

Research Proposal Peer Review Procedure

Section 1 - Context

(1) The University has a responsibility to ensure that, as with any research, proposals submitted for ethics approval are methodologically sound and of a high scholarly standard. Peer review of research provides expert scrutiny of a project, and helps to maintain high standards and encourage accurate, thorough and credible research reporting.

(2) This procedure provides the process for the peer review of all research proposals submitted for ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) or the Animal Care and Ethics Committee (ACEC). It supports the University's requirement that all research proposals for ethics approval be subject to peer review.

(3) Applications for ethics approval will not be accepted if the peer review does not comply with this procedure.

Section 2 - Faculty Committees

(4) Faculty Research Committees are responsible for overseeing the peer review process, and for ensuring that reviews conducted in their respective Faculties are rigorous and standardised.

(5) Faculty Research Committees will facilitate peer review of research proposals prior to submission of proposals to the HREC or ACEC, but can delegate that responsibility to a Faculty specific peer review committee or to School specific peer review committees where the volume of reviews warrants it. In each case, there should be a designated Chair of the committee approved by the Faculty Research Committee.

(6) Peer review committees have responsibility for ensuring that a review of the research proposal is undertaken against the criteria listed in the peer review report forms for ACEC and HREC applications: for ACEC - the "[Animal Research - Peer Review Report](#)" and for HREC - the "Human Ethics Peer Review Report and Head of School Declaration" (See Associated Information).

Section 3 - Peer Reviewers

(7) Peer reviewers are expected to be independent of the researchers, i.e. they should not be part of the research team for the project, or have any personal relationship with members of the research team.

(8) Where the research proposal is for a project to be undertaken by a student of the University as part of their program of study, the project supervisor cannot be a peer reviewer for the proposal.

(9) Suitable peer reviewers for any research proposal include experienced researchers in the general field of study or specific methodology of the proposal under review. Where there are confidentiality issues or commercial in confidence issues, reviewers should sign a confidentiality agreement.

(10) Those participating in peer review must undertake this process in a fair and timely manner, with due regard for the ethical and professional responsibilities the process demands. They should therefore:-

- a. act in confidence;

- b. declare all conflicts of interest;
- c. not permit personal prejudices or stereotypical beliefs about particular individuals or groups of people to influence the process;
- d. not take undue or calculated advantage of knowledge obtained;
- e. ensure their awareness of and compliance with the criteria to be applied;
- f. not participate in peer review outside their area of expertise; and
- g. give proper consideration to analysis, theoretical framework, research methods and findings that challenge accepted ways of thinking.

(11) In circumstances where a suitable peer reviewer cannot be identified internally an external peer reviewer should be sought.

Section 4 - Review Process

(12) It is essential that the peer review process be separated from the ethics approval process. Peer review is not a function of the Human Research Ethics Committee or the Animal Care and Ethics Committee, nor is it a function of a Faculty Research Ethics Advisor.

(13) Where the research proposal has been peer reviewed in the course of an award from a recognised granting body operating a competitive grants scheme, no further peer review will be required. Applicants for HREC or ACEC approval will be required to confirm in writing that the research methods described in the ethics application matches that described in the grant application. Details of the grant, its reference number and a copy of the application to the granting body must be provided in the application for ethics approval.

(14) Peer review must be undertaken in accordance with the process approved by the applicable Faculty.

(15) Peer review of research to be considered by the HREC or ACEC will be reviewed by at least one peer reviewer.

(16) The peer review process needs to be appropriate to review research proposals from coursework, honours, and higher degree by research students and staff.

(17) Peer review committees or panels must review the research proposal against the criteria listed in the "Peer Review Declaration" included in the application for human or animal ethics approval.

(18) The peer review process needs to be responsive to the relatively narrow research time windows open to some researchers, particularly coursework and honours students. Peer reviews should be completed and returned to the researcher in a timely manner, preferably within 10 working days of submission although shorter turn around is strongly encouraged. Electronic submission of peer review documents, approvals and feedback to applicants is strongly recommended to shorten turn around.

(19) The University Research Committee will collect and collate quarterly reports from each Faculty Research Committee documenting the mean number (and range) of working days taken for all peer reviews from receipt of an application to the date of return to the researcher.

(20) Researchers seeking peer review should provide a 2 - 3 page summary of the research proposal that covers

- a. a brief literature review;
- b. the aims of the proposed research;
- c. the proposed study sample; and
- d. the design, methodology and/or research procedures.

e. In the case of animal research, the animal species, number of animals, source and quality of animals (e.g. microbiological status) should be specified. Power estimates should be provided if appropriate.

(21) The applicant's Head of School must complete the declaration where required (contained in the application for human ethics approval) confirming the completion of a peer review and endorsing the undertaking of the research.

(22) Where the Head of School has a conflict of interest with the research or the research team, the declaration is to be completed by the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor or nominee.

(23) Any issues identified by the peer review are to be addressed by the applicant to the satisfaction of the peer reviewer prior to the Faculty Peer Review Committee's sign-off and submission for ethics approval.

(24) The peer review process may be complementary to, or conducted in concert with, other processes with a peer review element such as the Confirmation Year process for higher degree by research candidates.

(25) A template of the form to be used by Faculties to assist in monitoring the process of methodological peer review is included under Associated Information.

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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"University" - The University of Newcastle, a body corporate established under sections 4 and 5 of the University of Newcastle Act 1989.

"Area of expertise" - An area in which a staff member or a student have been peer-reviewed or published.

"Student" - A person formally enrolled in a course or active in a program offered by the University or affiliated entity.

"Candidate" - With regard to Higher Degree by Research it has the same meaning as student. For all other instances it is a person considered for appointment to a position.

"Research" - As defined in the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, or any replacing Code or document.