

## Human Ethics Policy - Research Involving Human Participants

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<b>Contact Person</b>	Secretary, Human Ethics Committee - Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

This Policy is Currently under Review

### Introduction

The Human Ethics Committee is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor. The Committee's function is to review proposals for research and teaching exercises that involve human participants in order to ensure that this work is conducted with appropriate regard for ethical standards and cultural values. All such research and teaching exercises are subject to review by the Committee unless they meet the criteria for departmental review as listed under Low Risk Applications (page 4), or an exemption as listed under Exemptions (page 3).

Applications for review and approval must be made on the form provided by the Committee, which may be obtained from the [Human Ethics website](#) at or from the Secretary, Okeover. Applicants should familiarise themselves with the Guidelines set out below. Assistance or advice concerning any points may be obtained from members of the Committee or the Secretary. The Committee endeavours to review applications as quickly as possible.

### The Rationale for Having a Human Ethics Committee

The University of Canterbury aims to promote excellent and ethical research. To this end a working party was set up by the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Canterbury in 1992, and this committee recommended that a Human Ethics Committee should be established (UC HEC).

The Human Ethics Committees are responsible to the Vice-Chancellor to ensure that researchers whose work involves human participants will conduct their work with appropriate regard for ethical principles and cultural values, and in accordance with the Treaty of Waitangi.

These principles and values include justice, safety, truthfulness, confidentiality and respect. Researchers must also take into account the evolving understandings of how those principles and values are expressed in a society at a particular time.

## **Policy Statement**

The purpose of research is to produce evolving understanding and information which may improve the situation of human beings. All research involving human participants should be conducted in accordance with ethical norms and be subject to ethical appraisal and approval of both its means and ends.

All such research must:

- have the informed consent of participants
- guarantee confidentiality of data and individuals
- avoid unnecessary deception,
- minimise risk to all participants
- be consistent with Treaty of Waitangi obligations.

All such research must be sensitive to the needs and characteristics of the participants. Researchers must recognise the power relationships involved in their work particularly where there are disparities related to age, race, culture, status, religion, class, gender or sexuality between researchers and participants, or where the persons involved belong to vulnerable groups in research such as young children, or people with mental illness or social disadvantage (refer section 6. Projects involving dependent persons, page 7).

There are occasions when funding agencies and other groups commissioning research require assurances that research projects have received ethical approval from an appropriate body. The Human Ethics Committees would provide such assurance.

In conclusion, the role of the Human Ethics Committees is to provide protection for all participants in the research activity, including the researchers themselves. It must ensure that all researchers are aware of and seek guidance about the principles and values of ethical research involving human participants.

## **Guiding Principles:**

The guiding principles of the University of Canterbury regarding research and teaching exercises involving human participants are:

- a) Participation of a human subject in any research project, course work project, or teaching exercise must be voluntary.
- b) Information provided to gain the consent of participants must be adequate and appropriate.

- c) Any deception or departure from the standard of **fully informed consent** must be justified in terms of its necessity to the scientific aims of the project.
- d) Confidentiality of information is to be assured at all stages of a project.
- e) Risk of harm to participants must be minimised.
- f) Projects must accord with legal requirements such as those of the Privacy Act.
- g) Research must demonstrate respect for the participant. It should be sensitive to the needs of the participants, such as age, gender/sexuality, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability or social class.
- h) Projects must accord with the Treaty of Waitangi.
- i) Projects involving human participants must be carried out and supervised by suitably qualified personnel. Research must meet appropriate scientific and scholarly standards.
- j) Conflict of interest should be avoided or declared.
- k) Research may be critical of public persons, institutions or organisations where benefits to society as a whole are considered to outweigh individual harms so that the role of critic and conscience of society can be fulfilled.

## Procedures:

Projects requiring review and approval by the UC HEC include:

- a) any research or teaching activity in which **persons** are subjected to experimental procedures or observation or questioning or otherwise used as a source of information or data.
- b) research which draws on personal information which is not currently in the public domain accessed from artefacts such as documents or computer records that has been collected for other purposes than the research. Personal information means any information about an individual who may be identifiable from the data once it has been recorded in some lasting and usable format.
- c) Projects which require approval from an appropriate medical ethics committee such as a Health and Disability Ethical Committee (HDEC) or the National Ethics Committee on Assisted Human Reproduction. A copy of the HDEC application form sent to that Committee must be sent to the Chair of the UC HEC for approval. Applicants must also complete a separate UC HEC application.

## Exemptions

In some cases, research activities may not require UC HEC approval and may be eligible for an exemption. In the first instance, those seeking an exception need to contact the UC HEC.

If an exemption is agreed to, then responsibility for facilitating exempt activities rests with either the researcher if a staff member, or with the responsible staff member if a student, and always with the written agreement of the HOD/S and *must* conform to this Policy.

Activities exempt from review and which do not require UC HEC approval or notifications are:

1. Projects for which blanket approval has been approved by the UC HEC (See Blanket Approval section below).
2. Research conducted by UCTL, the Students' Association or other Departments for the purpose of evaluating educational practices or courses.
3. Interviews conducted as teaching assignments by students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Journalism.
4. Case studies of business organisations and institutions unless the project involves gathering personal information of a sensitive nature about or from individuals.

### **Low Risk Applications**

Low risk applications are defined as involving the same risk as might be encountered in normal daily life.

Projects which meet low risk criteria are firstly reviewed and approved by departments/schools, but also require a final review and approval by the UC HEC.

The following project categories will be considered:

Masters theses, Masters level supervised projects undertaken as part of specific course requirements, Undergraduate and Honours class research where the project does not raise any issue of deception, threat, invasion of privacy, mental, physical or cultural risk or stress, and do not involve gathering personal information of a sensitive nature about or from individuals.

No project, regardless of level, will be considered as low risk if it involves any of the following:

- invasive physical procedures or potential for physical harm;
- procedures which might cause mental/emotional stress or distress, moral or cultural offence;
- personal or sensitive issues;
- vulnerable groups;
- Tangata Whenua;
- cross cultural research;
- investigation of illegal behaviour/s;
- invasion of privacy;
- collection of information that might be disadvantageous to the participant;
- use of information already collected that is not in the public arena which might be disadvantageous to the participant;

- use of information already collected which was collected under agreement of confidentiality;
- participants who are unable to give informed consent;
- conflict of interest e.g. the researcher is also the lecturer, teacher, treatment-provider, colleague or employer of the research participants, or there is any other power relationship between the researcher and the research participants;
- deception;
- audio or visual recording without consent;
- withholding benefits from “control” groups;
- inducements; and
- risks to the researcher

*(The list above is not definitive but it is intended to inform the researcher about the types of issues to be considered).*

### **Low Risk Research Approval**

Departments or Schools will undertake the first stage of approval of projects that meet low risk criteria.

1. Staff involved must sign a declaration that students undertaking the research projects:
  - are being made fully aware of the need for and the requirement of seeking UC HEC approval for all research involving human participants,
  - are conversant with the procedures involved in making such an application,
  - have individually filled in the required applications submitted to the staff responsible for the student project.
2. A low risk application form should be filled out and forwarded to the secretary of the UC HEC. Attachments should include the information and consent forms that will be used, which need to include the following statement:

***“This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department/School of [insert text] and the UC HEC Low Risk ethics process.***

(Please include the following complaints statement on your application).

***Complaints should be addressed to:  
The Chair  
UC Human Ethics Committee  
University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800, CHRISTCHURCH  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)***

3. A second stage of review will be undertaken by the Chair of the UC HEC (or their designate) before final approval can be made.

## Blanket Approval

Blanket approval will not be granted for any research project that involves any participants or procedures listed under Low Risk Applications above. Such projects will require UC HEC approval.

Blanket approval may be sought for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate class research or projects related to specific courses and/or field trips, which pose no threat to the well-being of the participants and where the methodology and its ethical implications is similar for all the projects.

- a) The staff member responsible for the project may seek approval for the whole class based on a single application to the UC HEC in the first year.
- b) This approval should be valid for three years if there is no substantial change in the project during this period. For the fourth year, a new application can be made seeking approval for a further three years and so on.
- c) The staff member responsible for the project should be asked to sign a declaration that the students:
  - undertaking those research projects are being made fully aware of the need for and the requirement of seeking UC HEC approval for all research involving human participants, and
  - are conversant with the procedures involved in making such an application.

Blanket Approval applications are made using the [Application for Review and Approval form](#) and sent to the Secretary, Human Ethics Committee, Okeover. Applications should include consent forms and relevant supporting documentation as appropriate.

- Projects requiring review may be initiated only after the Committee has given its approval.
- Retrospective approval of projects that have already begun will not be granted.
- Failure to gain approval may affect funding and publication decisions.

## Guidelines

Five primary principles underlie this Policy:

1. Informed and voluntary consent
2. Respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality
3. Limitation of deception

4. Minimisation of risk
5. Obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi

Researchers and teachers should take account of those principles in planning their projects and preparing their proposals. Where research varies from these principles a detailed justification must be included in the UC HEC application. Some implications of the principles are indicated below.

## **1 Informed Consent**

- 1.1 Prospective participants must be made fully aware of the nature of the research, so that they can make an informed decision whether to participate.
- 1.2 Participants must also be made aware of their right to decline to participate in the research, and to withdraw from it at any time (including withdrawal of information they have provided).
- 1.3 It is normally desirable that information be given, and consent obtained, in written form; but it is recognized that in certain cases this may not be appropriate or necessary.
- 1.4 Where a project involves solely an anonymous questionnaire, written consent need not be obtained provided that participants are clearly informed that completion of the questionnaire implies consent (see Appendix C).
- 1.5 Participation must not be obtained through coercion of any sort, or inducement beyond reasonable compensation for participation.
- 1.6 In some research involving groups of persons, it may be necessary to obtain consent from leaders of the group, as well as from its members.
- 1.7 Where prospective participants are not capable of giving informed consent to their own participation (as in the case of young children or persons with impairment and disabilities), this must be obtained from other appropriate persons.

## **2 Privacy and Confidentiality**

- 2.1 Participants have an absolute right to privacy and confidentiality, and they must be invited to exercise this right.
- 2.2 The identification of participants must not occur without their consent, and steps must be taken to see that their identities cannot be known by unauthorised persons.
- 2.3 Confidentiality of the information provided by participants must be ensured, and steps must be taken to see that it cannot be known by unauthorised persons.
- 2.4 In practical terms, researchers are responsible for the safekeeping of consent forms and the secure storage or destruction of information that may enable participants to be identified. See the UC Research and Intellectual Property policies in the Policy Library.
- 2.5 Where transcription will be carried out by a person(s) other than the researcher a confidentiality agreement should be made with the transcribers and participants made aware of this.

### **3. Limitation of Deception**

- 3.1 Deception of participants is allowed only when it is shown to be appropriate and necessary for the success of the project.
- 3.2 As soon as possible following completion of a project where deception has occurred, participants must be provided with an explanation of the true purpose of the project and of the need for the deception, and should then be given the opportunity to withdraw from participation in the project (See 8.3 below). Researchers also have an obligation to be available after participants have participated in the project should any stress, harm or other concerns arise.

### **4. Minimisation of Risk**

- 4.1 Researchers must endeavour to minimise any risks attendant on participation; such risks include pain, stress, emotional distress, embarrassment, and moral or cultural offence.
- 4.2 Prospective participants must be informed of any potential risks at the time when informed consent is sought, and should also be consulted to ascertain any potential risks they may foresee.

### **5. Obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi**

In order to give effect to the University's obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi, researchers whose projects raise ethnic issues involving a significant proportion of Maori participants or issues which are of central concern to Maori should pay particular attention to the following:

- 5.1 The need to consult with an appropriate Maori body and, if necessary, to obtain permission for access to participants and to carry out the research.
- 5.2 The need to recognise Maori attitudes to ownership of information which they supply.
- 5.3 The need of obtaining advice from Maori Research via Research & Innovation at an early stage of planning a project which is intended to involve a significant number of Maori participants.
- 5.4 All researchers whether their research is health related or not, are referred to the Health Research Council Guidelines for Researchers on Health Research Involving Maori 1998.

Applicants for UC Human Ethics Committee approval should bear in mind that the Committee will look for detailed evidence of consultation as appropriate to the research proposed.

### **6. Projects involving dependent persons**

When the participants in the research are children or other dependent persons, the following additional points should be observed.



- The consent of the dependent persons must be obtained as far as possible: they must not be required to participate against their will.
- The written informed consent of parents or of persons who are in loco parentis (teachers, guardians, caregivers) must normally also be obtained, and in some cases the consent of parents may be mandatory.
- Researcher/s need to be aware children are seen as having rights and that age appropriate consent is required, where possible in writing.

## **7. Teaching exercises or projects**

Where a teaching activity involves projects or exercises which require review and approval, the following guidelines apply.

- 7.1 The lecturer in charge of the activity must ensure that the students are acquainted with these principles and guidelines and that the projects or exercises are conducted in accordance with them.
- 7.2 In the case of undergraduate courses, the lecturer may apply for blanket review and approval. The application must provide full and adequate information regarding the students' projects or exercises, and evidence that students are acquainted with these principles and guidelines and will apply them. (See Section 4 above)
- 7.3 Normally postgraduate students must make their own applications for review and approval of their projects.

## **8. Communication with participants**

- 8.1 Information Sheets (on UC Letterhead) – must be written in plain language, which can be readily understood by those invited to participate. They should provide information concerning:
  - the identity of the researchers (and supervisors, if appropriate)
  - the course or degree for which the project is a requirement (where appropriate)
  - the aim of the project
  - the nature and duration of the participants' involvement
  - steps taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity
  - compensation for participation (if any)
  - risks of participation (if any)
  - subsequent tasks or procedures (if any)
  - the address of the researcher, supervisor if appropriate, and the UC Human Ethics Committee
  - In order to protect the researcher from unwarranted calls, home telephone numbers and addresses should not be given unless there is no alternative.

- Must state the project has been reviewed and approved by the UC Human Ethics Committee.

Consent forms – must indicate clearly that the subject:

- understands the information given on the Information Sheet;
- voluntarily consents to participate in the project;
- understands that he/she may withdraw at any time without penalty including withdrawal of information provided;
- agrees to publication of results, with the understanding that anonymity or confidentiality will be preserved;
- cover any special provisions such as waiver of confidentiality, publicly available storage of research material, or use of video and photographs;
- must state the project has been reviewed and approved by the UC Human Ethics Committee.

8.3 Debriefing Sheets – should include a detailed review of the purpose of the research in lay person’s terms and a clear explanation of why deception was necessary to achievement of the research aims. Any benefits to the person or other groups that might be created by successful completion of the research may be referred to and they should be given the opportunity to withdraw from the study without penalty if they are not satisfied with the explanation.

8.4 Summary of results – should be offered to participants when these become available at the end of the research.

## **9. Reconsideration of decisions of the Committee**

- a) An applicant who is dissatisfied with the Committee’s decision may request the UC HEC to reconsider the decision.
- b) Requests in writing for reconsideration should be addressed to the Secretary, UC HEC. Informal discussions of these matters may be initiated with members of the UC HEC, including the Chair.
- c) If approval is given for research, but there is deviation from the application, the approval may be withdrawn.
- d) In reconsidering the original decision, the UC HEC may seek and consider additional information.
- e) Complaints about research may be addressed to the UC HEC or the Research Committee or the Deputy Vice Chancellor.

## **Related Documents and Information**

- [Human Ethics Committee Application for Review and Approval](#)
- [Human Ethics Committee PhD and Staff, Low Risk Application Form](#)
- [Human Ethics Committee Application for Low Risk Research](#)

## Appendices

- Appendix A: Human Ethics Committee Terms of Reference
- Appendix B: Example Information Template
- Appendix C: Example Consent Template
- Appendix D: Example Rubric for an Anonymous Questionnaire

### Please Note:

These Appendices contain points to consider when constructing the information sheet and consent form, and are a rubric for questionnaires.

The HEC appreciates that many projects will have special features which may necessitate the production of considerably different forms, but experience has shown that the following examples in the Appendices are quite generally applicable and indicate the items which are regarded as essential for best practice and due process.

It may be appropriate to change the language used to suit the audience.

## Notes

1. Please see the [Human Ethics website](#) for additional information and contact details for Committee members:
2. Applications for review and approval must be made on the form provided by the Committee, which may be obtained from the [Human Ethics website](#) or from the Secretary, Okeover House, Ilam campus. Applicants should familiarise themselves with the Guidelines of this policy. Assistance or advice concerning any points may be obtained from members of the Committee or the Chair. The Committee endeavours to review applications as quickly as possible.

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1.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversion of document onto new template and document pushed out.</li> <li>• AVC(R) changed to DVC(R) in line with current title</li> <li>• Hyperlinks updated</li> </ul>	Policy Unit	Aug 2013
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## Appendix A

### Human Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

The Human Ethics Committee (HEC) is a committee responsible to the AVC Research.

The University of Canterbury aims to promote excellent and ethical research. To this end a working party was set up by the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Canterbury in 1992, and this committee recommended that a Human Ethics Committee should be established (UC HEC). The Human Ethics Committees are responsible to the Vice-Chancellor to ensure that researchers whose work involves human participants will conduct their work with appropriate regard for ethical principles and cultural values, and in accordance with the Treaty of Waitangi. These principles and values include justice, safety, truthfulness, confidentiality and respect. Researchers must also take into account the evolving understandings of how those principles and values are expressed in a society at a particular time.

The HEC's function is to review proposals for research and teaching exercises that involve human participants, in order to ensure that this work is conducted with appropriate regards for ethical standards and cultural values.

All such research and teaching exercises are subject to review by the Committee unless they meet the criteria for departmental review as listed under **Low Risk Applications**, or an exemption as listed under **Exemptions**.

The terms of reference of the UC HEC include the evaluation of:

1. The need and worth of the research;
2. The validity of the design, procedures and methodology to be adopted, as they might impact on any ethical or legal considerations outlined in 3-5;
3. The protection of human rights and cultural values of the participants, including the obtaining of informed consent, and recognition of participants' right to decline;
4. The ownership and use of findings, and the procedures to protect personal and confidential information;
5. Any legal issues which might arise; and
6. The procedures for the effective monitoring of research.

## Appendix B Example Information Template

[This information sheet is the starting point for constructing an Information Sheet but needs to be modified to cover the specifics of each individual project].

### University of Canterbury Letterhead

Department of [*Name of Department*]

### INFORMATION

You are invited to participate as a subject in the research project [*name of project*].

The aim of this project is [*aim of project*].

Your involvement in this project will be [*description of tasks and procedures, and estimation of time required*], and the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided without penalty.

As a follow-up to this investigation, you will be asked to [*description of any subsequent involvement*].

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures there are risks of [*description of any risks foreseen and add mitigation undertaken*].

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will not be made public without their consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, [*description of steps taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality*].

The project is being carried out [*as a requirement for course or degree (where relevant)*] by [*name of principal researcher*] under the supervision of [*name of supervisor (where relevant)*], who can be contacted at [*telephone number(s)*]. He/she/they will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

The project has been reviewed **and approved** by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Appendix C  
**Example Consent Template**

Modification will be necessary when the consent is sought from a parent or caregiver to allow, e.g., a small child to participate in a project.

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**University of Canterbury & Departmental Letterhead**

*[Researchers Name]*

*[Contact Address]*

*[Date]*

CONSENT FORM

*[Name of Project]*

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate as a subject in the project, and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved.

I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

I note that the project has been reviewed **and approved** by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

NAME (please print): .....

Signature:

Date:

## Appendix D

**Example Rubric for an Anonymous Questionnaire (paper or web-based)**

In many cases, where standard published questionnaires are to be used, it may not be practicable to have the following rubric printed at the top of the questionnaire. In such cases the rubric may be replaced by a separate information sheet along the lines of the model shown in Appendix A, abbreviated if appropriate, so long as the various points included in the model rubric appear explicitly. In particular, if it is not necessary to obtain written consent, it must be made clear that completion of the questionnaire implies consent to participate.

The following model rubric assumes that there is no accompanying information sheet.

**University of Canterbury & Departmental Letterhead****QUESTIONNAIRE**

**[Name of project]**

**Please read the following note before completing the questionnaire.**

NOTE: You are invited to participate in the research project [*name of project*] by completing the following questionnaire. The aim of the project is [*description of aim*].

The project is being carried out [*as a requirement for course or degree (where relevant)*] by [*name of principal researcher*] under the supervision of [*name of supervisor (where relevant)*], who can be contacted at [*telephone number(s)*]. He/she/they will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

The questionnaire is anonymous, and you will not be identified as a participant without your consent.

You may withdraw your participation, including withdrawal of any information you have provided, until your questionnaire has been added to the others collected. Because it is anonymous, it cannot be retrieved after that.

**By completing the questionnaire it will be understood that you have consented to participate in the project, and that you consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved.**