HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Research Ethics Advisors Role and Responsibilities

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

To assist researchers to design and conduct human research of the highest standard and to streamline the processes for obtaining approval from the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), Research Ethics Advisors (REAs) will be located in Colleges/Schools where human research is undertaken.

# 2.0 APPOINTMENT

It is expected that one (1) to three (3) REAs will be appointed from each College, proportional to the volume of human research conducted by staff and students from respective Colleges/Schools.

REAs will be appointed in consultation with their respective PVC following a call for expressions of interest from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) or delegate.

# ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be effective in their role, a REA candidate should meet the following criteria:

* + - Be a member of academic staff;
    - Have experience in conducting human research that is relevant to the major research activities of the College/School;
    - Be senior enough, or have sufficient experience within the College/School, to enable them to speak authoritatively on research ethics issues in that academic unit, and to represent it in University-level consultations on human research ethics issues;
    - Have significant knowledge, or ability to rapidly develop such knowledge, of the principles of ethical conduct in research, external regulatory frameworks, and the University’s research ethics arrangements;
    - Be committed to facilitating excellent and ethical research, and contributing to the delivery of services to other researchers;
    - Be capable of providing advice to students and staff on research ethics matters; and
    - Be capable of conducting presentations and workshops on research ethics matters, in collaboration with the Research Integrity Unit.

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

With the support of the HREC and the Research Integrity Unit each REA will undertake the following:

* + - Be the first point of contact for advice to researchers on the ethical design and conduct of human research;
    - Provide assistance to applicants in responding to issues identified by the HREC and facilitate communication between their College/School and the HREC;
    - Conduct at least one (1) seminar or workshop per year for their academic area on research ethics matters;
    - Contribute to the development and refinement of the University’s policies on human research ethics;
    - Be a member of the HREC and review Low Risk Research and More than Low Risk Research applications for ethics approval; and
    - Participate in at least one (1) training workshop for REAs per year.

It is estimated that REAs will need to devote an average of one (1) day per week to these responsibilities. At the discretion of a College/School it may be possible for two academics to share one REA position.

# Advice to researchers

The REA will be the first point of contact for researchers within a College/School for human research, beyond consultation with guidelines and reference material provided on the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics website and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*. The REA will offer advice, suggestions or guidance to researchers on the ethical design and conduct of their proposed research. This advice should be based on that reference material, relevant regulations and legislation, and an understanding of the principles of ethical conduct in the broad disciplinary area.

# Assistance to applicants for ethics approval

If the HREC requires an applicant for ethics approval to provide further information or make amendments before approval can be granted, the applicant will be encouraged to consult a REA in their respective College/School for assistance. This will:

* + - provide a local level of advice and assistance to researchers;
    - enable the College/School to be aware of common problems with applications from the area;
    - enable the College/School to raise concerns with the HREC on any perceived problems with the implementation of the University’s research ethics arrangements; and
    - facilitate greater communication between Colleges/Schools and the HREC.

# Research ethics seminars and workshops

The REAs within a College/School should conduct seminars or workshops for their academic area on research ethics matters. Such presentations should target students and both new and experienced supervisors and researchers. Each REA should conduct at least one such workshop per year. Colleges/Schools are encouraged to include research ethics training in the design of research training programs they conduct.

# Policy development

REAs will have an important role in the ongoing development and refinement of the University’s research ethics arrangements. There will be consultation with all REAs as new policies and procedures are developed. In addition, REAs are encouraged to raise comments, concerns or suggestions about the operation of the University’s arrangements to inform their review and to ensure that they meet the needs of their College/School.

# Membership of the HREC

REAs will serve as members on the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). These REAs represent broad academic disciplinary groupings in Colleges and Schools. In addition to the above roles and responsibilities, each REA will:

* + - Attend scheduled meetings of the HREC;
    - Be one of the principal reviewers for full review More than Low Risk Research applications for ethics approval from researchers in their academic grouping and “lead” the discussion of the applications at HREC meetings;
    - Be one of the two (2) members of the *HREC Pre-Review Panel* for Low Risk Research applications from their academic grouping;
    - Facilitate communication and collaboration with and between the REAs of their academic grouping and the HREC; and
    - Otherwise participate in the work of the HREC.

# 5.0 RESOURCING AND SUPPORT

The Human Research Ethics Officer (HREO) will be the contact point for REAs on policy questions and issues. The HREO will co-ordinate annual training for REAs and provide resources (such as template power point presentations and handouts) to assist REAs in their work.

A meeting of all REAs will be held at least once per year.

# 6.0 RECOGNITION

The workload for REAs is expected to be equivalent to approximately one (1) day per week and this will be included in the Academic Workload Model. Colleges and Schools are asked to support this formal recognition of the significant contribution of REAs to the conduct of research in their area, the important role of fostering quality research within the University, and the service and academic leadership provided by their REA.

# REPORTING

REAs will be asked to report as follows:

* + - Provide a brief annual report and feedback on their activities, including training workshops conducted and the time required to undertake REA activities.
    - When reviewing More than Low Risk Research applications, provide pre review comments to the Human Research Ethics Office within five (5) working days from the date of request; and
    - If reviewing Low Risk Research expedited applications, provide comments to the Human Research Ethics Office within one (1) week.

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