





University of South Africa Research Ethics Committees	
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COMPILATION AND AUTHORISATION

Action	Designated person	Date	Signature
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ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS/DESCRIPTIONS

Abbreviation	Definition/Description
CRIC	College Research and Innovation Committee CRIC The function of these committees is to ensure sound research and
CREC/ERC	College Research Ethics Committee (this term is synonymous with College Ethics Review Committee [CERC] or College Research Ethics Review Committee [CRERC] used in Unisa Policy documents). A College/Unit REC is attached to or based in a specific college/institute/centre and reports to the University of South Africa Research Ethics Review Committee. There is a minimum of one REC per college. It plays a governance function within the unit.
Sub-unit RECs/ERCs	The sub-unit RECs are school and departmental committees affiliated to and reporting to the college/institute/centre REC
HREC	Health Research Ethics Committee registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council to review human research in accordance with the National Health Act no. 61 of 2003.
AREC	Animal Research Ethics Committee
URERC	University of South Africa Research Ethics Review Committee Refers to the university REC that has Unisa-wide jurisdiction and is not attached to or based in a single unit in Unisa. It is a subcommittee of the Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Studies and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC).
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SRIPCC	Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Studies and Commercialisation Committee The SRIPCC acts on behalf of and reports to Senate.

1 PURPOSE OF THE SOP

The purpose of this SOP is to provide clarity regarding institutional lines and authority relevant to Research Ethics Governance at Unisa. The National Health Act 61 of 2003, the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics, the Policy on Academic Integrity, the Unisa Strategic Plan, the Unisa Research

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and Innovation Strategy and Plan, and the Unisa Research Ethics Strategy, inform oversight of RERCs at Unisa. The oversight of Animal RERCs is informed by the South African National Standard, “The care and use of animals for scientific purposes” SANS 10386:2008. International codes also inform the governance of the research conduct including the Belmont Report, the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences International Ethical (CIOMS) Guidelines and the Singapore Statement.

2 SCOPE

The scope of this document covers the institutional lines and authority relevant to Research Ethics Governance at Unisa.

3 RESPONSIBILITIES

The Executive and Extended Management (including Executive Deans and Deputy Executive Deans), members of the Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Studies and Commercialisation Committee, URERC, CRICs, Heads of Graduate Studies and Research, REC chairpersons, REC committee deputy chairpersons, administrative assistants/secretaries and members of all RECs should be aware of the Unisa research ethics governance framework.

4 THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA RESEARCH ETHICS GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 The University of South Africa (Unisa) is committed to promoting the conduct of ethical research and upholding the highest quality of academic and scientific standards in teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community engagement. To this end, Unisa subscribes to the King IV Report on Corporate Governance, thus moving away from a tick-box approach, to a principle-and-outcome approach. In addition, the critical role of stakeholders in the process of governance is acknowledged.
- 4.2 The Unisa Policy on Research Ethics, Policy on Academic Integrity and Code of Conduct set out the standards of conduct expected of all Unisa employees and students engaged in research and innovation. Breaches of these standards are dealt with through the Policy on Academic Integrity and the Disciplinary Code of the university.
- 4.3 Unisa fully endorses the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity. The statement expresses the expectations of researchers and their employers to promote responsible research practices.
- 4.4 To promote good research ethics governance, Unisa’s research ethics system and framework are informed by national legislation and regulatory requirements.

- 4.5 Subject to the Higher Education Act, 1997, Senate is accountable to Council for all the teaching, learning, research and academic functions of the university¹, inclusive of research ethics. The Vice-Chancellor is accountable for ensuring good corporate governance at Unisa (inclusive of research ethics governance).
- 4.6 The Senate, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, established the Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Studies and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) to perform its functions concerning research governance (inclusive of research ethics governance).
- 4.7 The Vice Principal: Research, Postgraduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation is the portfolio manager of research, innovation and commercialisation and responsible for all research related activities in the institution.
- 4.8 The SRIPCC, chaired by the VP: Research, Postgraduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation, inter alia, (a) develops and ensures the implementation of the research, intellectual property and postgraduate degrees policies and procedures, (b) develops and ensures execution of the strategic research and innovation plan of the institution, (c) monitors the implementation of the research and innovation policies and strategies of the institution and (d) makes recommendations to Senate on legislation, regulations, norms, standards and procedures relating to postgraduate degrees. Research ethics governance are firmly entrenched in the mandate of the SRIPCC aligned to its mission to foster a climate in the institution conducive to research and innovation².
- 4.9 University-wide good research ethics governance is a shared responsibility by the Executive Director: Research Administration and the Executive Deans of Unisa Colleges founded on Unisa's decentralised, research ethics governance system.
- 4.10 The Executive Director: Research Administration chairs the URERC and is the officer responsible for the revision of the Policies relating to Research Ethics and the implementation of university-wide SOPs. The Executive Director: Research Administration is accountable and responsible for the operationalisation, implementation and maintenance of sound research ethics systems, processes and practices on institutional level.
- 4.11 Executive Deans (EDs) of Colleges/ Units are accountable and responsible for the operationalisation, implementation and maintenance of sound research ethics systems, processes and practices on College level.
- 4.12 The SRIPCC delegates its responsibility regarding research ethics to one of its sub-committees, namely the University of South Africa Research Ethics Review Committee (URERC).

¹ Institutional Statute, paragraph 26 (4)

² Terms of Reference, SRIPCC.

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- 4.13 The EDs and Heads: Graduate Studies and Research represent the respective Colleges on the CRICs and SRIPCC.
- 4.14 To optimise the functioning of the URERC and strategically guide and promote high standards of research integrity and ethics, the Manager: Research Integrity (Directorate: Research Support) manages the institutionalisation and operationalisation of research ethics as defined by Unisa policies and procedures.
- 4.15 The Manager: Research Integrity advises the Executive Director: Research Administration and URERC about research ethics governing matters relating to the Unisa-wide research ethics system.
- 4.16 The Manager: Research Integrity is the deputy-chairperson of URERC, a member of the SRIPCC representing URERC, as well as a member of the Social and Ethics Committee of Council, and can also attends College/Unit/sub-unit REC meetings in an advisory capacity.
- 4.17 The URERC meets quarterly, submits quarterly reports to the SRIPCC concerning research ethics matters and advises the Senate and Council through the SRIPCC about research ethics matters.
- 4.18 A secretariat in the Directorate: Research Support provides administrative support to URERC, in particular to maintain a register of all ethics applications processed by Unisa RECs.
- 4.19 The main role of URERC is to promote the conduct of ethical research in Unisa and to optimise Unisa-wide regulatory compliance concerning research ethics. In particular, it contributes to safeguarding the dignity, rights, safety, and wellbeing of all actual or potential research participants and communities, as well as animals and plants, while taking into account the interests and needs of researchers and the integrity of Unisa³.
- 4.20 URERC reviews research ethics applications from non-Unisa researchers that require access to do research that involves Unisa employees, students or data.
- 4.21 The chairpersons of CRECs notify the URERC of high-risk research that has received ethics approval to promote sufficient risk reporting.
- 4.22 URERC considers appeals against the decisions of CRECs.
- 4.23 As an independent body with Unisa-wide jurisdiction, URERC comprises of members who:
- represent a specific College or other institutional Ethics Review Committees
 - have the ability to undertake thorough, competent and timely reviews of research proposals in the absence of undue political, institutional, professional

³ Terms of Reference, URERC, paragraph 1.1
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or market influence⁴ (refer to the Terms of Reference of the Unisa Research Ethics Review Committee).

- 4.24 The members of URERC is responsible for the governing or research ethics, on behalf of the Executive Deans of the respective colleges/units and represent the College ethics review committees (CRECs)/ unit CERCs. These members include all chairpersons of the Unisa colleges or other institutional Ethics Review Committees such as the Professional Research Committee.
- 4.25 The ad hoc members of URERC include persons with competence in law, research ethics and laypersons.
- 4.26 The Executive Director: Research Administration confirms the appointment of members of the URERC (For more detail refer to the SOP on the selection and appointment of members).
- 4.27 The Executive Deans of Colleges are responsible for the appointment of CREC and HREC chairpersons (See the URERC ToR).
- 4.28 CRECs and HRECs are independent bodies comprising of members who have the ability to undertake thorough, competent and timely reviews of research proposals. They must be independent from political, institutional, professional and market pressure.
- 4.29 To promote strategic engagement and adequate reporting, the chairperson of the CREC is a designated member of the College Higher Degrees Committee and the CRIC.
- 4.30 Each College has an Office of Graduate Studies and Research that is managed by a Head: Graduate Studies and Research, who is an academic employee. The Head: Graduate Studies and Research is an ex officio member of the CREC responsible for reporting on ethics matters to College Management and the SRIPCC.
- 4.31 The Heads of Graduate Studies and Research are academic employees responsible for the implementation of the Unisa Research and Innovation Strategy and Plan in the College. They must ensure that the Plan includes a plan for research ethics review at College level.
- 4.32 Research Ethics Review at Unisa aims to be disciplinary-relevant and takes into account the anticipated level of risk associated with any research in order to warrant proportionate review (See Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment).
- 4.33 In Unisa different categories of Research Ethics Committees exist, namely the institutional or URERC, college/unit RECs, HRECs, AREC and schools/departmental (sub-unit) RECs.
- 4.34 Any Committee reviewing health or health-related research must be registered to the National Health Research Ethics Council.

⁴ Terms of Reference, URERC, paragraph 1.3
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- 4.35 HRECs are independent structures accountable to comply with the research ethics standards set by the NHREC and to report to the NHREC.
- 4.36 The College/unit RECs are attached to or based in a specific college/institute/centre. There is a minimum of one unit REC per college.
- (a) The College REC chairperson, is responsible to ensure implementation of the Unisa Research Ethics Strategy:
 - (i) Participating in the development and implementation of strategy, policies, Ethics Review Committee terms of reference and standard operating procedures to facilitate ethical research and ethics review.
 - (ii) Providing guidance to and promote the compliance of the Departmental/Sub-unit RECs with national legislation and institutional regulations.
 - (iii) Contribute to more efficient research ethics governance across the university by engaging in scholarly deliberations and capacity development initiatives.
 - (b) To ensure operational efficiency and strategic engagement, the chairperson is a member of the Higher Degrees and College Research and Innovation Committee.
 - (d) College RECs must approve medium and high-risk applications.
 - (e) College RECs are notified/ratify the decisions made by the departmental RECs reporting to them.
- 4.37 The sub-unit RECs are either School committees or departmental committees affiliated to, and reporting to the college/institute/centre. The School Directors, and Chairs of Departments, are responsible to ensure sound research ethics governance and delegate authority to the RECs on School and Departmental levels. These committees report to the College RECs and only approve negligible or low risk research.

5. Authority lines

In table, 5.1 the reporting lines as prescribed by Unisa’s institutional governance framework is illustrated. However, the reporting lines of the RECs registered at the NHREC requires additional reporting lines required by the National Health Act, No. 61 of 2003.

Table 5.1 Institutional, unit/college and national lines of authority

Level	Committee	Accountable	Responsible	Functions	Terms of Reference
Institutional level	Senate	VC	VP: RIPSC	RE Policy Approval	
	Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Studies and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC)	VP: RIPSC	ED: Research	Review RE reports	
	University of South Africa Research Ethics Review Committee (URERC)	ED: Research	Manager: Research Integrity	Manages the design, implementation and evaluation of sound research ethics governance at Unisa Reviews non-health research proposals (external applicants) Appeals	
Unit level	College Research and Innovation Committees (CRIC)	Executive Dean	Head: Graduate & Research Office	Research and Innovation Strategy and Plan Research Ethics Strategy and Plan	
	College Research Ethics Review Committees (CREC) – not registered/non-health	Executive: Dean	Chairperson	Research Ethics Strategy and Plan Review RE applications Issue RE Certificates Appeals	
	School Research Ethics Review Committees (SREC)	Executive: Dean	Director/Chairperson	Review RE applications Issue RE Certificates	
	Departmental Research Ethics Review Committees – not registered (DREC)	Executive Dean	COD/Chairperson	Review RE applications Issue RE Certificates	
National level	HREC registered to the NHREC	Executive Dean/Chairperson	Chairperson	Ethics Strategy and Plan As set out in the TOR Reporting to NHREC URERC	

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6. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

- 6.1 Department of Health, Republic of South Africa. (2015). *Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures*.
- 6.2 King IV Report. Available from: <http://www.adamsadams.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/King-IV-Report.pdf>
- 6.3 Singapore Statement on Research Integrity. (2010). Available from: <https://wcrif.org/documents/327-singapore-statement-a4size/file>