

Terms of Reference - Human Research Ethics Committee

Section 1 - Purpose

(1) The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is a committee of the Vice-Chancellor, responsible for the review of human research conducted under the auspices of Southern Cross University in accordance with the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2023\)](#). The Committee operates within the portfolio of the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, who provides executive oversight.

(2) The HREC:

- a. Reviews research proposals that involve higher risk; meet criteria in the National Statement for submissions that require HREC review; or are escalated to the HREC by the Low Risk Committee or HREC Secretariat.
- b. Ensures research proposals align with the principles of research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence, and respect, as outlined in the National Statement.
- c. Operates independently in decision-making, ensuring ethical review processes are conducted with integrity and in accordance with the National Statement.

Section 2 - Responsibilities

Ethical Review of Human Research

(3) The HREC reviews human research proposals to determine whether they are ethically acceptable, considering:

- a. Alignment with the National Statement's principles: research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence, and respect.
- b. Assessment of risks and benefits to ensure risks are minimised, mitigated or managed, and justified by the benefits of the research.
- c. Suitability of consent processes, including fair recruitment; voluntary, informed, and appropriately documented consent; appropriate dissemination of research outcomes; and appropriate protections for participants' data.

Monitoring Approved Research

(4) The HREC oversees the ethical conduct of approved human research through ongoing monitoring. Researchers must adhere to approved ethics protocols and report any modifications or breaches. The Committee receives periodic updates on monitoring activities and compliance matters:

- a. Annual research progress reports
- b. Requests for changes of protocol
- c. Requests for renewal of ethics approval
- d. Reports of unexpected adverse events, as well as suspensions or withdrawals of approval for non-compliant projects.

Section 3 - Membership

(5) The HREC is constituted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2023), Paragraph 5.1.30. A properly constituted quorum must include members from each of the following categories and comprise a minimum of eight members:

- a. Category 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. Category B: Two people who bring a broader community or consumer perspective and who have no paid affiliation with the institution.
- c. Category 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. Category 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. Category 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.
- f. Category F: Two people with current research experience that is relevant to research proposals to be considered at the meetings they attend.

(6) The HREC maintains appropriate diversity and expertise by:

- a. Aiming, as far as practicable, for gender diversity at each meeting and for at least one- third of members at each meeting to come from outside of the University (National Statement, 2023, 5.1.36).
- b. Seeking external advice on specialised matters when necessary while retaining responsibility for final decisions.
- c. Including representation from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities where relevant to the research under review, in accordance with National Statement requirements (NS5.1.39).

(7) The HREC may nominate a Deputy Chair from among its members (NS 5.1.32). The Deputy Chair supports the Chair in ensuring the efficient operation of the Committee, may preside over meetings in the Chair's absence.

Meetings

(8) Meetings will be conducted in accordance with the [Standing Orders – Human Research Ethics Committee](#).

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	23rd April 2025
Review Date	23rd April 2027
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Expiry Date	Not Applicable
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