ANIMAL ETHICS COMMITTEE

Sub-Committee of the Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee (20070000031)
Established by Council: 9/90 8.5.90, Amended by Academic Committee 2/07 – 19.4.07

FUNCTIONS

The Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) will advise the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) and the Research Committee on the University's ethical standards and whether these standards satisfy the Queensland Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 and the terms of reference of the NHMRC Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (the Code).

The AEC will apply the principles outlined in the Code that govern the ethical conduct of people whose work for the University involves the use of animals for scientific purposes. The role of the AEC is to ensure that the scientific use of animals is justified, provides for the welfare of those animals and incorporates the principles of Replacement, Reduction and Refinement. In particular, the Committee will –

1. approve guidelines for the care of animals that are bred, held and used for scientific purposes on behalf of the University;
2. monitor the acquisition, transportation, production, housing, care, use and fate of such animals;
3. recommend to the University any measures needed to ensure that the standards of the Code are maintained;
4. describe how AEC members are appointed, re-appointed, or retired, according to procedures developed by the University in consultation with the AEC (See below);
5. require that all members declare and deal with any conflict of interest;
6. examine and approve, approve subject to modification, or reject written proposals relevant to the use of animals for scientific purposes;
7. approve only those projects for which animals are essential and justified and which conform to the requirements of the Code taking into consideration ethics, the impact on the animal or animals and the anticipated scientific or educational value;
8. withdraw approval for any project;
9. authorise the emergency treatment, or, euthanasia of any animal;
10. examine and comment on all University plans and policies that may affect the welfare of animals used for scientific purposes;
11. maintain a record of proposals and projects;
12. comply with the reporting requirements of the University and the Code; and
13. perform all other duties required by the Code.

The AEC does not apply a processing fee to the consideration of any proposal for ethical clearance or process ethical clearance matters which do not relate to Griffith University research or teaching.

OPERATING PROCEDURES

CHAIRPERSON

1. The Chairperson of the AEC is the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research), or nominee (who shall hold a senior Academic position) who possesses the following attributes:
an ability to bring impartiality to the task;
the skills to manage the business of the AEC;
an ability to communicate, negotiate and to resolve conflict; and
an understanding of the ethical and animal welfare issues involved in the use of animals for scientific purposes.

The Chairperson is a member of the AEC and may be appointed for a maximum of two terms, each of two years duration, with the same rights and obligations as all other membership categories (See below). In addition to those duties, authorities and responsibilities established by the Guide to Committee and Meeting Skills, the Chairperson will, according to the Code;

- ensure that the AEC operates in accordance with the principles and requirements of the Code, the relevant policies of the University and these operating procedures;
- ensure that proposals are considered by the AEC and the outcomes conveyed to applicants in a timely manner;
- advise the University regarding the resources required by the AEC;
- represent the AEC in any negotiations with management;
- oversee all requirements of the AEC to report and review its operation, as outlined in the Code (See 2.2.40); and
- ensure AEC records are maintained and made available for review by the University and authorised external reviewers.

2. The Chairperson has debate and voting rights for all matters before AEC – except in situations where a conflict of interest precludes them from exercising such rights.

3. The Chairperson will authorise the emergency treatment of animals, or euthanasia as necessary and for later ratification by the AEC. In cases of emergency before an animal is treated or euthanased, all reasonable steps must be taken to consult with the responsible investigator or teacher. Any treatment or euthanasia must be reported promptly to the responsible investigator or teacher and the AEC with reasons for the action taken, and confirmed in writing, as outlined in the Code (See 2.2.36).

4. The Chairperson may issue, in writing a notice to a responsible investigator of any suspension or breach of a protocol approved by the AEC as ratified by the Committee. In consultation with the Office for Research the Chairperson will determine whether the matter shall be referred for formal investigation.

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**OTHER AEC MEMBERS**

1. As defined in Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 of the Code the Committee must include members from Categories A to D and should include a member in Category E:

   A. a person with qualifications in veterinary science and with experience relevant to the activities of the University. Veterinarians who lack this experience must familiarise themselves with the biology and clinical characteristics of the species of animals used;

   B. a suitably qualified person with substantial recent experience in the use of animals in scientific or teaching activities. This will usually entail possession of a higher degree in research;

   C. a person with demonstrable commitment to, and established experience in, furthering the welfare of animals, who is not employed by or otherwise associated with the University, and who is not involved in the care and use of animals for scientific purposes. While not representing an animal welfare organization, the person should, where possible, be selected on the basis of active membership of and nomination by such an organisation;
D. a person who is both independent of the institution and who has not been involved in the use of animals in scientific or teaching activities, either in their employment or beyond their undergraduate education. A person who should bring a completely independent view to the AEC, and must not fit the requirements of any other Category; and

E. a person with training in animal care and welfare who is responsible for the routine care of animals from within the University.

The University may appoint additional members with skills and background (e.g. in ethics or statistics) of value to the AEC as per Section 2.2.4 of the Code. These members may be in addition to the prescribed membership Categories A to D.

**APPOINTMENTS**

1. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) may determine the method for nominating members and will determine their final selection for nomination to the Academic Committee on the advice of the Chairperson of the Research Committee. Appointment of members will balance continuity of expertise and renewal.

2. Before appointment, nominees must acknowledge in writing their acceptance of the terms of reference of the AEC and any requirements for confidentiality required by the University, including how advice may be sought without breaching confidentiality.

   The AEC will reach agreement on how advice may be sought without breaching confidentiality. Each member of the AEC will sign an agreement confirming that they will not disclose any confidential information to third parties and that they accept the University Personal Information Privacy Plan. Members must never compromise intellectual property, commercial-in-confidence, or participant confidentiality.

   Members will also sign an agreement to disclose in meetings any duality of interest, or potentially perceived conflict of interest (e.g. they are a member of the research team, they are a supervisor for a particular student proponent’s project, or they have a pecuniary interest in a project).

3. On the advice of the Chairperson of the Research Committee, the Academic Committee will appoint, or reappoint, members (other than the Chairperson) for a term of office of two years up to, but not including, the ordinary meeting of the Academic Committee in February of the relevant anniversary year. Such appointments may be renewable. Appointments are made in writing and recorded in meeting minutes. Members are advised in writing of their appointments. Members are retired from appointments if they fail to attend three consecutive meetings without approval, if their mental or physical state has deteriorated so that they cannot function effectively, or if they have taken action that discredits the University. In this situation members will be notified of their retirement by letter from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

4. At the first meeting of the year, the Animal Ethics Committee shall elect from among its members a Vice Chairperson to serve for a period of one year. The Vice Chairperson shall have the responsibilities of the Chairperson on those occasions when the Chairperson is absent from the University or where a conflict of interest arises.

**ROLE AND ELECTION OF THE AEC EXECUTIVE**

The AEC Executive is a subcommittee of the AEC that consists of the Chairperson and at least one Category C or D member elected at the first meeting of the year.

The AEC executive may approve minor modifications to projects for review at the next AEC meeting.
The AEC executive must not approve new proposals, major modifications or annual reports.

MEMBERS INDEMNITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

In accordance with Australian requirements and international guidelines, the University provides indemnification to the members of the AEC on the basis of them being either:

- students, staff, voluntary workers, foundation, institute, centre or other body, affiliated to, or operating within, the framework of the University and formed by or with the knowledge and consent of the University; or
- any person acting in an honorary (academic or otherwise) capacity, including honorary research fellows and voluntary workers who occupy a duly recognised position in the business of the University.

This indemnification covers officially approved activities undertaken with the knowledge of the University, or under the direction or control of, or at the request of, or which are activities relevant to that person's position with the University.

The names and personal information of AEC members will be treated as confidential for their personal security and will not be made publicly available or published on the Griffith website.

MEETING QUORUMS

Decisions of meetings are only valid if at least one member from each of Categories A, B, C and D is present. If more than four members are present, Categories C plus D should represent not less than one third of the number of A, B, C and D members who are present. When a face-to-face meeting is not possible, quorum may be established through the use of video-linking or teleconferencing with all remote members.

CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

6.1 The Committee usually meets ten times a year, as required by the Chairperson.

6.2 The Chairperson may invite experts to provide advice as required. An invited expert has audience rights, but cannot exercise a vote, or participate in debate, unless invited to do so.

6.3 Before attending meetings all persons must agree in writing to maintain the confidentiality of the information disclosed to them at meetings, or, as a result of their appointment.

6.4 Before attending meetings all persons must declare any conflict of interest they perceive prior to the meeting. All persons must disclose an actual, or, potentially perceived conflict of interest at the beginning of the meeting.

6.5 The Committee will consider whether to instruct the conflicted person, to withdraw from the meeting for the consideration of that matter, to remain as an observer, or to remain with rights of audience and debate. Declarations of conflict of interest and any withdrawal of members will be noted in the minutes.

6.6 Members have debate and voting rights for all matters before the AEC except in situations where a conflict of interest precludes them from exercising such rights. Where possible decisions to approve proposals should be made on the basis of consensus. Where two or more members oppose a proposal, it should not be approved until the Committee has explored ways of modifying the project that may lead to consensus.
6.7 Flying minutes will not be used to make decisions relating to new proposals, reports on, or major variations to, approved projects.

6.8 The AEC executive may approve minor variations to existing approved projects via flying minutes.

MEETING AGENDAS

7.1 To be considered for ethical review, a proposal must contain information as described in the Code and be submitted on the correct form with the appropriate signatures and attachments. An incomplete proposal, or one made using the incorrect form, may be returned unprocessed. The Griffith University Animal Ethics Form is a source of further information in relation to the processing of proposals for ethical clearance, including guidance to assist in responding to the AEC.

7.2 Unless an applicant presents a compelling argument for action to the contrary, proposals submitted after the due date for a meeting will normally be considered at the Committee's next meeting.

7.3 There are standard agenda items, and forms to assist the AEC to consider the following:

- reporting actions taken on conditional ethical clearances and seeking the Committee's ratification, amendment or modification of these actions;
- proposals for full ethical clearance;
- reporting decisions of the Executive on requests for minor modifications to existing ethical clearances and seeking the Committee's ratification, amendment or modification of the decisions; and
- presenting for action all conduct reports for review and determination that the project may continue, be suspended, require modification, or be discontinued.

7.4 Proposals to be considered by the AEC must be received by the Secretary at least two weeks prior to the meeting. Committee papers are generally distributed between two and one weeks prior to the meeting date. All ethical conduct reports received will be considered at an AEC meeting.

7.5 Meetings of the AEC follow the distributed agenda, and discussion and debate are directed through the Chairperson. Formal standing orders do not apply to the conduct of the meeting, and debate is largely conducted informally.

7.6 The outcomes on ethical clearance for proposals will be communicated to applicants by emails from the Secretary (normally within 48 hours of a meeting); by minutes of the meeting (normally within 72 hours) and (upon receiving a response from the proponent) full documentation to the Chairperson for action; and (normally within 10 days of the meeting) forward any recommendations from the Committee to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) and / or the Research Committee.

7.7 The Office for Research maintains hard copy and electronic records in relation to ethical clearance proposals and related activity. Access to these records is limited to members of the research team (including supervisors), members of the AEC, and authorised officers (e.g. the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research), Animal Facility Manager)

OPERATIONAL MATTERS

The AEC shall inspect annually all campus and other facilities for keeping animals used in approved protocols and monitor approved projects. When necessary the AEC will delegate elements of these roles to its own, or other AEC members, or University staff visiting remote facilities or sites.
Where inspections detect activities that are non-compliant with the Code, the AEC must ensure that such activities cease immediately and remedial action is initiated.

The Chairperson may issue, in writing a notice to a Chief Investigator of any suspension or breach of a protocol approved by the AEC as ratified by the Committee. In consultation with the Office for Research, the Chairperson will determine whether the matter shall be referred for formal investigation.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

The AEC makes recommendations and reports annually to:

- the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research);
- the Griffith University Council via the Research Committee;
- the Animal Welfare Committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council; and
- the Animal Welfare Unit of Queensland, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

RESOURCES

The Director, Office for Research will appoint to the Research Ethics Section under the supervision of the Manager, Research Ethics, an Animal Ethics Officer to act as the Secretary to the Committee. The Secretary of the Committee will:

- have rights of audience and debate at meetings, prepare minutes, conduct the business and facilitate the operation and purpose of the Committee on behalf of the Committee Chairperson;
- advise members of the Committee and receive and forward correspondence to them (including proposals, reports and variations to approved projects) as appropriate;
- advise and assist researchers, teachers and supervisors;
- advise the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) and the Manager Research Ethics on the governance of animal ethics, regulatory requirements, and compliance issues;
- maintain a register of ethical clearances;
- prepare internal and external reports, as requested by the Committee;
- arrange access to teleconferencing or video-linking facilities to form a quorum in exceptional circumstances when face to face Committee meetings are not possible.

COMPLAINTS AND INVESTIGATIONS

The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) is responsible for compliance with the Code and institutional procedures for handling grievances in relation to the Griffith University Animal Ethics Committee process (See the Code; Sections 2.247-48).

These include:

- Concerns and complaints about the scientific use of animals by the University;
- Alleged breaches of the University’s research ethics arrangement; and
- Requests for a review of a decision of the Committee.

Griffith University adopts the following procedures in dealing with these matters.

Concerns or complaints involving some form of correspondence or notice from a complainant will be initially checked and clarified informally with the Chairperson. A complainant may choose to be unidentified. Acknowledged formal complaints may be made in writing to the
Manager Research Ethics (Office for Research) who will brief the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) will confirm with a complainant the receipt of their complaint in writing and notify them of the nature and duration of any investigation. The complainant and researchers responsible for the use of any animals involved will be provided with reasons in writing for any suspension of ethical clearance granted by the Committee.

The researcher responsible for the project should have the opportunity to respond to the details of formal complaints without them identifying a complainant, unless with the consent of the complainant. Notification of the outcome of an investigation will be provided in writing to the complainant, the responsible researcher and the Committee.