

Ethical Research and Approvals Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Procedures HEPP86

SCOPE

This procedure applies to all SCEI-HE staff, students, and external researchers conducting, participating in, or disseminating research involving human or animal participants, their personal data, or biological materials. This includes all research regardless of funding source, academic level, or intent to publish. It also includes research conducted at SCEI-HE campuses, online, or in collaboration with external institutions.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to outline the roles, responsibilities, and processes for ethical oversight of research conducted under SCEI-HE. This ensures compliance with the **National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities**, relevant legislation, and institutional commitments to the protection of research participants and data integrity.

PROCEDURE STATEMENT

1. Research Governance

1.1 Oversight

The Quality Assurance (QA) Department is responsible for ensuring all research is conducted in accordance with ethical principles. The QA after corporate board approval establishes the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) to independently review and approve research proposals.

1.2 Structure of the HREC

- The HREC operates as an independent body under the oversight of the QA.
- It is constituted in compliance with the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and includes internal and external members.

1.3 Administrative Support

The Research Ethics Office provides administrative support to the HREC, ensuring efficient submission, review, and documentation processes.

Responsibility: QA, Research Ethics Office, Corporate Board

2. Appointment of HREC Members

2.1 Membership Composition

HREC members are appointed for three-year terms and must represent diverse perspectives, including:

- Academic staff with expertise in research disciplines.
- Legal professionals.
- Laypersons with no affiliation to SCEI-HE.
- Experts in animal welfare (for research involving animals).
- Representatives with pastoral care or community engagement expertise.

2.2 Selection Process

Members are appointed by the QA, SCEI-HE CEO or Chair through a transparent selection process based on qualifications, experience, and commitment to ethical research principles.

Responsibility: QA, CEO, HREC Chair

3. Responsibilities of HREC Members

- Thoroughly reviewing proposals and ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines.
- Attending scheduled meetings and contributing to discussions on research ethics.
- Participating in at least one training program on research ethics every three years.
- Declaring any conflicts of interest and recusing themselves where appropriate.
- Maintaining strict confidentiality regarding research proposals and deliberations.

Responsibility: HREC Members

4. Appointment and Responsibilities of the Chair

4.1 Appointment

The Chair and Associate Chair(s) are appointed annually by the Corporate Board to lead the HREC. Appointments may be renewed or reassigned.

4.2 Responsibilities

The Chair's key responsibilities include:

- Managing HREC meetings, including assigning reviewers and overseeing decision-making.
- Ensuring that review processes align with institutional policies and ethical standards.
- Addressing disputes or complaints related to research ethics.
- Reporting decisions and recommendations to the Academic Board and Corporate Board.

Responsibility: QA, CEO, HREC Chair

5. Review and Approval of Research Proposals

5.1 Submission Requirements

Researchers must submit a detailed proposal, including:

- Research objectives and methodologies.
- Participant recruitment and consent processes.
- Risk management and mitigation strategies.
- Data collection, storage, and privacy protection measures.

5.2 Review Process

- The HREC evaluates proposals based on ethical principles such as respect, beneficence, and justice.
- Proposals are approved if risks are minimised, benefits are clear, and informed consent is properly addressed.

5.3 Outcome Communication

- Approved proposals receive an official approval certificate.
- Proposals requiring revision are returned with detailed feedback.

5.4. Ethical Research Engagement

SCEI-HE commits to ethical research practices when engaging with First Nations communities by:

- **Adhering to the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research** and the NHMRC's *Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and*

Communities and Keeping Research on Track II.

- **Ensuring research projects are co-designed with, and align with, the priorities, values, and aspirations of the relevant First Nations communities.**
- **Requiring free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC)** at all stages of the research process, including proposal, design, data collection, analysis, dissemination, and storage.
- **Respecting and protecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)** by recognising the ownership of knowledge and cultural expressions and ensuring culturally appropriate use, attribution, and benefit-sharing agreements.
- **Upholding data sovereignty** through community-led decisions on how data is collected, used, stored, and shared, consistent with the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP®).
- **Securing approval from an Indigenous-specific Human Research Ethics Committee**, such as the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee, in addition to SCEI-HE's own Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), for all research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Responsibility: HREC Members, HREC Chair

6. Monitoring Approved Research

6.1 Progress Reporting

Researchers must submit regular progress reports to ensure ongoing compliance with ethical standards.

6.2 Audits and Inspections

The HREC may conduct audits to monitor adherence to approved protocols. Non-compliance may result in suspension or withdrawal of approval.

Responsibility: HREC Chair, Research Ethics Office

7. Privacy and Confidentiality

7.1 Participant Privacy

Researchers must safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of participant data in compliance with the Privacy Act and institutional policies.

7.2 Record Keeping

All HREC records, including proposals, meeting minutes, and correspondence, must be securely stored for at least seven years post-research completion.

Responsibility: Researchers, Research Ethics Office

8. Complaints and Research Misconduct

8.1 Complaints Management

- Complaints about research ethics are directed to the HREC Chair for investigation.
- Complaints unresolved at this level are escalated to the QA.

8.2 Research Misconduct

- Conducting research without HREC approval is considered misconduct and may result in disciplinary action under institutional policies.

Responsibility: HREC Chair, QA



RELATED POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

- National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research
- SCEI-HE Academic Integrity Policy
- Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research
- SCEI-HE Student and Staff Conduct Policies

DOCUMENT AND RECORD CONTROL	
Created	November 2024 (V1.0)
Amended	June 2025 (1.1)
Policy Owner	Corporate Board
Version	1.1
Effective date	June 2024
Next planned review	November 2026



Southern Cross Education Institute
Higher Education

530-538 Victoria Street, North Melbourne, VIC, 3051, Australia.
155-161 Boundary Road, North Melbourne, VIC, 3051, Australia.
41 Boundary Road, North Melbourne, VIC, 3051, Australia.
14-16 Grote Street, Adelaide, SA, 5000, Australia.
Email: info@scei-he.edu.au
Web: www.scei-he.edu.au
Phone: +61 3 9602 4110 (Melbourne) / +61 8 8212 8745 (Adelaide)