

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES: COMPRES

COMPRES		Standard Operating Procedure	
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1 COMPILATION AND AUTHORISATION

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	Prof. Werner de Klerk as Chairperson of the COMPRES Scientific Committee		10 April 2024
	COMPRES Internal EXCO		10 April 2024

2 DISTRIBUTION

Department/Unit	Name	Signature	Date
COMPRES	Prof. Retha Bloem		10 April 2024
Chairperson on behalf of COMPRES Scientific Committee	Prof. Werner de Klerk		10 April 2024

3 DOCUMENT HISTORY

Date	Version no	Reason for revision
10 April 2024	1	First document

4 ABBREVIATIONS AND/OR DEFINITIONS

<u>Abbreviation/ Definition</u>	<u>Description</u>
FHS	Faculty of Health Sciences
SC	Scientific Committee
SOP	Standard operating procedure
DD	Deputy Dean
COMPRES	Community Psychosocial Research
NWU	North-West University

HREC	Health Research Ethics Committee
Larger Project	A large-scale project encompassing several sub-studies or affiliated research studies.
Student Research	The project leads to the completion of a degree, e.g., a master's or PhD-proposal (can also form part of an approved large project).
Independent Project	Any independent research project that is not related to the completion of a degree.
Amendment	Any change made to the originally planned proposal and that happens while the study is being conducted. If changes have been made to methodological procedures and content as presented in the original proposal, it necessitates a subsequent review by the Scientific Committee.
R&I Committee	Research and Innovation Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences.

5 PURPOSE OF THE SOP

The purpose of this SOP is to outline the procedures, processes, and membership guidelines that the COMPRES Scientific Committee will follow when reviewing research proposals, including student research projects/studies, independent projects, and other relevant submissions, in alignment with its responsibilities under the *Terms of Reference of Scientific Committees in the Faculty of Health Sciences*.

Quality assurance and regulatory compliance regarding the scientific nature of research within the FHS are managed and administered by the research directors of the research entities within the Faculty. Guiding documents in understanding the terms of reference for scientific committees, including the *National Health Act 61 of 2003*, are included, as well as the mandatory requirements set out in the Ethics Guidelines stipulated for FHS and all NWU policies, rules, and guidelines applicable within research and academic governance.

As stated in the *Scope of North-West University Scientific- and Research Ethics Committee Document*: relevant scientific committee approval must first be granted before any research may be conducted. It further states that the Scientific Committee will review and approve the proposal on the following:

- Scientific validity and integrity.
- Potential study risk level.
- Involvement of potentially vulnerable participants.
- The context of the study.
- Rigour of the study.
- Relevance of study.
- Ethical integrity and soundness of study.

The purpose of the COMPRES Scientific Committee is:

- 1) To review and assist the Directorate with life cycle decisions regarding students.
- 2) To critically evaluate, provide feedback, and, where necessary, offer recommendations on the scientific validity of the research proposal.
- 3) To oversee and guide research activities, ensuring they contribute to advancing knowledge and solutions to problems in the relevant field of psychology and social work.
- 4) To ensure that the research proposed holds scientific merit and is ethically sound.
- 5) To ensure that the research study is worthwhile and aligned with and enhances the overarching goals and focus of the Research Entity (COMPRES).
- 6) To ensure that the research proposal adheres to the highest standards of research ethics, integrity, and rigour.

The Scientific Committee is responsible for:

- evaluating research proposals;
- reviewing the gap in practice or knowledge that will be addressed;

- evaluating the justification of the relevance and necessity of the study;
- reviewing the chosen research approach;
- reviewing the study designs and ensuring it suits the approach;
- reviewing the suitability of the sampling method, sample size, and appropriateness of the chosen study population;
- determining the suitability of data collection methods in terms of design and research question;
- reviewing data analysis method and the suitability thereof;
- reviewing strategies to promote rigour and ethical adherence;
- offering feedback on referencing;
- reviewing funding plan and feasibility of planned timeline for study; and
- offering insights on research outcomes and ensuring they are ethically and professionally sound.

6 SCOPE

This SOP applies to all researchers, committee members, supervisors/promoters of students and postgraduate students affiliated with the Research Entity, COMPRES. It covers the full application process to obtain Scientific Committee approval prior to conducting the research, permission for amendments, the monitoring process during research, and monitoring the data management upon completion of research for five (5) years.

7 RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1. The Researcher

- **Proposal Submission:** The researcher/supervisor/promotor should ensure the study proposal is submitted to the Scientific Committee before and/or on the intended committee meeting date before **10:00 am** (scheduled in advance by the Scientific Committee admin).
- **Research Defence:** The researcher is responsible for ensuring that necessary changes were made after receiving feedback from the Scientific Committee

regarding the Turnitin report before the researcher/student may attend the committee meeting to defend their research proposal. Student proposals where the Turnitin report similarity score is too high will not be placed on the agenda for the specific review round and will need to be resubmitted on the next COMPRES submission date. The student/supervisor/promotor is responsible for ensuring that changes are made based on the report before the next submission.

- **Implementation of Proposed Research Study:** The researcher/supervisor/promotor is responsible for ensuring that the study is executed in strict alignment with the proposal that received approval.
- **Communication:** Any changes, challenges, or findings/results that might affect the integrity or outcomes of the study should be promptly communicated to the Scientific Committee Chair/Research Director.
- **Amendments to Methodology:** Should there be any modifications or amendments to the initially proposed methodology, it is imperative that these changes undergo an expedited review by the Scientific Committee. The responsibility falls on the researcher/supervisor/promotor to resubmit the proposal alongside a detailed amendment letter. This letter must clearly highlight the adjustments made directly within the text of the proposal itself. This expedited review process is also applicable in situations where the NWU-Health Research Ethics Committee (NWU-HREC) requests a re-evaluation of the study by the Scientific Committee. It is essential that all such amendments are presented transparently and are thoroughly documented to facilitate a swift review.
- **Submission to COMPRES after NWU-HREC Approval:** After receiving NWU-HREC approval, the researcher/supervisor/promotor must submit the HREC-approved proposal and approval letter to the Scientific Committee Secretariat for archival purposes, with an indication of any major amendments.

7.2. The Scientific Committee

- **Turnitin Submission:** Once the secretariat of the Scientific Committee receives a proposal on a *Thursday*, it must be placed through Turnitin on *Friday*. Based on the similarity index report, the proposal will either be placed on the agenda and

sent for review on *Monday* or sent back to the researchers to make changes for the next submission date. The Chair of the Scientific Committee will assess the Turnitin similarity reports and indicate whether the proposal will be included on the meeting agenda or returned to the researchers for revisions.

- **Timeliness:** It is imperative that the committee members review all submitted proposals (that yielded acceptable Turnitin reports) promptly to prevent delays in research activities. Members also need to ensure that they have reviewed the relevant proposal(s) before the scheduled review meetings and send written feedback ten (10) working days after receiving the proposal (using track changes on the proposal) to the Chair of the Scientific Committee to send to the researcher/supervisor/promoter.
- **Attendance of Committee Meetings:** The core team and selected proposal reviewers **must** attend online Scientific Committee meetings scheduled unless unavailable and accepted by the Chair of the Scientific Committee, in which case this must be communicated to the secretariat in advance. Other reviewers will be invited to attend if they choose to do so.
- **Confidentiality:** The committee members must all sign a confidentiality agreement and maintain the confidentiality of all research proposals, discussions, and decisions.
- **Training and Professional Development:** Committee members attend regular training on the latest research methodologies, ethical standards, and any specific research-related advancements that should be part of the committee's programme.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Any committee member with a potential conflict of interest regarding a specific proposal must inform the secretariat in writing in advance and recuse themselves from reviewing that proposal.

7.3. Chairperson

- Oversees the operations of the Scientific Committee, ensures compliance with the SOP, identifies appropriate reviewers for proposals, facilitates discussions during meetings, and provides a consolidated report that reflects the collective decisions and feedback of the reviewers.

7.4. Vice-Chair of COMPRES Scientific Committee

- The Vice-Chairs stands in for the Chair and helps with complex decision-making during meetings. The Chair should liaise regularly with the Vice-Chairs and ensure they know enough about the research entity's current issues to stand in at short notice.

7.5. Committee Members

7.5.1 Core Committee Representative Members:

- Nominates potential examiners from the COMPRES potential examiners database. These nominations serve as possible examiner recommendations for supervisors/promotors at the commencement of title registration for each submitted student research project (Master's and PhD levels). Reviewing and recommending extensions of the study period, specifically focusing on the validity of the request for an extension of the study period.
- Reviewing interruption of study requests and making recommendations based on the information provided.
- Review other student requests and make recommendations based on the information provided.
- Note and discuss all students who exceed their study period and/or show poor progress. Based on the information provided during these discussions, the core team must identify how each individual case will be dealt with.
- Governance of the data management system in COMPRES.
- The core team is responsible for fostering a climate of research integrity.
- The core team will include: 1) the Scientific Committee Chair; 2) Scientific Committee Vice-Chairs; 3) the Entity Research Director; and 4) a representative of psychology and social work from all three campuses (PC, MC and VC) and CCYF (Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies).

7.5.2 Review members:

- Review proposals assigned to them, provide constructive written feedback within the timeline, and participate in online committee discussions.
- The committee needs to ensure that the feedback provided will enable the researcher to conduct methodically, scientifically sound research that aligns with

the entity's research focus. The feedback provided should be constructive and should be able to guide the research team.

7.6. Scientific Committee Secretariat

- Assist in administrative tasks, maintain records, schedule meetings, and facilitate communication between the Chair, Vice-Chairs, Scientific Committee, and proposers.
- Submit the proposal to Turnitin, then forward it to the Chair for a final review and approval before inclusion on the agenda.
- Ensure that research proposals are assigned to the appropriate reviewers (with the assistance of the Chair).
- Ensuring that all required documentation is available to the core group during their meeting and that the agenda includes all matters that need to be discussed.
- Ensure meeting agenda(s) and minutes are available in a timely manner.
- Ensure timely and effective communication with the researchers, Scientific Committee Chair, and the Scientific Committee.
- Sending student research project titles to the language editor once the Scientific Committee has approved the study.
- Ensuring approval letters are drafted, signed, and sent to the researcher/supervisor/promotor in a timely manner.
- Submit *no risk studies* on behalf of the researcher/supervisor/promotor to NWU-HREC, given he/she received all required documents.
- Keep track of research proposals that have been sent back to the researcher/supervisor/promotor with moderate changes.
- Ensuring that rebuttals/resubmitted studies or amended studies (via the expedited process) are sent to the correct reviewer(s).
- Following up with all parties involved, be it the researcher/supervisor/promotor or the Scientific Committee members, when certain deadlines are approaching.

8 PROCEDURE(S)

8.1 Proposal Submission:

- Proposals should be submitted electronically by emailing them to submission-compres@nwu.ac.za and the Scientific Committee secretariat before 10:00 AM

on the designated submission date. Proposals should be written according to the latest approved COMPRES template.

- Proposals must adhere to the formatting and submission guidelines provided by the Scientific Committee.

8.2 Proposal Review Process:

- Upon receipt, proposals will be assigned to three (3) committee members for evaluation based on their subject or methodological expertise and relevance to the proposal's subject matter.
- Committee members will review assigned proposals - within ten (10) working days upon receiving the proposal - independently and provide written feedback based on predetermined evaluation criteria, including scientific merit, feasibility, originality, and alignment with university and COMPRES research priorities.
- The secretariat will schedule a committee meeting to discuss the proposals, considering the feedback provided by individual members.
- The Chair, Vice-Chairs, and core team will meet one (1) hour (or longer – based on the agenda for that specific review round) before the scheduled meeting to oversee the governance of the proposed study.
- During the online Scientific Committee meetings (45 minutes), students, accompanied by their study supervisor/promotor, will defend their proposals. Subsequently, the selected committee members will share their evaluations and engage in constructive discussions aimed at reaching a consensus on the proposals' merits. core team members are invited to participate, offering feedback during these discussions, or may choose to excuse themselves following the morning session. Proposals may be approved, rejected, or recommended for revisions based on the committee's collective assessment.

8.3 Decision Making:

- Decisions regarding proposal approval, rejection, or revision will be made by consensus among the Chair and selected reviewers during committee meetings, during which each reviewer will indicate acceptance/rejection of the proposal. The

secretariat will minute these decisions and draft a letter to confirm the outcome, which will be sent to the supervisor/promoter after this meeting has adjourned.

- In situations where consensus is not achieved, the Chairperson will engage an external independent reviewer, who is an expert in either the subject matter or methodology, to review the proposal within five (5) working days. This reviewer will be given only the research proposal, without access to previous reviewers' feedback. Their decision will then be considered binding.
- Decisions will be documented and communicated to the proposers in writing, along with feedback from the Scientific Committee.

8.4 Revision and Resubmission:

- Proposers whose proposals are recommended for revision will be provided with specific feedback from the Scientific Committee.
- Revised proposals must include a rebuttal table addressing the feedback received, with changes within the proposal itself highlighted in colour. These revisions must be resubmitted to the secretariat within the specified timelines: five (5) working days for **minimal changes** and ten (10) working days for **moderate changes**. For **major revisions**, the proposal, along with the necessary revisions, must be resubmitted to COMPRES for a thorough review. In the case where a research study has been **deferred**, the proposal needs to be resubmitted to small groups or the critical review group for reevaluation.
- Rebuttals (minimal changes) will be evaluated by the Chair before final approval.
- Rebuttals (moderate revisions) will be evaluated by the original three (3) reviewers within five (5) working days. They will then notify the secretariat whether the proposal is accepted or requires further amendments.
- Rebuttals/re-submissions must be submitted to rebuttal-compres@nwu.ac.za and the Scientific Committee secretariat.

8.5 Confidentiality:

- All deliberations and discussions within the Scientific Committee are confidential.

- Proposals and related documents must be kept confidential and accessed only by authorised committee members and administrative staff.

8.6 Record Keeping:

- The secretariat will maintain accurate records of all proposals received, evaluations, decisions, and correspondence.
- Records will be securely stored and made accessible only to authorised personnel.
- These records will be stored and later destroyed according to the NWU Records Management SOP.

8.7 Compliance:

- The COMPRES Scientific Committee will operate in compliance with all applicable university policies, regulations, and ethical standards governing research.

8.8 Revision of SOP:

- This SOP will be reviewed periodically to ensure its effectiveness and may be revised as necessary with the approval of the Scientific Committee.

8.9 Communication:

- Any updates or changes to this SOP will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

9 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

- Terms of reference for research ethics committees of the Faculty of Health Sciences, 19 September 2016
- Scope of North-West University Scientific- and Research Ethics Committees, August 2019

10 ADDENDA

Not Applicable.