



Conscientious Objection Policy to Animal Use

Sample policy for Australian universities

Provided by Animal-Free Science Advocacy, January 2025

1. Preamble

[University Name] recognises students' right to conscientious objection and is committed to providing alternative learning, teaching and assessment methods that do not involve the use of animals or animal-derived materials, wherever feasible.

This policy aligns with the [Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes \(2013\)](#), which requires universities to implement and promote a conscientious objection policy:

5.1 Institutions must have procedures for addressing complaints and non-compliance relating to the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, including: complaints concerning the care and use of animals by the institution, including conscientious objection in the case of teaching activities.

2.1.5 Institutions must promote compliance with the Code by: ensuring that policies and procedures are made available to all relevant people and AEC members, and are promoted within the institution. This includes institutional policies on the care and use of animals, work health and safety, confidentiality, freedom of information legislation, legal requirements, conscientious objection in the case of teaching activities, privacy and commercial-in-confidence considerations.

Additionally, this policy reflects the university's broader commitment to ethical innovation, inclusivity and academic integrity by fostering a learning environment that respects diverse ethical perspectives.

2. Purpose

This policy outlines the framework for accommodating students who have conscientious objections to the use of animals in educational activities. It ensures ethical considerations are respected while maintaining academic standards and learning outcomes.



3. Scope

This policy applies to all students enrolled in university courses that involve animals or animal-derived materials in teaching, learning or assessment activities. It encompasses:

- Live animals.
- Cadavers.
- Animal-derived materials, including tissues and bones.

This policy applies to undergraduate, postgraduate and research-based programs, subject to professional accreditation standards where relevant.

4. Definition

Conscientious objection refers to the refusal to participate in specific activities based on deeply held ethical, moral, religious, cultural or scientifically reasoned beliefs.

In the context of this policy, it pertains to a student's principled opposition to engaging in educational activities involving animals or animal-derived materials. Examples include:

- Dissections.
- Live animal testing.
- Handling of animal-derived specimens.

Objections must be genuine, consistently upheld and enduring, reflecting a commitment to personal integrity. Temporary preferences or objections based on convenience are not considered conscientious objections.

5. Procedures

5.1 Providing alternatives

The university will offer equivalent learning experiences and assessments that do not involve the use of animals, including:

- Synthetic models.
- Digital and virtual dissection.
- Dissection videos.
- Organ-on-a-chip and cell culture technologies.

All alternatives must align with the course's intended learning outcomes and meet professional or accreditation standards.



5.2 Transparency

To ensure clarity and accessibility, the university will provide information through multiple channels:

Website

- A dedicated webpage outlining students' rights to conscientious objection.
- A step-by-step guide on how to notify the university.
- A list of available alternative learning methods and assessments.
- Contact details for relevant university staff, such as course coordinators and the Conscientious Objection Committee.

Orientation

- An overview of the policy during orientation sessions or distributed materials.
- A summary of students' rights, the objection process and available alternatives.
- A digital or printed guide outlining procedures.

Course and unit handbooks

- Clear indication of animal use in any course or module.
- Detailed descriptions of the types of animals or animal-derived materials used, including their species, source and purpose. Specify how they will be used and, if live animals, the duration of their involvement and the frequency with which each animal will be subjected to the procedure.
- Information on students' right to object, with links to the policy and contact details.

Direct communication

- Course coordinators will send an email to students in relevant courses, highlighting their right to object and providing links to the policy.

5.3 Registering conscientious objections

Students must submit a written Statement of Conscientious Objection using a standard form provided by the university. The objection should clearly state the nature of the objection and the specific activities or materials involved.

The objection should be submitted at least four weeks before the course or module starts. If animal use was not disclosed in advance, students may submit an objection at any time after becoming aware of the requirement.



5.4 Considering requests

The course coordinator will respond within 10 working days, outlining alternative learning and assessment methods. If the objection is submitted fewer than 10 days before the scheduled practice, the response time may be expedited.

5.5 Appeals process

Requesting a review

- If a student believes their objection has not been adequately addressed, they may request a review within five working days of receiving the decision.
- Reviews will be directed to the department head, ethics committee or academic appeals board, depending on institutional policies.

Review process

- Reviews will be conducted by an impartial staff member with expertise in educational ethics and alternative assessments. Their role will be specified in the course handbook, and students will be informed during orientation.
- A resolution will be provided within 10 working days.

Further escalation

- If unresolved, an external mediator may be consulted. The institution will provide contact details and procedural guidance.
- Mediation costs will be the student's responsibility unless delays were caused by the institution, particularly if a reasonable resolution was available.
- If mediation fails, students may escalate the matter to an ombudsman or an independent academic appeals body, as outlined in the course handbook.

6. Monitoring and Compliance

Anonymised records of objections, decisions and alternative arrangements will be maintained in compliance with data protection regulations.

An annual report will evaluate trends, outcomes and improvements in alternative methods. Student feedback will help ensure the policy remains effective and aligned with best practices.

Failure to comply, including delays or inadequate handling of objections, will be addressed through internal review mechanisms. Students may submit a formal complaint to the Faculty Dean or university ethics committee, or escalate the matter further to the student union, university ombudsman or an external regulatory body, as per the institution's grievance policy. Disciplinary action may be taken against faculty or staff for non-compliance.