How long will it take to obtain ethics clearance?

LOW RISK: Low-risk applications are reviewed by the Faculty Ethics Screening Committee (FESC), and it takes approximately 4 weeks to get from Point # 1 to Point # 8 below (refer to the next slide). Once Point # 8 has been reached, an applicant will receive a formal "go-ahead-with-your-data-collection" email from the FESC. It is important to note, though, that the Research Ethics Committee (REC) still has the prerogative to add a few additional stipulations, or to request further clarification/changes (which the applicant needs to respond to asap), before final approval is granted. Once an applicant has received the go-ahead from the FESC to start with their data collection, it takes an additional 40 days for the applicant to receive a formal letter of ethics clearance from the REC.

MEDIUM/HIGH RISK: Medium-risk or high-risk applications are reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee (REC), and it takes approximately 6 – 10 weeks to get from Point # 8 to Point # 10 (refer to the next slide). When it comes to medium-risk or high-risk applications, Point # 2 to Point # 8 becomes irrelevant, seeing as the application is reviewed by the REC, and not by the FESC. The FESC receives the application, though, and does a quick evaluation to ascertain whether the application is indeed medium-risk. Once the level of risk has been determined (usually within 7 days), the FESC submits the application to the REC for review and changes requested. An applicant will therefore need to wait until the REC gives the go-ahead before they can start with their data collection.

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION: Institutional permission (which is a completely separate process) might also be required. If the applicant applies for institutional permission from Stellenbosch University, it takes approximately 2 - 6 weeks for the application to be processed. If an applicant applies for institutional permission from an outside institution, the duration will depend on the institution.

What process is followed once an applicant submits an ethics application?

Applicant submits application online

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Supervisor reviews application

Application is acceptable

1. Supervisor submits application to FESC

2. Tanya reviews application & requests changes

3. Applicant makes changes & resubmits appl.

4. *(Applicant applies for Institutional Permission)*

5. Tanya submits application to other FESC member

6. Other FESC member reviews & approves appl.

7. Tanya submits application to REC

Application is not acceptable

Supervisor requests changes

Applicant makes changes & resubmits application

8. **Low-risk:** Applicant can start with data collection as soon as the FESC confirms via email, *and* as soon as a written letter of Institutional Permission has been obtained *(where applicable)*
Medium-risk: Applicant waits for REC review

9. REC reviews & approves application

10. Applicant receives Letter of Ethics Clearance

(+40 days)