

Terms of Reference
Faculty of Science Research Ethics Committee (FSREC)

Title	Terms of Reference, Faculty of Science Research Ethics Committee (REC)
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Person(s) responsible for drafting, review and revision	FSREC Chair, Servicing Officer
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Approval route	Faculty of Science REC Send to Senate Ethics in Research Committee (EiRC, for noting)
Approving body	Faculty of Science Board
Relevant related policies, procedures and guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard Operating Procedure, Faculty of Science Research Ethics Committee • UCT Policy for Responsible Conduct of Research • UCT Research Ethics Code for Research Involving Human Participants • 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, Faculty of Science Research Ethics Committee (FSREC) *updated 24th Feb 2025*

1. Purpose

To provide guidance on appropriate procedures for the review and clearance of research originating in the Faculty of Science. To support and promote research integrity in the Faculty of Science, premised on an awareness that principles related to research integrity, including definition of possible harms to research participants, must be considered with sensitivity to relevant social, historical and epistemic contestation.

2. Delegated authority of the committee

The Faculty of Science Research Ethics Committee (FSREC) has been established to review and take decisions on ethics applications it receives from the Faculty of Science staff and students. The Faculty of Science REC has been granted this authority by the Dean of the Faculty of Science, and the Faculty of Science.

Furthermore, the Dean and Faculty of Science recognise the independence of the Faculty of Science REC to make decisions within the scope of its terms of reference, standard operating procedure, institutional policies and international and national laws, with no undue influence or interference placed on the committee.

3. Membership

a. Composition

Collectively, the committee should include sufficient members with the necessary qualifications and experience, including research ethics training, to be able to review applications for clearance based on the science and research ethics, from the perspectives of the anticipated research participants, the researcher, and the university. REC members are expected to familiarise themselves with the institutional documentation as well as the national and international research ethics guidelines. They are expected to provide documented proof of such familiarity in the form of training certificates, and to update this documentation once every four years.

The composition of the committee (not including the Chair) is to be represented as follows, based on the proportion of applications typically received from each department:

- The Department of Computer Science to be represented by two (2) members.
- The Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences to be represented by three (3) members.
- The Department of Biological Sciences to be represented by one (1) member.
- The Department of Statistical Sciences to be represented by one (1) member.
- All other departments to be collectively represented by at least one member.
- Optionally membership can include one (1) external representative of communities where research is conducted.

Additionally, committee composition should take the following into consideration:

- Members without a PhD should have experience in conducting research with human participants.
- Members are expected to complete the Research Integrity training provided by the Office of Research Integrity.
- Membership may include researchers who do not typically do research with human data.

b. Servicing Officer

The Servicing Officer shall be appointed by the Dean.

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.
- Providing a preliminary review (for completeness) of applications received and moving them through the electronic Research Administration (eRA) system to undergo review, and then to the Exco for a final decision to be taken.
- Updating eRA to record decisions taken by the committee.

c. Term of office

Committee members will be appointed for a period of 3 years (as per Faculty General Rules and Procedures). Committee members shall be permitted to serve two (2) consecutive terms, following which they are not eligible for further membership until at least one year lapsed.

Committee members who take contact leave or sabbatical may be replaced temporarily for the duration of their leave or replaced with a new member at the discretion of the Chair and the Dean. Temporary committee members are still required to complete Research Integrity training.

d. Letters of appointment

Committee members shall be provided with letters of appointment issued by the Dean. 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 Faculty of Science.

Letters of appointment shall include the following information:

- Name of individual.
- Position they will hold in 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 REC, 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 REC activities, including review of applications received and, a commitment to acting in accordance with the REC Code (as per 3.m. below).

e. Appointment of a Chair

A Chairperson, suitably qualified, will be appointed by the Dean of the Faculty of Science for a period of three years, renewable twice. Ideally the Chairperson should have previously served as a member of the FSREC.

f. Duties of the REC Chair

The Chair of the REC 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 and the accompanying standard operating procedure.

The Chair will also be responsible for:

- In collaboration with the Servicing Officer, facilitate assignment of reviewers to applications, and overseeing progress of application processing.
- Reviewing and finalising decisions made on applications.
- Reviewing responses to the pre-screening questionnaire and determining whether applications are exempt from ethics review or need to proceed with a full ethics application. (This task may also be shared with designated Departmental Authorities.)
- Representing the Faculty of Science in the Ethics in Research Committee (EiRC).
- Reviewing and signing off on annual reports to the EiRC and other institutional bodies.
- 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, including reporting of these activities to the EiRC.
- In collaboration with the Servicing Officer, ensure that action items identified in meetings are attended to and completed by the responsible persons.

g. Election of a Deputy Chair(s)

The Chairperson should be assisted by at least one Deputy Chairperson. The Deputy Chair is elected during a committee meeting which has achieved quorum by a majority vote of the members present.

h. Duties of the REC Deputy Chair(s)

The Deputy Chair is expected to assist the Chairperson with responsibilities and inter-meeting matters, as well as to step into the role of Chairperson when necessary.

i. Executive Committee

The Executive Committee (EXCO) consists of the Chair, Deputy Chair, and one other member of the committee, who is elected during a committee meeting which has achieved quorum by a majority vote of the members present.

j. Duties of committee members

- Attendance at 80% of the meetings per year.
- Review of applications assigned.
- When designated by the EXCO, make recommendations on outcomes of applications.
- In cases of contact or sabbatical leave, work with the Chair and the Dean to identify a suitable replacement.
- Ensure training certificates are up to date.

k. Training requirements

New members of the committee undergo induction training on use of the ethics application system (eRA) and on research ethics (Success Factors website). Refresher training and new certificates should be submitted every four years.

All committee members are required to complete the Research Integrity modules provided by ORI on Success Factors, and to read the relevant UCT Research Integrity policies available on the ORI website.

This includes:

- 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
- 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

Attendance of organized REC training meetings (e.g. EiRC Workshop or Western Cape Research Ethics Committee workshop) is highly recommended for all committee members and will serve as refresher training.

l. Membership list

The membership list shall be kept up to date by the committee's Servicing Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Faculty of Science Deanery.

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

m. Conduct of committee members

Members of the Faculty of Science REC 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, a Vula site 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.
- viii. A summary table of project applications received with their outcomes¹.
- ix. All research projects received².
- x. All outcomes' letters and/or other communications sent to applicants².
- xi. Any incidents or deviations from ethics practices or policies which have been reviewed by the committee.

5. Availability of committee documentation

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

- i. Most recent or currently approved terms of reference
- ii. Most recent or currently approved standard operating procedures
- iii. Most recent or currently approved guidelines, practice notes, recommendations, how-to/user manuals for the eRA system
- iv. A link to the eRA system for applications
- v. Contact details for the Chair and/or Servicing Officer so that queries may be directed appropriately, this may be a shared committee email account.

6. Accountability, oversight, and reporting

a. *Annual Reporting*

Faculty oversight and reporting

The Faculty of Science REC is appointed by the Faculty of Science Dean, it is therefore accountable to Faculty Board.

The committee shall make an annual report available to the Faculty of Science Dean and the Faculty Board. The report shall summarise the activities of the committee for the preceding year, including the number of ethics project applications received, those approved or rejected and, reasons for rejection.

¹ As more committees make use of eRA this requirement will fall away as the system provides for this requirement

Reporting to the Senate Ethics in Research Committee (EiRC)

The REC is also accountable to the EiRC, the umbrella body of all Faculty and Departmental RECs across the institution.

The committee shall make an annual report available to the EiRC. The report shall summarise the activities of the committee for the preceding year, including the number of ethics project applications received, those approved or rejected and, reasons for rejection. The EiRC shall provide a reporting template to the Faculty REC to complete to streamline and harmonise the reporting practices across the institution.

b. Incident or deviation reporting

The REC shall report any incidents that deviate from ethics and integrity best-practice or institutional policy to the Faculty of Science Dean. The report shall include a summary of the incident, the deliberative process that REC engaged in to reach a decision, what that decision is, any remedial action recommended and the progress of the remedial action.

The REC shall have a standard operating procedure to manage and address any instances of ethical deviations or non-compliance with ethics regulations and policies.

Any incidents may also be reported to the EiRC, either at a regular committee meeting or in the annual report process, whichever route the Chair deems is most appropriate.

7. Remuneration of committee members

Members of the Faculty of Science REC will not receive remuneration for their role on the REC.

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 National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC) Ethics in Health Research Guidelines (2015) provided useful information which has been incorporated into this ToR document.

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.