

Terms of Reference

Senate Ethics in Research Committee (EiRC)

Title	Terms of Reference, Senate Ethics in Research Committee (EiRC)
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Person(s) responsible for drafting, review and revision	EiRC Chair; ORI Director, ORI Manager, ORI EiRC Servicing Officer.
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Status	Committee of Senate, Terms of Reference
Approval route	EiRC > URC for comments > SEC > Senate
Approving body	Senate
Relevant related policies, procedures and guidelines	<p>These terms of reference should be understood in conjunction with the general rules for procedures for committees, as amended from time to time, and published in the Principal's Circular. These general rules and procedures can be found at: http://governance.uct.ac.za/committees/default.aspx</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UCT Policy for Responsible Conduct of Research • UCT Research Ethics Code for Research Involving Human Participants • Register of Ethics Approvals for Research Conducted under the Auspices of UCT • Code for UCT Research Ethics Committee Members • Appeal to Ethics in Research Committee: Standard Operating Procedure • Conflict of Interest Policy • Policy and Standard Operating Procedure: Ethics Clearance and Permission to Engage UCT Staff and/or Students or their Data in Research • UCT Policy and Procedures for Breach of Research Ethics Codes and Allegations of Misconduct in Research • UCT Whistleblowing Policy • EiRC Recommendations: Standard criteria for inclusion in research invitations • UCT Guideline for Risk-Based Ethical Review of Research (Human Participants) • EiRC Guidelines and recommendations for the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in research • UCT Research Data Management Policy

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Terms of Reference, Senate Ethics in Research Committee

1. Purpose

To ensure the protection of human rights and the well-being of research participants based on ethical and integrity principles and norms, and compliance with the highest ethical standards in social and scientific research, including matters involving authorship and research misconduct, but excluding research involving animals.

The purpose of this document is drawn from the *Belmont Report* (1979), which states that “scientific research has produced substantial social benefits. It has also posed some troubling ethical questions” (pg. 3),

and the *South African National Ethics in Health Research Guidelines: Principles, Processes and Structures* (2024), which state that

“human dignity, equality and the advancement of human rights are respected, promoted and protected in terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (the Constitution). Section 27(1) of the Bill of Rights guarantees the right of access to health care services, while section 12(2) protects against research abuse by providing that ‘Everyone has the right to bodily and psychological integrity, which includes the right: a) to make decisions concerning reproduction, b) to security in and control over their body and, c) not to be subjected to medical or scientific experiments without their informed consent.’” (pg. 1)

In order to balance potential benefits of research with possible harms to participants, the EiRC and all RECs at UCT aspire to working in compliance with highest ethical standards in research, as articulated in various international and national guidelines such as those identified above.

The EiRC is not directly involved in ensuring that research does not damage or harm the reputation of the institution, although it may guide researchers in mitigating or minimising this aspect of proposed research.

2. Delegated authority of the committee

The Committee has the power to act on behalf of Senate

- to resolve, advise on, or otherwise deal with concerns, questions, and disputes about the implementation of the UCT Research Policy and the UCT Research Ethics Code for Research Involving Human Participants and other policies, guidelines and codes of conduct on these matters;
- to hear appeals in terms of the Standard Operating Procedure for Appeals to Ethics in Research committee.

3. Membership

a. Composition

The Vice-Chancellor (ex officio)

The Deputy Vice-Chancellors (ex officio)

The Chairs of the Faculties’ Standing Research Ethics Committees, including the Centre for Higher Education and Development, the Graduate School of Business and the Inter-Faculty Human Research Ethics Committee

Three members of the academic staff appointed by Senate

An external (non-UCT) lay member appointed by Senate

The Director of the Office of Research Integrity

Members co-opted, ad hoc, for specific enquiries by the Committee
One postgraduate student nominated by the Students' Representative Council.

b. Servicing Officer

The Servicing Officer shall be appointed by the Office of Research Integrity.

The Servicing Officer shall be responsible for:

- Scheduling of meetings, in consultation with the Chair, as necessary.
- Securing an appropriate venue for meetings, or provision of online meeting links.
- Preparing meeting agendas, in consultation with the Chair.
- Distributing the meeting agendas at least 7 days prior to a meeting.
- Recording or taking notes for the meetings.
- Providing attendance registers with appropriate declarations pertaining to conflicts of interest and/or commitment and confidentiality.
- Preparing meeting minutes for review by the Chair and/or Executive Committee (Exco).
- Inclusion of those minutes in a forthcoming agenda for review and/or approval.
- Obtaining the Chair's signature for the approved minutes, following committee approval.
- Maintenance and provision of a suitable shared repository for committee documents (including but not limited to prior agendas, minutes, project applications, outcome letters and other relevant committee documents).
- Recording of any action items agreed to in committee meetings, including person responsible and timeframes for completion.
- Liaising with committee members to ensure that action items are completed within the agreed timeframes.

c. Term of office

Committee members will be appointed for a period of 4 years from 1 July, to align with the terms of Senate. Committee members shall be permitted to serve two (2) consecutive terms, following which they are not eligible for further membership until at least one appointment cycle (3 years) has lapsed. After a break in service committee members are eligible to be reappointed to the EiRC.

Note: if the identity of a Chair of a Faculty Research Ethics Committee changes in the course of the current round of appointments to EiRC, the new Chair is co-opted to EiRC until the next round of appointments occurs.

d. Terms of Reference

- to receive reports from Faculty Research Ethics committees regarding ethics review and clearance processes, at least annually.
- to advise Faculty Research Ethics committees, as appropriate, to ensure maintenance of the highest ethical standards in research conducted at and under the auspices of the University.
- to make proposals for policy regarding maintaining the highest ethical standards in research.
- where it is clear at the point of application that there is the potential to harm or damage the institutional reputation, the EiRC recommends Faculty RECs work with researchers to mitigate those aspects of the study which may foreseeably raise concerns or risk the reputation of the institution. Review of research projects takes place through Faculty RECs and in line with their terms of reference and standard operating procedures, as such, review for potential institutional harm will happen in the context of Faculty REC processes.
- to hear appeals forwarded from Faculty Research Ethics committees in terms of the Standard Operating Procedure for Appeals to Ethics in Research Committee.
- to receive all Faculty-specific ethics codes, terms of reference and standard operating procedures, which have been duly approved by relevant faculty bodies, to be lodged with EiRC

for information and reference purposes, at the start of a new committee term, or at least once every four (4) years.

e. Letters of appointment

Committee members shall be provided with letters of appointment issued by the Executive Director of the Research Office. The Servicing Officer is permitted to assist in the preparation of the letters of appointment, provided they are reviewed and signed by the appropriate authority in the Research Office.

Letters of appointment shall include the following information:

- Name of individual.
- Position they will hold on the committee (in relation to the committee composition).
- Name of committee to which they are being appointed.
- Duration of the appointment, including the start and end dates.
- Information related to professional liability insurance provided by the institution.
- Expectations related to induction and ongoing training, including where to find resources and who to contact for assistance.

A committee member must formally accept their appointment to the EiRC, in writing, to the Servicing Officer and Chair. This acceptance must also include a commitment to complete the necessary training to actively and regularly participate in EiRC activities.

f. Appointment of a Chair

The Chairperson will be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor following consultation with the EiRC.

g. Duties of the REC Chair

The Chair of the EiRC is expected to guide the efficient and ethical functioning of the committee. The Chair will work closely with the Servicing Officer to ensure that meeting documentation is sufficiently and timeously prepared, shared with the committee and stored in the repository and that scheduled meetings are run in accordance with these terms of reference.

The Chair will also be responsible for:

- Reviewing and signing off on annual reports to the Senate Executive Council.
- Ensuring that any declared conflicts of interest/commitment are suitably addressed in the functioning of the committee and decisions it makes.
- In collaboration with the Servicing Officer, the Chair will monitor induction and ongoing or refresher ethics training of committee members.
- In collaboration with the Servicing Officer, ensure that action items identified in meetings are attended to and completed by the responsible persons.

h. Election of a Deputy Chair(s)

The Deputy Chair is a member of the Committee elected by the Committee.

i. Duties of the REC Deputy Chair(s)

The Deputy Chair has the delegated authority to act in the Chair's absence.

j. Duties of committee members

Attendance a 75% of meetings per year; active participation in the committee's activities.

Should a member be unable to attend a committee meeting, they must notify the Servicing Officer and, if appropriate, should nominate an alternate, especially in the cases of extended or sabbatical leave.

If committee members do not perform their duties, as described above, the Chair and Deputy Chair, in collaboration with the Servicing Officer shall commence procedures to have the member removed from the committee and replaced. This shall either take the form of consultation with the relevant Faculty Dean, in the case of Faculty REC Chairs or, consultation with the Senate Nominations Committee, in the case of Senate appointees.

k. Quorum

A quorum shall be made of 50% plus one (+1) of the committee membership.

l. Training requirements

All EiRC members must agree to undergo training in research ethics and the ethical review of research projects on an annual basis, including Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) content. All members, including new members, are required to complete the following training modules on research integrity/RCR that are offered on the UCT SuccessFactors online learning platform:

- Module 1: Introduction to Research Integrity
- Module 2: Misconduct and Questionable Research Practices
- Module 3: Authorship and Publication
- Module 4: Research Involving Research Participants
- Module 5: Managing and Sharing Human Research Data

As additional RCR modules become available the committee may be required to complete additional modules. Members may alternate between the RCR training and Training and Resources In Research Ethics Evaluation (TRREE) Training.

Members should liaise with the Servicing Officer to ensure that a record of all training is accurate and kept up-to-date.

m. Membership list

The membership list shall be kept up-to-date by the committee's Servicing Officer, in consultation with the Chair.

The membership list shall appear of the front of each agenda and minutes document produced.

n. Conduct of committee members

Members of the EiRC shall conduct themselves in accordance with the [UCT Code for Research Ethics Committee members](#).

Members shall be required to review the Code as part of their induction training and confirm that they agree to act in accordance with the code.

4. Committee records and documentation

The committee shall have access to a shared repository. This repository shall take the form best suited to the needs of the committee (for example, the internal governance intranet or an MS Teams site). The repository shall contain at least the following documents:

- i. Current and previous terms of reference documents.
- ii. Current and previous standard operating procedure documents.

- iii. Current and previous guidelines, practice notes or recommendations developed by the committee.
- iv. Record of current and previous committee membership, including member attendance, apologies and absences.
- v. Agendas, minutes and supporting documentation pertaining to meetings, stored per year and then per meeting, to enable ease of access and searching.
- vi. Current and previous annual reports prepared for the EiRC and other bodies to which the REC reports.
- vii. Record of the training committee members have undertaken, when, the service provider and any additional or refresher training undertaken by committee members.

5. Availability of committee documentation

The following documentation shall be made available on a publicly accessible website, to keep the operations of the EiRC as transparent as is possible:

- i. Most recent or currently approved terms of reference
- ii. Contact details for the Chair and/or Servicing Officer so that queries may be directed appropriately.

6. Annual Reporting

a. Faculty oversight and reporting

The EiRC is appointed by the Senate, it is therefore accountable to Senate.

The committee shall make an annual report available to Senate. The report shall summarise the activities of the committee for the preceding year, including details of ethics applications per Faculty.

The EiRC shall provide a reporting template to the Faculty RECs to complete to streamline and harmonise the reporting practices across the institution. These reports are collated into the EiRC annual report by the Servicing Officer.

7. Remuneration of committee members

Members of the will not receive remuneration for their role on the EiRC.

Members may request a letter from the Secretariat, signed by the Chair, confirming the length and type of service on the committee to include in *ad hominem* promotion applications.

8. Authorship and acknowledgement

The template document for Faculty Terms of Reference (ToR) was developed by Mrs Paula Saner (Manager, Office of Research Integrity). Each Faculty has permission to edit and adjust the template to suit faculty needs and practices.

The EiRC Servicing Officer is responsible for populating the content of the document and for regularly reviewing it to ensure it remains up-to-date and relevant.

Thanks go to the internal audit team for recommendations for improving ethics governance structures at UCT through strengthening and harmonising (where possible) documentation and processes.

9. References

The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (1979), https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/sites/default/files/the-belmont-report-508c_FINAL.pdf.

National Health Research Ethics Council (2024) ***South African Ethics in Health Research Guidelines: Principles, Processes and Structures***, 3rd ed. National Department of Health of the Republic of South Africa. Pretoria: NDoH. 137p. ISBN 978-0-621-52027-9, <https://www.health.gov.za/nhrec-guidelines/>.

Updated terms of reference, using new template version 1.1, September 2024