



FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

CHARTER OF THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (REC)

1. NAME

The name of the committee is the Faculty Research Ethics Committee and hereafter referred to as the REC.

2. STATUS

The REC is an independent committee in terms of research ethics decision-making, however in terms of institutional lines of authority, the REC reports to Faculty Board and to the Senate Research Ethics Committee.

3. MISSION AND GOALS

The REC protects the interests of research participants and researchers. This is done through a process of independent, critical review and ethical clearance of research performed within the Faculty/College/School, and research submitted for ethical clearance by researchers external to the Faculty/College/School where applicable. The REC also provides research ethics advice and guidance to researchers and other members of the Faculty/College/School or other Faculties/Colleges/Schools.

4. COMPOSITION

The REC comprises the following members:

- 4.1. Chairperson – nominated from the REC membership. To be eligible for nomination as Chairperson, a REC member must have completed at least one full term (see 8.3 below) or at least two years if a full term is three years and should preferably have completed one full term as a Vice-Chairperson of the REC if section 8 of the charter allows this.
- 4.2. Vice-Chairperson (there may be more than one Vice-Chairperson) – nominated from the REC membership. To be eligible for nomination as Vice-Chairperson, a REC member must have completed at least one full term as a member (see 8.3 below), or at least two years if a full term is three years.

- 4.3. Vice-Dean (Research and Innovation) (*ex-officio*)
- 4.4. Members – from Departments and research entities in the Faculty. The REC should comprise of at least 9 members excluding the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson(s).
- 4.5. Members with specialised expertise, if required.
- 4.6. Research ethics training is required in order to become a member of the REC. Prior to the completion of research ethics training, any staff member from a department or research entity who intends becoming a REC member may be an observer. Observers do not participate in REC decision-making. Research ethics training should be updated at least every three years.
- 4.7. Secretariat – may be comprised of one or more administrative staff at Department or Faculty level.
- 4.8. All REC members and observers must sign a confidentiality agreement on initiation of committee duties or prior to a REC meeting (if their involvement is limited or *ad hoc*).

5. FUNCTIONS

The functions of the REC are:

- 5.1. To facilitate the ethical review of research in the Faculty/College/School, both qualification and non-qualification research.
- 5.2. To facilitate post-approval ethical monitoring of research in the Faculty/College/School, as and when required.
- 5.3. To efficiently manage administrative processes related to research ethics application submission, review and dissemination of review decisions and approvals, monitoring and reporting.
- 5.4. To ensure confidentiality of all REC matters pertaining to research ethics application review and approval, monitoring and reporting, and to safeguard REC data and documents in order to ensure business continuity.
- 5.5. To develop policies, procedures, guides and related material for ethics review, monitoring and reporting, and ethical conduct in research when required and to make these easily accessible.

6. SCOPE OF AUTHORITY

The Faculty Board delegates scope of authority to the REC as it deems fit. The Senate Research Ethics Committee exercises research ethics oversight of the REC.

7. MEETING PROCEDURE AND REPORTING

- 7.1. Meeting Dates
 - 7.1.1. The REC meets as frequently as required in order to efficiently carry out ethical review of research ethics applications without delaying the progress of any research.

- 7.1.2. Meeting dates are determined at the beginning of each year and circulated to all REC members and more widely within the Faculty/College/School.
- 7.1.3. Special meetings – meetings other than routine meetings for the purpose of ethical review decisions – may be scheduled if a need is identified for such meetings.
- 7.1.4. The REC Chairperson determines a date for any special meeting and notifies all REC members of the meeting at least two calendar weeks in advance of the meeting date.
- 7.2. Meeting Attendance
 - 7.2.1. Meeting attendance for REC members is compulsory. Members not able to attend a meeting should notify and communicate their apologies to the Secretariat.
 - 7.2.2. Members not present at a REC meeting who have been requested to complete one or more research ethics application reviews must ensure that these completed reviews are forwarded to the Secretariat before the REC meeting.
 - 7.2.3. REC members not attending meetings who have taken leave are not expected to complete research ethics application reviews.
 - 7.2.4. REC members not following the procedure in Section 7.2.1 will be recorded in the minutes as absent from the meeting in question.
 - 7.2.5. Members absent from at least three consecutive REC meetings without sufficient cause will be removed from the Committee.
- 7.3. Meeting Agendas
 - 7.3.1. Meeting agendas are compiled by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Chairperson.
 - 7.3.2. Any REC member may request an item to be added to any REC agenda, however this must be done in consultation with the Chairperson or a ViceChairperson. Such requests must be in writing.
 - 7.3.3. With the exception of research ethics applications for consideration, all other items must be clearly identified in the agenda as being items for (i) noting or discussion, or (ii) proposed motions.
 - 7.3.4. Urgent items may be added to a meeting agenda when called for at the beginning of the meeting, however this is at the discretion of the Chairperson.
- 7.4. A quorum is constituted by a majority (> 50%) of members.
- 7.5. Any REC meeting that is not quorate may not make any decisions. The Chairperson may decide to (i) attempt to follow up with absent REC members who may be able to join the meeting within a short time frame (typically 15 - 20 minutes) so that a quorum may be achieved, and the meeting may proceed or (ii) cancel the meeting and communicate a new meeting date.
- 7.6. Members are required to declare any possible conflict of interest at any

meeting and may be excused from decision-making related to specific items in a meeting by the Chairperson if the conflict of interest is considered material, and subject to the meeting remaining quorate in the absence of such members from the discussion.

7.7. Committee decisions are made by consensus if possible. If this is not possible for any decision, the decision will be finalised by means of a vote in which case a majority vote (50% +1) carries.

7.8. Committee Voting

7.8.1. Each REC member (excluding members of the secretariat, observers and ex-officio members) has a single vote. The Chairperson does not vote, except in the case of a tie (see 7.8.3 below).

7.8.2. Any motion requiring a vote will carry with a simple majority.

7.8.3. In the event of a tie, the Chairperson will cast the deciding vote.

7.9. A member of the Secretariat is required to administer meetings in accordance with the Rules for Effective Meetings.

7.10. Meeting Minutes

7.10.1. Meeting minutes are compiled by the Secretariat and reviewed by the Chairperson.

7.10.2. At every REC meeting, minutes of the previous meeting must be proposed for approval by the meeting after giving REC members an opportunity to identify anything in the minutes requiring correction. The names of REC members proposing and seconding approval of the previous meeting's minutes must be recorded in the minutes.

7.10.3. Meeting minutes must clearly identify (i) members present, members who have given apologies and those absent from the meeting, (ii) conflicts of interest, (iii) additions to the agenda, (iv) noted items, (v) discussed items, (vi) resolutions and the result of each research ethics application review (for each individual reviewer).

7.11. Nomination and Voting: Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

7.11.1. When required, a call for nominations for Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson of the REC must be distributed to all REC members by the Secretariat at least two weeks prior to an REC meeting.

7.11.2. Nominations for Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the REC must be made in writing by another REC member at least two days prior to an REC meeting and there must be written evidence of acceptance by the nominee. Nominations must be sent to the Secretariat.

7.11.3. In the case of a single nomination for Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson, the REC must decide by consensus whether the nominated member is suitable for the nominated position. The nominated member must recuse themselves during these deliberations.

7.11.4. If there is consensus that the nominated member is suitable for the nominated position, the nominated member will be duly appointed to the position.

- 7.11.5. In the case of more than one nomination, the REC must decide by consensus whether the nominated members are all suitable for the nominated position. The nominated members must recuse themselves during these deliberations.
- 7.11.6. If there is consensus that all nominated members are suitable for the nominated position, REC members with voting rights will vote to decide which of the nominated members should be appointed.
- 7.11.7. Voting for the REC Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson takes place at a duly constituted REC meeting, and when nominations for these positions have been received, in line with 7.8 above.
- 7.11.8. The nominated REC member achieving a simple majority is duly appointed to the position.

8. LIFESPAN AND DISSOLUTION OF THE REC

Recommended terms of office of members of the REC are as follows:

- 8.1. The Chairperson is appointed for a minimum term of two years and may be re-appointed for a further one consecutive term.
- 8.2. Each Vice-Chairperson is appointed for a minimum term of two years and may be re-appointed for a further one consecutive term.
- 8.3. REC members are appointed for a minimum term of two years and may be re-appointed for a further one consecutive term.
- 8.4. The above (8.1-8.3) are a guide and the Faculty may define terms of office as required by context and need. In such cases, there must be alignment between the length of terms of office, requirements for specific REC positions (e.g., Chairperson) and maximum allowable consecutive terms.
- 8.5. The REC may be dissolved by the Senate Research Ethics Committee.

Approved: Senate Research Ethics Committee: 27 February 2023

updated version number and revisions clearly highlighted to the reviewer(s).

- 6.3.3. If there is a need for further consensus decision-making, the revised ethics application is placed on a REC meeting agenda and the procedure continues as per 4.2.3-4.2.7 above.
- 6.3.4. If 6.3.3 does not apply, the reviewer(s) must complete review of the revised research ethics application within 10 working days.
- 6.3.5. Review of the revised research ethics application should be limited to assessment of the student's compliance with the original revisions required by the reviewer.
- 6.3.6. Based on the conclusion reached by the reviewer(s), a new decision is indicated by the reviewer(s).
- 6.3.7. The documents referred to in 6.3.2 are forwarded to the Secretariat who in turn forwards the documents to the student and supervisor.

- 6.3.8. If the decision after review of a revised research ethics application is a minor revision, the process continues as described in section 6.2.
- 6.3.9. If the decision after review of a revised research ethics application is again a major revision, the process continues as described in section 6.3.
- 6.3.10. If the decision code after review of a revised research ethics application is approved, the Secretariat drafts an ethical clearance letter (see section 7 below).

7. Final Ethical Clearance

- 7.1. When a completed response to reviewers and a copy of the revised research ethics application are received by the Secretariat following a minor revisions decision or the research review decision was approved, an ethical clearance letter may be drafted.
- 7.2. Every ethical clearance letter must contain (i) the relevant identifying and contact details (e.g. student and supervisor or researcher names, research proposal title etc.), (ii) confirmation that the research has final ethical clearance, (iii) a unique clearance number, (iv) any applicable clearance conditions, (v) the date on which the clearance expires, (vi) a short summary of the steps to be taken in the event that the research ethics application requires amendment, (vii) and a short summary of the steps to be taken in order to renew ethical clearance.
- 7.3. Ethical clearance may be conditional. The conditions of such clearance may vary from case to case but are generally related to intermediate steps in or deliverables of the research method that are not available for review at the time the research ethics application is submitted.
- 7.4. Research ethics applications that aim to generate and use questionnaires or measurement tools as part of the method should be conditionally approved, with a requirement that the newly generated questionnaire or measurement tool be ethically scrutinised in order to secure final unconditional ethical clearance.
- 7.5. Ethical clearance letters are delivered by electronic mail to the student and supervisor or researcher.

8. Appeals, Referrals & Complaints

- 8.1. Appeals
 - 8.1.1. Any student, supervisor or researcher may appeal a decision of the REC if they believe the decision to be unfair.
 - 8.1.2. Appeals must be submitted directly to the REC Chairperson in writing within 20 working days of the decision having been communicated.
 - 8.1.3. On receiving an appeal, the Chairperson will convene and Chair an *ad hoc* Appeal Committee within seven working days consisting of at least one Vice-Chairperson and two other REC members who were not the original reviewers of the research ethics application in question and who

are not members of the Department in which the student is registered (or in which the research is being carried out).

- 8.1.4. If the Chairperson is conflicted in the appeal, then a Vice-Chairperson convenes and Chairs the Appeal Committee.
 - 8.1.5. If necessary, REC members or non-members with specialist expertise may be co-opted to the Appeal Committee.
 - 8.1.6. The Appeal Committee will consider the appeal, and the original review documents and attempt to reach a decision on the matter by consensus which will be to either uphold the original decision or, if there are compelling reasons, to replace the original decision with a different decision.
 - 8.1.7. If consensus is not possible then a voting procedure is followed, similar to that described in 5.2.5 - 5.2.8.
 - 8.1.8. The decision reached by the Appeal Committee is communicated to the researcher, students or researcher in writing.
 - 8.1.9. If, on the conclusion of the appeal process described above, a student, supervisor or researcher still believes that the original decision or the appeal decision is unfair they may approach the Senate Research Ethics Committee (SREC) and submit an appeal.
- 8.2. Complaints
- 8.2.1. Complaints related to any aspect of REC functioning, or related to the conduct of REC members, may be made by researchers, REC members, research participants or members of the public.
 - 8.2.2. Complaints should be directed in writing to the Chairperson of the REC, after which the Chairperson will decide on the appropriate course of action depending on the complaint.
 - 8.2.3. If a complainant does not wish to direct a complaint to the REC Chairperson, then the complaint should be directed in writing to the Faculty's Vice-Dean: Research, Innovation and Internationalisation or the Faculty's Executive Dean or directly to the Chairperson of the SREC.
 - 8.2.4. If a complainant does not wish to direct a complaint to any of the above, they may do so anonymously by using the University's Ethics Hotline.

9. Renewal of Ethical Clearance

- 9.1. Ethical clearance is valid until the date given on the relevant ethical clearance letter.
- 9.2. A short progress report must be submitted to the Secretariat by no later than two weeks after the ethical clearance renewal date (indicated on the ethical clearance letter, or last ethical clearance renewal letter).
- 9.3. Each REC renewal application is reviewed by the Chairperson or one of the Vice-Chairpersons and a recommendation is made to either renew the ethical clearance for a further clearance period.

- 9.4. Possible grounds for not renewing existing ethical clearance include unapproved material deviations from research procedure, previously unreported serious adverse events and the allocation of an E7 global code in the case of qualification research.
- 9.5. In the case of an E7 global code, ethical clearance may be renewed on successful appeal of the E7 if the appeal is successful in the same year.
- 9.6. Students, supervisors or researchers are notified about their ethical clearance renewal in writing by the Secretariat.
- 9.7. Renewal applications and their outcomes (i.e. successful or unsuccessful) are placed on an agenda of the next available REC meeting for noting.
- 9.8. If no application for renewal of ethical clearance is received by, at the most four weeks after the ethical clearance renewal date, the existing ethical clearance will have expired and the position will be that any research activities conducted after this point will be done without ethical clearance.

10. Amendment of Research Ethics applications with Clearance

- 10.1. General Procedures
 - 10.1.1. Due to unforeseen circumstances, it may sometimes be necessary to amend a research ethics application with existing ethical clearance.
 - 10.1.2. Students and supervisors or researchers faced with the prospect of research ethics application amendments must apply to the REC detailing the proposed amendments before they are implemented.
 - 10.1.3. The research ethics application amendment application, with supporting documents where necessary, and a copy of the ethical clearance letter must be submitted to the Secretariat.
 - 10.1.4. The REC Chairperson and one Vice-Chairperson review the submitted research ethics application amendment application and decide whether the proposed amendments are material on the basis of, among other factors, whether the proposed amendments:
 - 10.1.4.1. Affect the research method and the probability of delivering a meaningful and valid result.
 - 10.1.4.2. Affect the informed consent process and whether this is viable or may necessitate a process of re-consenting.
 - 10.1.4.3. Alter the risk: benefit ratio of the research in an unfavourable way or increase the possibility of harm to participants.
 - 10.1.4.4. Whether the proposed amendments in any way infringe on the participants right to privacy.
 - 10.1.5. If the two reviewers achieve consensus that the proposed research ethics application amendments are material, the student and supervisor or researcher are notified of the requirement for further review of the research ethics application. Otherwise, the student and supervisor or researcher are notified that there is no need for further review of the

- research ethics application and that they may proceed with the implementation of the amended research ethics application.
- 10.1.6. If the proposed research ethics application amendments are material, the research ethics application, together with a copy of the original and amended research ethics application, is allocated to the two original research ethics application reviewers if possible.
 - 10.1.7. The two original reviewers return their reviews of the proposed research ethics application amendments to the Secretariat within five working days and indicate their decision.
 - 10.1.8. The Chairperson assesses the two reviewers' decisions. If the two decisions are the same, the Chairperson requests that Secretariat notify the student and supervisor or researcher of the decision. If the decisions are different, the Chairperson considers the two original reviewers' comments and makes a final decision which is communicated by the Secretariat to the student and supervisor or researcher.
 - 10.1.9. If the decision referred to above in Section 10.1.8 necessitates revision of the proposed amendments this is done to the satisfaction of the Chairperson, after which a final decision is communicated to the student and supervisor or researcher.
 - 10.1.10. A new ethical clearance letter is always issued after an application for amendments to a research ethics application with ethical clearance. The new ethical clearance letter clearly indicates that the application was made, what the outcome of the application was and any new conditions of ethical approval, or other details (such as monitoring etc.).
 - 10.1.11. If Section 10.1.6 applies, the original ethical clearance number is amended on the new ethical clearance letter by adding the following: 'Amendment 1.0'. The amendment version is incremented for any future approved amendments.
 - 10.1.12. If Section 10.1.6 does not apply, the original ethical clearance number is used on the new ethical clearance letter.
 - 10.1.13. All amendment applications are placed on an agenda of the next available REC meeting for ratification.
- 10.2. Qualitative Research
- 10.2.1. Section 10.1 above should be read with the understanding that approaches to the acceptability of research ethics application amendments differ between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms.
 - 10.2.2. Whereas the emphasis in quantitative research is on the detailed description of a research method which is accepted to be final and should ideally not change, the approach to methodological adaptation in qualitative research is acknowledged to be far more fluid and evolving with progression of the research.

- 10.2.3. The threshold for judging materiality of amendments in quantitative research is thus accepted as being generally lower than in qualitative research.
- 10.2.4. However, amendments that can be argued to have ethical implications must be seen as material regardless of the research paradigm.

11. Monitoring, Reporting, Suspension & Termination of Research

11.1. Monitoring of Research

- 11.1.1. The REC reserves the right to monitor any research that it has granted ethical clearance for, at any time and for any period of time until completion of the research.
- 11.1.2. Requirements for monitoring of research are proportional to the risk of harm to participants.
- 11.1.3. Research that is considered greater than low (minimal) risk may be subject to more frequent and detailed monitoring, the particulars of which are set out in the relevant ethical clearance letter.

11.2. Reporting of Adverse Events

- 11.2.1. Adverse events occurring during any research cleared by the REC must be reported to the Secretariat of the REC.
- 11.2.2. Serious adverse and related events must be reported within 48 hours of the discovery of their occurrence, while non-serious related adverse events must be reported within five working days.
- 11.2.3. The Chairperson, together with one or both Vice-Chairpersons, may make immediate recommendations regarding the research methods and procedures in relation to the reporting of a serious adverse event, if this is believed to be necessary to protect the interests of participants.
- 11.2.4. Notwithstanding 10.2.3, all serious related adverse events must be reviewed by the REC at a meeting as close to the reporting of the adverse event as possible.
- 11.2.5. All adverse event reports must be submitted to the Secretariat within the time frames indicated above.

11.3. Suspension and Termination of Research

- 11.3.1. The REC reserves the right to withdraw ethical clearance for any research with such clearance previously granted by the REC if it is brought to the attention of the REC, and there is reasonable *prima facie* evidence, that (i) the research is non-compliant with the research ethics application that was granted ethical clearance, or the REC SOPs, and (ii) that the interests of research participants have been harmed or are at risk of harm.
- 11.3.2. The REC reserves the right to intervene in any research that has not yet received ethical clearance if it is brought to the attention of the REC, and there is reasonable *prima facie* evidence, that there has been interaction

with human participants or animals without prospective ethical clearance where this would have been required.

- 11.3.3. Research referred to in sections 11.3.1 and 11.3.2 above is considered suspended, pending an inquiry into the circumstances around the alleged non-compliance.
- 11.3.4. The Chairperson, in consultation with one or more Vice-Chairpersons, may determine that research should be suspended, as per the definition in section 11.3.1.
- 11.3.5. Immediately following this determination, the Chairperson informs the relevant student and supervisor, or researcher, in writing of the suspension. This process must be completed within 24 hours.
- 11.3.6. Once the relevant student and supervisor, or researcher have been informed of the suspension, the relevant Head of Department and ViceDean: Research and Innovation are notified.
- 11.3.7. The Chairperson convenes, within five working days, an inquiry into the suspension which includes representation from the research team, the REC and the Faculty.
- 11.3.8. Findings of the inquiry must be communicated to all parties as soon as they are finalised and may involve (i) lifting of the suspension and reinstatement of ethical clearance, or (ii) remedial action aimed at rectifying the non-compliance and reinstatement of ethical clearance (provided that the remedial action is complied with) or (iii) termination of the research.
- 11.3.9. In the case of Section 11.3.8 (i), the REC may impose conditions on the reinstated ethical clearance, or specific monitoring and reporting requirements.
- 11.3.10. Students and supervisors, or researchers, have the right to appeal findings of an inquiry referred to in Section 11.3.7 by approaching the SREC.
- 11.3.11. Regardless of whether or not the findings of an inquiry are appealed, the SREC must be notified of the outcome of any inquiry.

12. Closure of Research Projects

- 12.1. The REC must be notified in writing of the closure of all research projects that have been granted ethical clearance, regardless of the reason.
- 12.2. Closure of research projects should follow final approval of the research by the Senate Higher Degrees Committee, in the case of qualification research or completion of data collection in the case of non-qualification research.
- 12.3. Closure of the research has no implications for future publication arising from data collected and analysed as part of the research.

13. Scientific Misconduct & Unprofessional Behaviour

- 13.1. There is a moral obligation on all REC members to be vigilant for, and report, any suspected scientific misconduct that they may become aware of at any stage of a research project.
- 13.2. Instances of suspected scientific misconduct should be reported to the Chairperson, or to a Head of Department, Vice-Dean: Research and Innovation or Executive Dean. Those reporting scientific misconduct have a right to do so anonymously by using the University's Ethics Hotline.
- 13.3. Once reported, instances of suspected scientific misconduct are dealt with according to the University's policies.
- 13.4. There is a similar moral obligation and professional duty on all REC members to be vigilant for, and report, any suspected unprofessional behaviour that they may become aware of at any stage of a research project.
- 13.5. Such suspected instances should be reported as described in 13.2 - 13.3 or through reporting mechanisms made available by the relevant statutory bodies (e.g. the Health Professions Council of South Africa).
- 13.6. Unprofessional conduct reported internally may also be reported to the relevant statutory body by the REC.

14. External Requests for Faculty Student/Staff Research Participation

- 14.1. External requests for research participation involving students or staff in the Faculty/College/School are made through the Strategic Research Support office.
- 14.2. The Strategic Research Support office provides institutional gatekeeper permission for external research, subject to its own review process.
- 14.3. If necessary, the Strategic Research Support office may request ethical review of an external request for research. This is done on an *ad hoc* basis through communication between the Director: Strategic Research Support and the Chairperson of a REC best positioned for this purpose.

Approved: Senate Research Ethics Committee: 27 February 2023