



**EXCELSIA
COLLEGE**
Sydney - Australia

Document Name

**PROCEDURES FOR APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF A RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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Preamble

These procedures apply to all research conducted by Excelsia College staff and students, including honorary research fellows and associates, when their research projects are being done under the auspices of Excelsia College.

The Excelsia College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) must be notified of all research involving humans and **applicants must receive approval from the HREC before commencing research.**

Purpose of Ethical Scrutiny and Relevant Documents

Excelsia College makes provision for the review of all research that is conducted under its auspices and involves human participants. Such review arises from the College's values, and forms part of its obligations to the Australian Government, the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Australian Research Council. Excelsia College recognises its obligation to promote the responsible conduct of research.

Research and the furtherance of human knowledge is a foundational task of tertiary institutions, and Excelsia College is committed to the highest standards of professional conduct. Researchers at, or associated with, Excelsia College, are therefore expected to conduct their work in accordance with legislative requirements, recognised national and international ethical standards and the highest expectations of their disciplines.

Research involving humans includes, but is not restricted to, the use and/or collection of personal, collective or cultural data from participants or from their records, and may include their oral testimony or observed cultural activities and the testing of responses to conditions devised by researchers as set out in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct In Human Research* (2007, updated 2013).

All applicants to the HREC are strongly advised to consult the *National Statement* which is available from <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e72> as it sets out the principles that apply to research involving human participants.

Another relevant document that should be consulted is the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, which is available at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/r39syn.htm>

The process of ethical scrutiny by the HREC seeks to minimise the risk of physical, mental and spiritual harm, danger and discomfort from research and its procedures. It aims to protect the welfare and rights of researchers, supervisors and research participants.

Although the preparation of a research proposal for the HREC takes considerable time and effort, this preparation not only minimises harm, but also strengthens the research itself by helping researchers clarify their goals, procedures and intended outcomes. Researchers are invited to discuss their research with members of the HREC before submitting their proposals: contact the Excelsia College Director of Research in the first instance.

Stages of Research Scrutiny

There is a two-tier process for assessing the ethical aspects of research proposals at Excelsia College. First, all applications are considered by the Risk Assessment sub-committee of the HREC. The sub-committee determines its category of risk, as required by the *National Statement*. If the application has already been assessed by a funding body or via a Confirmation of Candidature process for PhD students, the initial questions of risk and merit may have been addressed. In these cases the HREC Risk Assessment sub-committee will refer the application to the second stage of assessment. The second stage is where the application is assessed for ethical concerns. Proposals deemed to be negligible or low risk are assessed by the HREC sub-committee, but all other proposals are assessed in the second stage by the full HREC.

Proposals that are likely to be assessed at stage 2 by the HREC Risk Assessment sub-committee are those involving:

- the use of existing collections of data or records that contain only non-identifiable data about human beings, e.g., historical records or previously collected data from anonymous surveys;
- published works of scholars or materials in the public domain;
- negligible risk of harm to those involved, e.g., where the likely risk is no more than inconvenience, such as an impersonal, brief survey.

Proposals that are likely to require assessment at stage 2 by the full HREC are those involving:

- projects for which application for external funding has or will be made
- projects which propose to observe living persons' actions or to ascertain their views, beliefs or attitudes
- projects which have the potential to raise issues of duty of care, including researcher self-care
- projects which involve searching records from which may be ascertained the views, beliefs, attitudes or actions of living persons or of persons who have died within the last 50 years
- projects which have the potential for infringing the rights, privacy or confidentiality of participants.

In particular, researchers are asked to seek advice about their ethics applications if their research involves

- therapies or clinical trials or similar interventions
- children
- women who are pregnant
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- culturally and linguistically diverse people
- people highly dependent on medical care who may be unable to give consent
- people with a cognitive impairment, an intellectual disability, or a mental illness
- topics that may cause distress to participants due to past traumatic experiences
- limited disclosure involving active concealment and/or planned deception
- study or exposure of illegal activity, or research that is likely to discover illegal activity
- research that could jeopardise a participant's employment
- research that poses a risk to the physical or emotional safety or welfare of a student researcher.

Applying for Ethical Approval of Research

- a. Complete the Research Ethics Proposal Form. Please keep to word limits, use 'lay', jargon-free language, and answer each question in accordance with these guidelines. Ensure the application form is signed by you and your (principal) supervisor, and includes all necessary attachments.
- b. Send a scanned, signed copy and six hard copies to the Ethics Officer. Make sure the copies are received at least two weeks before the scheduled date of the HREC Risk Assessment sub-committee meeting [see webpage or ask the Ethics Officer for the schedule]. Late applications will be deferred to the next HREC Risk Assessment sub-committee meeting.
- c. The HREC Risk Assessment sub-committee will assess the proposal's academic merit and level of risk. Academic merit will be assessed on the basis of your summary of the research project where research aims or hypotheses, relevant theory, research methods and potential impact of the research are presented. Level of risk is assessed according to the criteria for negligible risk, low risk, and all higher risk proposals specified at point 2 above.
- d. Where the proposal is deemed to be of academic merit and negligible or low risk it will then be assessed for ethical approval by the HREC Risk Assessment sub-committee.
- e. Where the proposal is deemed to lack clear academic merit and/or the proposal cannot be assessed for risk, a revision addressing specific points of concern or clarification will be requested. This revision may be submitted to the next HREC Risk Assessment sub-committee meeting.
- f. Where the proposal is deemed to be of academic merit and to hold more than low risk, it will be referred to the full HREC for ethical evaluation. The full HREC will meet no more than two weeks after the sub-committee meeting.
- g. Feedback will be given within ten days of the HREC Risk Assessment sub-committee meeting, and also within ten days of the full HREC meeting if the proposal is so referred. Feedback will be in the form of an e-mail from the Ethics Officer specifying whether the proposal has been
 1. granted ethical approval, or
 2. granted ethical approval subject to minor amendments to be made to the satisfaction of the HREC Chair, or
- h. not granted ethical approval but requiring resubmission.
- i. In cases 1 and 2, a unique HREC approval number will be given. This number must be cited in correspondence about the research, including letters concerning consent and other participant information.
- j. In cases 2 and 3, where a change or resubmission is required, as much information as possible will be given in writing from the HREC Chair (or representative).
- k. **Researchers must not proceed with their research, including recruitment of participants, without written approval from the HREC.**

Special Cases for Research Approval

a. Research involving children

Researchers who plan to involve children as research participants should read carefully chapter 4.2 of the *National Statement*. In particular, issues of vulnerability of children and young people, and their capacity to give consent (in part or fully) to research participation must be considered.

Applications to the HREC for research involving children must include satisfaction of requirements for meeting the new *Working With Children Check* for all researchers having direct physical or face-to-face contact with children as part of the research project; further information can be found at www.newcheck.kids.nsw.gov.au

b. Research in state schools

Where research involves students in NSW State schools, researchers should consult the *State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP) Guidelines 2014* available from the Department of Education and Communities website https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/research/serap_contacts.htm. In order to finalise applications for consent to undertake research in NSW State Schools, researchers must provide evidence of ethical approval from their own institution (e.g. the Excelsia College HREC) as well as submitting their proposal through the SERAP online process.

In general, student researchers at Honours or Masters level are likely to find that the time taken to obtain approval for research in state schools is not appropriate for students with tight deadlines for theses (see SERAP p. 11). Hence, students at Excelsia College are advised to avoid research in NSW State schools unless they are enrolled in a PhD program. Staff members wishing to undertake research involving students in State schools should comply with processes for ethical approval at this College as well as the SERAP processes.

References Consulted

MCD University of Divinity *Guidelines for Application for Ethical Approval of a Research Project* 11.05.12

UWS Guidelines relating to human ethics http://www.uws.edu.au/research/researchers/ethics/human_ethic