

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

ANIMAL ETHICS COMMITTEE OPERATING GUIDELINES

Endorsed in principle by the Animal Ethics Policy Committee at Meeting 2/06

Overview

It is a requirement of the University and the *Australian Code of Practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* 2004 (7th edition) that policies and procedures for the fair resolution of disagreements relating to animal ethics and animal welfare are established and implemented. Responsibility for the implementation of these procedures is shared by AECs, institutional officers, and senior academic and management personnel.

Policy Principles

- The risk of disputes relating to Applications for the scientific use of animals will be minimised by the use of AEC operating procedures in a manner that is confidential, fair to applicants, acceptable to AEC members, and compliant with the Australian Code of Practice.
- AEC decisions are to be made in a manner that is acceptable to AEC members and compliant with the Australian Code of Practice.
- AEC operating procedures that prevent or resolve any conflict of interest that may arise within the membership of the AEC will be used.
- Operating procedures for the resolution of any disputes, concerns or grievances that may arise between AEC members, the AEC and investigators, or between the AEC and the University will be followed.
- Operating procedures for addressing any concerns expressed about animal welfare or non-compliance/breach of the Australian Code of Practice or AEC decisions will be used. Concerns may be received from students; a member of the animal care, research or academic staff; a member of the AEC; the DEH Animal Welfare Unit, visitors to the University; or any other person. The procedures will ensure that persons may voice concerns without jeopardising their employment, careers or coursework.

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1 PROCEDURES FOR CONSIDERATION OF APPLICATIONS TO THE ANIMAL ETHICS COMMITTEE

The procedures followed by the AEC when considering proposals for breeding, holding and use of animals for scientific purposes must comply with Sections 2.2.15 – 2.2.25 and Section 4 of the Australian Code of Practice. Only those scientific, teaching and husbandry activities that conform to the requirements of all relevant Sections of the Code and legislation may be approved.

1.1 INFORMATION TO BE SUPPLIED TO THE AEC

- Printed proposals should place before the AEC sufficient information to satisfy the AEC that the proposed use of animals is justified and complies with the principles of Replacement, Reduction and Refinement. The justification process includes weighing the predicted scientific or educational value of the proposal against potential impact on the welfare of the animals, and justification given for the number of animals requested.
- Printed proposals should be presented in a form that allows the AEC to easily assess information provided. They should be written in a Plain English manner that can be understood by all members of the AEC (i.e. lay language) and must identify the impact of all sections of the proposal on animals used and means by which the impact will be minimised. Advice on these matters can be obtained from the AEC Secretary and the Animal Welfare Officer.
- The on-line application form seeks information from applicants in order to meet the requirements of the Australian Code of Practice (refer to Code Section *Proposals-general* (2.2.15-2.2.16)). Applicants supply the required information by completing all sections of the application form, and by addressing specific queries raised by the AEC during its deliberations.
- Applications must be received by the AEC Secretary by 5 pm on the deadline date (listed on the Research Ethics and Compliance Unit website) on order to be included on the Agenda for the subsequent AEC meeting.

1.2 CONSIDERATION OF ANIMAL USE PROPOSALS

1.2.1 New proposals and renewal of existing projects must be considered and approved only at quorate meetings of the AEC.

1.2.2 The AEC must be satisfied that the proposed use of animals is justified by weighing the predicted scientific or educational value of the proposal against the potential impact on the welfare of the animals. An essential component of this assessment by the AEC involves consideration of the steps taken by the applicant to comply with the principles of Replacement, Reduction and Refinement specified in the Code.

1.2.3 AEC members treat the information supplied by applicants as confidential, and undertake to not disclose the specifics or sensitive aspects of Applications to people outside the AEC, except where this is needed by a function of the University. Information can be sought by AEC members from contacts outside the AEC, but they must not identify the investigators or divulge information that could identify the project or aspects which could be regarded as scientifically or commercially sensitive. Members will seek advice from the Convenor if they are unsure of how to balance their responsibilities.

1.2.4 Decisions should be made in a manner that is fair to applicants, acceptable to all members and in accordance with the procedure detailed above.

1.2.5 Investigators and teachers must be informed of decisions in writing.

1.2.6 A register of all proposals to the AEC, including the outcomes of the Committee's deliberations, must be maintained.

1.2.7 Decisions must be made as promptly as possible.

1.2.8 Scientific or teaching activities involving the use of animals must not start before written approval is given.

1.3 CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING AND VOTING RIGHTS OF MEMBERS

1.3.1 Decisions by the AEC with regard to approval, modification or rejection of a proposal, or withdrawal of approval for a project must comply with Sections 2.2.20 – 2.2.23 of the Australian Code of Practice and should be made on the basis of consensus.

- When consensus is achieved, then this decision is recorded. If the project is rejected, this should be recorded in the Minutes with the reasons for the rejection.
- Where consensus cannot be reached after reasonable effort to resolve differences, the AEC should explore with the applicant(s) ways of modifying the project that may lead to consensus. If consensus is still unachievable, the AEC should only proceed to a majority decision after members have been allowed a period of time to review their positions, followed by further discussion.

1.3.2 Where a decision is unable to be made on the basis of consensus as detailed in point 2.2.1, a majority vote may be used to resolve the issue. All members have the right to vote, except

- (i) under circumstances as specified under the Conflict of Interest guidelines, or
- (ii) where a member is co-opted to the Committee for the purposes of providing expertise on specific issues, and hence takes no part in the proceedings of the Committee other than offering expert advice on the issues concerned.

The Secretary of the AEC has no voting rights.

1.3.3 Irreconcilable differences that arise during deliberations by the AEC may be referred to the Animal Ethics Policy Committee for advice and review of the due process. Procedures for resolving disagreements are detailed below.

1.3.4 Irreconcilable differences between the AEC and an investigator or teacher must be referred to the Animal Ethics Policy Committee for review of the due process. The ultimate decision of the AEC after such review must not be overridden.

1.4 OUTCOMES FOLLOWING AEC DELIBERATIONS

The consideration of an application by the AEC will normally result in one of the following outcomes:

- The application is approved immediately, or
- The AEC approves the application subject to a satisfactory response from the investigators to queries or concerns raised by the AEC members, or
- The AEC asks for resubmission of the application where its contents are quite inadequate for the purposes of the AEC, or
- The application is rejected.

1.5 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

When a research proposal of which a member is an investigator is considered by the AEC, the minutes of meeting should clearly record and reflect that:

The member concerned is required to either absent himself / herself from the meeting during discussion of his / her proposal or absent himself / herself from the discussion and only respond to questions directed to him /her. This member will not participate in voting on the proposal.

NOTE : An *Investigator* is a researcher or teacher who is involved in the conduct of the scientific use of animals outlined in the application.

2 PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS

2.1 SEEKING A CONSENSUS DECISION

Generally, since the majority of decisions are reached by consensus (refer to point 1.3), any concerns held by the members of the Committee should be expressed during discussion of that project. If these cannot be satisfactorily answered by those present, the researcher should be invited to the meeting if possible, or to the next, to speak to their proposal and answer questions.

2.1.1 After a project has been discussed with the researcher present for part of that time, and when all questions and concerns appear to be answered, the Convenor will then ask the members whether or not all are in agreement that it be:

- approved; or
- approved subject to any changes which have been requested; or
- rewritten and submitted, or
- rejected.

If consensus is achieved, then this decision is recorded. If the project is rejected, this should be recorded in the Minutes with the reasons for the rejection, and the researcher should be informed about the reasons for the rejection.

2.1.2 If consensus is not achieved, the members are allowed a period of time to review their positions. Comments or additional information may be sought by members of the AEC from an impartial source (such as the Animal Ethics Policy Committee). At a subsequent time, discussion of the project is recommenced and when all questions and concerns appear to be answered, the Convenor will then ask the members whether or not all are in agreement that it be:

- approved; or
- approved subject to any changes which have been requested; or
- rejected.

If consensus is achieved, then this decision is recorded. If the project is rejected, this should be recorded in the Minutes with the reasons for the rejection, and the researcher should be informed about the reasons for the rejection.

2.2 SEEKING A MAJORITY DECISION

2.2.1 Where a decision is unable to be made on the basis of consensus, a majority vote may be used to resolve the issue as detailed above. If people wish to have their abstention recorded, they should request this. If they vote No, this should be recorded in the Minutes with the reasons for their disagreement.

If a majority decision is achieved, then this decision is recorded. If the project is rejected, this should be recorded in the Minutes with the reasons for the rejection and the researcher should be informed about the reasons for the rejection.

2.2.2 If a majority decision is not achieved, the project is neither approved nor rejected. The outcome of the voting should be recorded in the Minutes with the reasons for disagreement and the lack of resolution. The project cannot proceed.

2.2.3 If a researcher wishes to dispute the decision-making process of the AEC, the matter can be forwarded to the Animal Ethics Secretary for referral to the Animal Ethics Policy Committee for comment and review of due process. The full documentation relating to the matter, such as Minutes of the relevant meetings, and the details of votes, abstentions, reasons for disagreement or lack of resolution should be provided by the AEC and the researcher to the Animal Ethics Secretary.

The Animal Ethics Policy Committee will advise the AEC, the researcher and the Licence nominee (i.e. the DV-C Research) of the outcome of the review of due process.

NOTE: *The Code states*

2.2.14 Irreconcilable differences between the AEC and an investigator or teacher must be referred to the governing body of the institution for review of the due process. The ultimate decision of the AEC after such review must not be overridden.*

* the Animal Ethics Policy Committee performs this role on behalf of the University.

3 PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING CONCERNS, GRIEVANCES AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION INVOLVING ANIMAL ETHICS OR ANIMAL WELFARE

3.1 GRIEVANCES AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION CONCERNING AEC OPERATION

If a member of an AEC or a researcher has any grievance about the operation of that committee, they should discuss this, in confidence, with the Convenor of that AEC. If the grievance cannot be resolved they may then take their concerns to one of the representatives of the Animal Ethics Policy Committee (Animal Ethics Secretary or Animal Welfare Officer), or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research.

3.1.2 In some cases, other University policies and procedures will also apply (e.g. Guidelines and rules for responsible practice in research).

3.1.3 The DV-C Research will be the person responsible for resolving grievances, disputes or concerns relating to AEC operation.

3.2 ANIMAL WELFARE CONCERNS REPORTED TO THE AEC

Animal Welfare concerns may include:

- departures from practice of humane and ethical treatment of animals in the animal house and / or laboratory
- breaches or non-compliance with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, Regulations or associated Codes of Practice
- breaches or non-compliance with the Australian Code of Practice, or the decisions of the AEC.

- 3.2.1 If animal house, academic or other staff or students have any enquiries or concerns about the well being of animals held in the School or Department for use in breeding, research or teaching, these concerns should be reported to the Convenor of the relevant AEC, or to one of the representatives of the Animal Ethics Policy Committee (Animal Ethics Secretary or Animal Welfare Officer).
- 3.2.2 All complaints, concerns or enquiries will be treated confidentially* and sympathetically.
- 3.2.3 If the complaint is of a serious nature, or if the matter cannot be resolved, then the Animal Ethics Secretary or the Animal Welfare Officer should be notified. The DV-C Research must be informed of all serious animal welfare matters.
- 3.2.4 The DV-C Research will be the person responsible for resolving grievances, disputes or concerns relating to animal welfare.
- 3.2.5 In some cases, other University policies and procedures will also apply (e.g. Guidelines and rules for responsible practice in research).

* NOTE: *The Code states:*

- 2.1.1(xi) *Responsibilities of Institutions*
Establish mechanisms to respond to enquiries or complaints concerning the use of animals within the institution and ensuring that personnel and students may voice concerns without jeopardising their employment, careers or coursework.

4 **ORGANISATIONAL REPORTING STRUCTURE** – Table attached.

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4. The University of Adelaide - Organisational reporting structure for Animal Ethics and Welfare

