Short Introduction to the EBE Ethics Application Process

Introduction

As with many other universities of good reputation the University of Cape Town requires those who conduct research under its auspices to uphold norms that promote and protect the wellbeing of society. These norms relate to research involving the participation of humans (e.g., interviews, etc.,), research involving tests performed on humans, research involving animals (even indirectly), research that poses risks to society, personal privacy and other values. The responsible conduct of research further includes attention to a variety of topics including plagiarism, data management, authorship and recognition/acknowledgement of contributions to research, conflicts of interest, conflicts amongst researchers, and research misconduct (e.g., fabrication or falsification of results).

Consistent with best practices, all research conducted at UCT has to be reviewed by a body designated for ethics oversight by the Senate. The EBE Ethics in Research Committee is responsible for assisting researchers in EBE, including students, to ensure that their proposed research meets the highest ethical standards.

More details about the ethical standards for research in EBE can be found in the **EBE Ethics in Research Handbook,** http://www.ebe.uct.ac.za/ebe/research/ethics1

Submitting an application

The process of submitting an ethics application are shown in figure 1. In preparing an application all researchers are asked to:

1. Familiarise themselves with the EBE Ethics in Research Handbook.
2. Identify aspects of their research that may be ethically problematic.
3. Write a cover letter in which the ethically problematic issues are discussed, and how they are mitigated or resolved is explained. Researchers should bear in mind that if the ethics reviewers identify ethical problems they will request further information and this may involve a resubmission. Therefore, reading the ethics handbook and understanding ethical requirements will greatly ease the review process.
4. Attach a research proposal with every application. This application should be written in a manner (e.g., plain English) that allows ethics reviewers to understand what will be done in the research and how the research will affect participants and society. This understanding is necessary for reviewers to identify possible ethical shortcomings or risks of the research. If a research is written in a prose that is difficult for an average person to understand, a resubmission may be requested.
5. Fill in the application form and submit it to the appropriate body (see figure 1). All applications are submitted Online. The application instructions can be found on the EBE Ethics in research website http://www.ebe.uct.ac.za/ebe/research/ethics1

Review cycle

All applications submitted to the EiRC by the 25th of the month will be reviewed by the 12th of the next month. Therefore, applicants should expect to be notified of the outcome of the review after the 12th of the month. Please keep in mind that depending on the volume of applications received there may be minor delays in review and notification.
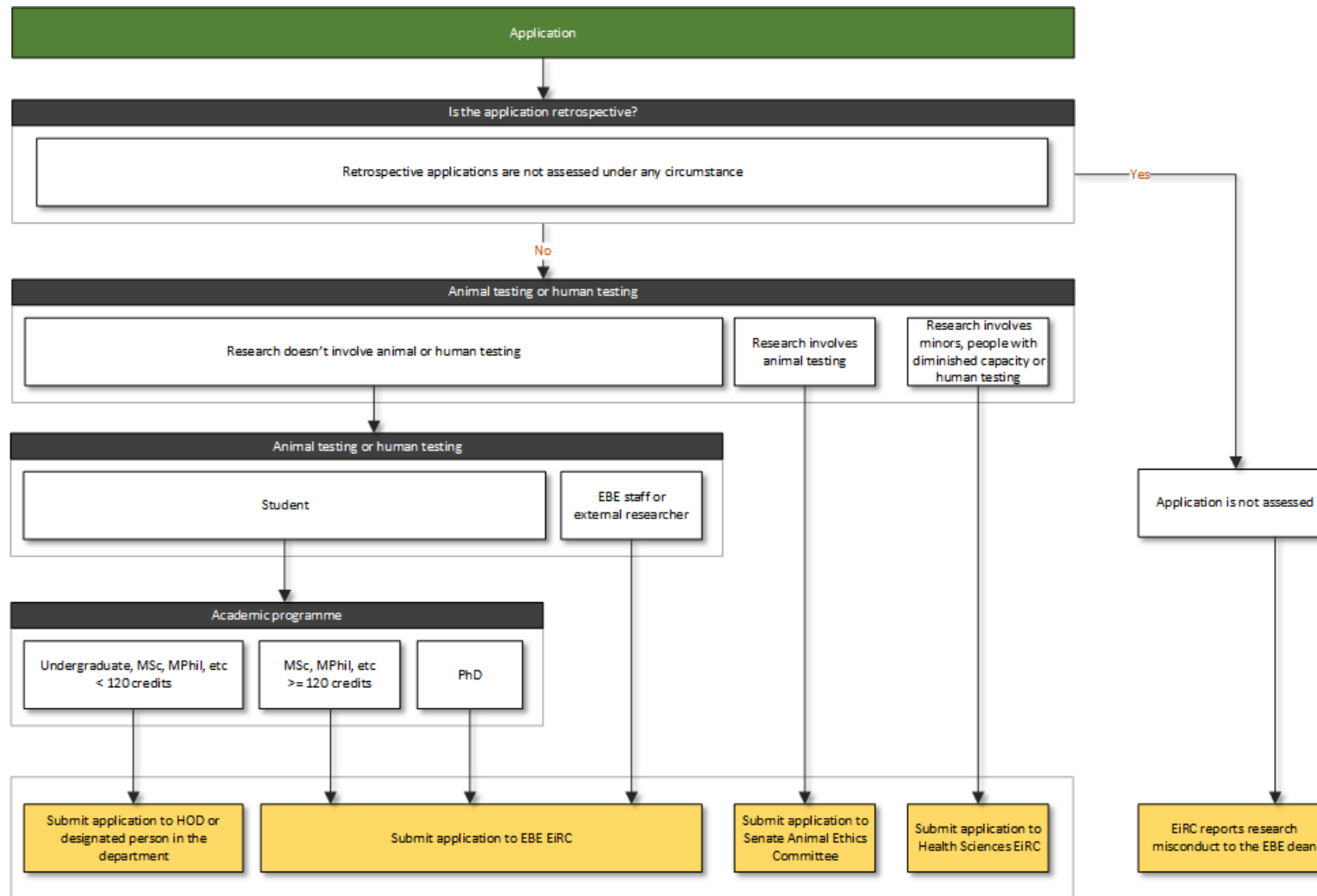
Application

Is the application retrospective?

Retrospective applications are not assessed under any circumstance

Yes

No

Animal testing or human testing

Research doesn't involve animal or human testing

Research involves animal testing

Research involves minors, people with diminished capacity or human testing

Animal testing or human testing

Student

EBE staff or external researcher

Application is not assessed

Academic programme

Undergraduate, MSc, MPhil, etc < 120 credits

MSc, MPhil, etc >= 120 credits

PhD

Submit application to HOD or designated person in the department

Submit application to EBE EiRC

Submit application to Senate Animal Ethics Committee

Submit application to Health Sciences EiRC

EiRC reports research misconduct to the EBE dean

Figure 1 The process of submitting an application. There are three important things to note in the figure. (1) There are different bodies at UCT for assessing ethics applications. Where an application is lodged depends on the nature of the research and the status of the applicant. (2) ALL research involving human testing and animal testing must be lodged with the Health Sciences EiRC and the Senate Animal Testing EiRC respectively. (3) Retrospective applications are not assessed at all.

Understanding the review process and Reviews within departments

It's useful to understand the review process when putting together an application. In reviewing an application reviewers will look for potential ethical risks or shortcomings in a research (see figure 2):

1. The research poses a risk to society or has the potential to disrupt communities.
2. The research makes use of animals
3. The research makes use of vulnerable groups.
4. The research makes use of minors or people with diminished capacity.
5. Clinical tests are performed in the research.
6. The researcher gathers private and personal information or compromising information, but shows no care for the privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, safety or security of those who have provided the information.
7. The researcher does not advise participants in the research of their risks and rights and/or withholds information from participants that is necessary for participants to consider whether to involve themselves in the research.
8. There are conflicts of interest in the research that compromise the outcome of the research.

When framing a cover letter applicants should speak to the above issues and explain how the research mitigates or resolves these issues.

Applications reviewed and signed off within departments are handled according to the flowchart shown in figure 2.

Retrospective applications

Ethics clearance should be sought before any field work, lab work, interviews, or other substantive research (excluding the research proposal) has been carried out. Ethics applications that arrive to the EiRC after the field work, lab work, interviews, or other substantive research has been carried out is treated as a Retrospective application.

As set out in UCT's ethics policies, failing to apply for ethics clearance is considered a research misconduct. When the EBE EiRC receives a retrospective application, it reports it to the dean of EBE as a research misconduct. The matter will then be handled as set out in UCT EBE Policy and Procedures for Breach of Research Ethics Codes (see Part VII of the handbook).

If you suspect that your research may be ethically retrospective please contact the EBE EiRC as soon as possible for information and assistance.

Important:

- Where participants are drawn from the UCT student body, additional permission to carry out the research will be required from the Executive Director, Department of Student Affairs (DSA). http://www.uct.ac.za/students/services/affairs/
- Research involving UCT staff may similarly require permission from the Executive Director of Human Resources.
- Research involving minors or health research (as defined in South African law and regulation) requires review and approval by a registered Research Ethics Committee (REC); at UCT, the Faculty of Health Sciences' REC is registered and authorized to review, approve, and provide oversight of health research.
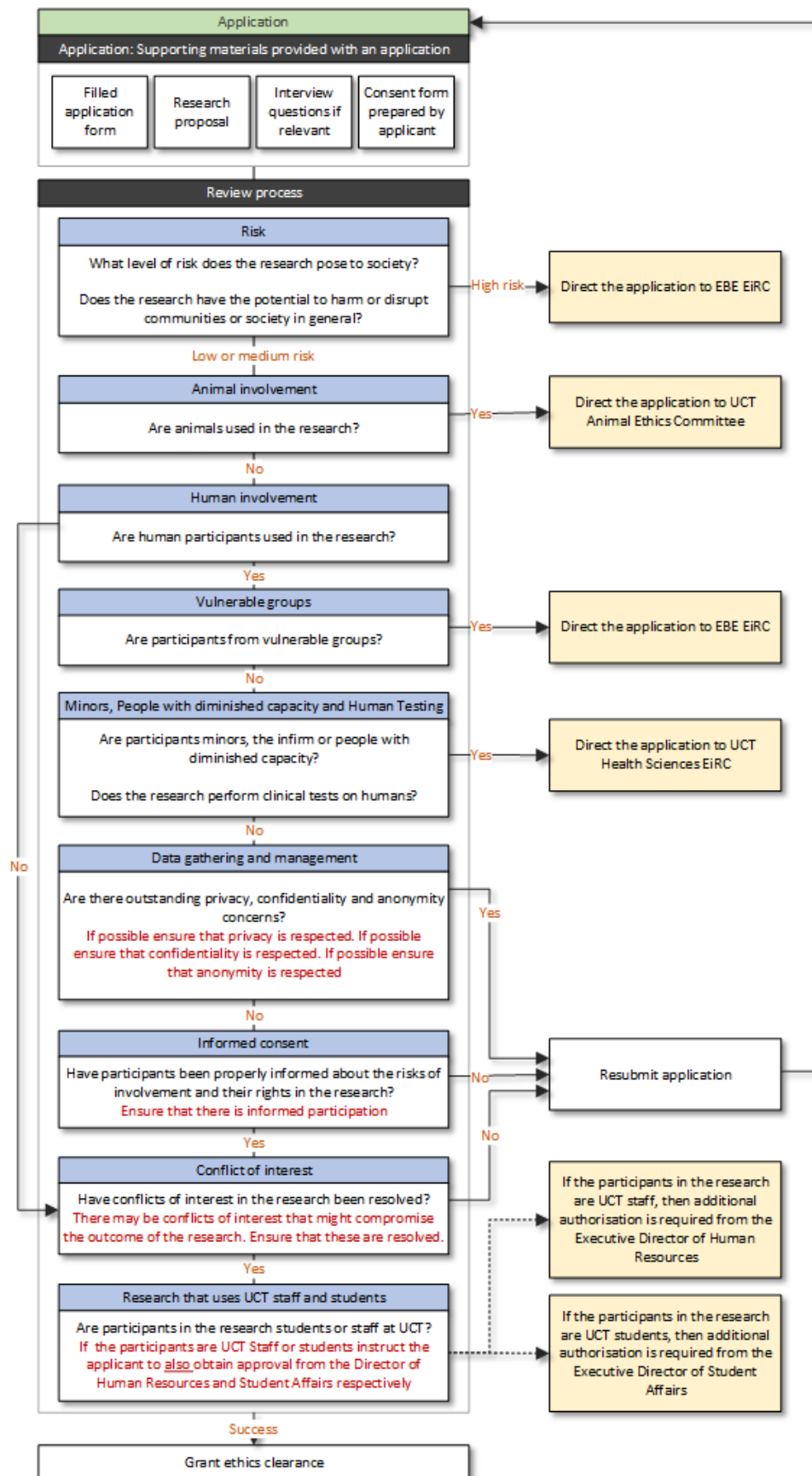
Figure 2 The general ethics review process within departments. In some instances applications will have to be directed to other ethics committees of UCT.