



Research Ethics Committee (REC) Terms of Reference

Policy Category	Academic
Policy Code	RES-HE-08
Policy Owner	Dean
Responsible Officer	Associate Dean, Research and Scholarship
Approving Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	06 August 2025
Commencement Date	07 August 2025
Review Date	3 years
Version	2025.1
Related Documents	HDR Supervision Policy HDR Examination Policy HDR Responsible Conduct of Research Policy HDR Candidature Policy Academic Integrity Policy HDR Guide for Ethical Use of GenAI HDR GenAI Policy
HESF (Threshold Standards) 2021	4.1.1; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 4.1.4; 4.2.1; 4.2.2; 4.2.3; 4.2.4; 6.2.1; 6.2.2; 7.2.1.
Policy Visibility	Public

1. Purpose

This Terms of Reference establishes the authority, responsibilities and operating procedures of the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the Australian Institute of Higher Education (AIH). The REC safeguards the rights, dignity, safety and wellbeing of human participants involved in research conducted under the auspices of the Institute, ensuring compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2025) and other relevant legislation and guidelines.

2. Principles

- Independence: Ethical review is conducted free from undue influence.

- Respect: Research upholds the autonomy, privacy and cultural heritage of participants.
- Beneficence: Foreseeable benefits outweigh and justify any risks or burdens.
- Justice: Participant selection and research outcomes are equitable and fair.
- Integrity & Transparency: Decisions are evidence-based, documented and open to scrutiny.
- Proportionality: Review intensity matches the level of risk.

3. Scope

These Terms apply to all AIH staff, students, visiting researchers, partners and contractors who design, conduct, supervise or manage research involving human participants that is undertaken at, by or on behalf of AIH, including multi-institutional studies where AIH is a collaborating or lead site.

4. Definitions

Key terms used in this policy are consistent with the NHMRC, including:

- Human research
- Negligible risk
- Low risk
- Higher than low risk
- National Statement

5. Details

5.1 Governance & Reporting

The REC is a standing sub-committee of the Academic Board. It operates with delegated authority to approve, require amendment to, or reject human research proposals. The Committee reports quarterly to the Academic Board through the Associate Dean, Research and Scholarship and provides an annual activity report to the Board, including membership, meeting statistics, monitoring outcomes and any serious adverse events.

5.2 Functions and Responsibilities

- Review research proposals that are more than low risk to determine ethical acceptability.
- Provide expedited review pathways for negligible- or low-risk studies.
- Monitor approved research via progress reports, amendments and adverse-event notifications.
- Recommend suspension or withdrawal of approval where participant welfare cannot be assured.
- Advise researchers and governance bodies on ethical aspects of research design and conduct.
- Promote education and training on research ethics across the Institute.

5.3 Composition & Membership

The REC shall comprise a minimum of eight members:

1. Associate Dean, Research and Scholarship (Chair)
2. Dean and Director of Teaching and Learning
3. Director of Research
4. Program Director, Information and Technology Systems
5. External research-active members (x 2)
6. HDR Supervision Coordinator (Ethics Officer)
7. Academic Operations Coordinator (Secretary)

Members are appointed by the Academic Board for renewable three-year terms via an open and transparent process. All members complete induction and ongoing professional-development activities. The Academic Board may appoint a Deputy Chair. External members are eligible for reimbursement of reasonable expenses.

5.4 Meetings & Quorum

The REC meets at least four times per calendar year (once per quarter). A quorum requires 50% membership plus the Chair (5 in total). Decisions are preferably reached by consensus; where consensus is unattainable, a simple majority vote is taken, and significant minority views are minuted. Urgent matters may be decided by circular resolution of the Chair and ratified at the next meeting.

5.5 Decision-Making Protocols

The Committee may grant: (a) Approval; (b) Provisional Approval subject to specified modifications; (c) Withhold Approval pending re-submission; or (d) Rejection on ethical grounds. Researchers receive written notification within 14 days, including reasons for any decision requiring changes or disapproval.

5.6 Monitoring & Compliance

Principal Supervisors must submit annual and final reports and notify the REC immediately of serious adverse events, protocol deviations or new information that may impact ethical acceptability. Failure to comply may result in suspension or withdrawal of approval and referral under the HDR Responsible Conduct of Research Policy.

5.7 Complaints & Appeals

Complaints about research conduct are investigated by the Associate Dean, Research and Scholarship or nominee. Complaints about REC decisions or processes may be escalated to the Dean and, if unresolved, to the Academic Board. All complaints are logged and reported to the Academic Board.

5.8 Records & Confidentiality

AIH maintains a secure electronic register of all applications, correspondence and decisions for a minimum of seven years. Committee papers are confidential; members sign an annual confidentiality and conflict-of-interest declaration.

6. Legislation & Standards

- National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2025)
- Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)
- Guidelines under Section 95 of the Privacy Act 1988
- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 – Standards 4.1 & 4.2

7. Version Control

Version	Authored by	Brief description of change	Date Approved	Effective Date
2025.1	Dean	Initial release of Research Ethics Committee TOR.	06 August 2025	07 August 2025