

Terms of Reference

University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (UniSQ HREC)

Responsible officer	Senior Manager, Research Integrity & Ethics	Approval Date	25 June 2026
Committee Services Officer	Senior Research Ethics Advisor	Approval Authority	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Development and Commercialisation)

1. Role

The University is required to ensure that any research conducted under its auspices is conducted in a responsible and ethical manner. In addition, the University is obliged to comply with the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (the National Statement). In accordance with the requirements of The National Statement, the University has established the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (UniSQ HREC). In fulfilling its role under the National Statement, the UniSQ HREC operates within the following framework:

- 1.1 **Strategic Responsibilities:** Ensuring that the principles that govern the ethical conduct of research involving human participants are applied by the University's employees and students.
- 1.2 **Resource Scope:** All University staff and students conducting research involving human participants.
- 1.3 **Value Delivery:** Ensures compliance with the national regulatory framework for research integrity and ethics.
- 1.4 **Risk Management:** Reviews human research ethics applications and evaluates risk to participants, the research and the institution, and monitors risk through progress reports.
- 1.5 **Performance Measures:** Compliance with the national regulatory framework for research integrity and ethics.

2. Function

The UniSQ HREC will:

- 2.1 review and decide on written proposals for research involving human participants, considering ethical implications, compliance requirements, and the scientific or educational merit of the study. Decisions may include: approve, approve with additional conditions, subject to modifications, not approve with option for resubmission, or reject without resubmission;
- 2.2 monitor the conduct of approved research activities until their completion to ensure compliance with relevant requirements, and withdraw approval if necessary;

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- 2.3 contribute to the development and periodic review of guidelines, policies, and procedures addressing ethical issues arising from research involving human participants, as appropriate; and
- 2.4 perform all other duties required by the National Statement.

3. Authority

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Development and Commercialisation).

4. Membership

In accordance with the membership provisions of the National Statement (S5.1.30), the minimum membership of the UniSQ HREC will be eight (8) persons, and must include the following categories:

4.1. Minimum Membership Categories

- 4.1.1 A Chairperson with suitable experience, including previous membership of an HREC, whose other responsibilities will not impair the UniSQ HREC's capacity to carry out its obligations under the National Statement.
- 4.1.2 At least two (2) people who bring a broader community or consumer perspective and who have no paid affiliation with UniSQ.
- 4.1.3 At least one (1) person with knowledge of, and current experience in, the professional care or treatment of people; for example, a nurse, counsellor or allied health professional.
- 4.1.4 At least one (1) person who performs a pastoral care role including, but not limited to, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander elder or community leader, a chaplain or a minister of religion or other religious leader.
- 4.1.5 At least one (1) qualified lawyer, who may or may not be currently practising and, where possible, is not engaged to advise the institution on research-related or any other matters.
- 4.1.6 At least two (2) people with current research experience that is relevant to research proposals to be considered at the meetings they attend.

As far as practicable:

- there should be a member diversity, including gender diversity;
- at least one-third of members should be from outside the University;
- one or more members should be experienced in reflecting on and analysing ethical decision-making; and
- meetings will be arranged to enable attendance of all members of the minimum membership categories either in person or via available technology, for example videoconference. *

*S5.2.5 of the National Statement permits a Human Research Ethics Committee to consider applications where there is less than full attendance of the minimum membership, provided that the chairperson is satisfied that the views of the members who are not present have been received and considered by all members of the HREC participating in the meeting, before a decision is made.

4.2. Casual Vacancies

Where a member is absent from three or more consecutive meetings without having been granted leave of absence or negotiated other means of contribution/participation, that member shall be deemed to have vacated the position, resulting in a casual vacancy.

4.3. Working Parties, Co-option and Observers

The UniSQ HREC may invite people with specific expertise to provide advice as required.

The Senior Manager, Research Integrity and Ethics may attend meetings in an advisory capacity to the UniSQ HREC, as required.

5. Responsibilities

5.1. Governance Responsibilities of the University

In accordance with Chapter 5.1 of the National Statement, specific responsibilities for UniSQ include, but are not limited to:

- the ethical review process is resourced appropriately to ensure that it is conducted competently and professionally;
- appropriate training and resources are provided to:
 - UniSQ HREC members in relation to policies and guidelines relevant to Human Research ethics and the business of the University; and
 - Researchers to support their understanding of Human Research ethics and ethical review processes; and
- development, documentation and implementation of local work processes to promote appropriate ethical review.

5.2. Responsibilities of UniSQ HREC Members and Human Research ethical review members

In accordance with Chapter 5.2 of the National Statement, UniSQ HREC members are each responsible for deciding whether, in their judgement, a research proposal submitted to the UniSQ HREC meets the requirements of the National Statement and other relevant guidelines and is ethically acceptable. To fulfill that responsibility, each member of the UniSQ HREC should:

- undertake induction training;
- become and remain familiar with the National Statement, consult other guidelines and information relevant to the review of specific research proposals;
- prepare for and attend scheduled meetings, or if unavailable, provide opinions on the ethical acceptability of research proposals before meetings;
- attend continuing education or training in research ethics on a regular basis (and at least every three years);
- declare and manage perceived, potential and actual conflicts of interest on any matters coming before the UniSQ HREC prior to any discussion of the matter; and
- maintain confidentiality regarding the content of items under review and any other matter under consideration in accordance with the UniSQ HREC Confidentiality Agreement.

5.3. Responsibilities of UniSQ HREC Chair

In addition to the responsibilities outlined for Human Research ethical review members and UniSQ HREC members, the UniSQ HREC Chair, with assistance from the Deputy Chair/s, is responsible for:

- impartially guiding the operation of the UniSQ HREC;
- deciding, in their own judgement, whether a lower risk Human Research ethics application, lower risk Human Research amendment application, a reciprocal HREC approval arrangement, or any other items under review referred to the UniSQ HREC Chair by the UniSQ HREC or University-established Human Research ethical review process is ethically acceptable; and
- representing the UniSQ HREC in any negotiations with University management.

6. UniSQ HREC Delegations

The UniSQ HREC has established the following delegations:

UniSQ non-HREC Review Process	UniSQ HREC Delegation
Expedited review by at least two (2) appropriately qualified and trained officers of the University of Southern Queensland	• minimal or low risk (lower risk) HRE applications
Executive Review (which will normally comprise the review and approval of items by the UniSQ HREC Chairperson and/or UniSQ HREC Deputy Chairperson/s)	• minimal or low risk registration of other Australian registered and/or certified HREC approved projects • Negligible and low risk HRE Amendment requests • Review and approval of any other Item Under Review referred by the UniSQ HREC (such as review and approval of responses to subject to modification outcomes on HRE Applications);
Office of Research Review (which will normally comprise the review and approval of items by a suitably qualified and trained staff member of the Ethics Office).	• Monitoring of HRE Milestones (progress and final reports) where the progression of the approved project is straightforward.

7. Meetings, Reporting and Minutes

Frequency of Meetings:	The UniSQ HREC will normally meet as per the University Calendar scheduled dates. Special meetings may be called by the Chair as required.
Reports To:	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Development and Commercialisation). A report on governance and/or operational matters from each meeting may be referred to the Research Committee of the Academic Board.
Minutes:	Meetings will be formally minuted.

8. Ethical Practices, Confidentiality and Independence

Members of the UniSQ HREC are to:

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- exercise objectivity and integrity in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities;
- refrain from entering into any activity that may prejudice their ability to carry out their duties and responsibilities objectively and independently;
- act in a proper and prudent manner in the use of information acquired in the course of their duties and responsibilities, particularly in regard to the maintenance of confidentiality and privacy of information;
- exercise sound judgement guided by the highest personal standards of honesty and integrity in all matters relating to membership of the UniSQ HREC;
- ensure that they do not place themselves in situations which could lead to, or be perceived to, give rise to a conflict of interest;
- disclose to the UniSQ HREC any matter which could compromise, or be seen to compromise, the performance of their duties on the UniSQ HREC or give rise to a perception of a conflict of interest; and
- have a sound understanding of the University's Code of Conduct.

9. Secretary

The Committee Services Officer to the UniSQ HREC is the Senior Research Ethics Advisor.

10. Review of Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference will be reviewed by the Senior Manager, Research Integrity and Ethics, or a Senior Ethics Advisor alongside the UniSQ HREC, annually or earlier if required by external regulatory bodies.

11. Modification History

Date	Source	Details
21/03/2014	Manager, Research Integrity & Ethics	• Removal of member names from public document • Title change from Manager, Research Integrity and Governance to Manager, Research Integrity and Ethics
19/06/2018	Manager, Research Integrity & Ethics	• Revision of nomenclature of Committee to USQ HREC • Revision of nomenclature of The Statement to the National Statement • Minor revision of 4.1 Responsibilities of USQ HREC Members to clarify requirements for member training and declaration of perceived, potential, and/or actual conflicts of interest • Major revision of 4.4 Sub Committees to 4.4 Delegations and content revised to include current review and approval delegations approved by USQ HREC • Minor revision of 5. 1, 5.2, and 5.3 to reflect current processes • Deletion of "Decisions between meetings" from 5.

29/06/2018	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation)	Revised Terms of Reference approved
28/09/2022	Ethics Coordinator	- Converted Terms of Reference to new UniSQ branding as per requirements of the University of Southern Queensland 2022 Brand Reputation Project. - Revised all references of USQ to UniSQ as per the rebrand requirements. - Moved trim location to the footer and replaced with Committee Services Officer details.
05/03/2026	Senior Manager, Research Integrity and Ethics, Senior Research Ethics Advisors and UniSQ HREC	- Minor revision to 1. Role to improve contextual framing. - Revision of 4 Minimum membership, including 4.1 Membership categories and 4.2 (now 5.2) Responsibilities of UniSQ HREC Members to align with the revised National Statement (2025); - Revision of 4.3 (now 4.2) Casual vacancies and 4.5 (now 6) UniSQ HREC Delegations to align with updated institutional processes, with delegations relocated under a new standalone heading. - Relocated 4.2 (now 5.2) Responsibilities of members under new heading, 5 Responsibilities. Expanded content to Included 5.1. Governance Responsibilities of the University, 5.3 Responsibilities of HREC Chair (relocated from the HREC procedure). - Minor revision of 10 Review of Terms of Reference - General formatting, numbering, and grammatical updates applied throughout. - All revisions approved by the UniSQ HREC on 21/04/2026
25/05/2026	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Development and Commercialisation)	Revised Terms of Reference formally approved