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RHODES UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

SOP 3.5 PROCESSES FOR DEALING WITH QUERIES COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS ABOUT RU-HREC OPERATIONS AND DECISIONS

Approved by:	Name	Signature	Date
Human Research Ethics Committee	Dr Janet Hayward (Chair)		26/02/2024
Endorsed by:			
VC Legal Unit	Mr Ismail Amojee		09/03/2024
DVC: RISP	Dr Kwezi Mzilikazi		12/03/2024

COMPILED BY Dr Janet Hayward, Chair, Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee

DOCUMENT HISTORY

Version 1.01 (November 2014): Rhodes University Ethical Standards Handbook (comprising Institutional Policy, Terms of Reference and Standard Operation Procedures).

Version 2.0 (February 2024): Derived from division of previous version into separate documents and revised to align with RU Research Policy (2021) and DoH Guidelines (2015; 2024).

PROCESSES FOR DEALING WITH QUERIES COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS ABOUT RHODES UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE OPERATIONS AND DECISIONS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline procedures dealing with queries, complaints and appeals about the operations and decisions of Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC).

2. Complaints, queries, and objections about ethics clearance decisions

Complaints, queries, and objections against Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC) decisions may take two forms:

- 1) an objection by a colleague internal to Rhodes University, or external party (e.g. funders), to a complete application,
- 2) an objection by a researcher who disagrees with the decision of the RU-HREC.

3. Objections and appeals to a complete application

- 3.1. The objector (whether internal or external) is to lodge a written objection citing valid reasons relating to the ethical premises of the research, with the Chair of the RU-HREC Committee. Vexatious objections, without substantive reasons, may be turned away.
- 3.2. The Chairperson is obliged to respond to the substantive concerns raised.
- 3.3. Depending on the nature of the objection, the preferred avenue is to attempt to resolve the issues raised in consultation with the relevant parties (objector, the researcher, RU-HREC).
- 3.4. The input of a senior academic in the field, either internal or external, may be required to assist the RU-HREC in resolving the issue.
- 3.5. Where the objection cannot be resolved in this fashion, the DVC:R&I should attempt to resolve the dispute.
- 3.6. Where this is unsuccessful, the objector may appeal to the NHREC.

4. Objections and appeals by a researcher who disagrees with the decision of the RU-HREC.

- 4.1. A researcher who wishes to appeal an ethics clearance decision will write to the RU-HREC Chair with a clear rationale for the appeal.
- 4.2. Responses will depend on the risk level of the study:
 - 1) In risk levels 'low' and 'medium', the Chair should invite the researcher and (where applicable) the supervisor, to discuss the appeal with the RU-HREC in person or in writing; RU-HREC may then revise the decision, retain the decision, or seek further advice from RUREF, and/or internal or external experts.
 - 2) At risk level 'high' the RU-HREC Chair should appoint senior academic reviewers either internally or externally to review the application, the previous reviews, and the researcher's response, and make a recommendation to RU-HREC regarding how to resolve the issue.

5. Effective date of this SOP

26th February 2024 with the next revision date being 26th February 2027, or as deemed necessary by a quorate meeting of RU-HREC.