Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Guidelines for Committee Members

1.   Committee Procedures

Committee procedures are detailed in the Human Ethics Committee Terms of Reference which are available in the Committee Member Reference File and on the MUHEC website (http://humanethics.massey.ac.nz).

This section draws attention to aspects of the procedures of particular importance to members.

1.1   The Committee meets at least once per month (except January); however extra meetings will be scheduled as required as all applications received in a month will be processed that month. Meetings begin at 10.00am (MUHEC: Southern A & B) and 9.15am (MUHEC: Northern) and will finish no later than 3.30pm for MUHEC: Southern A & B and 4.30pm for MUHEC: Northern (finishing time is dependent on the number of applications).

1.2   If possible, Committee members should give notice of absence to the Secretary prior to the agenda being prepared (i.e. two weeks before the meeting).   If the agenda has already been circulated, Committee members should advise the Secretary as soon as possible of their absence and provide written feedback on their assigned applications.

1.3   Car parking for meeting days will be organised by the Secretary on a yearly basis. Committee member should provide the Secretary with details of the make, model and number plate of their car.

1.4   Refreshments will be provided, including lunch for all day meetings.

1.5   On request, Committee members will be provided with a Massey University library card by the Secretary.

1.6   Committee members should read the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants and bring a copy to every meeting.

1.7   The quorum for meetings is six (6), with at least three (3) from the Community Membership category.

1.8   A Deputy Chair will be elected at the last meeting of the current calendar year for the following year. This person will act in the Chairperson's absence.

1.9   Meetings will be conducted in two parts. Part I will consist of general business which the public may attend. Part II will exclude the public so that matters may be discussed without public disclosure when the Committee is satisfied that there are considerations that outweigh the public interest of disclosure.

1.10   Agendas, minutes and appropriate documentation will be distributed to each member of the Committee ten to fourteen days prior to the meeting.   Occasionally late items are accepted at the discretion of the Chair.   These documents will be distributed to Committee members in a second posting.

1.11   Applications for approval will be on the MUHEC Application form.

1.12   The Committee is available to discuss with potential Applicants difficult ethical issues concerning their research, teaching and evaluation proposals.

1.13 Discussion of applications will normally be restricted to ethical issues and not involve discussion of research methods unless these create an ethical dimension.

1.14 The Committee may request an Applicant to attend a Committee meeting to provide further information before approval will be given.

1.15 Each application submitted to a Human Ethics Committee will be assigned to one of the following approval categories:

- *Approved*
  Either with or without comments.

- *Provisionally approved*
  Subject to revisions of the application and/or satisfactory answers to questions submitted to the Applicant. The Applicant's reply and/or revised application to be forwarded to the Secretary and referred for approval to the Chair and/or the Chair and nominated Committee Member(s).

- *Approval deferred*
  Pending substantial revisions of the application and/or satisfactory answers to questions submitted to the Applicant. The Applicant's reply and/or revised application to be forwarded to the Committee for reconsideration.

- *Approval declined*
  Reasons for declining approval to be forwarded to the Applicant, either with or without an invitation to submit a substantially revised application for reconsideration by the Committee.

1.16 Approval for research and teaching projects will expire at the end of three (3) years from the date of final approval.

1.17 The Chair has the power to approve amendments when these are of a minor nature. These must be ratified at the next meeting.

1.18 An expedited review may be requested by an Applicant in writing to the Chairperson. If the Chair agrees that an application requires a more rapid response than can be given if the matter waited until the next scheduled Committee meeting, an expedited review may be granted. This procedure requires circulation of the application to Committee Members and at least half of the Committee, including at least one Maori and one Community Member, indicating their approval of the application. These decisions must be ratified at the next Committee meeting.

1.19 Where there is insufficient expertise on the Committee to assess an application properly or address an issue raised, the Committee may seek additional expert advice. Such experts may be invited to attend a relevant Committee meeting.

1.20 Decisions will normally be made by consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved, the decision will be made by the majority, and the minority viewpoint recorded in the minutes.

1.21 To achieve impartiality, any member of the Committee who has an application before the Committee or who has a conflict of interest whereby the impartiality of that member could be questioned, will withdraw from the Committee's assessment of that application.

1.22 Committee Members are supported and encouraged to consult on ethical issues with individuals, whanau, hapu and iwi, provided the confidentiality of the application and details of the issue under appraisal are protected. Members should obtain consent from the Committee or Chair before any consultation takes place.

1.23 Complaints will be dealt with according to the Complaints Procedures of the Human Ethics Committee.

1.24 Requests for reconsideration of a decision made by a Human Ethics Committee will be dealt with according to the Reconsideration Procedures of the Human Ethics Committee.

2. Education of Committee Members

Committee members learn informally by participation in the work of the committee throughout their term. Formally, new committee members are educated about their responsibilities through induction and mentoring. All committee members are also provided with ongoing professional development in human research ethics issues.

2.1 Induction
Following notification of their appointment, new committee members are contacted by the committee chairperson to receive an overview of the committee's processes and procedures. Typically, new members attend one or two monthly committee meetings before presenting their first review of an application. New Committee members may also be paired with another academic or community member, who acts as their mentor.

2.2 Mentoring
Gaining familiarity with the processes and procedures of the committee, and the confidence to participate fully in its discussions, may take several months. The committee chair monitors the confidence of new members. Mentors may jointly review applications with new members or provide advice and support with regard to processes and procedures.

2.3 Professional Development
Relevant articles and media items are regularly included in committee members' meeting papers. Chairs occasionally report items of interest from the Human Ethics Chairs Committee, other ethics-related meetings or their wider reading. Community members are also entitled to request reading facilities at the Massey University Library. The main formal professional development opportunity for committee members is the annual professional development workshop, held in November. At this, members of the three MUHEC committees meet together to listen to guest speakers and discuss topical human ethics issues. There is a modest professional development annual budget for each committee to subsidise member participation in approved professional development activities.

3. Committee Members' Responsibilities Prior to the Committee Meeting

Committee members should refer to the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants when reviewing applications. To be an effective Committee member requires the willingness and ability to conduct a thorough review of research applications and do the majority of the work before the Committee meeting. Identifying and evaluating ethical issues are often time consuming and complex processes.

All Committee members must read all applications. In addition, individual Committee members will be allocated a small number of applications (generally 1 to 3) to present at the Committee meeting. Members should read applications on receipt of documents and again just prior to the meeting.

It is important to develop a formal personal system for reviewing applications. What works well for one Committee member, may not be the best system for another. One suggestion is as follows:

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3.1 Reviewing an Application

3.1.1 Read the Information Sheet
Because the purpose of this document is to explain the important aspects of the research to potential subjects in lay language, it should provide a good introduction to the application. During this initial reading, members should not take notes or attempt to correct the wording of the document. The purpose of this reading is to familiarise the member with the overall design of the study.

3.1.2 Read the application summary
After completing an overview of the research based on the Information Sheet, the Committee member should review the summary of the application. The applicant is expected to have summarised the important aspects of the research in a way that facilitates the Committee's review.

3.1.3 Read the full application
The full application and supporting material should then be read carefully, with notes taken as needed.

3.1.4 Read the Information Sheet again
The member should next reread the Information Sheet and other supporting documents, this time recording suggested corrections or questions. A check should be made that all information in the application relevant to participants is included on the Information Sheet.

3.1.5 Check documentation
All attached documents should be reviewed for inclusion of the required information and appropriateness for their intended audience.

On the MUHEC website researchers have been given suggested formats for the following documents:
- Information Sheet
- Consent form
- Confidentiality Agreement
- Transcriber's Confidentiality Agreement
- Authority for Release of Tape Transcripts

3.2 Additional Information/Presenter's Responsibilities Prior to the Committee Meeting

3.2.1 Consider the Committee meeting to be primarily a place to make decisions, not gather information
An effective Committee will use the full Committee meeting time to debate issues and make the difficult determinations that are required to meaningfully influence the protection of research subjects. It is counterproductive to use the meeting time for things that could have been done more effectively before the meeting.

3.2.2 Get questions answered before the Committee meeting
A thorough review usually means that members may need clarification or additional information about aspects of the research proposal. The meeting is not the best place for most of these activities. Applications must be read ahead of time so that members may come to the meeting with the information needed to make an informed recommendation about how the Committee should decide on the issue.

3.2.3 Concerns regarding procedural matters
The Secretary should be contacted if a member has any queries concerning the choice of application form, the choice of Committee or any other procedural questions so that issues can be sorted out before the meeting.

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3.2.4 Concerns about an application
Before the meeting, a member should inform the Chair and/or other Committee members of any substantive concerns about an application as every attempt should be made to resolve issues prior to the meeting.

3.2.5 Decide if the applicant should attend the meeting
If a member considers that it will be useful for an applicant to attend the meeting, the Secretary should be contacted, who will inform the applicant of this with as much lead in time as possible. The applicant should be given as clear an idea as possible why his or her presence at the meeting may be useful.

The most common reason to have an applicant attend the meeting is to discuss an important issue that could not be resolved before the meeting. Another reason might involve a situation where the Presenter thinks it will be important for other members to hear a researcher explain something personally rather than to have the Presenter explain to the Committee that there is no reason to be concerned.

3.2.6 Substantial changes in the language of the application or accompanying documents
The Committee meeting is not the place to spend time polishing the wording of the Information Sheet, Consent Form etc. It is preferable if the Presenter comes to the meeting with an explicit recommendation on how the documentation should be revised.

4. Committee Members' Responsibilities at the Committee meeting

4.1 Presentation of Applications at the Committee Meeting

4.1.1 Limit the initial summary of your review to one to two minutes
It is difficult to follow a presentation that lasts more than one to two minutes. Remember the purpose of an initial presentation is to summarise the important points.

4.1.2 Resist the urge to impress the Committee with how much work has been done
In many situations, a high quality review requires many hours of hard work on the part of the Presenter. The Committee expects and appreciates a thorough review on the part of each Presenter but the optimal Committee function requires only a bottom-line summary at the Committee meeting. This is not to say that members should not explain the efforts that they went through to evaluate an application or the complex issues that they encountered. It is both important and appropriate for Presenters to explain to the Committee the important relevant events including significant time factors. However, it is possible to summarise this information in a way that gives the Committee the facts needed to make an informed determination.

4.1.3 Questions from other members should wait until the presentation is made
In many situations, Committee members will want to ask questions to clarify their understanding of the Presenter's review. The Committee meeting will function optimally if the meeting is structured so that the Presenter completes the summary presentation before comments or questions are allowed from other members.

4.1.4 End the presentation with a recommendation
There are many situations where the Presenter wants to consider the opinions of other members, before finalising his/her recommendation. This is how the Committee should function, however it will improve the review process if Presenters approach their applications with a goal of being able to end their initial presentation with a recommendation for how the Committee should decide on the item in question. All Committee members should understand that such recommendations should be viewed as preliminary assessments that are being included in the initial presentations

to help members clarify their thinking on the important issues that are required to make a determination on an application.

4.2 Interaction with applicants/members of the public

4.2.1 Treat all applicants with courtesy

Occasionally staff and student applicants attend meetings by invitation or request. For student applicants in particular, the experience of appearing before the committee may cause anxiety. The Chair will normally invite committee members to speak in turn. Committee members should phrase their queries to applicants politely and unambiguously and allow the applicant sufficient time to respond. The intention is to facilitate collegial dialogue between the committee and applicants to ensure that the committee has all the information it requires in order to make its decision. Adversarial interactions should always be avoided.

4.2.2 Avoid disclosing identifying details from applications to members of the public

Normally, applications are considered in Part I of the agenda, which is open to members of the public, including press. Members of the public rarely attend Committee meetings. They may request a copy of the Part I Agenda. When members of the public are present, the Chair will advise Committee members to avoid the use of identifying details such as names, institutions and places. This is to protect the confidentiality of research participants

4.3 Interaction with Chair and other members

4.3.1 Understand the role of the Chair

The Human Ethics Committee follows committee procedural conventions. The Chair's role is to ensure that the agenda is followed and completed in the time available, that each application is reviewed thoroughly, that all members contribute to deliberations, and that decisions are accurately summarised in the minutes by the Secretariat. Unusually, MUHEC meeting minutes are approved at the time of review so that the Chair has delegated authority to approve applications following meetings.

4.3.2 Take personal responsibility for ensuring effective committee deliberation

Committee members should be sensitive to the need for the Secretariat to accurately record deliberations and decisions. Questions and comments should be made through the Chair and members should avoid talking over one another. The aim is to achieve a consensus decision following thorough deliberation. Members should be respectful of the positions of other members, particularly where there is disagreement, and base their responses to these on moral reasoning with reference to the ethical principles in the Code. This also helps to ensure that minuted questions and queries to applicants explain precisely the reasons why the Committee wishes further information, clarification, or changes to an application.

5. Ethical Principles

5.1 Knowledge and Use of the Code

5.1.1 Deliberation and decisions are made by reference to ethical principles

These principles are contained in the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants. Committee members should have a full understanding of the Code and avoid discussions and recommendations based on personal belief alone. Applicants are referred to the ethical principles in the Code to assist them in answering questions in the application form. The ethical principles therefore provide a common basis for making decisions about the relative benefits and harms of a proposed research study. The intention of the Code is to provide

protection for all participants in research and certain teaching and evaluation programmes as well as to protect researchers and institutions.

5.2.2 In reviewing and discussing applications, committee members are required to apply the ethical principles that comprise the Code. The major ethical principles are:

- respect for persons;
- minimisation of harm to participants, researchers, institutions and groups;
- informed and voluntary consent;
- respect for privacy and confidentiality;
- the avoidance of unnecessary deception;
- avoidance of conflict of interest;
- social and cultural sensitivity to the age, gender, culture, religion, social class of the subjects;
- justice.