

Competency Training and Assessment Guidelines

May 2020

PURPOSE

The Flinders University holds a licence with the SA Department of Environment and Water for conducting teaching and research with animals and is subject to the conditions of the SA Animal Welfare Act 1985. This Act requires compliance with the *Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes*.

The *Australian Code*, 2013, indicates in Section 2.4 that investigators

- are required to be competent in the procedures they perform or to be under the direct supervision – 2.4.18 (ii)
- ensure that procedures involving animals accord with current best practice – 2.4.15 (ii)
- ensure that animal care is provided by an adequate number of competent people - 2.4.17
- ... ensuring that people involved in the care and use of animals in the project are knowledgeable about the normal behaviour and signs of pain and distress for the species they use – 2.4.18 (v)

In section 2.1.5 institutions are required to promote compliance with the Code by ensuring guidelines are developed that must include how the competence of people involved in the care and use of animals will be assessed and ensured – 2.1.5 (v) (a).

In addition to fulfilling the above compliance requirements competency training and assessment guidelines will assist Flinders University to,

- Harmonise standards across its colleges and extend that harmonisation with other institutions with similar missions in South Australia and interstate.
- Facilitate movement of students and academics within the university and with external research and teaching institutions.
- Promote collaboration with external partners involved in the use of animals for teaching and research.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of these guidelines are:

- To ensure the Flinders University and researchers/lecturers are compliant in their work with animals according to the *SA Animal Welfare Act 1985* and the *Australian Code*.
- To provide a structure for the delivery and recording of competency based training and assessment
- To ensure that training is delivered in diverse modes and that there is flexibility in the forms of evidence required to demonstrate competence to account for the breath of research and researcher/lecturer needs.
- To acknowledge academic and professional expertise of our staff and seek engagement with researchers/lecturers such that they feel they have ownership of the process
- To facilitate research and teaching and prevent delaying the commencement of research or teaching programmes by providing a system of supervision so that participants can commence their duties while maintaining compliance.
- To ensure veterinary oversight of the training and assessment process to confirm that standards, involving surgery and anaesthesia/analgesia are consistent with contemporary veterinary and medical practice.
- To encourage and confirm the maintenance of current competency by investigators and lecturers.

ASSESSORS

- Animal Facility staff can approve competency for basic animal procedures.
- The AWO can approve competency for all procedures (including complex or invasive procedures).
- If a CI has had their competency approved by the AWO, then they can certify the competency of their staff. This should be followed up with competency approved by the AWO (or delegate) where practicable.
- External institution competency can be recognised, where appropriate, and approved by the AEO, AWO, or AWC.

PROCESS

- Training and assessment of individuals will be identified in the process of the development of projects for submission and approval by the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC).
- All investigators in a project, not deemed to be previously competent in routine laboratory animal procedures (including handling, injection and sampling techniques, humane killing, and clinical monitoring and recording) relevant to their project will be required to undertake facility induction training and assessment delivered by the COMPHAF Technician Trainer or CSEAF Senior Technician or AWO (or delegate), prior to commencing work with animals. Records of this training and assessment will be maintained in the Competency Skills Register, and participants will be issued with a certificate of completion.
- The Facility Trainer/s or AWO (or delegate) will enter any specific routine training details, including dates, techniques trained in, and competencies achieved, into the Competency Skills Register when a participant's training programme has commenced. This Competency Skills Register will be accessible by the Facility Trainers, the AWO, and the AEO. This enables all parties to easily access and view all training records as required.
- All investigators who will be performing anaesthetic and surgical procedures involving the recovery of animals, if not deemed previously competent, will be required to undertake training and assessment with the AWO (or delegate) relating to anaesthetic practice, aseptic surgical technique, principles of surgery, wound closure, and management and post-operative care. Records of completion will be maintained as previously described.
- Once a project is approved, it is the responsibility of the chief investigator or deputy, with the assistance of the Animal Welfare Officer (AWO), to develop a plan for individuals requiring training and assessment for specialised procedures in their projects.
- The chief investigator (CI)/deputy will deliver training and assessment for each required individual in the specialised skills relating to the project until they have reached a provisional level of competency as determined by the CI/deputy.
- Once provisional competency (PC) has been awarded the CI/deputy will inform the AWO (or delegate) once a person is ready for final assessment, if the participant is to work unsupervised. The provisionally competent trainee may continue to participate in the research project undertaking the relevant procedure but is required to be directly supervised by their supervisor who is listed in the competency skills register as competent in the technique.
- The AWO (or delegate), CI/deputy/supervisor will provide direct face to face assessment of the trainee, in consultation with the CI/deputy/supervisor. Definitive competency (DC) will be awarded to the trainee in a joint decision of the AWO (or delegate) and CI/deputy/supervisor. Alternative forms of evidence may be used including video and third party evidence. The form of the evidence must be agreed upon by the CI/deputy and AWO (or delegate) prior to the assessment activity.
- Recognition of competency between partner institutions which maintain similar standards will be promoted with the AECs of those organisations. The Flinders AWC will approve the relevant partner institutions based on the advice of the AWO (or delegate) and category B members of the AWC.

- Recognition of prior competency for individuals who have been trained and assessed at other institutions for which a cross recognition agreement does not exist will be undertaken on a 'as needs basis'. Evidence will be reviewed by the Animal Ethics Officer (AEO)/AWO (or delegate) in consultation with the CI/deputy/supervisor of the participant.
- Researchers are expected to ensure they have been assessed for current competency in the procedures they undertake in their projects approximately once every three years in line with current approved projects. This will be achieved by researchers undertaking training refresher and assessment, requesting the AWO (or delegate) or CI/deputy/supervisor to view procedures in a project or provide a statement by a recognised external institution. Researchers involved in field activities can either invite the AWO (or delegate) on field trips to view procedures, provide video or other documentary third party evidence to verify current competency.

RECORDS

- Records of assessment, in the form of a Competency Skills Register, will be maintained on a central database accessible by the AEO/AWO/CMPHAF Technician Trainer/CSEAF Senior Technician.
- A database that facilitates user access without compromising the validity of records and confidentiality needs to be developed to ensure that investigators can access their competency results in a timely fashion
- Competency certificate statements under university letter-head signed by the chief assessor, which in most circumstances, will be the AWO (or delegate) will be issued on request, to enable investigators to demonstrate their competencies to other authorities.

ACRONYMS

- AWO – Animal Welfare Officer and his/her agent
- AEO – Animal Ethics Officer
- CI – Chief investigator
- PC – Provisional competency
- DC – Definitive competency