



Compulsory Scientific Committee, Research Ethics Committee and RDGC members training on:

- * Responsibilities of SCs, RECs, and RDGC**
- * The changed RDGC process**

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DVC: R&I*



The various roles and responsibilities of Scientific Committees (SC), Research Ethics Committees (RECs), and the Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (RDGC)

- Some problems were picked up of sometimes poor SC review and sending it to the REC.
- Reviews done by the RDGC that could have been done by the RECs.
- Prof Jeffrey requested me to lead a task team to review the RDGC process and then for implementation in 2024.
- Prof Jeffrey requested training of SC and REC members, and update RDGC members before implementation.

1. Introduction

- **Reality:** A proposed study could be scientifically sound yet pose significant ethics related risk to the research.

- Thus, a study needs reviews by both:

- **Scientific Committees (SC)**
- **Research Ethics Committees (REC)**

as they consider different sets of questions.

- Some proposals need an additional level of review by the **NWU Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU-RDGC)**.

Note: This could add a plus minus two to three months to obtain approval.

A summary of the NWU approved “Framework of fostering a climate of RCR” (Greeff, 2021)

Area	Topic	
Support	Research environment	
	Research study supervision	
	Mentoring	
Organization	Research ethics structure	
	Scientific committee structure	
	Integrated Research Integrity Management System	
	Data practices and management	
	Fair research assessment practices	
Communication	Research collaboration	
	Declaration of interests	
	Stakeholder/external organization communication	
	Publication and communication	
	Research ethics and research integrity webpage	
Training	Research ethics and research integrity training	
	Academics	Postgraduate students

Focus only on the Scientific Committee and the Research Ethics Committee

Area	Topic and Actions
Organization	<p>Research ethics structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and maintain a <i>research ethics structure</i> and clearly described SOPs. • Provide high quality <i>ethics review processes</i> by dedicated Faculty RECs (for minimal risk) and NHREC registered RECs (EMELTEN-REC & HSSREC for medium, high risk and vulnerable populations; NWU-HREC for all health and health-related) • Provide <i>clear review guidelines</i> for REC members and researchers. • Provide <i>training for REC members</i> on review and governance of research ethics. • Provide <i>training for researchers</i> on research ethics and administration.
	<p>Scientific committee structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and maintain a <i>scientific committee structure</i> and clearly described SOPs. • Provide high quality <i>scientific review processes</i> by research entity scientific committees. • Provide <i>clear review guidelines</i> for members and researchers. • Provide <i>training for committee members</i> on the review process. • Provide <i>training for researchers</i> on scientific review and administration.

Scientific versus research ethics review

Scientific review

- Scientific content experts representing the **researcher** and **research community** **looking at the science** as members of the Scientific Committee (SC).

Ethics review

- A group of people (members of the Research Ethics Committee [REC]) that **represents the interest of the potential participant (human or animal)/environment/society** and who have had additional training in looking **in more depth at the link between the proposed science and the research ethics**. They also indirectly protect the **researcher** and the **institution**.

The Research Data Gatekeeper review

- A group of people (the Research Data gatekeeper Committee [RDGC]) who act as gatekeepers for **all NWU data** (staff, students and systems/departments/laboratories to be used for research purposes. They protect the **institution** but indirectly the **people/departments etc behind the data**.

- It is unrealistic to expect a single group of individuals to possess the required skills and time to competently carry out the many tasks needed to review the specific science (linked to a discipline/field) and research ethics and protect the rights and welfare of research participants/society and the institution.
- The two committees (SC and REC) must work as **well-coordinated linked teams** both taking on the responsibility to ensure the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) at the NWU.
- Every proposal requires an autonomous assessment of:
 - Scientific merit.
 - Potential conflict of interest.
 - Ethical acceptability.

This review often referred to as the *three-pronged approach*.

Thus, an initial focused review of the *science* and *conflict of interest* of the proposed research study by a **Scientific Committee (SC)** is essential.

This is then followed by a *comprehensive in-depth ethics review* by the **Research Ethics Committee (REC)**.

However, we do know that science and ethics are intrinsically tied and should not be separated and that there will always be *some level of overlap* between scientific and research ethics reviews.

The REC must consider the research ethics behind the science but cannot focus on the detailed science expertise (discipline specific) that the SC must do.

- If an ethics committee must conduct an exclusive scientific review, **two primary problems arise**:
 - It distracts from the intensive review of research ethics due to lack of time.
 - It may lack the scientific expertise necessary to adequately assess the “technical” merit of the proposal and lose the independent “technical resource” of the scientific review committee.
- The REC should be able to focus its efforts on assessing whether the proposal meets the **research ethics requirements** as stated in institutional, national and international codes and regulations.
- Despite the need for the three distinctive reviews (science, conflict of interest, and research ethics) their interrelated nature requires **a single body to be vested with the explicit authority and legal accountability** for the final determination regarding the ethical acceptability of the proposal. ***This lies with the REC.***

2. The Scientific Committee (first formal structure of review)

The Scientific Committee should do an *in-depth scientific review*.

All proposals/protocols should undergo an independent and rigorous review to assess:

- Scientific quality, viability, feasibility, and suitability.
- The importance of the research in increasing knowledge.
- Appropriate research methodology to answer precisely articulated scientific questions (sample sizes, methodology, analysis, statistical justification, bias, feasibility).

Eleven elements essential to the scientific review

- 1) Importance and novelty of the scientific question.
- 2) Thoroughness of the evaluation of relevant literature and previous studies.
- 3) Strength of the scientific design and methodology.
- 4) Feasibility of the research as designed.
- 5) Appropriateness of the inclusion/exclusion criteria.
- 6) Appropriateness of the analysis (statistical /qualitative/text).
- 7) Estimate of the probability of meeting the enrolment goals/sample size (if participants).
- 8) Strength of the qualifications of the researchers to carry out the study and facilities available for the study.
- 9) Monitoring plan.
- 10) Data-management plan.
- 11) Dissemination plan.

1) Importance and novelty of the scientific question

- Usually an “observation” made by a researcher that needs an “answer”.
- Is the research question about what the researcher wants to know clear?
- Does the research question develop into a feasible and valid study?

Characteristics of a good research question: FINER

- **F=feasibility**
 - Adequate number of subjects/sources.
 - Adequate expertise.
 - Affordable in time and money.
 - Manageable scope.

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- **I=interesting to the researcher**
 - Something to be passionate about.
 - Something to be an expert at.
 - Something that makes a difference in the world.
 - **N=novel**
 - Confirms or refutes previous findings.
 - Extend the previous findings.
 - Provides new findings.

- **E=ethical**

- Human rights of participants and society.
- Confidentiality.
- Informed consent (if participants).
- Beneficence, nonmaleficence, social justice.

- **R=relevant**

- To scientific knowledge.
- To the participants.
- To society.
- For future research directions.

2) Thoroughness of the evaluation of relevant literature and previous studies

- Comprehensive and thorough.
- Applicable literature.
- Covers the grounding theory/paradigm for the research.
- Will the research add to the body of knowledge?
- Search engines.
- Dates of references. No old resources unless essential and motivated.
- No plagiarism/self-plagiarism ([Turnitin report](#)).

3) Strength of the scientific design and methodology

- Must match the research question/s.
- Show knowledge of the methodology.
- The research process is clear and systematic.
- Must result in reliable and valid data.

4) Feasibility of the research as designed

- Worth doing.
- Possible to do.

5) Appropriateness of the inclusion/exclusion criteria (if it involves humans/animals or even text)

- Are they clearly stated?
- Are they realistic?
- Are the correct participants/animals involved?
- Does the researcher want to generalize? Then match population.
- Does the researcher want to contextualize? Then include “expert” participants.

Note: This could also be true for inclusion of appropriate text, models etc. in research not involving humans i.e., systematic or rapid literature reviews, or desk top studies leading to guidelines.

6) Appropriateness of the analysis (statistical/qualitative/text)

- Review the appropriateness of the suggested analysis (**Note: this must be clearly described in the proposal for both quantitative and qualitative studies**).
- If quantitative, was their *consultation with statisticians*? Attached report from the statistician.
- If no statistical consultation *prove of expertise* of the researcher must be attached.
- Knowledge of the method of analysis must be evitable.

7) Estimate of the probability of meeting the enrolment goals/sample size (if it involves humans)

- Will the researcher meet enrolment goals?
- Too high or too low?
- Really understanding saturation/representation in qualitative research?

8) Strength of the qualifications of the researchers to carry out the study and facilities available for the study

- *Matched abbreviated CV* of the researcher/s is important and should be included in the application. Study specific CV.
- Refers to the skills and expertise of the researcher.
- Also, the skills and expertise of the supervisor.
- Must match the study.
- Look at the role each team member will play.
- How many studies is the researcher involved with?
- How many students are the supervisor supervising?
- Are the necessary facilities available?

9) Monitoring plan

- How will the researcher monitor the research process?
- How will the researcher monitor the ethical aspects of the research?
- How will the researcher report research progress?
- How will extension of the study be handled?
- How, when and to whom will incidents be reported?
- How will incidents be handled?
- How, when and to whom will amendments be reported?
- How will amendments be handled?

10) Research data management plan

- Is there a clear research data management plan?
- What data will be stored?
- How will data be stored?
- Where will the data be stored?
- Who will manage the data storage?
- Who will have access to the data?
- How will data sharing be managed?
- If data is shared, is there a data transfer agreement (DTA) in place?
- When will data be transferred to the research entity?
- When will data be deleted?
- Is the data management done according to POPIA if it involves personal information of participants?
- Will the data be available for Open Access (eligible use) when all the initial goals were met (privileged use)? How will this be done?

11) Dissemination plan

- When will the findings be communicated?
- To whom are they going to communicate finding? Not just an article.
- How will it be communicated to the study participants/society/policy makers/scientific community?
- Is there a clear dissemination plan?

3. Conflict of interest review

Conflict of interest in research mostly refers to:

Interest in the outcomes of the research that might lead to personal advantage.

- Conflict of interest needs to be reviewed by the SC although the REC will also be reviewing specific aspects.
- There could be conflict of interest on the part of the:
 - Investigator/researcher
 - Scientific Committee
 - Research Ethics Committee
 - Institution
- May place the participants or the institution at undue risk.
- Position of potential conflict by virtue of researchers' pursuit of knowledge, welfare of the participants involved in their research, and the institution.

Involved in two competing interests

- **Financial gain or interest**
- **Non-financial**
 - Intellectual.
 - Bias.
 - Overly optimistic promises of potential benefits of the research.
 - Roles of the researcher/s.
 - The desire for professional advancement.
 - The desire to make a scientific breakthrough.
 - Relationship with participants i.e., family, friends, therapist, colleague.
 - Personal or professional conflicts i.e., in peer review, evaluation, assessment, and collaboration.
 - Personal or professional affiliations.
 - Past, present, or anticipated activities that may compromise the present research.

NB: Anything that could cause others to second-guess your work.

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- Conflict of interest must always be *declared* and clearly *indicated how it will be mitigated*.
 - The scientific committee (and REC) should determine:
 - If and how protection of participants/institution could be negatively affected.
 - Whether the recommended conflict management plan is sufficient to ensure the protection of the participant/institution.
 - What information related to the conflict should be disclosed to *participants* through the informed consent process and to the *institution* through the various committee processes.
 - Whether an ongoing review is required if the research progresses.

Other aspects that need to be reviewed by the SC:

Note: Some faculties might differ on specifics, but it is important that these aspects need review.

- The appropriateness of the title.
- Authorization by the supervisors.
- The signed NWU Code of Conduct for research (2018).
- The appointed examiners to serve as the examination panel.
- **NB:** The **first assessment of the risk level** of the proposed research (No, low/minimal, medium, high according to the NWU risk level descriptor document) and **suggested to the REC**. NB An expedited process for no risk studies by the REC should be available.
- **Identify the most appropriate REC** to refer the study further for research ethics approval (according to the **REC scope document of the NWU, 2018**).
- Protecting the reputation of the institution.
- Aligning SC responsibilities with IRIMS's fostering of a climate of Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR).
- Provide formal and signed proof of scientific approval of the study.

Decision making

- **A decision is made from four options:**
 - Approved.
 - Minor to several less serious changes required for approval (Don't serve again).
 - Deferred (several more serious/major changes required) (Serve again).
 - Disapproved (Back to the drawing board).

Important to note

- The SC review is the *first formal process* and not part of supervision.
- The SC should identify proposals that are *not yet suitable* for REC consideration and *return them to researchers* with suggestions to improve quality.
- Written feedback to researchers should be *anonymous* by not identifying the reviewers.
- Best practice to have *researchers present* during the feedback process to provide context and not just tick boxes.
- Enough time should be allocated to allow *reasonable discussion* between reviewers and researchers.

4. The Research Ethics Committee

- The objective of the research ethics review (REC) is to ensure the *ethical conduct* of the research and that the *interests* of the participants/society are fully:
 - Recognised
 - Represented
 - Protected
- The REC reviews the *ethics of science* as well as the *research ethics*.

**The three principles and eight norms and standards use during the REC review:
(Covered in detail in REC training)**

Principles: (from the Belmont report after the Tuskegee study, slightly adjusted for SA)

- 1) Beneficence and non-maleficence.
- 2) Distributive justice (equality).
- 3) Respects for persons (dignity and autonomy).

Norms and standards:

- 1) Relevance and value.
- 2) Scientific integrity.
- 3) Role-player engagement.
- 4) Fair selection of participants.
- 5) Fair balance of risks and benefits.
- 6) Informed consent.
- 7) Ongoing respect for participants, including privacy and confidentiality.
- 8) Researcher competence and expertise.

Areas of focus for the research ethics review:

- Scientific aims, objectives and design.
- Selection of study population.
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- Community entry and engagement.
- Recruitment and enrolment.
- Obtaining informed consent: various populations.
- Choice of participants of how their data can be used in the future.
- Research method and procedures.
- How will researchers be trained to obtain the necessary skills.
- Risk of harm and likelihood of benefit. How risk of harm will be mitigated.
- Decide on the *final risk level*.
- Reimbursements, inducements, and costs for participants.
- Who the funders are and their integrity.
- Conflict of interest.
- Participants' privacy and confidentiality interests.
- Vulnerability issues.
- Expertise of the researchers (Abbreviated CV).

For Animal research ethics:

The 12 Rs Framework as a comprehensive, unifying construct for principles guiding animal research ethics (Brink & Lewis: 2023)

- Replace
- Reduce
- Refine
- Respect
- Responsible
- Regulation
- Righteousness
- Reliability
- Reckoning
- Reproducibility
- Relevance
- tRansferability

Animal research ethics

- **These principles are applied within the three domains of:**
 - Animal Welfare.
 - Social Responsibility.
 - Scientific Integrity.
- **With a continuous feedback loop of:**
 - Monitor.
 - Observe.
 - Amend.
 - Implement.
- From the onset of planning, the approval processes, the execution, reporting, to dissemination.

Additional aspects to consider

- Is the advertisement appropriate?
- Are all contracts signed and in place?
- Are all required appendices available?
- Adherence to the requirements of the NWU research data management policy.
 - Is a research data management plan in place?
 - Is a data transfer agreement (DTA) in place if required?
 - Is a material transfer agreement (MTA) in place when required?
- Is a research monitoring plan in place?
- Is the timeline appropriate?
- The budget. Will the research cost be covered?
- Signed NWU Code of Conduct for research (2018).

The ethical basis for *decision making* in the ethics review process


- RECs should use the ethical principles outlined in research ethics regulations, guidelines, and international human rights research ethics guidance documents as a basis for evaluating proposals.
- RECs should make clear on which specific ethical guidelines are being relied on in making decisions.
- The guidelines should be readily accessible to researchers and the public.

The decision-making process of the REC

- Must be done in a **transparent** way and with a **collective** decision-making process.
- **Collective decision-making** through:
 - **Aggregate individual views** (2 to 3 reviewers).
 - **Deliberation** (debate) in the REC meeting.
 - **Analogue reasoning** (consensus) in the REC meeting.

NB Thus the importance of face-to-face meetings.

- If there is disagreement, they go to **vote**.

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- **A decision is made from four options:**
 - Approved.
 - Minor to several less serious changes required for approval (Don't serve again).
 - Deferred (several more serious/major changes required) (Serve again).
 - Disapproved (Back to the drawing board).
 - Decide on the final risk level.
 - Refer to the RDGC if NWU data is being used.
 - Approve the study and provide a letter of approval valid for **a year only** and **extended** based on a passive monitoring report.

Additional tasks of the REC

- To review the research ethics of **external requests** sent to the RDGC for the use of NWU data (staff, students, systems/departments/laboratories) for research purposes.
- The REC has the further responsibility to **monitor** the research once it has been approved (annual monitoring reports) and to **extend the approval** on a **yearly basis** thus having the ongoing responsibility through the lifetime of the study.
- To handle all reports of **incidents** or **serious adverse effects**.

Aspects that at present fall through during publication

- The ethics of publication.
- Clear guidelines as to which authorship guidelines are being followed e.g. Cope.
- The inclusion/exclusion of authors and the order of authors.
- Students having to be first authors based on the A Rules.
- Acknowledgement of team members or people who do not qualify for authorship.
- Correct identification of NWU affiliation **and** the research entity.
- Violation of Copy Rights by publishing work done at other institutions under the NWU without clear written permission of the institution and all authors involved.
- Review for plagiarism of articles specifically submitted by staff.
- Staff not always obtaining SC and REC approval for publications (thus no peer review).
- Staff not obtaining RDGC approval for the use of NWU data.
- Problematic choice of journals.

GUIDANCE FOR THE NWU- RDGC, SCs AND RECs:

RECEIPT, REVIEW, AND APPROVAL PROCESSES RELATED TO NWU DATA, STAFF, STUDENTS OR SYSTEMS/DEPARTMENTS/ LABORATOIRES

TASK TEAM:

- Prof Minrie Greeff
(leader)
- Ms Feziwe Mseleni
- Ms Zama Kose
- Prof Wayne Towers
- Prof Hennie Goede
- Prof CP van der
Vyver
- Prof Johanita Kirsten

Introductory statement

Irrespective of the scope and responsibilities of the NWU-Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU-RDGC) and the NWU Research Ethics Committees (RECS) to be discussed in the table below, the approved processes for **all internal research** of all academics, students or other parties will be followed as indicated in the NWU Research Ethics Policy (2018), the NWU Research Ethics Committees Terms of Reference (2018), and the Research Ethics Committees Scope document (2018) (available on the NWU research ethics webpage):

- 1) First reviewed by a Scientific Committee (SC);
- 2) Followed by a review by the appropriate Research Ethics Committee (REC);
- 3) Referred to the NWU-Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU-RDGC) in cases identified in the scope and responsibilities indicated in the table below.

All **external research requests** will use the *RDGC office administration* as their first point of contact from where it will be distributed for the next step in the process:

- 1) The RDGC; or
- 2) the appropriate REC.

1. SCOPE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE NWU-RDGC AND RECS RELATED TO RESEARCH USING NWU DATA (SECONDARY DATA USE) OR WANTING TO INVOLVE NWU STAFF, STUDENTS OR SYSTEMS/DEPARTMENTS/LABORATORIES IN RESEARCH (PRIMARY RESEARCH)

RDGC	RECs
<p>Purpose:</p>	<p>Purpose:</p>
<p>1) To be a gatekeeper by <i>receiving, reviewing, and approving</i> all requests from NWU researchers wanting to use NWU data related to staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories originally gathered for other purposes than research, to be used for research purposes (secondary data use). The RDGC takes responsibility for communication with the researcher.</p>	<p>1) To <i>receive, review and approve</i> all requests from NWU researchers intending to involve NWU staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories to collect research data for the first time (primary research). The REC takes responsibility for communication with the researcher.</p> <p><i>*The REC reports on a quarterly basis (template) to NWU-RDGC.</i></p>

2) To be a gatekeeper by *receiving and referring* requests from **external researchers** wanting to utilise **NWU data related to staff, students or systems/departments/laboratories** originally gathered for other purposes than research, to be used for research purposes (secondary data use) or gathered for research for additional research outcomes, to RECs for *ethics review (expedited and context focused)*, and then to *review and approve as a gatekeeper* for secondary data use or for additional research outcomes. The RDGC takes responsibility for communication with the external researcher.

2) To review the **research ethics (through an expedited process)** of requests *referred to the REC* by the RDGC from **internal (already reviewed by a SC and a REC but still raising concerns) or external researchers** wanting to utilize **NWU data related to staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories** originally gathered for other purposes than research, to be used for research purposes (**secondary data use**) or gathered for research for additional outcomes. The response is sent back to the RDGC to take responsibility to communicate with the external researcher.

*Should a REC receive a direct request from an external researcher, they should refer the researcher to the RDGC office administration as their first step.

3) To *receive and refer* all requests from **external researchers** who want to do research that will involve NWU staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories, in order to collect research data for the first time (**primary research**) to an appropriate REC for ethics review and approval (expedited). The REC takes responsibility for communication with the external researcher.

All external SoTL requests also first sent to the RDGC office administration.

3) To *receive, review and approve* (through an expedited process) requests *referred to the REC* by the RDGC from **external researchers** wanting to use NWU staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories to collect research data for the first time (**primary research**). The REC takes responsibility for communication with the external researcher.

*Should a REC receive a direct request from an external researcher, they should refer the researcher to the RDGC office administration as their first step.

*The REC reports on a quarterly basis (template) to NWU-RDGC.

4) To *receive, review and approve* requests from parties (internal or external) for **non-research purposes** e.g., quality improvement, climate survey, other surveys, etc. The RDGC communicates with the parties involved.

4) To *receive, review and approve* all **SoTL related research** from *internal researchers*, after it has served at a Scientific Committee. The REC is responsible for communication with the external researcher.

To *receive, review and approve* all **SoTL related research** from *external researchers*, referred to them by the RDGC. The REC is responsible for communication with the external researcher.

*Should a REC receive a direct request from an external researcher, they should refer the researcher to the RDGC office administration as their first step.

*The REC reports on a quarterly basis (template) to NWU-RDGC.

5) To be a final **arbitrator** on all matters related to gatekeeper issues that could not be solved by existing processes for either internal or external researchers for research with existing NWU data related to staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories (secondary data use), or research involving NWU staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories for the first time (primary research).

1.1 DEFINITIONS OF RELATED CONCEPTS

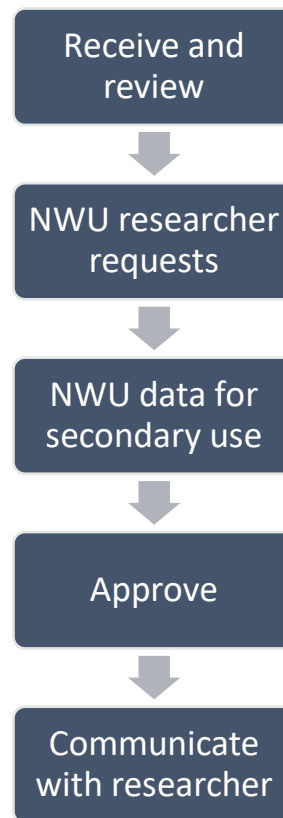
Concept	Description
Secondary data use	The use of NWU data (staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories) originally gathered for other purposes than research to be used for research purposes.
Additional research outcomes	Research over and above the originally planned outcome(s) of the research.
Primary research	Research involving NWU staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories to collect research data for the first time.
SoTL research	Research related to Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

Laboratory-related research	Research related to laboratory practices or data gathered for non-research purposes, to be used as research.
Non-research purposes	Requests related to the gathering of data for quality improvement, climate surveys, other surveys etc.
NWU Data	Existing NWU data (staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories) collected for purposes other than research.
External researchers	Researchers from outside institutions wanting to conduct research using NWU data for secondary data use or staff, students, or systems/departments/laboratories for primary research.
NWU-RDGC	North-West University Research Data Gatekeeper Committee.
NWU-RECs	North-West University Research Ethics Committees.

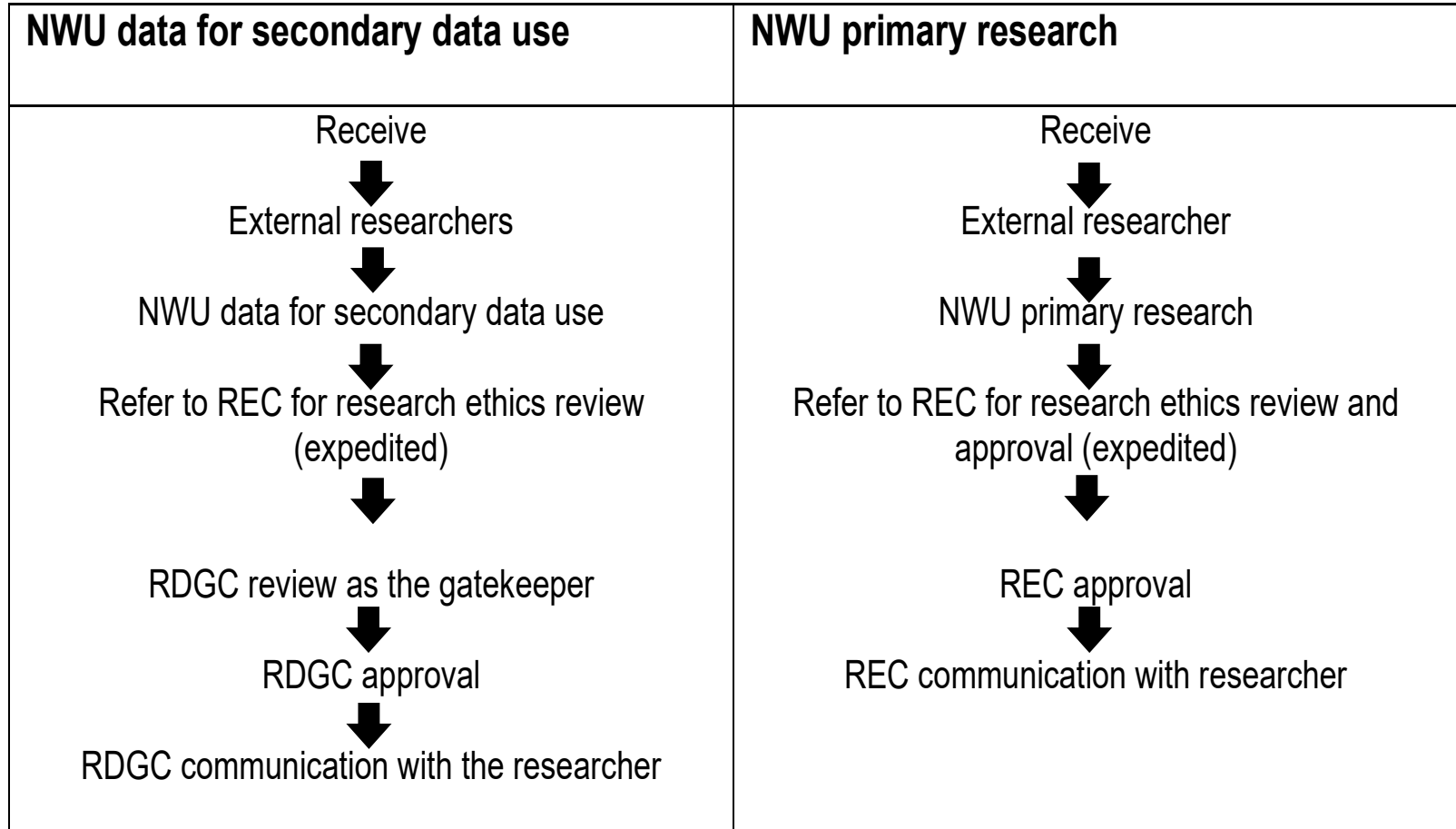
1.2 FLOW DIAGRAMS FOR RDGC AND RECS RECEIVING, REVIEWING, AND APPROVING OF RESEARCH REQUESTS

1.2.1 RDGC Related processes

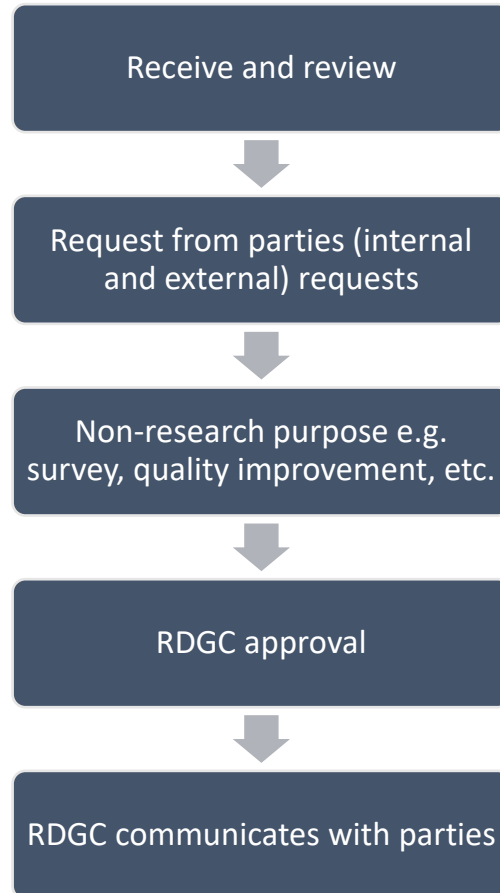
1) NWU data for secondary data use by NWU researchers (after SC and REC review)



2) *Research requests from external researchers for use of NWU data or research involving NWU staff/students/systems/departments/laboratories*

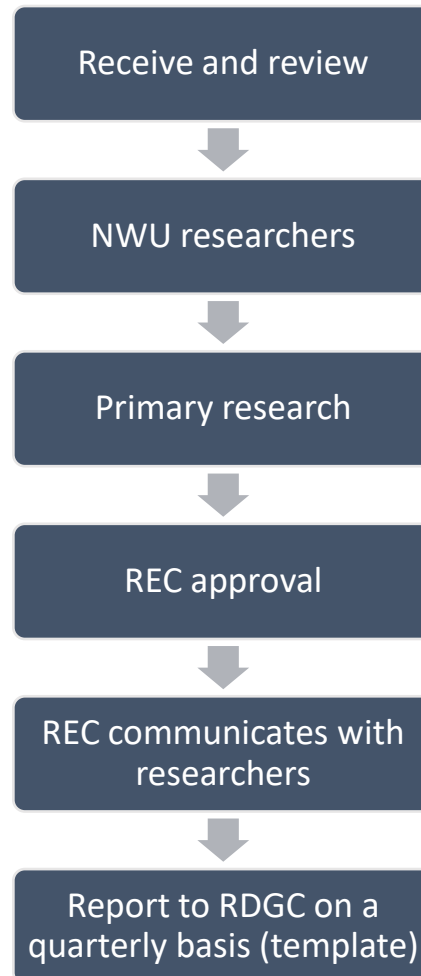


3) Request from other parties for non-research purposes

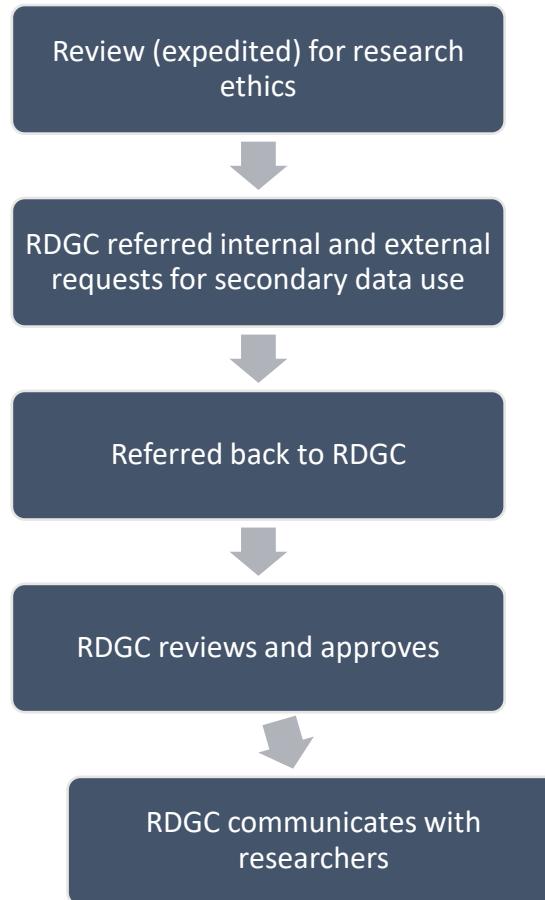


1.2.2 REC PROCESSES

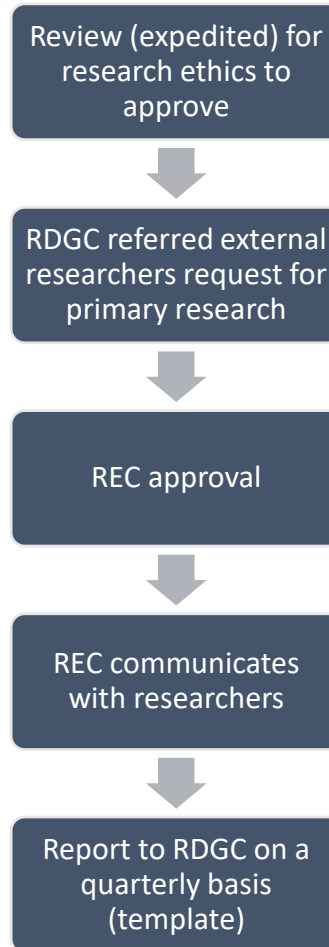
1) *Requests for primary research by NWU researchers for research with NWU students, academics, or systems/ departments/laboratories*



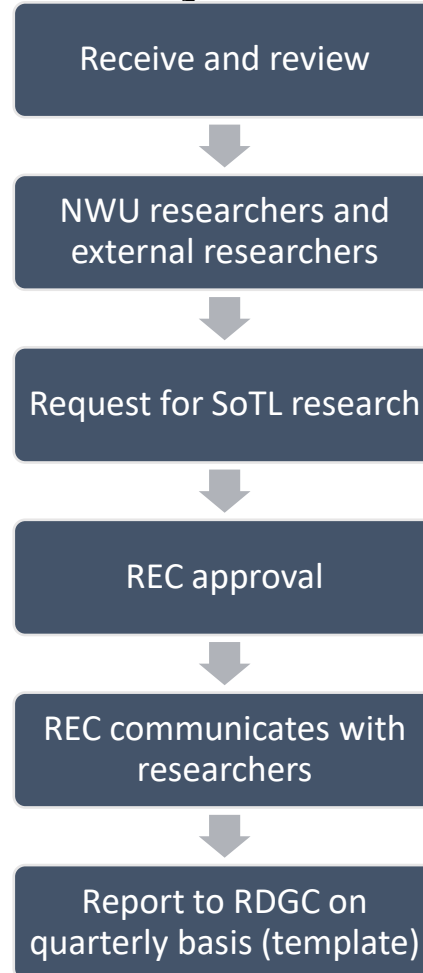
2) Research referred by RDGC for research ethics review of internal (already reviewed by a SC and REC but still with questionable practices) or external requests received for secondary data use



3) Research referred by RDGC for research ethics review of external requests for primary research involving NWU students, academics, or systems/departments/laboratories



4) Requests for SoTL research by NWU researchers (after SC review) or external researchers referred by the RDGC



2. RDCG RELATED CONTEXT

2.1 EXAMPLES OF NWU DATA REQUESTS

NWU staff data	NWU student data	NWU systems etc. data
Specific data on staff (not including identifying information).	<p>Student assessment results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tests.• Examinations.• Assignments.• Portfolios.• Presentations. <p>Student enrolment and registration figures.</p> <p>Academic records.</p> <p>Specific data on students (not including identifying information).</p>	<p>Data on the PDFs NWU has hosted.</p> <p>TTIS file information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seed fund applications.• Project quarterly reports.• Project close-out reports. <p>Data as per the InfoEd system of the NWU:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subsidy claims.• Research outputs to DHET. <p>NWU social media data e.g., Facebook.</p> <p>Data in the Alumni office.</p> <p>NWU systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Efundi.• InfoEd.• The VSS system (mark capturing) etc.

2.2 PARAMETERS FOR USE BY NWU-RDGC FOR THE REVIEW OF REQUESTS FOR NWU DATA OF STAFF, STUDENTS OR SYSTEMS/DEPARTMENTS/LABORATORIES

2.2.1 Data for which access will not be granted:

- 1) Direct access to e-mails (however, in studies of national interest, a process of facilitation could be negotiated).
- 2) Any personal information of students, academics and/or support staff.
- 3) Staff performance agreements, employee assistance program (EAP) or other private People and Culture processes.
- 4) Any detail on student, academic or support staff disciplinary processes.
- 5) Any detail on undergraduate student, postgraduate student, or academic's teaching-learning or research integrity breaches/transgression processes.
- 6) Any detail on research ethics approval processes.
- 7) Any detail regarding promotional processes.

2.2.2 Anonymization of data

All data provided will be in an anonymized format (de-identified as per POPIA requirements if personal information is involved).

2.3 RISK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS OF NWU DATA

Minimal risk	Medium risk	High risk
<p>Definition: All NWU data comparable to data that would be gathered during activities of “daily academic life”, with only minimal foreseeable risk in the use thereof.</p>	<p>Definition: All NWU data where there is some form of evaluation or private information that if appropriate steps are taken to mitigate or reduce the overall risk e.g., de-identification, it will only lead to a potential medium foreseeable risk in the use thereof. Remedial interventions could be undertaken should harm occur.</p>	<p>Definition: All NWU data where there is some form of evaluation or private information that if de-identified and mitigating factors clearly identified could still lead to a potential risk in the use thereof. Should remedial interventions be undertaken it would not reduce the harm that could occur.</p>
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student numbers per qualification. • Student enrolment and registration figures. • Student throughput rates. • Efund usage statistics. • Any NWU data available to the public. 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymized student academic records. • Anonymized student assessment data. • Internal evaluation processes of quality improvement. • Surveys on university climate studies etc. • Efund content related to evaluation or assessment e.g., lecturer evaluations, outcomes of online tests or assignments etc. • Data as per InfoEd system of the NWU. • NWU social media data. 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data allowing comparison between universities where the outcome of the data analysis is linked to a specific department/faculty/university etc. • Any data where the university per se will be identified as institution. • TTIS file information.

3. REC RELATED CONTEXT

3.1 EXAMPLES OF NWU STAFF, STUDENT, SYSTEMS etc. REQUESTS

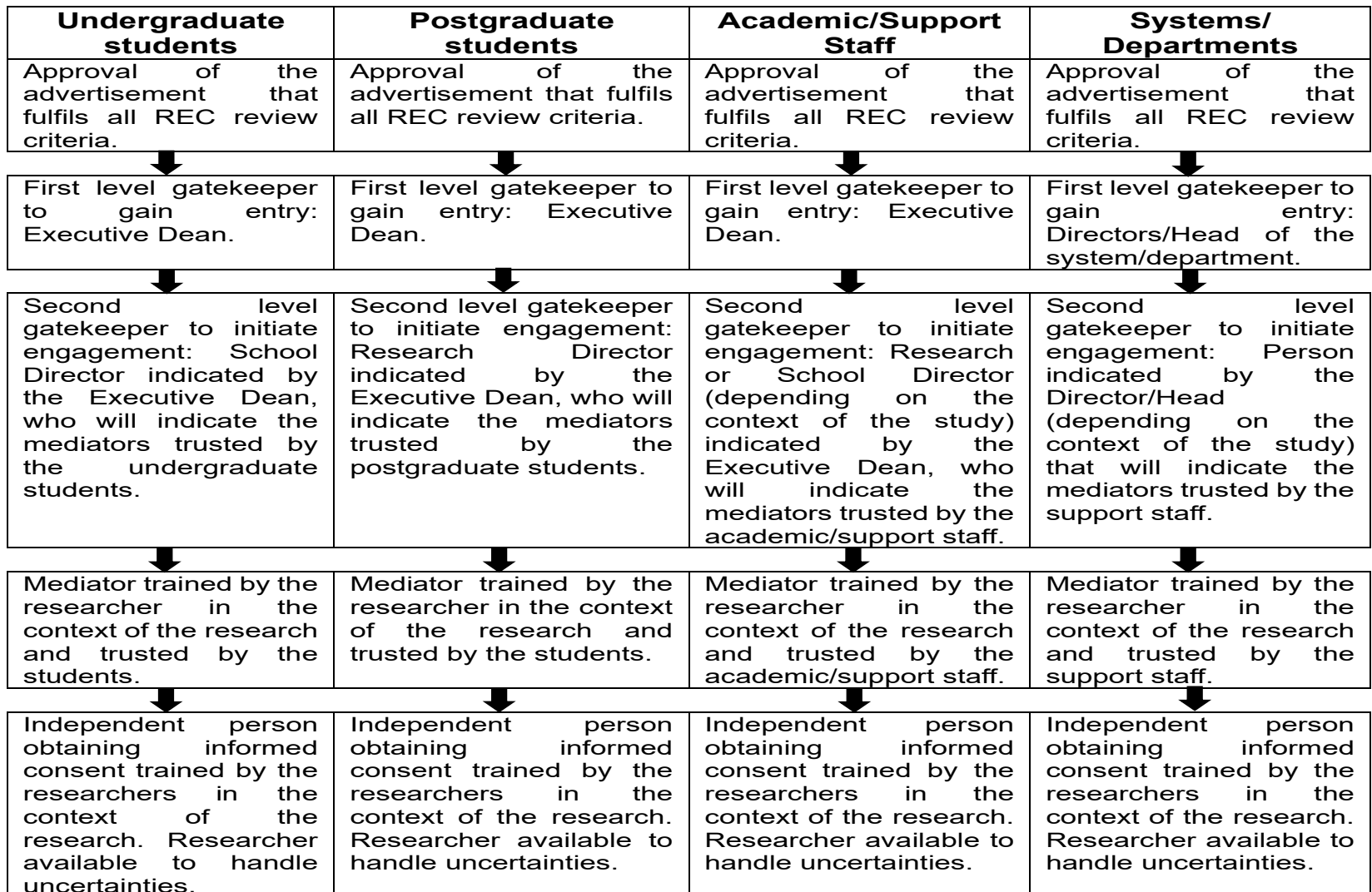
NWU staff	NWU students	NWU systems etc.
<p>Human Resources policies and procedure documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruitment and selection process.• Performance management.• Remuneration and benefits.• Leave.	<p>Student course materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Syllabus.• Study guide.• Prescribed resource material.• Textbooks.• Online materials.• Tests.• Examination papers. <p>Strategic plans and annual reports related to students.</p> <p>Curriculum content of specific groups.</p> <p>Selection processes of specific students.</p>	<p>NWU employment equity plan.</p> <p>NWU strategic plan.</p> <p>Policies on Human Resources.</p>

3.2 GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING THE POTENTIAL VULNERABILITY WHEN INVOLVING NWU STUDENTS IN RESEARCH


- a) The opportunity for power relationships should be always prevented.
- b) No student is to be used due to them being conveniently accessible i.e., convenience sampling.
- c) The purpose of studying students should always be due to the potential benefit of being a student e.g., to improve teaching-learning outcomes etc.
- d) At no stage may any student be exposed to the potential of victimization, power relationships, coercion and/or undue influence.
- e) Under no circumstances is the use of remuneration or potential benefit e.g., mark increase to be used to *recruit* students for research participation.
- f) When working with data in the lecturer's possession, all Scientific Committee and Research Ethics Committee processes for approval should be followed.

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- g) Students, more so than usual, should always be fully informed of the purpose and nature of the study and have the ability to make a choice without running the risk of being exploited.
 - h) At no point should the lecturer be the person obtaining informed consent from their own students, in their own studies.
 - i) In no way is the nature of the data gathered from the students allowed to expose the student to any potential harm.
 - j) At no stage is data to be gathered through a process where students are exposed to being a “captured audience”.
 - k) At no point should the lecturers be the person to gather data from their own students, for their own studies i.e., they should always have a second party gathering the data.
 - l) No data gathering should at any time impose on teaching-learning activities.

3.3 FLOW DIAGRAM FOR RECS ON THE PROCESS TO BE FOLLOWED BY RESEARCHERS IN GAINING ENTRY, ENGAGING WITH THE SPECIFIC RESEARCH COMMUNITIES, AND OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT FROM PARTICIPANTS



3.4 REC REVIEW CRITERIA FOR ADVERTISEMENTS



Criteria	Comments
Clear, visually appealing presentation.	
Only the approved NWU logo (No other logos).	
Details of research entity under which the study is being conducted.	
Only to use brief and clear statements i.e., not cluttered content.	
Clear description of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of the research. The targeted population. The method(s) to be used for data gathering. The time required to collect the required data. Where data will be collected. 	
Clear indication of the timeframe of study.	
Details of the contact person to approach to become a participant.	
Contact details of the researcher.	
The REC that approved the study and the REC approval number.	

3.5 TEMPLATE FOR RDGC QUARTERLY REPORTING BY RECS (Excel format with dropdown lists)

YEAR					
REC Name		QUARTER:	JAN-MAR		
			APR-JUN		
			JUL-SEP		
			OCT-DEC		
Primary research approvals					
Internal/External	Title	Target population Undergraduate students Postgraduate students Academics Support staff NWU systems/ departments/laboratories)	Sample size	REC Approval number	Date of REC Approval
SoTL research approvals					
Internal/External	Title	Target population Undergraduate students Postgraduate students Academics Support staff)	Sample size	REC Approval number	Date of REC Approval

Use of the new system

- SCs and RECs must adjust their documentation before the end of 2023.
- RECs will take on the responsibility as from **January 2024**.



End of session



Thank you.

Slides and guidelines will be placed on the NWU research ethics web page.



Questions and answers