



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
Faculty of Health Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee



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Dear Heads of Departments, Departmental Research Chairs, Principal Investigators, Researchers, Supervisors, Postdoctoral Fellows, Postgraduate Students and Undergraduate Students

RE: UPDATED LETTER - FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC) TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR RESEARCHERS, ALL RESEARCH STAFF, AND ALL POSTGRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS CONDUCTING RESEARCH

The HREC has updated its letter (originally issued 18 September 2025) to revise and clarify the Research Ethics Training Requirements for all research involving human participants, samples, and/or data. The updates include alternative training courses and clarification to address queries and challenges experienced by researchers and students since the original letter was disseminated.

Key updates/revisions:

1. Revised effective date (1 July 2026) – i.e., a grace period of 6 months to complete the research ethics training requirements.
2. Who is required to complete research ethics training.
3. Access to UCT ORI research ethics training modules on SuccessFactors.
4. HPCSA-accredited Continuing Professional Development (CPD) ethics points for completing ORI research ethics training modules.
5. Acceptable alternative research ethics training courses.
6. Good Clinical Practice (GCP) vs research ethics training requirements.

National requirements for research ethics training

In 2024 the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC) published the updated Ethics in Health Research Guidelines: Principles, Processes and Structures (National Department of Health, NDoH 2024).

The updated guidelines stipulate that “all researchers, and students who undertake research with human participants must complete theoretical research ethics training to ensure they are familiar with expectations, especially those set out in the NDoH 2024 guidelines and, for clinical trials, the South African Guidelines for Good Practice in the Conduct of Clinical Trials, SA GCP 2020 (Section 5.4, page 86: NDoH, 2024)”.

Who is required to complete research ethics training

The expectation is that all researchers (Principal and co-investigators as well all research study staff/assistants with direct or indirect interaction with human participants or their data and samples), including undergraduate and postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows, should complete the institutional-required research ethics training before conducting research. Researchers are expected to ensure they have the appropriate knowledge, skills, expertise, competence, including discipline-appropriate scientific background and research ethics training to conduct studies involving human participants (NDoH, 2024).

Accordingly, the Faculty of Health Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) will require evidence of research ethics training from everyone involved in research, to be submitted with all new protocol applications and annual progress reports for health research¹. This research ethics training requirement includes everyone (e.g., principal and co-investigators; research coordinators; fieldworkers; and all study staff and assistants) with direct or indirect interaction with human participants or their data and samples. The training requirement also encompasses all types of health research, including but not limited to clinical trials, quantitative research, qualitative research, cell lines, case reports/series, databases/registries/repositories, systematic or scoping reviews, retrospective audits or folder reviews, and all undergraduate and postgraduate student research. If you have any queries regarding the research ethics training requirement for different study staff or the nature of health research, please contact the HREC at hrec-enquiries@uct.ac.za.

Implementation date and grace period

The implementation date for the updated research ethics training requirements has been revised from 1 January 2026 to 1 July 2026, providing a six-month grace period for everyone to complete the required training. All researchers and students are requested to adhere to the research ethics training requirement as soon as possible.

Please note that, effective from **1 July 2026**, the HREC will not accept new ethics applications or annual progress reports without research ethics training certification as described below.

Minimum required research ethics training (UCT ORI Modules)

The HREC's minimum research ethics requirement is completion of the UCT Office of Research Integrity (ORI) *Module 4: Research Involving Human Participants and Module 5: Managing and Sharing Human Research Data*. These courses are accredited by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and researchers can apply for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) ethics points by following instructions and completing a short form on this [webpage](#). The estimated completion time of the ORI modules is three (3) hours each.

Access to ORI training modules on SuccessFactors

The modules are freely accessible on SuccessFactors to all UCT permanent/T2 staff and postgraduate students (Master's, Doctoral, Postdoctoral). Postgraduate student access to the modules, including downloading the certificates, requires active registration for the current academic year. Please prioritise finalising your registration for 2026; your access to SuccessFactors will be restored within approximately 48 hours, and you can retrieve your certificates or complete the online content thereafter.

Please note that you need to be fully registered (i.e., your MOU/PPA needs to be finalised and signed off and your registration complete) for the data to transfer from PeopleSoft to SuccessFactors. Please note you need to use your official UCT staff or student email address to access SuccessFactors (personal emails such as Gmail, Yahoo etc will NOT work). If you experience technical issues with the training platform, please contact the ORI directly via email at research.integrity@uct.ac.za.

Acceptable alternative research ethics training

The HREC will accept alternative research ethics training courses, such as those listed below, only if they include both an assessment and certification of training. In accordance with NHREC requirements, the HREC cannot accept courses that do not have an assessment included – for example workshop attendance only without assessment and certification is not sufficient to meet the NHREC requirements.

Alternative ethics training courses from other South African institutions, particularly HPCSA-accredited training, will be accepted only if they include an assessment and certification. Typical assessments include module-based quizzes with a required minimum score to obtain certification.

¹ The National Health Act 61 of 2003 (NHA) defines 'health research' to include any research which contributes to knowledge of a) the biological, clinical, psychological or social processes in human beings, b) improved methods for the provision of health services, c) human pathology, d) the causes of disease, e) the effects of the environment on the human body, f) the development or new application of pharmaceuticals, medicines, and related substances, and g) the development of new applications of health technology (NDoH, 2024).

Examples of alternative research training courses

1. [Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation \(TRREE\)](#) modules 1-3.
2. TCPS 2 CORE-2022 (Course on Research Ethics): Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. <https://www.tcps2core.ca/welcome>
3. U.S. Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) Human Research Protection Training <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/education-and-outreach/human-research-protection-training/index.html>
4. WHO Research Ethics Online Training <https://globalhealthtrainingcentre.tghn.org/research-ethics-online-training-v2/>
5. CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) Program. Human Subjects Protection courses <https://about.citiprogram.org/series/human-subjects-research-hsr/>

If a researcher or student has completed a course(s) not on the HREC list, they need to submit a course descriptor showing that there is an assessment plus their ethics training certificate.

Research ethics vs Good Clinical Practice (GCP) certification

Please note, while there may be some overlap, there is a difference between research ethics training (which is the focus of this notification) and Good Clinical Practice (GCP) training. The HREC would like to clarify the misconception that researchers who have done GCP, do not need to do additional research ethics training. All those involved in clinical trials (e.g., principal and co-investigators, study coordinators, research nurses, clinical staff, and other research personnel) are still required to have valid South African Good Clinical Practice (SA GCP) certification in addition to the above research ethics training requirements.

Expiry of research ethics training certification

Please note that, in accordance with NDoH (2024) requirements, research ethics training must be renewed every three years. If prior research ethics training has been completed (only for courses stated above), this certification will be accepted by the HREC if the date of completion is within three years of the training requirement effective date (1 July 2026).

Please plan ahead and ensure completion of the required research ethics training before submitting HREC applications and annual progress reports.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and is essential to ensuring continued compliance with national and institutional requirements for health research in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Yours sincerely



PROFESSOR MARC BLOCKMAN

CHAIRPERSON, FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE