

La Trobe University Human Research Ethics

Staff Survey Guidelines

The University Human Ethics Committee (UHEC) has considered the question of whether internal, administrative surveys sent to staff should count as research involving human participants.

It is university policy that research involving human participants, including surveys, should be reviewed by the UHEC or a Faculty Human Ethics Committee (FHEC) as appropriate.

Staff surveys undertaken for academic freedom in for example social psychology would obviously fall under the university requirement for ethics approval. On the other hand, a questionnaire distributed by a Head of School inquiring into staff OSP plans for the next few years is clearly not research involving human participants in the intended sense and does not require ethics approval.

However, between the two examples described above there are situations where staff surveys may be undertaken internally which go beyond normal information gathering for unexceptionable administrative purposes.

In such instances, the UHEC recommends the following:

1. Where there is genuine uncertainty about the need for ethics approval, the UHEC or appropriate FHEC secretary should be consulted about the necessity to obtain human ethics approval.
2. Where a conscientious decision is made that a staff survey does **not** require ethics approval, the following guidelines should be observed:
 - 2.1. The survey instrument should be accompanied by a clear statement regarding the purpose of the enquiry and the use to which the information will be put.
 - 2.2. There should be a statement that participation in the project is voluntary or, if it is not, a justification for it not being voluntary.
 - 2.3. The questionnaire should be anonymous or, if it is not, a justification be given for the failure to preserve anonymity.
 - 2.4. The fate of the questionnaires, whether they are to be destroyed after data extraction or retained for possible future use, should be clearly stated.

Please note that these guidelines do not apply to routine information gathering for normal administrative purposes.

These guidelines were endorsed by the UHEC and noted by the Academic Board [AB97/131(M) item 332.3.5].