



LOW RISK ETHICS COMMITTEE AND APPROVAL RULES

Responsible officer	Edwina Murphy, Director of Research
Contact	emurphy@actheology.edu.au
Approved by	Human Research Ethics Committee
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Superseded documents	
Related documents	Research Data Management Policy Report of Research Misconduct Ethics Protocol LREC Submissions and Outcomes Form

1. PURPOSE

To ensure that Low Risk College Ethics Committees set up by affiliated colleges to deal with low-risk research proposals are able to ensure that any human participant research conducted meets relevant scholarly standards; that those conducting human participant research are adequately experienced, qualified and supervised, and understand the need to assess risks to their own safety and that of participants; and to define the circumstances in which low-risk proposals are exempt from review.

2. DEFINITIONS

ACT is the *Australian College of Theology Limited*.

Affiliated College is an institution approved to offer an accredited higher education award of the ACT.

Coursework is work done by a student within a unit of study to a set curriculum and assessment schedule.

Low Risk Ethics Committees (LRECs) are ethics committees set up by **affiliated colleges** to deal with low-risk research proposals.

Ethics protocol is the name of the submission setting out the proposed research and including, as appropriate, recruiting information, interview and/or survey questions, participant information statements, consent forms, and other relevant material.

Graduate School of Research (GSR) is the division of **ACT** which oversees research and research training, managed by the **Director of Research** and overseen by the **Research Committee**.

HDR stands for Higher Degree by Research.

HREC is the Human Research Ethics Committee of the **ACT** which has the overall responsibility for ethics review of human participant research and, in particular, of HDR projects and of research involving more than low risk.



Human participant research is research that involves humans through such means as surveys, interviews, personal documents and information, observation, and psychological testing.

National Statement is the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023 of the **NHMRC**.

NHMRC stands for National Health and Medical Research Council.

3. SCOPE

All low-risk ethics research and Low Risk Ethics Committees of affiliated colleges.

4. RULES

Parameters of Low Risk Ethics Committees

4.1 Affiliated colleges may set up Low Risk Ethics Committees in accordance with the criteria set by HREC to assess Low Risk Ethics Protocols. However, all HDR Ethics Protocols, regardless of the level of risk, must be submitted to HREC.

4.2 Although circumstances will vary, examples of low-risk research may include:

- social science questionnaires on non-controversial, non-personal issues;
- observational studies in public situations which focus on non-sensitive issues;
- studies of existing de-identified data, documents, or records; and
- applications for approval of amendments to previously approved research protocols.

Note, however, that any of the above circumstances could, in some situations, become sensitive issues. Social, cultural, or religious issues related to any of the above examples might suggest the need for review by the HREC.

4.3 If there is any risk of harm (including psychological harm, devaluation of personal worth, cultural harm, and social harm), taking into account the likely participants, the research is not low risk and must be referred to HREC.

4.3 Any research involving children and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in their identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is not low risk and must be referred to HREC.

4.4 Affiliated colleges that establish an LREC must have the resources and capacity to carry out such review competently and professionally. That review must:

(a) be carried out by people who are familiar with the National Statement and have an understanding of:

- (i) the ethical issues that can arise in the research under review;



(ii) issues associated with the collection, use and management of data and information in research (see Chapter 3.1, Element 4 of the National Statement and the ACT Research Data Management Policy);

(iii) the privacy guidelines that may apply to the research under review;

(iv) other legal standards that may apply to the research under review, such as legislation relating to guardianship;

(b) be informed by guidance provided in other sections of the National Statement.

4.5 The Chair of HREC and the Director of Research may approve low risk research and report to the following HREC meeting.

Membership

4.6 Affiliated colleges who wish to establish an LREC must ensure that:

- members of that committee have relevant experience and/or expertise;
- members undertake appropriate induction;
- the ACT is notified of LREC membership and any changes to it, so that the information provided on the ACT website is correct;
- where possible, there should be a balance of men and women;
- where an HREC member is also on staff at an affiliated college, only one such HREC member can be on that college's committee;
- at least one member should be from outside the college; and
- there should be no less than three (3) members.

Induction

4.7 Initial induction of an affiliated college's ethics committee will be provided by HREC. No LREC will be given approval to undertake reviews of ethics protocols until they have completed the induction requirements.

4.8 New members of an established LREC should undergo induction training as soon as practicable. This may be the same as the initial induction training or an alternative option approved by the Director of Research and the Chair of HREC.

Training

4.9 Ongoing regular training once initial induction has been completed is encouraged. HREC will notify colleges of training opportunities such as those run by the NHMRC or other universities or providers. Members, including those of the HREC, are encouraged where possible to attend at least one training session every two years.



Applications

- 4.10 Applications for low-risk ethical review should provide sufficient information for the LREC to assess the research in accordance with the National Statement, using the HREC application form or a form approved by HREC.

Records and Reporting

- 4.11 LRECs should maintain a record of all research proposals received and reviewed, including at least:
- name of the student or affiliated college staff member;
 - title of the project;
 - correspondence between the proposer and the committee;
 - outcome of the committee's decision regarding the proposal;
 - expected time frame of the project;
 - terms and conditions, if any, of approval of any proposal; and
 - a copy of each research proposal and application for ethical approval, including any information sheets, consent forms or relevant correspondence, in the form in which they were approved.
- 4.12 LRECs should report the outcomes related to ethics proposals via the *LREC Submissions and Outcomes Form* accessible via the Graduate School of Research website.
- 4.13 LRECs are encouraged to submit all material related to the submission with the form.
- 4.14 The HREC may conduct audits of Low Risk Ethics Committees from time to time. If supporting material has not been submitted with the form, this may be requested by HREC.

Monitoring research

- 4.15 Researchers are required to report any adverse events immediately to their supervising college and to HREC. HDR candidates will also report on their research, including any concerns, through their Annual Progress Report to the ACT.
- 4.16 Participant Information Statements will provide the contact details of the ACT HREC so that participants may report any concerns.
- 4.17 Anyone may report a concern about human participant research through the contact form on the ACT website or may complete a *Report of Research Misconduct* available on the Graduate School of Research website.

Research Exempt from Review

- 4.18 Research that is conducted as part of an educational training program in which the research activity is for training purposes only and where any



outcomes or documentation are for program use only may be exempt from review if it is no more than low risk as defined by the **National Statement**, particularly Chapter 2.1.

4.19 In order to qualify for this exemption from review in the ACT context, research must:

4.19.1 **Be for training purposes only**

- Be part of a coursework unit (not a project);
- Not be published after completion of the research.

4.19.2 **Be no more than low risk**

For a full description, see the **National Statement**. The following is an indicative list, rather than an exhaustive one:

- Not involve people under 18 or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in their identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders;
- Present no risk of harm, which includes psychological harm, devaluation of personal worth, cultural harm, and social harm. Therefore, the research must not address personal issues likely to cause distress, such as abuse, sexual orientation or practices, etc;
- Not involve a significant power imbalance between the researcher and the participant(s), except in the case of anonymous surveys;
- In the case of observation, information must be collected and recorded without personal identifiers and should be highly unlikely to cause distress to anyone associated with the information or the outcomes of the research.

4.19.3 **Follow these ACT procedures**

- Questions used in semi-structured interviews or anonymous surveys must be approved by the academic staff member;
- Standard participant information statement and consent form templates (available from the GSR website) must be used where the participants are identifiable to the researcher;
- A standard template (available from the GSR website) must be used at the beginning of an anonymous online survey;
- If observation is undertaken in a semi-public setting (e.g. a church), official approval must be sought (e.g. from the pastor, church council, and/or small group leader) and participants verbally notified that the group is being observed (preferably in advance, so that they have the opportunity not to attend).

4.20 The submission of the unit to the moderation portal will state that the human participant research involved is Exempt from Review because it adheres to



the above guidelines. The unit coordinator will also upload the relevant ACT ethics templates as modified for use by students in the unit. If the moderator has any concerns about the research, they should contact ethics@actheology.edu.au before approving the unit.

4 RELATED LEGISLATION AND REFERENCES

[National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023](#)

5 VERSION HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Changes made
1	R&RSC	28 April 2017	28 April 2017	Formatted into new rules format
2	HREC	2 August 2021	2 August 2021	College Ethics Committees now Low Risk Ethics Committees (LREC) Inclusion of faculty researchers and student project researchers Induction process replaced by online training modules New LREC reporting form (Appendix 2)
3	HREC	5 March 2024	5 March 2024	Change of title from College Ethics Committee Rules; addition of Chair and DoR as LREC; incorporation of Research Exempt from Review; changes to forms; removal of appendices.

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