

Hints & Tips

Human research ethics at Griffith University

Last updated December 2024

Have you 'done ethics' yet?

It is not unusual to hear researchers ask their colleagues whether they have "done ethics yet" by which they mean have they completed the application for ethical review, come through ethical review and received their magical email authorising them to conduct their research. While regarding research ethics in this way is perhaps not surprising (ethical review can sometimes feel like an administrative hurdle before a research project can get underway) it is not a positive way to approach the University's research ethics arrangements or the ethical review process.

The ethical dimensions of a project are pivotal to its quality and success. **Researchers of all disciplines must treat research ethics as an important design, conduct and reporting consideration during every phase of a project.**

The ethical dimensions of a project need to start being considered long before an application for ethical review has been submitted, continue throughout the design of a project and then throughout data analysis, the drafting of the outputs and beyond.

This resource sheet is intended to assist researchers with the preparation of an application for ethical review.

Consider ethics early

The process of obtaining ethical review can be constructive and relatively easy if the various issues are considered early in the planning phase of a research project, rather than just before work is scheduled to commence.

Apply for the right level of review

The University has established six pathways for ethical review (see **Review Pathways** on page 3). This matches the level of documentation, who reviews the paperwork and the processing time to the ethical sensitivities and risks of a proposed research project.

Refer to the guidelines and ensure that you apply for the right level of review. Over or under applying can result in unnecessary delays.

HDR candidates

University policy is to regard the principal supervisor as the Chief Investigator and the HDR candidate as a member of the research team. This is the case even when the candidate holds an academic appointment. While the HDR candidate can be the contact person for all matters related to the review of the ethics application, in all materials provided to research participants a member of the student's supervisory team must be listed as the Chief Investigator and first point of contact for any questions about the research.

Consult the Research Ethics Manual

In 2014 the University released version 3 of the Griffith University Research Ethics Manual, which is booklet-based resource for researchers and ethics reviewers. This Manual provides practical advice on a range of ethical challenges (such as consent for the participation of children in research) and presents accepted solutions to common ethical problems (e.g. is it possible to offer potential participants an incentive to encourage their participation). It also discusses national developments (e.g. the opt-out approach to recruitment and consent). By referring to the Manual, a researcher can anticipate the kinds of questions and concerns that the ethics reviewers are likely to raise and can seek prior advice on the appropriate way to address specific issues.

The GUREM booklets and an index for the entire Manual can be found online at:

<https://www.griffith.edu.au/research/research-services/research-ethics-integrity/human/gurem>

Discuss with your REA

Every research centre and school of the University has been invited to appoint one member of academic staff to serve as a Research Ethics Advisor (REA) for that area. One of the roles of a REA is to provide advice to

Hints & Tips

Human research ethics at Griffith University

Last updated December 2024

students and staff on making an application for ethical clearance, and for guidance on how to respond to questions/instructions from the ethics committee.

A REA will expect that a researcher will have consulted the GUREM before seeking their advice. If a supervisor has been unable to advise her/his student, the REA will expect to be approached by **both** the supervisor and student.

A list of current REAs can be found online at: <https://www.griffith.edu.au/research/research-services/research-ethics-integrity/human>

Establish a Position

Each application is assessed on its merits. Nonetheless, the *Griffith University Human Research Ethics Manual* provides insight into the way the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee has previously interpreted and applied the *National Statement*.

Please refer to the relevant sections of the Manual for guidance on how to address the most common factors that will be covered in your application. Sometimes a research project will require a different approach from what is anticipated in the Manual, but at least you will understand the context in which the ethics committee will consider your approach.

Make your own ethical reflections transparent

In planning their own research, researchers will often consider and address ethical issues automatically as a component of the professional conduct of the proposed research design. It is important however that, in making an application for ethical review, you make this process transparent to the ethics reviewers. In that way, the reviewers can see that you are aware of, and have responded to, the issue, rather than being unsure whether the silence means that you are unaware of the issue.

Fully complete the form

Provide a complete response to the questions, it is almost never sufficient to respond to a question with only a single sentence.

Do not leave sections of a research ethics form blank. Even if you write “No” or “Not Applicable”, fully complete forms. The ethics committee is likely to query a blank response field. Before responding “Not Applicable”, especially to a key ethical question such as Risks, carefully reflect upon whether or not there is an answer that should be tendered.

Always read the help text each question prior to responding and provide a full and considered response.

Include attachments

Applications for ethical clearance will often include attachments (e.g. a copy of the informed consent materials, some sample questions from the instrument/indicative line of questioning, or copy of the approval from another organisation). Ensure that all the required attachments are included with your application for research ethics review OR that you provide an indication of when the attachments will be provided later.

Review outcomes and starting the project

The typical review outcomes are:

Resubmit – This occurs where the number and/or significance of the matters requiring attention require the applicant being returned for revision and resubmission.

Provisional approval – Even though the reviewers are largely willing to approve the project they require clarifications/changes to some components of the project. A response to this feedback should be via email/memo. Generally the consideration of a response will take a few days. The project cannot

Hints & Tips

Human research ethics at Griffith University

Last updated December 2024

be commenced until the Office for Research emails an authorisation for this to occur.

Conditional approval – This is where the reviewers authorise the immediate commencement of the project on the understanding that a handful of administrative/textual/minor matters will be addressed (e.g. provision of a site approval from the participating school/business).

Approval - The reviewers have authorised the immediate commencement of the project without any matters requiring attention. Even though no project-specific conditions have been attached to the clearance, the researchers must adhere to the general conditions/responsibilities discussed in [Booklet 3 of the GUREM](#).

Generally every month applicants will be sent reminders about pending responses to resubmit, provisional and conditional review outcomes. Very overdue responses may trigger formal breach proceedings as per the *Griffith Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

In some cases an application will be returned without review, this is typically the case if the application is incomplete or does not provide sufficient information to enable an informed review.

Research integrity

The [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2018\)](#) discusses the principles and responsibilities that are important for all research, irrespective of whether the work requires ethical review. The Australian Code is supported by a series of best practice guides on topics such as authorship, management of data and publication ethics.

Some elements of the *Australian Code* overlap with research ethics (e.g. privacy and data storage). Others are primarily research integrity matters (e.g. publication ethics and authorship).

Awareness of these national standards is essential and there can be serious consequences for breaches of the *Australian Code* or the more serious misconduct.

Every University Group has appointed at least one senior researcher to be a Research Integrity Advisor as a source of collegiate advice to other researchers in the Group. Visit the University's research integrity page for more about research integrity at Griffith University: <http://www.griffith.edu.au/research/research-services/research-ethics-integrity/research-integrity>

Workshops for your area

The Office for Research can conduct short workshops for your area, which provide an overview of Griffith University's human research ethics and/or research integrity arrangements. This will be tailored to research in your area, provide practical tips and useful strategies, and reflect on real cases (within the University and beyond).

Typically workshop formats can be tailored for between 45 and 180 minutes and include time for discussion, questions and one-to-one consultations. Workshops would normally be co-presented by Dr Gary Allen and the REA for the Element/Research Integrity Advisor for the Group.

Some Elements have usefully requested separate sessions for students, ECRs and new supervisors, supervisors, and other researchers. Such workshops are possible as long as there will be five or more attendees. Other useful idea is a short briefing about developments at Griffith University and nationally (such as the introduction in 2014 of the opt-out approach to recruitment/consent) or a roundtable to discuss a specific frustration for experienced researchers in the Element (e.g. informed consent in international contexts).

Contact research-ethics@griffith.edu.au to arrange a workshop for your area.

Hints & Tips

Human research ethics at Griffith University

Last updated December 2024

Review pathways

Level of review	Applies to	Application form	Considered by	Average processing time*
Minimal risk (NR)	Minimal risk research	Proportional Review Form (Research Information Management System (RIMS))	Office for Research	14 working days from the date the CI approved the application
Expedited Ethical Review Level 1 (E1)	Research with no more than a low risk of harm and no significant ethical issues	Proportional Review Form (Research Information Management System (RIMS))	Chair or Deputy Chair of the GUHREC	15 working days from the date the CI approved the application
Expedited Ethical Review Level 2 (E2)	Research with no more than a low risk of harm and addressed ethical issues	Proportional Review Form (Research Information Management System (RIMS))	Panel of the GUHREC	20 working days from the date the CI approved the application
GUHREC Review (FR)	Research that does not qualify for review via the NR, E1 or E2 pathways	Human Research Ethics Application	Monthly meeting of the GUHREC plus 3 weeks	Please allow up to 10 working days following the meeting for the initial review outcome
Prior review (PR)	Special review for research that has already been approved by another research ethics committee.	Proportional Review Form (Research Information Management System (RIMS))	Typically the Office for Research	7 working days from the date the CI approved the application
Variations	Special review for variations to approved projects.	Via n email as per Booklet 6 of the GUREM	Typically the Office for Research	3 days

RIMS can also be used to confirm whether a planned research activity falls outside the scope of the University’s human research ethics arrangements or if it is exempt from research ethics review.

* These processing times are estimate only and are subject to change according to workload.

Contacts

Current list

Research Ethics Advisors

Can be found on our [website](#) under ‘Research Ethics Advisors’.



Hints & Tips

Human research ethics at Griffith University

Last updated December 2024

Julie Robinson
Ethics Administration Officer
P: 5552 9253 | E: j.robinson@griffith.edu.au

Gynelle Murray
Research Ethics Officer, Human Ethics
P: 3735 2069 | E: gynelle.murray@griffith.edu.au

Kim Madison
Policy Officer, Research Ethics and Integrity
P: 37358043 | E: k.madison@griffith.edu.au |

Monica Naughtin
Senior Manager: Research Ethics Integrity and Governance
P: 3735 4375 | E: m.naughtin@griffith.edu.au | Bray Centre (N54) 0.15