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Animal Research Ethics Committee SOP for Whistleblowing

1. PURPOSE OF THE SOP

This standard operating procedure (SOP) sets out the *procedure to follow when* a member of the Animal Research Ethics Committee (AREC), a staff member or a student of the University of Limpopo (UL) wants to raise concerns with the AREC chairperson. The concerned individual must have reasonable grounds to believe that there is *1) research non-compliance, 2) violation of good research practice, 3) misconduct, 4) fraud, 4) maladministration, or 5) non-adherence to approved research procedures, guidelines or policies* committed by a researcher (staff member and/or student) of the University of Limpopo (UL), *in respect of research*.

Members of the AREC, staff members or students of the institution to enjoy the full protection afforded by the Public Disclosure Act No. 26 of 2000 (PDA) and can blow the whistle on the four mentioned aspects without fear of disclosure.

This SOP ensures confidentiality to all members of the AREC, staff members or students of the University, and furthermore ensures that nobody would be exposed for disclosing in good faith information that would assist the Chairpersons of the AREC in meeting their obligation in terms of the guiding principles and regulations.

2. SCOPE

This SOP deals only with alleged actions committed by *researchers* (staff and/or students of the institution) within the research involving animals. The SOP deals primarily with, but is not limited to, misconduct, fraud, maladministration and non-adherence to approved research procedures, guidelines or policies as defined in the definition section below.

Concerns are raised with respect to matters relating to:

- 1) Research non-compliance
- 2) Violation of good research practice
- 3) Misconduct.
 - a. Fabrication (making up research data or results and recording or reporting the fabricated material).



- b. Falsification (manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research records).
 - c. Plagiarism (the appropriation of another person's research ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit).
- 4) Fraud.
 - 5) Maladministration.
 - 6) Non-adherence to approved research procedures, guidelines or policies.

It is not the objective of this SOP to replace any other policies or procedures of the institution. The provision is that the disclosure is made in good faith, in the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure that it shows irregularities in research practices, and the disclosure is made to the appropriate person(s).

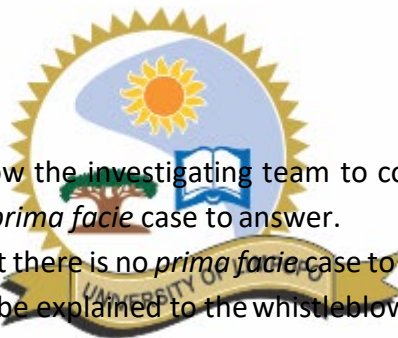
Personal grievances must be dealt with in terms of existing labour procedures at the institution. This SOP should not be used to reconsider any matter which has already been addressed under harassment, complaint, disciplinary or other procedures.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

- The institution is committed to the highest standard of ethics and integrity in research.
- Researchers of the institution are expected to behave in an honest and responsible way at all times.
- Research activities will be carried out in an open and transparent manner and in accordance to the code of conduct for researchers of the institution.
- Any member of the AREC, staff member or student of the institution who has a reasonable belief that any act of misconduct, fraud, maladministration, or non-adherence to approved research procedures, guidelines or policies has been committed, is obligated in terms of this SOP to report any such unethical research practices at the institution using the correct procedure.
- Any whistleblowing should be done in a bona fide and non-vindictive manner.

4. PROCEDURE(S)

- a) A disclosure should be made in writing and submitted to the either the AREC secretariat, who will forward to the chairperson as soon as.
- b) When a member of one of the AREC, a staff member or a student of the University makes a disclosure to the secretariat, it must be done in a responsible and honest manner.
- c) If the notification is made to the AREC secretariat or chairperson, they must as soon as possible acknowledge receipt of the disclosure directly to the whistleblower and immediately (within three days) notify the chairperson of the committee by forwarding the disclosure.
- d) The chairperson will immediately upon receipt of the disclosure set up an appointment with the whistleblower, the applicable legal representative of the AREC within 14 (fourteen) working days of the acknowledging of the disclosure.



- e) The aim of this appointment is to allow the investigating team to conduct an initial investigation in order to establish whether there is a *prima facie* case to answer.
- f) If the investigating team considers that there is no *prima facie* case to be answered and that no further action will be taken, this decision will be explained to the whistleblower.
- g) If the investigating team considers that there is a *prima facie* case to be answered, the way forward is discussed to the satisfaction of all members.
- h) If disciplinary measures are required, the research director will be notified and the appropriate University procedure followed.

- i) Investigations will be dealt with sensitively, on an impartial basis and within a reasonable time frame.
- j) Details of the allegation, the identity of the person making the allegation and against whom the allegation is made will remain confidential.

- k) The chairperson and legal representative of the AREC can request the assistance of an independent person. Those requested to assist in the investigation will be chosen on the basis of being independent from the issues/events from which the allegation has been initiated.

- l) The Senate Research Ethics Committee (SREC) is notified of the reporting and the actions taken. If necessary the SREC is included in the actions.

- m) If the whistleblower is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation they should raise their concerns with the secretariat to find another solution or to refer them to a higher authority.