluntariness**  
Participants must be free to refuse to participate in the project and must be free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and with no negative consequences.  
Participants should not be subject to any coercion, inducement or influence that could impair the voluntary nature of consent.
- **Informed**  
Information must be provided to the participants about the aims of the project, the requirements of the project, the use of the information collected, and any measures to protect the confidentiality of the information collected. Consent must be obtained based on the information provided to the participant.

## **APPLYING FOR A UNIT LICENCE**

### **Who should complete the Unit Licence application?**

The Unit Coordinator who is responsible for the unit. In some cases, the Course Coordinator may also complete the application.

### **What information should be sent with the Unit Licence application?**

The application should include the following:

- Application form;
- Unit plan and handout to students;
- Ethical risk assessment checklist;
- Information Letter;
- Consent Form; and

- Data collection instruments.

NOTE: Where a document cannot be provided with the Unit Licence application, this can be explained on the application form.

### **What are the arrangements where students will be conducting individual projects?**

For data collection by individual students or small groups of students, it may not be possible at the time of applying for the licence to outline the proposed participants or the nature of the data to be collected. Where data collection is required to teach research design and methodology, the Unit Coordinator may set the requirements of the unit, but the projects will be developed by the students in the unit. In this case, the Unit Coordinator should guide the students in the design of the projects.

The Unit Coordinator is also responsible for reviewing the following:

- the project plan for individual project;
- data collection instruments (e.g. questionnaire or interview questions);
- the Information Letter to Participants;
- the Consent Form; and
- the ethical risk assessment checklist.

### **Where should the application for a Unit Licence be sent?**

The Unit Licence application should be submitted to the Research Ethics Team, who will arrange for the Chair (or his or her nominee) of the school's Human Research Ethics Subcommittee to review the application.

### **How long will the Unit Licence be granted for?**

Initially Unit Licences will be granted for the period of **one semester** (or the time taken to complete the unit). If the aims and requirements of the unit remain the same **AND** the Unit Coordinator has not changed, a unit licence may be renewed in subsequent years (rather than a new application being submitted).

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

### **What is an Information Letter to Participants and Consent Form?**

The Information Letter to Participants needs to contain information that a reasonable person would think was significant and/or relevant for making the decision to participate in the collection of data. A Consent Form establishes that the participant provided informed consent to participate.

All participants should be provided with a copy of the Information Letter to Participants. Consent to participate is usually established by a signed Consent Form.

### **Identical data collection for all students**

The Information Letter to Participants and the Consent Form may be developed by the Unit Coordinator.

### **Individual student projects**

Each individual student or small group of students should develop these documents using the templates and submit the documents with the plan for their data collection. The Unit Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that these documents contain the necessary information.

### **Is there a template available for developing an information letter and consent form?**

Templates for developing these documents are available. The information in red type on the template needs to be amended or deleted based on the data being collected.

NOTE: The templates are only appropriate for the unit licence and should not be used for a research project.

### **What if the project only involves an anonymous questionnaire/survey?**

Anonymous questionnaires require an Information Letter but they do not require a signed consent form. The Human Research Ethics Committee recommends the following statement appears on the questionnaire:

*This is an anonymous questionnaire. You should read the Information Letter carefully as it explains fully the intention of the collection of this information. Please ensure you do not write your name (or any other comments that could identify you) on the questionnaire. By completing the questionnaire, you are consenting to take part in this data collection.*

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

### **What level of risk is acceptable?**

Assignments and collection of information, data and/or samples undertaken by students for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of a unit should not normally be of the type that would require review and approval by the University Human Research Ethics Committee, i.e. they should not involve more than minor risk to the participants.

### **What is the ethical risk assessment and ethical risk checklist used for?**

The Unit Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the proposed data collection does not involve more than minor risks to the participant. The ethical risk assessment and checklist will help to determine this and should be used to review the proposed data collection.

### **Identical data collection for all students**

The Unit Coordinator should complete the ethical risk checklist and attach the checklist to the unit licence application.

### **Individual student projects**

Each individual students or small group of students should complete an ethical risk checklist and submit it with the plan for their data collection to the Unit Coordinator. If the Unit Coordinator determines that the project is greater than minor risk, the project should be submitted to the appropriate Human Research Ethics Subcommittee for review.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

### **How can confidentiality be protected?**

Wherever possible, data should be collected in a way that cannot identify the individual participant and/or their organisation. If this is not possible, participants need to give an assurance that the information will be kept confidential. Data and information that identifies individual participants should be stored securely, and only accessed by the student(s) and the Unit Coordinator. The identity of the individual participants should be removed from the data as soon as possible.

### **What happens to the data collected by the students at the end of the unit?**

It is not expected that the data will be used for any other purpose. The Unit Coordinator should request copies of all data (hard copy and electronic) as part of the final report submitted for assessment. Once these have been received, the information should be stored in accordance with the University's retention policies for student assignments. Please contact RAMS for advice on retention of data beyond the minimum retention periods. If this will not happen, further explanation should be provided.

## **MONITORING**

### **What monitoring needs to take place?**

It is the responsibility of the Unit Coordinator to monitor the conduct of data collection for assessment or teaching requirements of a unit to ensure that it remains within the scope of the Unit Licence, and complies with University policy, the *National Statement* and other relevant legislative and/or regulatory requirements.

The Unit Coordinator must ensure that all data collection will not involve more than normal, everyday risk to the participants, or that the potential risks are either unlikely to occur or extremely minor, and that the proposed management of identified minimal risks is acceptable.

Any significant ethical issue that arises during data collection must be reported immediately to the Research Ethics Team.

The Research Ethics Team may also conduct random audits of assignments conducted by students.

## AMENDMENTS

### **What needs to be done if there are any amendments needed?**

An application can be made for a variation to the Unit Licence at any time. Examples of variations include a change to the focus of the unit, or student projects that are significantly different to those outlined on the licence.

If the Unit Coordinator changes, a new Application for a Unit Licence must be submitted.