



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Victorian Schools Animal Ethics Committee (VSAEC)

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 The VSAEC is responsible for the ethical review of planned activities to use animals for teaching purposes under the [Australian Code of Practice for the Care and use of Animals for Scientific Purposes 8th Edition 2013](#) (the [Code](#)), and that all activities relating to the care and use of animals in government, Catholic and independent schools are conducted in compliance with the [Code](#).

1.2 VSAEC will review all written applications from schools planning to use animals for teaching purposes under the following recommendations:

- approved meeting all criteria
- approved subject to modifications
- rejected, as proposal is not compliant with the [Code](#).

1.3 VSAEC, in considering a written application, must be convinced that the benefits of the activity outweigh the potential costs to the animal/s. For animal use to be justified the 3R's must be complied with as follows:

- replacement of animals with alternatives where possible
- reduction in the numbers of animals used (without compromising statistical validity)
- refinement of techniques to reduce the impact on the animals.

1.4 In undertaking its work, the VSAEC will:

- maintain and update the website [Teaching with Animals](#) providing information for schools to enable them to fulfil the requirements of the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986](#) and the [Code](#)
- maintain a register of approved projects and provide a formal annual report to the Bureau of Animal Welfare
- identify school/s undertaking projects for annual site inspections/audits and prepare a written report of site inspections/audits for consideration at the following Committee meeting
- take appropriate actions when projects or activities are in breach of the [Code](#)
- perform all other duties as required by the [Code](#).

1.5 VSAEC members will ensure the standards of the Code are maintained by reporting instances of non-compliance to the VSAEC Chair. Where non-compliance is identified, VSAEC will:

- give priority consideration to the wellbeing of the animals affected
- recommend remedial action, where appropriate, to ensure compliance with the Code
- suspend or withdraw approval for the activity if deemed appropriate.

2. Membership

2.1 VSAEC members are drawn from the scientific and wider community to bring a diversity of knowledge, values and beliefs to the committee. Membership must comprise at least four people – one from each of the following four categories:

Category A	A veterinarian with relevant experience.
Category B	A person with substantial recent scientific or teaching experience in the use of animals.
Category C	A person with an active membership of an animal welfare organisation or with a demonstrated commitment to animal welfare/ethics.
Category D	An independent person who has not been involved in the scientific use of animals and who is independent of educational institutions.



2.2 The VSAEC chairperson is appointed in addition to Category A to D members.

2.3 The VSAEC will be chaired by the Director, Primary Learning and Development Reform Branch, Department of Education and Training (DET), and will be supported by a DET Secretariat (Executive Officer).

2.4 The Executive Officer is the first point of contact for teachers and schools wishing to access the VSAEC.

2.5 Additional members:

- Category E: a member of the animal care staff is recommended but not mandatory
- a person responsible for the routine care of animals within the institution may be appointed as an additional member to assist the VSAEC
- additional members may be appointed with skills and background of value to the VSAEC for particular purposes and specified periods.

3. Meetings and administration

3.1 The VSAEC will meet five times annually but may elect to conduct special meetings if circumstances or the nature of the business is urgent or extraordinary.

3.2 Meetings will be held at DET and will be face-to-face unless express agreement is given by the Chair for a member to participate by other means, e.g. video conferencing.

3.3 The Committee will be supported by a DET appointed Executive Officer who will issue meeting agendas and other papers and prepare meeting minutes. All materials will be provided to members one week prior to meetings (and one week after meetings for minutes). All VSAEC members are able to nominate agenda items and submit meeting papers.

4. Operation

4.1 To reach a quorum at least one member from each of categories A, B, C and D must be present at meetings, and must be present throughout the meeting. Categories C and D together must represent at least one third of those members present.

- For decision making, members with a conflict of interest must withdraw from the meeting on matters that relate to that conflict of interest. Once such members have withdrawn, the remaining members must constitute a quorum.

4.2 Members must declare any perceived, potential or actual conflicts of interests at the start of the meeting which will be recorded in the minutes.

4.3 Members must maintain confidentiality regarding the content of project applications and the deliberations of the VSAEC.

4.4 VSAEC decisions will be made on the basis of consensus. Where consensus cannot be reached after reasonable effort to resolve differences, the Executive Officer will explore with the applicant(s) ways of modifying the project or activity that may lead to consensus. If consensus is still not achieved, VSAEC will only proceed to a majority decision after members have been allowed a period of time to review their positions, followed by further discussion.

4.5 These Terms of Reference will be reviewed as necessary in response to changes in legislation and departmental policy.