

Animal Ethics Committee (AEC)

Service level report for the period 1 January 2024 – 31 March 2026

A Research Ethics Survey was completed in mid-2024 as part of the [Research Ethics Improvement Plan](#). A key area of feedback in the survey is that researchers would like better information about expected processing timeframes across the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC), Auckland Health Research Ethics Committee (AHREC), Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) and Biological Safety Committee (UABSC). This report details the processing timeframes for AEC and will be updated quarterly.

Time to first review

The *time to first review* time point looks at the time between a new application submission date and the first review outcome date. In the context of the AEC this is the time to conditional outcome. The table below details the total number of applications receiving a first review outcome each quarter over the reporting period and the associated processing timeframes (average, median and 80th percentile).

The Trend (Y) column shows whether the 2026 quarterly median is higher or lower than the 2025 annual median. The Trend (Q) column shows whether the 2026 quarterly median is higher or lower than the same quarter from the previous year.

Quarter	# First Review Outcomes	Average Days	Median days	80th PCNT	Trend (Y)	Trend (Q)
2024 Total	43	105	108	124		
2025 Total	61	99	86	121		
1 2026	10	81	50	127	↓ (36)	↓ (92)
2026 Total	10	81	50	127		

Although first-quarter timeframes are usually affected by the December–January closedown period, Quarter 1 2026 shows a clear improvement. The Quarter 1 2026 median time to first review was 50 days, which is 36 days lower than the 2025 annual median of 86 days. It is also 92 days lower than the Quarter 1 2025 median, indicating a substantial improvement in first review timeframes compared with the same quarter in the previous year.

Time to final approval

The *time to final approval* time point looks at the time between the application submission date and the final approval outcome date. The *time to final approval* time point is longer than the *time to first review* time point due to the high proportion of applications that receive a

first review outcome of ‘Conditionally Approved’. These conditions must be satisfied before a final approval can be obtained. The table below details the total number of applications receiving a final approval outcome over the reporting period and the associated processing timeframes (average, median, 80th percentile, Trend (Y) and Trend (Q)).

Quarter	# Final Approval Outcomes	Average Days	Median Days	80TH PCNT	Trend (Y)	Trend (Q)
2024 Total	37	173	136	216		
2025 Total	56	158	132	232		
1 2026	14	193	170	254	↑ (38)	↑ (14)
2026 Total	14	193	170	254		

The increases in Trend (Y) and Trend (Q) are largely due to a longtail of backlogged applications from 2025. With the improvements implemented in 2025 and 2026 (as detailed below), material improvements to the time to final approval time point are expected to be evident from Q2 2026.

Improvements

To maintain this momentum and ensure our processes continue to improve in a sustainable way, the Animal Ethics Improvement Plan outlines the next phase of development. The first half of 2026 will include the pilot of the rolling pre-screen, which is already underway. This is a collaboration between the AEC Secretariat and the Clinical Services Veterinarians and ensures that applications are tabled at AEC meetings once they have undergone a thorough pre-screen. We expect this to significantly improve time to conditional outcome and final AEC approval. If successful, this process will be adopted as part of the AEC’s regular workflow from the second half of 2026.

In parallel, we are developing updates to the application form that will include a built-in AI-enabled support agent. This agent will assist applicants by identifying incomplete sections, highlighting unclear responses, and prompting for required detail, helping to ensure that applications are higher quality at the point of submission. This is expected to reduce avoidable delays and improve the overall efficiency of reviews.

We have also moved to a rolling allocation of committee reviews. This means that once applications pass the pre-screen, they can be distributed to AEC members as they are ready, rather than waiting for fixed batching. This approach is intended to give reviewers more manageable workloads and sufficient time to complete high-quality reviews.

Alongside these initiatives, we are enhancing communication between the AEC and applicants to support clearer expectations and greater transparency throughout the process.