Research Peer Review Guideline for Ethics Applications

Section 1 - Introduction

(1) The University of Newcastle (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, helps to maintain high standards, and encourages accurate, thorough and credible research reporting.

(2) This Guideline outlines the responsibilities and process requirements required for peer review of all research proposals submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), or other relevant delegated authority, or the Animal Care and Ethics Committee (ACEC) for ethics approval. It supports the University's requirement that all research proposals for ethics approval be subject to peer review, as outlined in the Responsible Conduct of Research Policy.

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

Section 2 - Audience

(4) University researchers conducting animal or human based research.

(5) Conjoint appointed researchers conducting animal or human based research.

(6) Coursework and Honours Students and Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Candidates conducting animal or human based research.

(7) Peer reviewers.

(8) Heads of School.

Section 3 - Document Specific Definition

(9) This Guideline should be considered in line with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. In the context of this document, peer review means the "impartial and independent assessment of research by others working in the same or a related field" and having sufficient standing to competently review the merit and protocols of the project.

Section 4 - Responsibilities

College Research Committees Responsibilities

(10) College Research Committees are responsible for:

This document may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Printed copies, or part thereof, are regarded as uncontrolled and should not be relied upon as the current version. It is the responsibility of the individual reading this document to always refer to the Policy Library for the latest version.

Page 1 of 6

a. overseeing peer reviews in their respective Colleges;

b. ensuring that the peer reviews conducted are of the highest rigor and are undertaken in accordance with this Guideline;

c. providing suitable peer reviewers, which includes experienced researchers in the general field of study or specific methodology of the proposal under review;

d. seeking an external peer reviewer in circumstances where a suitable peer reviewer cannot be identified internally; and

e. facilitating peer review of research proposals prior to submission of proposals for University ethics approval.

(11) College Research Committees can delegate Clause (10) e. to a College specific peer review committee or to a School specific peer review committee where the volume of reviews warrants it. In each case, there should be a designated Chair of the Committee approved by the College Research Committee.

Peer Review Committee Responsibilities

(12) Peer review committees have responsibility for ensuring that:

a. a review of the research proposal is undertaken against the criteria listed in the peer review report form for ACEC ([Independent peer review of scientific merit of a research protocol involving the use of animals](#)) and HREC ([Human Research Ethics Committee Peer Review Declaration](#)) applications; and

b. human ethics protocol peer reviewers respond to the questions listed on the [Peer Reviewer Response form](#).

(13) 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 ethics approval.

Peer Reviewer Responsibilities

(14) Peer reviewers need to ensure that they are independent of the researchers. That is, they should not be part of the research team for the project, or have any significant personal relationship or other conflicts of interest with members of the research team.

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

(16) Peer reviewers should sign a confidentiality agreement where there are confidentiality or commercial in confidence issues.

Researcher Responsibilities

(17) Researchers seeking peer review should include 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;

d. the design, methodology and/or research procedures;

e. for animal research, the animal species, number of animals, source and quality of animals (e.g. microbiological status) should be specified in the summary of the research proposal; and

f. Power estimates if appropriate.

(18) Researchers must address any issues identified during the peer review prior to submission of an application to the ethics committee.

Head of School Responsibilities

(19) The applicant's Head of School must complete the [Head of School 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.

(20) Please also see Clause 21.

College Pro-Vice Chancellor Responsibilities

(21) The [Head of School Declaration](#) is to be completed by the College Pro Vice-Chancellor or nominee where the Head of School has a conflict of interest with the research or the research team.

Section 5 - Peer Review Process Requirements

(22) It is essential that any peer review is separate from the ethics approval process. Peer review is not a function of the HREC or the ACEC, nor is it a function of a College Research Ethics Advisor, except in as much as the ACEC, HREC or other relevant delegated authority must be assured that a peer review has been properly conducted.

(23) Peer review must be undertaken in accordance with the methodology approved by the applicable College Research Committee, including use of a documented standard protocol and its attachment to the signed peer review form. The peer review process needs to be appropriate to review research proposals from Coursework and Honours Students, Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Candidates, and Staff.

(24) The peer review process may be complementary to, or conducted concurrently with, other processes with a peer review element such as the confirmation process for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Candidates, as described in the [Confirmation Guidelines for HDR Candidates](#). Confirmation may meet peer review requirements where the methodology does not alter significantly as a result of the Confirmation process.

(25) An internal peer review is not required where the research proposal has been peer reviewed in the course of an award from a recognised granting body operating a competitive grants scheme. Applicants for human ethics 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.

(26) Peer review of research to be considered for human ethics or ACEC approval will be reviewed by at least one peer reviewer unless clause 25 applies.

(27) The peer review needs to be responsive to the relatively narrow research time window open to some researchers, particularly coursework and honours students. Peer reviews should be completed and returned to the researcher in a timely manner. Electronic submission of peer review documents, approvals and feedback to applicants is strongly recommended to shorten turn around.

(28) Any issues identified through the peer review are to be addressed by the applicant to the satisfaction of the peer reviewer prior to the submission of an application for consideration by an ethics committee.

(29) Peer review of human research applications must be in accordance with the process (as described in the [Peer Review of Research Proposals Submitted for Human Ethics Approval Procedural Flowchart](#) or [College of Engineering, Science and Environment Proposed Peer Review of Research Proposals Submitted for Human & Animal Ethics Approval Procedural Flowchart](#)).

(30) Peer reviews should be completed within 10 working days of submission, although shorter turnaround is strongly

This document may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Printed copies, or part thereof, are regarded as uncontrolled and should not be relied upon as the current version. It is the responsibility of the individual reading this document to always refer to the Policy Library for the latest version.

Page 3 of 6

encouraged.

Section 6 - Reporting

(31) The University Research Committee will collect and collate quarterly reports from each College Research Committee that documents 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.

This document may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Printed copies, or part thereof, are regarded as uncontrolled and should not be relied upon as the current version. It is the responsibility of the individual reading this document to always refer to the Policy Library for the latest version.

Page 4 of 6

Status and Details

Status	Historic
Effective Date	13th August 2018
Review Date	13th August 2021
Approval Authority	Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation
Approval Date	13th August 2018
Expiry Date	21st February 2024
Responsible Executive	Juanita Todd Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)
Enquiries Contact	Jodie Marquez Director, Research Ethics & Integrity Research Ethics and Integrity Unit

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Higher Degree by Research (HDR)" - Is a postgraduate university degree involving a unique supervised research project. These degrees are either a Masters of Philosophy, or a Doctoral degree (either Professional Doctorate or a PhD).

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

"Working day" - Any day other than Saturday, Sunday, or a public holiday in Newcastle, on which business may be conducted.

"Applicant" - Where referring to a student, an applicant is an individual seeking entry to a program or course offered by the University or its partner organisation/s. For all other uses of this term, the generic definition applies.

"Award" - When referring to a University qualification, this term means an academic qualification approved by Academic Senate that is conferred when a student has met the relevant program requirements. For all other uses of this term, the generic definition applies.

"Course" - When referring to a course offered by the University, a course is a set of learning activities or learning opportunities with defined, assessed and recorded learning outcomes. A course will be identified by an alphanumeric course code and course title. Course types include core courses, compulsory courses, directed courses, capstone courses and electives. For all other uses of this term, the generic definition applies.

"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.

"School" - An organisational unit forming part of a College or Division, responsible for offering a particular course.

"Staff" - Means a person who was at the relevant time employed by the University and includes professional and academic staff of the University, by contract or ongoing, as well as conjoint staff but does not include visitors to the

This document may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Printed copies, or part thereof, are regarded as uncontrolled and should not be relied upon as the current version. It is the responsibility of the individual reading this document to always refer to the Policy Library for the latest version.

Page 5 of 6

University.

"College" - An organisational unit established within the University by the Council.