



**Tshwane University
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GUIDELINES ON THE EVALUATION OF RESEARCH-RELATED QUESTIONNAIRES WHERE STAFF MEMBERS AND/OR STUDENTS ARE THE TARGET RESPONDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Research questionnaires (i.e. paper-based format, electronic format or as part of a structured interview) are widely used research instruments to gather data regarding individuals' and/or groups' self-reported perceptions, thoughts, emotions or behaviours in various contexts. Staff members and students of tertiary institutions are often used as respondents in research projects due to their proximity to researchers, accessibility and general awareness of academic research. However, a high incidence of research projects can result in the "over"-research of certain respondent groups. This may result in respondent burnout and/or respondent apathy. For this reason a quantity management system needs to be applied. Specific respondent groups may be regarded as being members of a vulnerable population when the researcher is in a dominant power relation to them due to contextual and/or organisational structures, e.g. lecturer-student and manager-subordinate relations. As a result, the management of tertiary institutions need to carefully consider the requests of researchers who wish to utilise staff members and/or students as respondents in research projects.

Currently, a sub-committee of the Central Research and Innovation Committee (CRIC) is responsible for the evaluation of the content, design and research ethics of questionnaires intended by researchers for distribution amongst staff members and/or students of the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). In many instances the research proposals of such projects are also submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for ethical clearance. This results in the duplication of the formal evaluation process.

AMENDMENT OF THE RESEARCH POLICY

The proposed amendment of the research policy regarding the evaluation of research-related questionnaires to be distributed amongst TUT staff members and/or students, is that this function in future be managed and performed by the Research Ethics Committee.

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE PROCEDURES FOR THE EVALUATION OF QUESTIONNAIRES

The Research Ethics Committee will appoint a sub-committee to evaluate all the research-related questionnaires where TUT staff members and/or students are the target respondents.

1. STRUCTURE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE EVALUATION SUB-COMMITTEE

- 1.1 The Questionnaire Evaluation sub-committee will consist of the following members:
 - 1.1.1 Chairperson – elected by the Research Ethics Committee. He/She must be a member of the Research Ethics Committee.
 - 1.1.2 Secretary – secretary of the Research Ethics Committee.
 - 1.1.3 Statistician – appointed by the Directorate: Research, Innovation and Partnerships.
 - 1.1.4 Expert members – co-opted by the Research Ethics Committee for their expertise in the development and utilisation of questionnaires for research purposes. Expert members may also be co-opted from relevant interest groups where TUT staff members do not have the necessary skills to evaluate a particular questionnaire.
 - 1.1.5 Expert staff member from the faculty where the project is registered.
- 1.2 The term of office shall be three years, and, on expiry of his/her term, an individual member may indicate his/her availability for a further term of office.
- 1.3 Each sub-committee member will be formally required to adhere to the Research Ethics Committee's confidentiality statement.

2. EVALUATION PROCESS

- 2.1 The sub-committee will evaluate all the research-related questionnaires (i.e. paper-based questionnaires, electronic-based questionnaires and structured interview schedules) intended for collection of data from TUT staff members and/or students. The questionnaires can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee in one of the following ways:
 - 2.1.1 The Faculty Research and Innovation Committee (FRIC) of each faculty electronically submit to the Research Ethics Committee all the approved research proposals, inclusive of the questionnaires, and supporting documents (e.g. informed consent document). This includes registered research projects for TUT postgraduate qualifications and non-qualification purposes.
 - 2.1.2 Researchers who are registered for postgraduate qualifications at a tertiary institution other than TUT or who intend to conduct an independent research project that proposes to collect questionnaire-based data from TUT staff members and/or students, must directly and electronically submit their research proposals, inclusive of the questionnaires, and supporting documents to the Research Ethics Committee for evaluation.
- 2.2 The sub-committee will continuously conduct their activities by electronic means.
- 2.3 At least three members of the sub-committee will individually evaluate *inter alia* the content, structure, validity to meet the aims of the research project, institutional sensitivity/awareness and ethics of the submitted questionnaires. In addition, the evaluation will be carried out with due consideration of the principle of academic freedom. Each evaluator will submit a written evaluation report to the Chairperson within a reasonable timeframe. The Chairperson will summarise the individual evaluator comments and suggestions in a written feedback to the researcher. The feedback will indicate whether the sub-committee grants approval or declines the application for the distribution of the questionnaire amongst TUT staff members and/or students. Where an application is declined, the sub-committee will provide the researcher with the recorded reasons for its decision. The decisions of the sub-committee are ratified at the next meeting of the Research Ethics Committee.
- 2.4 A researcher may lodge an appeal to the Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee, and, if that appeal should fail, it may lodge an appeal to the CRIC against the sub-committee's decision to decline his/her application.

- 2.5 If a sub-committee member is in any way involved in a research project submitted for evaluation, he/she will recuse himself/herself from the evaluation process.
- 2.6 A register will be compiled to keep track of the specific staff and/or student populations that are targeted by the various questionnaires. The sub-committee may decline an application to distribute questionnaires amongst specific respondent populations when it is deemed to equate to over-research of a vulnerable population.
- 2.7 The secretary will keep accurate records of the questionnaire evaluations and feedback. All documentation relevant to the questionnaire evaluations will be safely and securely retained by TUT.