

## Executive summary

Organisations that live by the governing principles of the Australian code have a culture of care where all contributors know and respect each other's role and work cooperatively to deliver best practice outcomes.

The culture at University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) was commendable, with clear and open communication avenues to support compliance and positive animal welfare outcomes. Many aspects of animal care and use were at an appropriate and high standard, with dedicated and competent people working diligently to support this outcome. However, there were several risks to compliance with the Australian code identified during the Independent External Review (IER). The findings and associated recommendations within this report should be considered in this context and seen as opportunities to further improve.

The inherent risk associated with UniSQ investigators working across different jurisdictions in Australia is substantial. Every state in Australia has different legislation and local requirements. There was no specific training to raise awareness of these requirements for the investigators nor AEC members, nor detailed documented processes in place. Notwithstanding the exceptional awareness, support, and knowledge of the Ethics team about the various regulatory frameworks, it could not be established that the inherent risk had been adequately mitigated through appropriate formal administrative controls. To further support compliance it is recommended the current processes be formalised, with decision rational and outcomes documented.

Other compliance risks primarily related to some policies, procedures, and processes relevant to scientific animal use either not reflecting Australian code requirements in full, and/or not aligned with UniSQ's current operating environment. Contemporary practices were mostly consistent with the Australian code and supporting compliance despite a lack of documents reflecting arrangements.

Key documents that were not correct, or lacked detail, presented real and potential compliance risks in terms of people with intentions of doing the right thing not knowing what nor how to do it consistently. Additionally, there were cases where (appropriate) practices conflicted with the written procedure.

It strongly recommended animal use procedures and documentation be updated to reflect all relevant Australian code requirements for governance, operations, and managing complaints, non-compliances and unexpected adverse events. When these are formalised, AEC members and investigators should be made aware through further training.

Initial training and education in understanding Australian code requirements and responsibilities for both investigators and Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) members were notably in place, however refreshers and continuing education needed attention. It is recommended that UniSQ further resource this area to facilitate more in-house sessions and/or attendance at external events such as conferences.

The primary responsibility of the AEC is to ensure all activities relating to animal research are conducted in compliance with the Australian code. The AEC was operating at a high standard, undertaking its responsibilities with diligence, and demonstrating careful consideration of applications for new and amended projects and other related matters brought to its attention. The provision of administrative support to the AEC was outstanding.

To monitor animal care and use under approved projects the AEC primarily relied on annual project reports, and self-reporting by investigators should issues arise. There was not a robust post approval monitoring program or strategy in place. It is recommended further resources be provided to better support the AEC and UniSQ in monitoring compliance.

This IER report makes findings in the following seven areas, aligned with the obligations and responsibilities in accordance with the Australian code.

- Institutional (UniSQ) responsibilities
- Governance of the AEC
- Applying to the AEC
- Responsibilities of the AEC
- Collaborative arrangements
- Responsibilities of investigators /teachers
- Assessment of UniSQ’s response to the previous IER

The IER Panel have considered the findings in each of these areas to establish a residual risk rating aligned with the relevant clauses of the Australian code section six.

Table one: Residual risk rating

Australian code – Section six	Residual risk rating
The conduct of people involved in the care and use of animals for scientific purposes on behalf of the institution	Low
The adequacy of the institutional program to ensure compliance	Medium
The adequacy of institutional support, resources, and educational programs to ensure all people can meet their responsibilities	Medium
AEC operating effectively in accordance with the Australian code	Low
Effectiveness of institutional strategies to promote and monitor the implementation of the governing principles of the Australian code	Low
Effective monitoring of the wellbeing of animals	Medium
Actions taken in response to recommendations in the report from the previous external review	Medium

Thirteen recommendations for changes to further support attainment of consistently high standards across all levels are made throughout this report and listed at [appendix one](#).

Attention to these will further support UniSQ in its already noteworthy endeavours and serve to protect the public’s confidence that respect for animals underpins all decisions and actions involving the care and use of animals, in accordance with the Australian code’s Governing Principles.

It was recognised that several matters requiring attention had been identified prior to the IER and planning was underway to address these issues. During the IER, as applicable and possible, action was taken to remedy issues that arose. This is indicative of the commitment to ongoing continuous improvement.

All the UniSQ team members involved in the IER, [appendix two](#), were commended for their dedication to animal welfare, cooperation, and timely attention to the IER process.