

Honours Research and Human Research Ethics

Like any other human research, Honours research that involves human participants, their information or tissue requires ethics approval. The [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023](#) provides guidelines on the risks and benefits of research and is for use by researchers, ethics reviewers and others. It is essential that Honours students and their supervisors read this document and adopt its principles into the design of the Honours research project from its earliest planning stages.

Important differences with Honours research include the level of experience of the research student and the level of supervision that student receives. Honours students are at the beginning of their research journey and may have less experience conducting interviews, administering surveys, or running focus groups compared to postgraduate students. Honours supervisors may be responsible for a large cohort of students and may not be able to provide the same level of individual guidance that postgraduates enjoy.

These differences have an impact on the merit and integrity of the research. The National Statement requires that research be “conducted or supervised by persons or teams with experience, qualifications and competence that are appropriate for the research” (1.1e).

Consideration should also be given to the complexity of research methods and participant groups. It is worth considering some things to avoid and some alternatives including:

- Replacing active human participation with secondary analysis of data;
- Limiting the use of research methodologies that will increase risk of physical injury or harm, mental or emotional distress, or that may reveal illegal activities;
- Limiting the use of targeted participant groups identified in National Statement Section 4.

These research adjustments can help facilitate Honours research that will require human research ethics review.

It is imperative that supervisors work with their students to ensure that the ethics application is submitted early in the first semester of enrolment to allow time for the review and approval process. This can take around four weeks (for low-risk projects) and the Ethics team recommends that this be done by the second month of the Honours project's first semester. This is so that there will be sufficient time for data collection, data analysis and write-up. It is also recommended that the scope of the project be given appropriate consideration, given the limited time frame in Honours theses/research projects.

Completing an ethics application is important to ensure that Honours research, like any other human research, is conducted with respect and integrity, and that the safety of participants, Honours students, supervisors, is maintained. Engaging with the ethics process is also an important skill for future research.