

MAXIMISING THE CHANCE OF FIRST TIME APPROVAL

Research Ethics and Integrity Animal Ethics

How to optimise your application for approval

It is highly recommended that prior to submission you discuss your application with your Faculty/Institutional or Centre Research Ethics Advisor and/or with the Research Ethics and Integrity (REI) Veterinary Officer or your UQ Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) Secretary.

All researchers should inform themselves of the requirements in *The Australian Code of Practice for the Care and use of animals for scientific purposes* (current edition) [the Code] as well as UQ policy and guidelines within 4.20.11 Animal Ethics in Teaching and Research.

Wildlife researchers should read, Section 5 (Wildlife Studies) of the Code which makes particular reference to free-living vertebrates and those captured from free-living populations, including native, non-indigenous and vertebrate pest species. It should be read in conjunction with the rest of the Code, and in conjunction with any other relevant legislation, especially the *Nature Conservation Act* (1992) if work is being conducted in Queensland.

The Code clearly sets out in Section 2.7.4 the information AECs are required to obtain from applicants within an application form.

In assessing applications, it is often difficult for the UQ AECs to obtain a clear picture of what happens to individual animals from the beginning to the end of the project. The AECs must assess the impact on animals within all procedures and the project as a whole, so these details should be provided in a clear and concise manner. The application should therefore focus on what is happening to the animals and what is being done to ensure their wellbeing. It is important that this information is presented in a way that shows clearly what is happening to the individual animals from the beginning to the completion of a project. The impact of procedures needs to be clearly detailed. The investigator should provide step-by-step explanation of all treatments (substances, dose rate, routes, volumes, needle size, anaesthetics, analgesics, surgical procedures etc.) and the expected effects on the animals. In addition, factors that will impact on animals such as housing (type, duration, environmental enrichment, diet) should be considered. Where SOPs have been previously approved for use, these should be utilised within applications to the AEC so as to ensure best practice and minimise repetition of information. Approved SOPs can also be varied within the application. All current SOPs are available on the Animal Ethics website at: <https://www.uq.edu.au/research/research-support/ethics-integrity-and-compliance/animal-ethics/standard-operating-procedures-sops>

The application should also explain clearly why the use of animals is justified, why the species and number of animals have been chosen and that the qualifications of personnel are suitable for the procedures to be performed.

The AEC must be assured that the 3Rs of animal use (refinement, replacement and reduction) are complied with and that the benefits of the animal use outweigh the potential costs to the animals. Therefore, your application must convince the AEC that:

- Animal use is essential to achieve the stated goal (i.e. no other means are available);
- The scientific merit of the project justifies the use of animals; and
- The minimum number of animals required to achieve valid data has been proposed for use (in some instances this may be more animals), with the least possible impact on the well-being of animals involved.

It is important for applicants to remember the composition of the AEC. Applications must be written primarily for an interested intelligent person without a scientific background (the Code section 2.4.12). The use of specialist language without appropriate explanations may delay the approval of an application or see it returned for revision.

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What are the most common problems with applications that delay approval?

Common problems with applications that may result in delays to the approval process include:

- Required participants are missing – All projects must have a Chief Investigator, Alternative Investigator, Facility Manager (if animal work is being undertaken in a UQ facility) and Emergency Contact. Some other projects will also require the inclusion of an Administrator, External Monitor and Veterinarian.
- If participants are external to UQ, ensure all required information regarding their registration to undertake Scientific Procedures via their institutions or as an individual is provided.
- If the project involves participants from a number of institutes, or overseas participants, then the type of collaboration must be outlined, and registration of any other institutes or AECs.
- It is a requirement that the application be written in plain English. If this is not done, then clarification may be required. Failing to describe the aims and benefits in simple language prevents the lay members of the AEC being able to assess the remainder of the application - Ensure all specialist language is replaced or explained.
- The use of unexplained acronyms. Where an acronym is to be used, ensure it is explained at its first use.
- The use of animals is not adequately justified, or the statistical justification is poorly addressed. (see 1.1 of *The Code* for the criteria used by the AEC in determining if a project is justified and in weighing up the benefits of the project against the potential effects on the animals). You may require a biometrician to provide justifications for the numbers proposed, if a statistical justification is provided. It is also important to ensure that the correct type of justification is provided, ensure you read the drop-down information available at this question in the application.
- Ensure you appropriately address each of the 3Rs. It is also imperative that the 3Rs are addressed at all stages of your application, and not just in the Scientific Purpose.
- The severity of the procedures is not adequately justified.
- The use of non-animal alternatives is not adequately addressed.
- Answers are not provided to ALL required questions.
- There is inadequate or insufficient information, especially with respect to procedures, dose rates and monitoring - provide full details of procedures. When referring to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), indicate the SOP number and title. Ensure the SOP information you are providing is the most up to date available from the Animal Ethics website. When varying an existing SOP, ensure you outline the whole variation.
- There is a discrepancy between the numbers of animals requested and the description of the experiment(s) in the text of the application.