

Schools Animal Ethics Committee (SAEC)

OPERATING PROCEDURES

Endorsed 16 March 2022

Introduction

The Schools Animal Ethics Committee (SAEC) acts as the animal ethics committee for schools and colleges in Western Australia that hold a licence to use animals for scientific purposes. This committee is responsible for ensuring that the use of animals in schools and colleges complies with the *Animal Welfare Act* (2002) (the Act) and the National Health and Medical Research Council's *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, 8th Edition 2013 (Updated 2021)* (the Code).

The SAEC services the following institutions and their associated schools:

- The Department of Education (DOE)
- Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA)
- Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA)

The SAEC has developed these Operating Procedures in accordance with Section 2.2.1 (iv) of the Code to enable compliance with the provisions of the Code and the relevant policies of the institutions it serves.

Provisions of the Code

Provisions of the Code apply to the establishment of the SAEC, the composition and governance of the committee as well as the responsibilities of the SAEC regarding ethical review, approval and monitoring of animal care and use.

Where a provision of the Code has not been included in these Operating Procedures it is assumed to apply. Should an instruction in these Operating Procedures be deemed to be inconsistent with the Code, the provisions of the Code supersede.

SAEC Definitions

Animal: any live non-human vertebrate (that is, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, encompassing domestic animals, purpose-bred animals, livestock, wildlife) and cephalopods.

3Rs:

Reduction alternatives: methods for obtaining comparable levels of information from the use of fewer animals in scientific procedures or for obtaining more information from the same number of animals.

Refinement alternatives: methods that alleviate or minimise potential pain and distress and enhance animal wellbeing.

Replacement alternatives: methods that permit a given purpose of an activity or project to be achieved without the use of animals.

Science: The Western Australian Curriculum: Science has three interrelated strands: *Science Understanding*, *Science as a Human Endeavour* and *Science Inquiry Skills*. Together, the three strands of the science curriculum provide students with understanding, knowledge and skills through which they can develop a scientific view of the world.

Teaching activity: any action or group of actions undertaken with the aim of achieving a scientific purpose, where the scientific purpose is imparting or demonstrating knowledge or techniques to

achieve an educational outcome in science, as specified in the relevant curriculum or competency requirements.

Assessment of Applications

The SAEC will examine and approve, approve subject to modification, or reject written applications relevant to the use of animals for scientific purposes.

- Any activities that involve minor conscious disruption to an animal's condition require an application to be submitted and approved by the SAEC prior to commencement of the activity, including:
 - non-invasive investigations of animal's responses to varied conditions;
 - the monitoring and care of very young and vulnerable animals;
 - invasive procedures;
 - procedures involving pain, risk to the animal and/or recovery; and/or
 - activities requiring the death of an animal.
- All applications must be submitted online via the Animal Ethics System.
- New applications may only be considered at a quorate meeting of the SAEC.
- The Executive Officers will ensure that all applications and supporting information is distributed prior to the meeting allowing reasonable time for members to read, consider and prepare questions.
- Applications may be approved for a maximum of three years, allowing for the approved number of animals to be used in each of the approved years, i.e. the number of animals approved for use is per year of approval.
- Decisions are made on the basis of consensus and confirmed by a show of hands. Where consensus cannot be reached after reasonable effort to resolve differences, the SAEC should explore with the applicant(s) ways of modifying the project that may lead to consensus. If consensus is still unachievable, the SAEC should only proceed to a majority decision after members have been allowed a period of time to review their positions, followed by further discussion.
- Following the SAEC meeting, a Certificate of Approval, Animal Use and Health Records, the sector specific Licence (CEWA & DOE only) and relevant standard operating procedures are emailed to the teacher and principal informing them that the application was approved.
- If the SAEC deem an application to have insufficient information to make an informed decision, the application will be returned outlining the information and/or changes required. The SAEC may authorise the Executive Officer to provide approval if the response provided meets the requirements. These applications will be ratified at the next SAEC meeting.
- During the deliberation of applications, the SAEC will determine which schools will be subject to an inspection. Some factors that may be considered could include whether a teacher is new to an activity, there is an unknown supplier and/or previous low hatching rates, non-compliance or adverse events to animals.
- In the event that a teacher or principal is dissatisfied with either the SAEC's procedures or any decision relating to any application, they will be referred to the SAEC's Complaints and Grievance Processes.
- Executive Officers will maintain a database (register) of all applications to the SAEC, both approved and rejected, including the outcomes of the committee's deliberations.

Membership of the SAEC

- The SAEC membership will consist of:
 - a) at least one and up to 3 persons in Category A as described in Clause 2.2.4(i) of the Code.
 - b) at least three and up to 5 persons in Category B as described in Clause 2.2.4(ii) of the Code.
 - c) at least one and up to 3 persons in Category C as described in Clause 2.2.4(iii) of the Code.
 - d) at least one and up to 3 persons in Category D as described in Clause 2.2.4(iv) of the Code.

- The SAEC may appoint reserve members for each category for the purpose of ensuring a quorum when regular members are unable to attend. Reserve members will meet the criteria for membership of the relevant category. However, they will only attend meetings when one or more of the regular members in their category is unable to attend.
- The Chairperson is a mandatory appointment under Clause 2.2.2 of the Code and is appointed by the Department of Education.
- The SAEC may appoint a Deputy Chairperson to cover short-term absences by the Chairperson. This person may be appointed in addition to Category A to D members, in which case they would not have counted, for the purposes of determining a quorum, unless acting as Chairperson.
- The SAEC may invite other people to attend individual meetings to provide expert opinion to assist deliberations.

Meetings (2.2.25 to 2.2.26)

- The SAEC will ordinarily meet twice each school term, in week 3 and week 8 unless otherwise decided by the SAEC. In exceptional circumstances, an extraordinary meeting may be called.
- Each meeting will be quorate. The quorum for a meeting is a minimum of four members, who must include a separate person from each of Categories A, B, C and D as stipulated by the Code and the Chairperson or their nominated representative.
- If there are more than four members present, Category C and D members together must represent no less than one third of the members present at a meeting.
- Only members in Categories A, B, C and D and the Chairperson are counted for the purposes of determining whether a quorum is present.
- In exceptional circumstances, a member required to meet quorum may participate in a meeting via a teleconferencing or videoconferencing link if it is not possible and/or practical to attend the meeting in person. Members in addition to those required to meet quorum may teleconference whenever it is not possible and/or practical for the additional member to attend the meeting in person. The electronic link must utilise a conferencing feature so that all participating members can hear each other during the meeting discussions and decision making.
- Participation of a member via a teleconferencing or videoconferencing must be clearly noted in the minutes and the member may authorise the Chair to record their support on the application.
- If quorum is not met, the present members will review the applications and make recommendations. The Department of Education's Executive Officer will summarise the discussion and forward the information to members of the category not represented during the meeting for their response to formalise a final decision.
- The DOE Executive Officer will maintain minutes of decisions and other aspects of SAEC business for each meeting.
- If a member is unable to attend s/he will provide adequate notice to ensure a quorum will be met.
- When a school is seeking approval for an activity due to commence before the next SAEC meeting, the Executive Officer will normally ask the school to arrange alternative dates. If there are exceptional circumstances, an out of session deliberation may be undertaken via group email.
- An out of session deliberation requires approval by one member of each category.
- The SAEC authorise the Executive Officers to approve changes to activity dates whereby the duration of the activity and all other conditions remains the same when an amendment form is submitted.
- Decisions and recommendations made the out of session must be ratified by a quorate meeting of the SAEC.

Monitoring (2.3.17 to 2.3.23)

The SAEC monitors the care and use of animals by:

- Ensuring applications comply with the Act and the Code. Other guidelines, including standard operating procedures, for the ethical treatment of animals relevant to the specific activity may also apply.
- Monitoring activity completion reports and annual reports.
- Carrying out inspections of school and college sites and activities deemed as high risk by the SAEC. The inspection team will prepare a written report for the SAEC following inspections. Should the written report include recommendations, schools/colleges will be requested to respond to the report.
- Selecting schools to submit photographic evidence in lieu of a physical inspection in certain circumstances such as those with time constraints, regional or remote geographical location or government mandated stay at home orders. Photographic inspections will be evaluated by the SAEC at the next quorum meeting.
- Commenting on the standard of the facilities/infrastructure, animal management and staff competencies and make recommendations where appropriate.
- Authorising delegates to inspect sites and monitor projects on behalf of the SAEC. Delegates must prepare written reports for the SAEC following inspections (2.3.23).
- Whenever possible, ensuring a Category C or D member participate in inspections (2.3.20).
- Assisting in the development of any new SAEC Standard Operating Procedures.
- Approving the SAEC Standard Operating Procedures.
- Ensuring the SAEC Standard Operating Procedures are reviewed on a three-year cycle.

Non-compliance (2.3.25)

- Where an instance of non-compliance with the Code is detected the SAEC will advise the teacher who is responsible for the activity (as nominated on the application), and the school principal either by phone call, email or letter, depending on the severity of the non-compliance.
- Where non-compliance with the Code is detected that may compromise the welfare of animals the SAEC will ensure that such activities cease immediately, and that corrective action is taken. Significant instances of non-compliance will be further investigated by the relevant Executive Officer or Chairperson and reported to the SAEC.
- Significant contraventions of the Code or approved project procedures may be referred to the institution. Some matters may be dealt with by the institution's internal discipline system.
- Instances of non-compliance will be added to a register that will be monitored for repeat offenders. Repeat offenders may receive a short-term ban on activities using animals.
- Instances of non-compliance are reported to the regulator in the SAEC's Annual Report.

Conflict of Interest

- A SAEC member must declare all real or potential conflicts of interest and the nature of that interest to either the chair or an executive officer of the SAEC as soon as is reasonable after they become aware of the conflict.
- A conflict of interest may arise where a SAEC member:
 - has his or her own application being considered;
 - has an interest in an external provider of a product or service; or
 - has an interest or relationship with a researcher or teacher with an application being considered.
- When a member of the SAEC is a practising teacher or lecturer that has their own application being considered, he or she will not take part in the vote.
- Where a situation arises where a member of the SAEC has an interest that may be seen to influence the objectivity of a decision that member must declare the conflict of interest and refrain from joining in the discussion, providing an opinion or casting a vote on any matter where there could be a perceived or real conflict of interest.

Immediate Use of Animals (2.1.5 (v) (e))

- The SAEC may by the agreement of one Category A member, one Category B member, one Category C and one Category D member approve, in advance, the immediate use of animals

should that be required for the diagnosis of unexplained and severe disease outbreaks, or morbidity/mortality, in animals or people.

Appointment of an Executive (2.2.23)

- If established, an Executive may be formed by the Chairperson (or Deputy Chairperson) and at least one member from Category C or D to:
 - approve amendments to projects; and
 - specify emergent or alternative action required in response to reports of adverse events.
- An Executive may make decisions by meeting in person, via teleconference or via email communications.
- An Executive must not approve new applications.
- Decisions and recommendations made by an Executive must be reviewed by a quorate meeting of the SAEC.

Member appointments, retirement, roles and responsibilities

- The Chairperson is a mandatory appointment under Clause 2.2.2 of the Code and is specifically appointed by the Department of Education.
- The SAEC may appoint a Deputy Chairperson to cover short-term absences by the Chairperson. This person may be appointed in addition to Category A to D members, in which case they would not have counted, for the purposes of determining a quorum except when acting as the Chairperson.
- The Department of Education, the Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) and the Association of Independent Schools Western Australia (AISWA) will each appoint an Executive Officer. Executive Officers are not mandated positions and as such are not counted for the purposes of determining a quorum.
- A Category B member may also be appointed to the role of an Executive Officer if required by an institution. In this instance the member will count as a Category B member for the purposes of determining a quorum.
- Any member of the SAEC receiving a welfare complaint is obliged to raise the matter with the AEC as soon as possible.

1 Procedures for appointing new members

- Members are recruited and appointed as vacancies arise.
- Category A, C and D vacancies are filled by the DOE Executive Officer through recommendations or an advertisement. Interested applicants apply in writing to the SAEC Executive Officer providing a brief CV with evidence of their appropriateness for the role.
- The SAEC Chair will present recommendations to the SAEC for endorsement.
- The Department of Education, the Catholic Education, Western Australia (CEWA) and the Association of Independent Schools, Western Australia (AISWA) will each appoint a Category B member that meets the requirements of Clause 2.2.4 (ii) of the Code.
- The SAEC Chair will be informed in writing about the appointment of an institution Category B representative.
- The DOE Executive Officer will be responsible for the induction of new members except for the Category B representatives for the Catholic and Independent schools, which will be the responsibility of their respective Executive Officers.
- Appointments will be reviewed every 3 years but may continue by agreement of both parties.

2 Retirement from the SAEC

- Voluntary retirement:
 - Any member wishing to retire will inform the Department of Education's Executive Officer in writing.
 - Category B members will also inform the relevant sector Executive Officer.
 - The Department of Education, Executive Officer will inform the SAEC chair of any retirements.

The SAEC chair will thank in writing both the retiring SAEC member and where appropriate the institution or organisation they represent.

- Involuntary retirement:
 - Following recommendations from SAEC members, any member can be informed by the SAEC Chair that their participation is no longer required.

3 Role of the Executive Officers

- The DOE, CEWA and AISWA Executive Officers are the first point of contact for teachers and schools wishing to access the SAEC.
- The DOE Executive Officer will act as first point of contact for Central Regional TAFE College.
- The Executive Officers will assist the Chair and efficient operation of the SAEC by:
 - expediting applications and approval processes through the provision of advice and assistance to researchers regarding ethics applications, procedures and mandatory reporting requirements;
 - organising the distribution of information to members;
 - scheduling meetings and monitoring sessions; and
 - overseeing database integrity and requirements and providing management reports.
- The Executive Officers will approve amendments whereby the only change is to the activity dates and all other elements, including the duration of the activity, remain the same as the approved activity.
- CEWA and AISWA Executive Officers will ensure that any additions to their sectors application register, inspection visits register, and non-compliance register are forwarded to the DOE Executive Officer for inclusion in master documents.

4 Responsibilities of the Chair

The Chair must:

- Ensure that the SAEC operates in accord with the principles and requirements of the Code, the relevant institutional policies and the agreed SAEC procedures.
- Ensure that applications are considered by the SAEC and the outcomes are conveyed to the activity leaders in a timely fashion.
- Advise the institutions regarding the level of resourcing required by the SAEC.
- Represent the SAEC in negotiations with the institution's management.
- Oversee all requirements of the SAEC to report and review its operation as outlined in the Code.
- Ensure SAEC records are maintained and made available for review by the institutions.

Complaints and Grievances Procedures

- In the event that a teacher or principal is dissatisfied with either the SAEC's procedures or any decision relating to any application, monitoring and/or evaluation they will be referred to the SAEC's Complaints and Grievance Process.
- The school community and general public will be able to access these processes on the public facing website.
- These processes are outlined in the flowcharts below.

Confidentiality

SAEC members will sign a confidentiality agreement prior to appointment.