

Animal Care Competency Training and Assessment

Section 1 - Purpose

(1) This document has the same force and effect as a procedure and sets out competency training and assessment requirements for all people involved in the care and use of animals for scientific purposes in association with the University and ensures that they:

- a. understand their responsibilities and the requirements of the [Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes 8th Edition 2013 \(Updated 2021\) \(the Code\)](#)
- b. have the necessary skills and knowledge
- c. have access to appropriate educational programs and resources.

(2) For the purpose of this procedure, scientific purposes includes, but is not limited to, use for research and teaching.

(3) This procedure outlines the mechanisms Charles Sturt University (the University) will use to assess and ensure the competence of people involved in the care and use of animals at the University. This procedure is not intended to outline the content or level of individual competence assessments.

Scope

(4) This procedure applies to all personnel involved in the care and use of animals for scientific purposes under the authority of the University's Animal Ethics Committee (AEC). Personnel includes chief investigators, investigators (e.g. teaching staff, researchers, students), animal care staff, animal technicians and the members of the AEC.

(5) In accordance with [the Code](#), this procedure does not apply where the immediate use of animals is required for the diagnosis of unexplained and severe disease outbreaks, or morbidity, in animals or people.

Section 2 - Policy

(6) This procedure supports the [Research Policy](#) and should be read alongside that policy.

Section 3 - Procedure

(7) Clause 1.29(i) of [the Code](#) states that people who care for and use animals must ensure that procedures are performed competently, and:

- a. be competent for the procedure they perform, or
- b. be under the direct supervision of a person who is competent to perform the procedure.

(8) The mechanisms that the University uses to ensure and assess competency differ across roles and are outlined below.

Competency requirements for animal-based researchers and teaching staff

(9) The University and the AEC recognise that the use of animals for scientific purposes involves a broad range of duties and procedures, and that investigators competent in a particular procedure are often the best personnel to supervise, train and assess competency in others.

(10) On occasion, and at the discretion of the presiding officer of the AEC, other personnel may be identified with the appropriate expertise and capability to train and assess competency in others.

(11) All researchers and teaching staff using animals for scientific purposes must be competent to care for and use animals for scientific purposes, demonstrated by:

- a. completion of the University's elearning modules related to research integrity and animal care and ethics
- b. satisfying the AEC that they are competent to perform their tasks
- c. in the case of investigators, having received instruction in a scientific discipline relevant to the experimental work being undertaken.

(12) Persons using animals for scientific purposes who are considered not yet competent must be under the direct supervision of a person who is competent, and supervision must continue until competency is attained.

(13) Persons who are considered not yet competent to care for or use animals are not permitted to be chief investigators for projects authorised by the AEC.

(14) Persons who have not completed mandatory training may be refused approval to use animals for scientific purposes by the AEC.

Assessing competency

(15) Evidence of competency must be provided as part of the ethics application for projects.

(16) Evidence of competency includes but is not limited to:

- a. higher education or vocational education and training qualifications
- b. certification of competence issued by a proper authority
- c. attestation by previous employers as to experience
- d. results of challenge tests by delegated University personnel, including the Animal Welfare Officer
- e. previous involvement in research or teaching that involved the competencies being claimed
- f. any other evidence that supports the competency.

(17) In submitting project documentation and applications to the AEC, the chief investigator will notify the AEC whether the persons involved in the project are competent to undertake their responsibilities in the project, or whether supervision will be required. When supervision is required, the chief investigator will nominate a person who is competent in the procedure to be the supervisor.

(18) In the annual progress report/continuation application to the AEC, the chief investigator will notify the AEC of any investigators who have achieved competence in their responsibilities.

(19) The AEC may require an assessment of competency in routine or specific activities. Such an assessment will be performed by a person or group nominated by the AEC and holding suitable qualifications, against a competency standard agreed by the AEC.

Chief investigators

(20) In accordance with [the Code](#) (clause 2.4.5), chief investigators have the responsibilities set out in the Glossary section of this procedure.

(21) Chief investigators must have completed the University's elearning modules related to research integrity including animal care and ethics.

(22) A chief investigator is usually, but not always, also an investigator, with all those associated responsibilities.

Animal care staff

(23) For the purpose of this procedure, animal care staff include any person charged with the care of animals, where those animals are used for scientific purposes. The care and use of animals for scientific purposes may be for the entire duration of their time in the care of the University or for a finite period in the course of an approved protocol.

- a. Examples of animals used for the entire duration of their time include the standing equine and sheep herds and the birds kept for laboratory diagnostic purposes.
- b. Examples of animals used intermittently are animals that are part of a project protocol for a finite period.

(24) [The Code](#) (clause 2.5.2) requires that, within the scope of their responsibilities, animal carers and veterinary staff must ensure that their duties are performed competently.

(25) In accordance with [the Code](#) (clause 2.5.14), the relevant animal facility managers are responsible for the overall management of research animal breeding and holding facilities at the University and are appointed on the basis of appropriate animal care or veterinary qualifications, or experience.

(26) The relevant officers with overall responsibility for management of animal facilities will ensure that:

- a. the practices and procedures for the care and management of animals are based on current best practice, as defined in [the Code](#) and the glossary of this document
- b. animal wellbeing is monitored by competent animal care staff, knowledgeable about animal behaviour and signs of both good and ill health, pain, distress and injury for the species at all stages and sites of animal care and use
- c. routine monitoring by animal care staff occurs frequently enough that sick, distressed or injured animals are promptly detected and identified, and appropriate action is taken.

(27) The University is supportive of animal care staff in gaining formal animal care qualifications and accepts, as evidence of competency, completion of an appropriate competency based animal care course.

Heads of Schools and Research Centre Directors

(28) In signing submissions to the AEC by their staff the Head of School, Executive Director, Research Institute or delegates agree that they have:

- a. sighted relevant qualifications and training certificates for their staff
- b. confirmed relevant animal care and ethics elearning training is complete.

Animal Ethics Committee (AEC)

(29) Where the composition of the Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) meets the requirements of [the Code](#), the AEC is considered competent in undertaking ethical review and providing fair, consistent and timely review of applications and reports related to the care and use of animals.

(30) The Research Integrity Unit (RIU) provides new AEC members with a copy of [the Code](#) and may provide other materials as relevant to the business of the AEC.

(31) The RIU provides new AEC members with a program of induction and onboarding into their roles as committee members.

(32) New AEC members are required to undertake specific training as prescribed by regulatory bodies in the states and territories where the University holds a licence for the use of animals for scientific purposes.

(33) To further the competence of AEC members to undertake their duties, the University may support the attendance of AEC members at appropriate seminars, conferences and workshops.

Approval for publication and amendment

(34) While the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Research) has the delegated authority to approve this procedure for publication to the University's policy library, [the Code](#) requires, at clause 2.1.5(v), that procedures as to how the competence of people involved in the care and use of animals will be assessed and ensured are developed in consultation with and approved by the AEC.

(35) To ensure compliance with [the Code](#), major and minor variations to this procedure must be endorsed by the AEC before approval by the relevant delegated authority.

Section 4 - Guidelines

(36) Nil.

Section 5 - Glossary

(37) For the purpose of this procedure, the following terms have the definitions stated:

- a. Chief investigator – means the person with ultimate responsibility as identified in clause 2.4.5 of [the Code](#). 'A person must be identified who has ultimate responsibility for the care and use of animals in a project. This person must:
 - i. ensure that all people involved in the project understand and accept their roles and responsibilities
 - ii. ensure that procedures and resources are in place so that all people involved in the care and use of animals in the project can meet their responsibilities, including their education, training and supervision, as appropriate
 - iii. be competent with respect to the wellbeing of animals used in the project.'
 - iv. For clarity, the chief investigator does not relieve the individual responsibility of each investigator working with animals in any project.
- b. Current best practice – means, as defined by [the Code](#) (clause 1.9, 'Practices and procedures used for the care and management of animals must be based on current best practice that:
 - i. takes into consideration the relevant aspects of species-specific biology, physiology and behaviour
 - ii. is based on the best available scientific evidence (or, in the absence of scientific evidence, accepted practice), which includes the potential adverse impact of conditions and procedures on the wellbeing of the animals
 - iii. includes strategies to minimise adverse impacts.'
- c. Investigator – means, as defined by [the Code](#), 'any person who uses animals for scientific purposes. Includes researchers, teaching staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students involved in research projects, and people

involved in product testing, environmental testing, production of biological products and wildlife surveys.'

- d. Wellbeing of animals - means, as defined in [the Code](#), a condition in which 'an animal is in a positive mental state and is able to achieve successful biological function, to have positive experiences, to express innate behaviours, and to respond to and cope with potentially adverse conditions. Animal wellbeing may be assessed by physiological and behavioural measures of an animal's physical and psychological health and of the animal's capacity to cope with stressors, and species-specific behaviours in response to social and environmental conditions.'

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