

# Deakin University Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG)

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### PURPOSE

The Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) is responsible for the review of lower risk human research applications as per the terms of the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023](#) (the National Statement). The delegation of lower risk review to the HEAG is via Deakin's Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC), under the auspices of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation (DVCRI), as per the National Statement (NS) Chapter 5.1, 5.1.12.

### SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

1. The HEAG provides ethical review and monitoring of lower risk human research ethics applications conducted by Deakin staff and students, including those that may involve research collaborators external to the University, where Deakin is the lead institution.

### COMPOSITION OF THE HEAG

2. Membership of the HEAG will include:
  - a) Chairs, who are also members of DUHREC, and Deputy Chairs, who assist the Chairs. All Chairs are appointed by the DVCRI.
  - b) Reviewers, who are academic staff from Deakin's four faculties - Arts & Education; Business & Law; Health; and Science, Engineering and Built Environment (SEBE) - and appointed by the DVCRI.
3. HEAG reviewers are appointed by the DVCRI, in consultation with the HEAG Chair and the reviewer's Head of School/Institute. The usual term of appointment is 2 years, however members may be re-appointed for additional term/s subject to review by the Chair/Deputy Chair and re-appointment by the DVCRI.
4. The Research Ethics team will provide administrative support to the HEAG including preparation of emails to reviewers, Chairs and researchers.

### FUNCTIONS

5. Applications will be reviewed by a minimum of 2 reviewers.
6. Reviewers will assess applications deemed lower risk by the Principal Investigator and will determine whether such applications meet the criteria for research involving no risk of harm, as per the NS Chapter 2.1 and page 110.
7. Where proposals meet the criteria for lower risk research, reviewers will consider the ethical acceptability and implications of such proposals, and determine whether they comply with the NS and other relevant legislation e.g. Privacy Act and guidelines e.g. the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018](#) (the Code).
8. Where applications are deemed to be greater than lower risk research, according to NS Chapter 2.1, 5.1.11, they will be referred to DUHREC for review.
9. The Research Ethics Office will support the HEAG to monitor progress and document the completion of HEAG-approved research projects.
10. Potential breaches, complaints, adverse incidents, events or reactions relating to HEAG-approved research projects will be referred to the Research Ethics office for investigation. Research integrity

issues/concerns are to be referred to the faculty Research Integrity Adviser (RIA) or Research Integrity team via [research-integrity@deakin.edu.au](mailto:research-integrity@deakin.edu.au) .

11. HEAG Chairs will report on HEAG matters via the Ethics Chairs meetings, DUHREC agenda and DUHREC meetings as needed/required. Reporting of HEAG projects will be managed by the Research Ethics Office with an annual report included in the DUHREC Agenda.
12. The HEAG will provide accurate records in a timely fashion as requested by the DUHREC Executive to facilitate an audit as described in paragraph 36 of the [DUHREC Terms of Reference](#).
13. To promote understanding of Human Research Ethics within the HEAG by acknowledging accepted community standards and the legislation and guidelines in relation to human research (see paragraph 6 above).

#### **HEAG DECISIONS AND PROCESSES**

14. HEAG members assigned to review proposals confirm that the research is lower risk, and are responsible for assessing if the application meets the requirements of the NS, is compliant with any other relevant guidelines and legislation, and is ethically acceptable.
15. The HEAG confirms that each research application submitted for review meets the criteria for lower risk research (as per NS Chapter 2.1 and page 110) and the [Human Research Ethics Procedure](#).
16. To fulfil their responsibilities, each member of the HEAG should become familiar with the NS and consult other guidelines or legislation relevant to the review of specific research applications.
17. After reviewing an application, each HEAG member will determine whether to recommend:
  - a) Approval
  - b) Approval subject to amendments/clarifications
  - c) Resubmission required (i.e. where a new or significantly revised application is required due to extensive amendments) or
  - d) Referral to DUHREC (as the proposal does not meet the criteria for lower risk research).
18. Where reviewer recommendations about a research proposal differ, the HEAG Chair/Deputy Chair will be the final decision maker.
19. Decisions of the HEAG must be clearly communicated to researchers as promptly as possible and include reasons for its decision. Where relevant, reference to the NS should be included, for instance where an application is judged not to be compliant with a section of the guidelines.
20. The HEAG operates on a rolling review basis with proposals considered by circulation. HEAG reviewers are asked to notify the Research Ethics Office in advance if they are unavailable to review applications due to planned absence/leave.

#### **HEAG MEETINGS**

21. The HEAG may hold an annual meeting for the purpose of addressing emerging issues and providing continuing education and training to reviewers. The meeting will be documented as minutes by the Research Ethics team. Minutes will be circulated to Chairs and reviewers for their reference and may be requested as part of the scheduled audit process undertaken by DUHREC.

#### **INDUCTION & TRAINING**

22. Induction training will be provided by the Research Ethics Office.

23. HEAG reviewers are required to attend continuing education or training in human research ethics (NS 5.1.26 c i, ii) at least every three years, for example attending HEAG Induction training (prior to commencing reviewing), observing a DUHREC meeting, attending a Victorian Ethics Network (VEN) seminar etc.

#### **HEAG DOCUMENTATION/RECORD KEEPING**

24. The HEAG will comply with the NS requirements for documentation/record keeping (NS 5.2.15-5.2.20).

#### **REQUIREMENTS OF MEMBERSHIP**

25. HEAG Chair and Deputy Chair are appointed by the DVCRI for 2 years following an expression of interest process relating to a position description. Selection panels for HEAG Chair and Deputy Chair should include the DUHREC Chair/Deputy Chair, a member of the Research Ethics Office and a faculty representative (e.g. faculty Executive Dean/Associate Dean Research). The Deputy HEAG Chair will provide support to the HEAG Chair and act as Chair when required (e.g., due to absence/leave or resignation of the Chair).
26. Members must declare any perceived, potential, or actual conflicts of interest that relate to the review of an ethics application. Where an actual conflict exists, the application will be reallocated to another member of the HEAG for review. Where a perceived, or potential conflict of interest exists, the reviewer may be allowed to continue their review at the discretion of the HEAG Chair/Deputy Chair.
27. Members must maintain the confidentiality of all HEAG proceedings.
28. Members may resign from the HEAG by notifying the Chair or Research Ethics Office in writing.

#### **RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER RESEARCH REVIEW PROCESSES**

29. DUHREC has oversight of the ethics review process of the HEAG. The DUHREC Executive is responsible for auditing the operations of the HEAG every five years to ensure that only lower risk research is being reviewed (see NS 5.1.23a) and that the work of the HEAG is otherwise compliant with the requirements of the NS.

Effective Date: 28 February 2024