Policy Document Administrator	Edwina Murphy, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Policy Document Approver	Human Research Ethics Committee
Responsible Body/Person	Human Research Ethics Committee
Next Review date	May 2029
Superseded documents	LREC Submissions and Outcomes Form
Related documents	HREC Terms of Reference Research Data Management Policy Research Misconduct Procedure Report of Research Misconduct Ethics Protocol
Related HE Standards	4.1
Related National Code Standards	N/A

1. PURPOSE

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; to define the circumstances in which proposals are considered low-risk; and to define which of these low-risk proposals are exempt from review.

2. DEFINITIONS

Definitions for any words in **Bold** in this document can be found in the Policy Glossary. The first instance of each defined term has been outlined in bold.

3. SCOPE

All low-risk ethics research.

4. RULES

Parameters of Low Risk Ethics Approvals

4.1 The Chair of the **Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)** and the **Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) (DVC-R)** may approve low risk research, including that of affiliated staff and HDR candidates, and report to the following HREC meeting.

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 full HREC.

4.3 If there is any risk of participants experiencing more than discomfort, i.e. harm (including psychological harm, devaluation of personal worth, cultural harm, and social harm), taking into account the intended or likely participants, the research is not low risk and must be referred to the full HREC.

4.4 Similarly, answering yes to any other question in Section A of the Ethics Protocol (e.g., the research involves children and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) means that the research is not low risk and must be referred to the full HREC.

4.5 Answering yes to a question in Section B of the Ethics Protocol may require assessment by the full HREC. This will be determined by the Chair of HREC and the DVC-R.

Applications

4.6 Applications for low-risk ethical review should use the standard HREC application form.

Records and Reporting

4.7 Records of low-risk research proposals and approvals will be maintained in the same way as those which are more than low-risk.

Monitoring research

4.8 Research will be monitored in accordance with the HREC Terms of Reference.

Research Exempt from Review

4.9 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.

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

4.10.1 Be for training purposes only

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

4.10.2 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 real or perceived power imbalance

between the researcher and the participant(s), except in the case of anonymous surveys or where the participant would be perceived to have greater power than the researcher;

- 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.

4.10.3 Follow these AUT 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 Graduate School of Research [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).

4.11 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 AUT's ethics templates as modified for use by students in the unit. If the moderator has any concerns about the research, they should contact ethics@aut.edu.au before approving the unit.

5 RELATED LEGISLATION AND REFERENCES

National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2025

Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018

6 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; delegation to Chair and DoR to approve low risk research; incorporation of Research Exempt from Review; changes to forms; removal of appendices.
4	HREC	14 October 2024	14 October 2024	Affiliated staff research to be reviewed by HREC.
5	HREC	11 May 2025	1 January 2026	Removal of LRECs and related changes.

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