



UGANDA NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Credit Point System for Members of Research Ethics Committees in Uganda

Better Ethics, Better Research

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1. Background

Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) oversees research conduct in the Uganda. It also regulates the function of Research Ethics Committees (RECs) in the country. RECs ensure that research is conducted ethically and responsibly, i.e. without deliberate harm to research participants and without compromising their interests, values, rights and welfare. RECs, therefore, ought to have capacity to review and promote the ethical conduct of research. Much of this capacity revolves around the competence of REC members to undertake high quality review of research protocols. UNCST established the Accreditation Committee for RECs in Uganda (ACRECU) under Section 5 (e) of the UNCST Act Cap 209 to strengthen the RECs. The latter accredits all RECs in Uganda, ensuring that the RECs function within a minimum national standard. The REC accreditation process started in 2009, and to date several RECs have been accredited (see updated list of accredited RECs at: www.uncst.go.ug).

2. Why the REC credit point system?

The ACRECU at its 37th meeting held on 9th February 2016 resolved to set up a credit point system (CPS) for all members of the RECs. The REC CPS is premised on the need to continuously improve the quality of REC review, and oversight of research conducted in Uganda. As science advances and as societies evolve, research involving humans as research participants also gets more complicated and so does the ethical issues associated with such contemporary studies. Besides, norms and traditions differ from one location to another, and hence the need to understand the context within which research is taking place. The field of research ethics also evolves quite rapidly. Therefore, rules are changing more frequently as more evidence is gathered on scientific and ethical review practices in the country and around the world. It is thus important for members of RECs to keep abreast of these changing circumstances, so that they are able and prepared to address any emerging issues to protect the safety, rights and welfare of research participants.

3. Objective

The objective of the REC Credit Point System is to improve the skill and competence of REC members in the performance of their work of protecting the safety, rights and welfare of research participants in Uganda.

4. Guidelines

a. Earning credit points

A REC member, other than lay members of the community serving as REC members and alternate members, shall earn a minimum of 30 credit points every calendar year to remain eligible to serve as a REC member. Lay members of the community serving as REC members and alternate mem-

bers shall earn a minimum of 20 credit points¹. Each REC shall document and report the points of each REC member, and submit these together with the annual REC report to the ACRECU before 31st January each year.

A REC member who does not attain the required minimum number of points in the year shall be put on probation for four months (as grace period) to accumulate the required points. Failure to obtain the required points in the four months probationary period may lead to disqualification from serving as a REC member. A REC member who is so disqualified may independently acquire the necessary points and be reappointed to serve in the REC.

b. Credit points distribution

A REC member may earn credit points as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Earning credit points

	Attribute	Credit Points	Indicator
1	Attendance at REC meetings or participation in research site monitoring visits	2 points per meeting or research site monitoring visit	Attendance list/minutes/site monitoring report
2	Participation in recognised REC training of 2 days or more	10 points	Certificate
3	Giving a lecture or organising a seminar on research ethics/presenting a paper at a REC/ethics workshop	8 points	Astract/Paper/presentation/evidence of facilitation
4	Participation in the Annual National Research Ethics Conference (ANREC)	7 points	Certificate
5	Participation in other REC seminars/meetings/online courses in research ethics (local or international)—includes participation in the Forum for REC Chairs Meetings	5 points	Certificate

c. Eligibility for the credit points

- i. All REC members regardless of their years of service in the REC and training are eligible for the credit points.
- ii. Non-REC members who qualify to serve as REC members may also enrol for the credit points. Non-REC members need a letter of recommendation from their institutions of affiliation in order to enrol for the CPS.

d. Information on available educational activities

The educational activities for REC members will be sent to all RECs at the beginning of each year. They will also be posted on the Forum for Research Ethics Committee Chairpersons in Uganda (FRECU) mailing list, as well as on UNCST website.

e. Registering for points

¹ The ACRECU reserves the right to change these thresholds any time.

Each REC member will register and keep monitoring their points on UNCST web portal created for this purpose. The information will be compiled, verified by UNCST staff and shared with ACRECU from time to time. REC administrators shall also keep record of REC credit points and include this in REC's annual report.

f. Deadline for submission of credit points

Credit points for a given calendar year shall be entered into the UNCST web portal no later than 31st December each year; and shall be included in the Annual REC report to the ACRECU due before 31st January of the subsequent year.