

FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE ETHICAL CLEARANCE COMMITTEE (FoAECC) 2019-2021

1. The Scope

Universities are expected to conduct high quality research in a responsible manner ensuring that ethical conduct is practiced all time. Hence, each academic staff member is expected to undertake research in her/ his field of study, develop new knowledge and disseminate such new understandings to relevant stakeholders. Ethical conduct of research carry out by the academic staff of faculty of Agriculture is to be ensured by an authorized body. The main role of the proposed Ethical Clearance Committee (ECC) is to provide ethical clearance for the research proposals submitted by the academic staff members of the Faculty of Agriculture prior to submitting to funding sources. In addition, if any risk becomes apparent after the commencement of a research, a review will be conducted upon the request of the researcher. The committee is expected to provide an independent and timely review with suggestion for improvement of ethical aspects of objects used in the research, process for data collection and management at the outset of research. Thus, the approval process should serve as supporting mechanism for researchers but not as a barrier for timely submission of proposals, conducting of researches and publication of research findings. Committee may also advice on getting an approval from relevant regulatory agencies and laws applicable for certain activities of the proposed study.

2. The committee

The committee is an independent committee of Faculty of Agriculture and shall be appointed by the Faculty Board to consist 8-10 members. The committee along with the FRC will prepare Guidelines and Operational procedures adhering to the University policies and giving due consideration to the diverse interests and the needs of the researcher. The guidelines and operational procedures for ethical clearance process have to be approved by the Faculty board of Agriculture. The committee has a liberty to review the guidelines and update/ modify if necessary once in every 2 years and obtain the approval of the Faculty Board accordingly.

- The committee will work independently without any interference from the appointing body.
- Considering the disciplines of research that would seek the clearance, members will be selected from different sectors and institutions representing different disciplines. Members that hold administrative positions will not be considered.
- The committee will be comprised of 8-10 members from the Faculty of Agriculture and from outside representing the following disciplines are suggested to consider in appointing members:
- Appointment of members will be valid for a period of three years (as for the research committee). Reappointing for another term will be possible. The Faculty Board reserves the right for reappointment and termination of the membership.

- Provisions will be available to obtain the opinion of an outside expert when the required expertise is not available in the committee.
- If a situation of conflict of interest arises relevant member/s should refrain from getting involved in the review process.

The Faculty Board approved and confirmed the nominations of the following members for the Ethical Clearance Committee of the Faculty.

Field	Member
Molecular Biology - Plant Science*	Dr. N.U. Jayawardena, Department of Agricultural Biology, Faculty of Agriculture
Molecular Biology - Animal Science *	Dr. K.K.S.P. Kodituwakku, Department of Animal Science, Faculty of Agriculture
Animal Welfare*	Dr. T.S. Samarakone, Department of Animal Science, Faculty of Agriculture
Human Behaviour*	Dr. S. Kumar, Department of Agricultural Economics & Business Management, Faculty of Agriculture
Social Sciences Specialist*	Dr. L.N.A.C. Jayawardena, Department of Agricultural Extension, Faculty of Agriculture
Animal Science Specialist*	Prof. J.K. Vidanarachchi, Department of Animal Science, Faculty of Agriculture
Animal Nutrition*	Mr. M.B.P.K. Mahipala, Department of Animal Science, Faculty of Agriculture
Food & Nutrition of Human *	Prof. D.G.N.G. Wijesinghe, Department of Food Science & Technology, Faculty of Agriculture
Environmental Science*	Prof. M.I.M. Mowjood, Department of Agricultural Engineering, Faculty of Agriculture
Clinical Sciences	Dr. Arinda Dharmapala , Department of Surgery, Faculty of Medicine
Medical Sciences	Dr. Eranga Siriweera, Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine
Psychology	Dr. Ramila Usoof-Thowfeek, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts
Legal Aspects	Mr. Romesh Karalliyadda
Chairman of Faculty Research Committee*	Prof. S.P. Nissanka, Department of Crop Science, Faculty of Agriculture

* Preferably from the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya.

3. Disclaimer

The committee will not monitor the conduct of research projects unless a necessity is arise. The committee will also not be responsible on aspects pertaining to preserving integrity and privacy of data, responsible use of data and interpreting and disclosing of data to public. Issues with authorship, plagiarism, peer review and conflict of interest also will not be considered by the committee.

4. Guiding principles of ethical clearance process of the Faculty of Agriculture

In general, research ethical guidelines are provided on collection of valid data, the ownership and responsibility of collected data and, managing and sharing data. Researchers are expected to abide by the following ethical guidelines;

4.1 General

- i. Research must be conducted by responsible and qualified researcher/s
- ii. Research must be designed and implemented assuring the academic integrity.
- iii. The research should comply with the law / legislations of the country.
- iv. The research should plan aiming to minimize any harm to those involved or used in the research.
- v. Evaluate the research methodology carefully and any ethical risks*¹ should be addressed at any phase of the research.
- vi. Confidentiality of the review process must be strictly safeguarded by the committee.

4.2 Research involves with animals

The ethical clearance process would consider the risks and benefits of using animals in research. The guidelines are generally aimed to avoid mistreatment to animals and ensure welfare standards are maintained.

- i. Comply with the law of the country and the university regulations
- ii. Use the minimum number of animal objects that could provide adequate data
- iii. Follow standard procedures to collect samples from animals.
- iv. Plan proper disposal of the samples/ animals at end of the experiments.

4.3 Research involves with human

Adhering to research ethics with human subjects are challenging and crucial as the research should be conducted in a manner that would protect the rights and dignity of participants/respondents.

- i. The participants/respondents should be informed fully about the objectives and the methodology of the research before they commit taking into consideration their intelligence level and language preference.
- ii. Consent of the participants/respondents should be obtained after providing adequate and correct information on their role. It is more appropriate to obtain the written consent on a consent form.
- iii. In case of participation of minors, the consent of parents/legal gradients should be obtained.
- iv. Their privacy should be protected and confidentiality of the information obtained must be kept.

5. Process of ethical clearance

5.1 The committee will assure that process will be taken place adhering to the guidelines of the ethical clearance. The process will be independent and transparent and should be clearly stated by the committee. In the review process, the research team, their responsibilities towards the project, any agreements made with respect to the research or between institution and the University and the declaration of the conflict of interest will be considered.

* Unexpected negative ethical consequences of practices associated with research.

The process involves the following steps

- i. A written request should be submitted by the researcher (lead scientist). In the case of undergraduate research, supervisor is responsible for assuring of getting the clearance.
- ii. Applications should be received by the committee leaving one month duration for the review process.
- iii. Outcome of the clearance process need to be communicated immediately after completion of the process (within 4 weeks of application) by the chairperson of ECC
- iv. Re-submissions will be allowed and should be done within 2 weeks after receiving the outcome of the previous review.
- v. Decision on the resubmitted application will be communicated within 2 weeks after receiving the submission.

5.2 Committee meetings

The procedures will be developed by the committee on conducting the meetings (Number of meetings, how often, how many applications to be entertained etc.)

5.3 Elements to be assessed

The aspect to be assessed could be prepared by the ECC including scientific merit, scientific validity, fair selection of participants, process of getting consent from participants and benefits to the communities are to be considered under this.

The following aspects will be qualitatively assessed when granting clearance.

- 1) Relevance and utility of the study
- 2) Scientific merit of study design i.e. scientific validity of data collection and management
- 3) Fair selection of subjects / participants
- 4) Process of obtaining consent from human subjects / organizations
- 5) Consideration of animal welfare standards
- 6) Benefits to the target audience
- 7) Relevant expertise consulted in the design process
- 8) Disposal of waste material and clearing the sites
- 9) Protection and safeguarding from any harm to humans and the environment

5.4 Decision

Based on the above assessment the FoAECC will provide a recommendation, i.e.

- a. Cleared
- b. Not cleared due to the following lapses that must be addressed by the researcher(s)

5.5 Time Frame:

The decision must be conveyed to the researchers within 4 weeks.

5.6 Responsibilities of the members of the committee:

- 1) Undertake an independent and unbiased assessment of applications and provide unbiased decisions.
- 2) Timely delivery of the decision

6. Annexure – Guidelines for evaluations

A. Application form

The following elements are suggested to be captured clearly in the application form

- a) Project title:
- b) Project funding source:
- c) Date of commencement of project: Date ending:
- d) The purpose of the research
- e) Details of the research methodology
- f) Intended outcome and use
- g) Nature of participation requested;
- h) Benefits and disadvantages/risks of participation;
- i) A clear statement that participation is entirely voluntary and that participants can withdraw from the project at any time without prejudice, now or in future;
- j) Method of collecting data and how collected data will be handled and protected (e.g. confidentiality, anonymisation, data protection)
- k) How results will be disseminated;
- l) Plans for storage, archiving, sharing and re-use of data
- m) Qualifications of the researcher / applicant

B. Ethical review evaluation form (To be prepared by the committee)

C. Consent forms

The following aspects should be stated clearly for the fairness of the participant

- a) I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet; Agree / Disagree
- b) I have been given the opportunity to clarify doubts reasonably; Agree / Disagree
- c) I agree to take part in this project;
- d) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason;
- e) A statement that asks the participant to consent to procedures for handling any personal data collected (e.g. confidentiality, anonymisation, etc.);
- f) A statement that asks the participant to consent to proposals for data storage, archiving, sharing and re-use for future research;
- g) A statement that asks the participant to consent to any planned audio or visual recording.