

Research Ethics and Covid 19 – update 26th March 2020

Research Involving Face-to Face Data Collection

In response to the Covid 19 situation, all face-to-face data collection undertaken as part of University research projects should cease immediately. The following new arrangements should then be followed, according to the nature of your research.

Research in Prisons or the Probation Service

Notification has come from the National Research Committee (NRC) in Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services that in the light of the Covid 19 pandemic all data collection of any kind in prisons and the probation service must cease immediately. This includes web-based or telephone data collection. It is to allow the service to prioritise the core aspects of their work.

The NRC have also said that they are no longer accepting new applications for studies which involve the collection of new data. When this changes, we will be informed. Only applications involving secondary data analysis that do not pose a risk of potential harm to individuals and impact negatively on resources (e.g. analysis of data supplied centrally by HMPPS/MoJ Headquarters) will be considered. If doctoral or other students are currently undertaking or planning such studies in HMPPS, they should discuss this with their supervisor.

Amending Research with Face-to-Face Participant Interactions

The University requires ongoing research to make changes to how participant interactions are conducted. Researchers must consider if they can adapt their research to conduct participant interactions remotely (telephone, email, zoom, online surveys). If this is not possible, the research must be paused. Either change must be made with immediate effect.

Changes to the method of data collection from face-to-face to remote should be recorded on your original ethics application. In Converis, go into your approved application, scroll to the tab called 'P12 - post approval amendment', then detail and submit your amendment. Changes to your collection methods which do not increase the risk of the project should be able to be approved promptly. Changes to project end dates should also be submitted in this way.

In some cases changes to the method of data collection will alter the level of risk to participants, e.g. if you are working with vulnerable participants and to do so remotely might remove the safeguard of the researcher being able to detect distress face-to-face. In these instances you should submit a whole new ethics application, not an amendment.

The University's ethics administrators are working hard to maintain service levels during these challenging times and would like to ask that, in the first instance, colleagues refer to the Converis user guide to assist them in navigating the Converis system, minimising avoidable delays and errors.

The following resources may be useful to you:

- Converis User Guide: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/~media/home/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/user-guide.pdf?la=en>
- SHU Amendments Guidance: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/~media/home/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/amendments-guidance.pdf?la=en>
- Qualtrics Online Surveys: https://students.shu.ac.uk/shuspacecontent/it/free-discounted-software#slidingDiv_22
- Fieldwork during a Pandemic: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cIGjGABB2h2qbduTgfqribHmog9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/mobilebasic>

If you Need to Suspend your Research

Should it not be possible to modify your research project, you must inform your active participants that the research has been suspended. You should inform why the study has been suspended and about any implications this may have for them. Note that if there are participants who are no longer in the study but were given specific dates about updates/feedback etc., you should also contact these participants and explain that there will be a delay.

New Applications Submitted for Review

You can still continue to apply for ethics approval using Converis. Please note that there may be a delay in the response time as reviewers adjust to the new circumstances. However you will not receive approval for data collection that involves face-to-face interactions with your participants, until further notice.

If it is not possible to conduct your participant interactions remotely then you must wait until you are advised that face-to-face interactions can recommence.

Doctoral Researchers

If you are a doctoral researcher with time or facilities constraints around conducting your research and your data collection cannot continue at the present time, you should contact your supervisor to discuss the possible options. It may be that you can change your plan of work and focus in the short-term on other parts of your study (literature review, methodology).

You and your supervisor should keep a record of your discussions on the remote supervisory meeting form, a copy of which should be sent to your PGR Admin team using the relevant shared inbox.

Projects Involving the NHS

The Health Research Authority's new guidance can be found here:

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/covid-19-guidance-sponsors-sites-and-researchers/>

Amendments to HRA projects should be submitted in the usual way:

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/approvals-amendments/amending-approval/>

Ensuring the safety of patients and reducing burden on clinical services are the underlying priorities.