

# PROCEDURES FOR THE OPERATION OF THE ANIMAL ETHICS COMMITTEE

## Introduction

All projects undertaken at the University of Canberra that involve the use of animals either for research, teaching or other experimental study in which animals are used must be approved by the Animal Ethics Committee (AEC). This is in keeping with the [ACT Animal Welfare Act \(1992\)](#) and the [Australian Code for the Care and use of Animals for Scientific Purposes](#) (8<sup>th</sup> edition 2013).

The [Australian Code for the Care and use of Animals for Scientific Purposes](#) (*The Code*) also requires that institutions have in place procedures for the effective governance and operation of the AEC that enable the AEC to comply with the Code and relevant institutional policies, and promote competent and timely ethical review of animal care and use.

These Procedures, while underpinned by the *The Code*, are part of a broader suite of codes relating to ethical conduct and the practice of research such as the [Charter of Conduct and Values](#), the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) and the [UC Responsible Conduct of Research Policy](#)

## 1. Animal Ethics Committees

*The Code* specifies the responsibilities of AECs as follows:

- review applications for projects and approve only those projects that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code
- review applications for activities associated with the care and management of animals in facilities, including procedures applicable to breeding programs integral to the maintenance of an animal line, and approve only those activities that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code
- conduct follow-up review of approved projects and activities, and allow the continuation of approval for only those projects and activities that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code
- monitor the care and use of animals, including housing conditions, practices and procedures involved in the care of animals in facilities
- take appropriate actions regarding unexpected adverse events
- take appropriate actions regarding non-compliance
- approve guidelines for the care and use of animals on behalf of the institution
- provide advice and recommendations to the institution
- report on its operations to the institution.

## 2. The UC Animal Ethics Committee

The [Terms of Reference](#) for the UC AEC clearly specify the following: the committee's role, scope of responsibilities, committee structure and support, tenure of committee membership, meeting quorums, and accountability,

## 3. Conduct of Meetings: General Principles

3.1 The Committee will meet six times a year. Dates for the meetings for the upcoming calendar year will be posted on the Research Services website at the end of each year.

3.2 Upon confirmation of committee membership and before attending meetings, members must agree in writing to maintain the confidentiality of the information disclosed to them at meetings or as a result of their appointment.

3.3 All members must disclose any actual, or, potentially perceived conflict of interest at the beginning of each meeting. These will be recorded in the meeting minutes.

3.4 The Committee will deal with situations in which a conflict of interest arises, including any situation where a Committee member has an interest that may be seen to influence the objectivity of a decision by:

- requiring a member whose objectivity may be influenced by an interest (including consideration of a proposal submitted by that member) to leave the room prior to any discussion of the identified item, returning only at the invitation of the remaining members to provide clarification on issues raised (after which the member will again be requested to leave), or returning only when a decision has been finalised;
- recording the method of dealing with any conflict in the relevant meeting minutes (e.g. recording that the member left and returned to the room);
- considering and responding to any concern or claim raised by an activity leader or other party that a Committee member has a conflict of interest that may have influenced the objectivity of a Committee decision; and
- advising complainants, in writing, of the Committee's response to any concern or claim relating to a conflict of interest. If the complainant is not satisfied with the Committee's response, a grievance may be lodged.

3.5 Members have debate and voting rights for all matters before the AEC except in situations where a conflict of interest precludes them from exercising such rights.

#### **4. Pre-Meeting Process: Applications**

4.1 To be considered for ethical review, applications must be submitted to the Research Ethics & Integrity Team via the Online Ethics Application Form by the stipulated deadline. Details regarding the application process are detailed on the [Research Services Office website](#).

4.2 Applications will be distributed to Committee members for review three weeks prior to the scheduled date for the meeting.

4.3 After reviewing the applications, members will submit their questions to the Research Ethics & Integrity Team within one week of receipt of the applications. Questions can be submitted via email or via the Online Ethics Application Form.

4.4 The Research Ethics & Integrity team will collate the questions pertaining to each application and forward them to the relevant applicant for response prior to the Committee meeting.

4.5 The responses provided by the applicants, if received prior to the meeting, will then be tabled at the meeting for approval.

#### **5. Meeting Preparation**

5.1. The Research Ethics & Integrity team will consult with the Chair in the preparation of the meeting agenda.

5.2 Committee members may request through the Chair or Research Ethics & Integrity team for items to be placed on the agenda

5.3 The Research Ethics & Integrity team will oversee the distribution of all agenda items to the Committee one week prior to the meeting via the Online Ethics Portal. Standard agenda items will include:

- Application and Authorisation Status Reports
- Minutes of the last meeting
- Annual and End of Project Reports
- Other relevant documentation such as letters, emails, inquiries

## **6. Conduct of Meeting**

6.1 The Committee must have a quorum (see TOR) in order for the meeting to take place. If a quorum is not achieved, the meeting will be rescheduled to the earliest possible date.

6.2. In consideration of new applications, the Q&A will be considered by the Committee at the meeting. If the Committee is unanimously satisfied with the responses to the questions, the application may be immediately approved.

6.3 The Committee may require that the applicant provide further clarification (for example, if they feel that questions raised have not been appropriately addressed in the responses). Additionally, they may wish to raise further questions regarding the application. In such cases, the application will not be approved and applicants will be advised of additional matters that must be addressed before ethics clearance can be granted.

6.4 Follow up responses from applicants will be communicated to the Committee for out of session approval.

6.5 At all times, the Committee will strive to reach decisions by general consensus. Where consensus cannot be reached, the Committee may do any of the following: invite the applicant to the Committee meeting for further discussion of the application; explore possibilities for the applicant to modify the application; or proceed to majority decision after all members have been allowed further time to review their positions and discuss their views

6.6 The Committee will also consider other agenda items and provide feedback to researchers as required,

6.7 The Committee meeting will follow the distributed agenda, with discussion to be directed through the Chair.

## **7. Record Keeping and Reporting**

7.1 The Research Ethics & Integrity team will keep a record of the discussion and circulate the minutes of the meeting to the Committee

7.2 The Research Ethics & Integrity team will communicate the outcomes on ethical clearance to applicants via the Online Ethics Portal within 7 days of the meeting.

7.3 Projects will not be permitted to commence until applicants have received written approval

7.4 The Research Services will maintain electronic records in relation to ethical clearance applications and related activity.

## **8. Monitoring**

8.1 The Committee will monitor all activities relating to the care and use of animals, including through the conduct of annual inspections of animal facilities.

8.2 The Research Ethics & Integrity team will be responsible for ensuring that the inspections occur as required, preparing a report, and maintaining a register of inspections.

8.3 In instances where, during inspections, the Committee detects activities that are not compliant with approved applications or animal handling that is not compliant with the Code, the researcher will be advised in writing of the breach and requested to suspend activities until remedial action is initiated.

8.4 The Committee will also monitor researchers' activities by reviewing the following: annual reports which researchers will need to submit to the Committee for approved projects and End of Project reports.

## **9. Unforeseen Events and Adverse Incidents**

9.1 It is a condition of ethics approval that researchers immediately report any of the following to the Research Ethics & Integrity team: proposed changes in the approved project; serious or unexpected

adverse effects on the animal; unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical capability of the project.

9.2 Requests for amendments to approved applications will be considered out of session and may be referred to the full Committee if deemed necessary.

9.3 In incidents of adverse events, the UC veterinarian will be immediately called upon to investigate the incident and advise animal carers of emergency welfare intervention necessary. Animal carers will promptly advise the responsible researcher of actions to be taken. The event will also be reported to the Committee.

9.4 The Chair will have authority to suspend the approved project if deemed necessary.

## **10. Complaints**

10.1 The Deputy Vice Chancellor Research & Innovation is responsible for compliance with the Code and institutional procedures for handling grievances in relation to the UC AEC. These include concerns about the use of animals by the University; alleged breaches of the Code; and requests for a review of a decision of the Committee.

10.2 The [Animal Ethics Committee Complaints Procedure](#) provides details of the process that will be followed at all times.

10.3 Complaints must be sent in writing to the Research Ethics & Integrity team, with details of specific concerns and issues. All complaints will be treated seriously and will follow procedural fairness and maintain confidentiality

## **11. Institutional Reporting**

11.1 The Committee will report annually to Vice Chancellor, University Research Committee, Academic Board and Council. The report will include the following information:

- numbers and types of projects assessed and approved or rejected;
- educational activities undertaken by the members of the AEC on behalf of the Committee;
- administrative or other difficulties being experienced;
- any matters that may affect the University's ability to maintain compliance with the Act and the Code and, if necessary,
- provide appropriate recommendations

11.2 The Committee will also report annual to the following external organisations: NSW Department of Primary Industries, the Animal Welfare Unit of the ACT Government and other government departments as required.