



COVID-19 pandemic: Continuity of Research and Research-Related Activity

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University position on research and research-related activities

When the country went into lockdown in March 2020 the University closed (including all laboratories) and we issued instructions to cease all face-to-face research and research related-activities in line with Government advice and legislation. As a result research since then will either have been carried out remotely using virtual methods or was suspended.

Following the publication of an initial (11/5/20) and an updated (24/7/20) [COVID-19 recovery strategy](#) by government, as well as specific advice for a range of industries, sectors and parts of the economy and society, there are significantly fewer restrictions now in place than were imposed in March. However, there remains a need to observe and maintain social distance to prevent cluster outbreaks and risk escalation to community transmission, which would likely lead to a re-imposition of some or all restrictions.

This document sets out what this means for research and research-related activity carried out for and on behalf of the University, particularly for the re-commencement of some areas of research and research-related activities. The document is intended to be dynamic, and will be further updated as necessary, but it is also intended to accommodate future government advice, which may comprise either a further loosening, or a re-tightening, of restrictions, locally, regionally or nationally. The potential for government advice to change, including the possibility of one or more future local, regional or national lockdowns, should be considered when returning to your research or research-related activities. In this respect, you should give due consideration to future-proofing your methodology.

Please note:

- This document applies to **all** research and research-related activity undertaken at, on behalf of, or under the auspices of the University and is in line with current [Government advice](#).
- Research and research-related activity includes but may not be limited to:
 - Funded research
 - Staff research
 - Postgraduate Research student research
 - Taught Programme student research (Postgraduate and Undergraduate)
 - Activities relating to the generation, collation or monitoring of research impact
 - Steering Group or Project Board meetings for research
 - Activities to design or develop future research, including the preparation of applications or bids for external funding
- Any information included within this document should be read alongside the latest [Government advice](#) and existing [CCCU research policies and governance guidance](#) within the University's [Research and Enterprise Integrity Framework](#).
- There may be differences between the laws and guidance of each of the devolved UK Administrations, as well as locally and regionally within the UK, in relation to Covid-19. The laws and guidance for each devolved Administration, locality or region should be adhered to at all times. The guidance within this document applies to research and research-related activity anywhere in the UK.
- The initial temporary changes to the governance of research and research-related activities under the University's [Research and Enterprise Integrity Framework](#), the current guidance related to exiting lockdown, along with the details of applicable policies, procedures, guidance and advice are detailed at Annex A.

- This document will be kept as up to date as possible but given the speed at which events are happening, where there is a contradiction or conflict between advice, the following order of precedence should be followed:
 1. Government legislation, advice or guidance relating to measures to combat COVID-19
 2. This statement on Continuity of Research and Research-related Activities
 3. Policies, procedures, guidance and advice under the University Research & Enterprise Integrity Framework.

All research (including face-to-face)

Research and research-related activities can resume subject to Government legislation and guidelines – this includes face-to-face human participation and interaction. This means that if you had to suspend your research or revise your methodology to include remote/virtual interactions with participants you may now resume activities as per your original ethics approval. However, the health and welfare of researchers and any participants must be a primary concern at this time, and balanced against the necessity and importance of conducting the research.

Any researcher wishing to continue an existing research project or propose a new research project to begin in the UK involving face-to-face interaction, must be able to demonstrate that:

1. The proposed activity is safe for all involved e.g. researchers, participants, the public by updating the Research Health & Safety Risk Assessment form for your project records
2. The circumstances in which the research will be conducted will not be in breach of social distancing or other restrictions issued by local or national government
3. Face-to-face interactions are an essential element of the research methodology and the same outcomes cannot be achieved from virtual/remote methods
4. You have sought and can demonstrate explicit permission from participants to meet face-to-face in the current context and have saved as part of your project records.
5. If the research is to take place largely within an external setting/organisation (including professional settings where students are carrying out their research within their place of employment) you will need explicit permission from a suitable person¹ within the external setting/organisation to carry out your research within the current context. This should be saved as part of your project records.

Each country, and regions within countries, are progressing through the COVID-19 pandemic at a different rate and there will be researchers (both staff and students) who are based outside of the UK or have already returned to their home country where local government guidance might be different from that in the UK.

As such, if ALL of the following criteria apply in addition to those listed above you may be able to begin or recommence face-to-face research in line with local guidance and legislation:

1. You are already in the country in which you need to do the research i.e. you are based there for your research or other purposes and have remained there or it is your home country
2. Social distancing is no longer or has not yet been implemented by the local government
3. [The Foreign & Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#) guidance does not indicate any restrictions to normal interactions for this country.

Whether or not you return to face-to-face data collection methods or activities may in large part be a methodological issue. Please consider carefully whether returning to or beginning face-to-face interactions is the best approach for your research. You may wish to consider:

- the impact on your participants e.g. Is it safe for participants to take part in your research? Are participants being asked to travel to somewhere outside of their daily routine thus increasing the risk of exposure? Is it likely that participants will withdraw due to being uncomfortable with face-to-face methods?
- the impact on your research if activity has to cease due to restrictions being re-introduced e.g. How will resuming/beginning face-to-face activities now effect your research if lockdown measures are

¹ This should be a person that has the authority to make decisions on behalf of the external setting or organisation.

re-introduced in the near future and you have to return to remote/virtual methods or suspend your research?

If you choose to resume face-to-face activities these must be in line with your ethical approval, if there is to be a substantial change in research protocol either an amendment or a new ethics application will be required. If your ethical approval does not include face-to-face data collection methods then an amendment² will need to be submitted or if the methodology changes are significant a new ethics application may be requested.

It must be noted that it is the responsibility of the researcher to carefully monitor any changes to local and national government guidance and if the circumstance(s) that allow(s) the research to take place changes, then all face-to-face research activities must cease with immediate effect and any scheduled activities cancelled. It will of course be permissible to continue your research remotely if this is practically feasible.

² If your original ethics application was submitted through [Research Space](#) then please login to your application and complete the online amendment form. If it was a paper/email application then please complete and submit an [Amendment Form](#).

Access to University facilities

The Project 20.21 Group has agreed proposals for a phased re-opening of research facilities for access by staff and Postgraduate Research (PGR) students.

Research within re-opened buildings can only recommence if:

a) the activity justifies return

Although it may be possible to continue or commence research within re-opened facilities the demand is likely to exceed availability. It should be considered whether use of re-opened university facilities is essential for the completion of research – can the approach be changed to avoid use? Consideration should also be given to the extent to which the research will yield meaningful benefits or impacts.

b) it is safe for individuals to return

Any re-opened site will be subject to national and local laws, advice and guidance on whether or not it is safe to continue to provide access. The risk of further local and national lockdowns remains which will take priority over the information provided within this document. In addition, each member of staff and PGR student will have their own personal circumstances to consider. For example, do you (or any members of your household) have underlying conditions that make you vulnerable to COVID-19? Will you need to use public transport to access University sites?

Please refer to the main [University Advice and Guidance](#) for up to date information on access.

Reducing burden on key workers and organisations

Please note that the advice below applies regardless of your employment status. That is, even if you are working as a professional within an educational or health and social care setting or are employed by the organisation within which you wish to carry out your research the information below applies in relation to research or research-related activity being carried out for and on behalf of the University i.e. you will need explicit permission from the organisation to carry out your research as stated on page 5.

Educational Settings

Staff and Postgraduate Research Students

Staff and Postgraduate Research students may continue or commence any primary research or research-related activity involving interaction with schools, the wider compulsory education system (including with teachers or students) and other educational settings (e.g. early-years) subject to explicit permission being sought from the Headteacher or other relevant senior management team member to do so.

Although it may be possible to continue or commence research within or about schools, the wider compulsory education system or in other educational settings (e.g. early-years), the system remains under considerable pressure as a result of measures to combat COVID-19. Consequently, the continuation or commencement of any primary research or research-related activity involving interaction with schools, the wider compulsory education system (including with teachers or students) and other educational settings (e.g. early-years) must be subject to a very careful consideration of the impact on a system under considerable pressure. This will include a consideration of the extent to which the research will yield meaningful benefits or impacts for schools, the wider compulsory education system and/or other educational settings.

Students on taught Programmes (Undergraduate and Postgraduate)

Educational settings are adopting very different strategies to allow them to reopen to full capacity. We need to be sensitive to this and equally as flexible in our approach to research within educational settings.

For research assignments and projects (including research projects and dissertations) involving data collection in or with educational settings, programme teams must ensure that:

- the setting is fully informed and able to accommodate the work i.e. it will not be unduly burdened,
- the setting has explicitly agreed to allow the research to take place under the current circumstances; and
- that the research will cause no disruption to staff, students and/or participants beyond what is normally expected.

This may be achieved by a local checklist, which programme teams may wish to develop, or by consideration on a case-by-case basis. Research assignments and projects involving data collection in or with educational settings must be approved by tutors/supervisors before commencement to confirm that these conditions have been satisfied. Programme Directors must take responsibility for ensuring that processes are in place for this. Any queries should be referred to the Faculty Director of Research in the first instance.

Health and Social care settings

Staff and Postgraduate Research students may continue or commence any primary research or research-related activity involving interaction with health and social care settings subject to the correct external ethics approval, and explicit permission to access the setting for research purposes being granted from the relevant research & development department or a relevant senior manager within the setting.

Health Research Authority (HRA) information

- Live/ongoing HRA approved studies - Guidance can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/covid-19-guidance-sponsors-sites-and-researchers/>
- New studies requiring HRA review - The HRA have advised that they will not be accepting or reviewing any new applications from undergraduates or MSc students for the foreseeable future, with a few exceptions. Further guidance on the exceptions and alternative research options can be found here: <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/research-planning/student-research/>

Annex A: Specific temporary updates to the governance of research and research-related activity

The only changes to existing governance documentation are the temporary exceptions listed below. All other existing governance remains and should be adhered to.

Temporary COVID-19 exception (Lockdown only)	Exiting lockdown (July 2020 onwards)	Governance area	Related governance documentation
<p><i>Where applicable all research or research related-activities with human participants/interactions should immediately move to remote data collection/methods/interactions or if this is not possible the research or research related activity must be suspended until further notice.</i></p>	<p>Research that involves face-to-face interactions with participants can resume/commence subject to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethical approval • it being safe to do so • seeking explicit permission from participants • it being essential to the research methodology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research with human participants • Data protection • Storage and retention of research data • Online research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Enterprise Integrity Framework • An Introduction to Ethics Issues and Principles in Research Involving Human Participants • Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants • Ethical Procedures for the Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants • Data Protection in Research • Code of Conduct: Practice for Research Involving Human Participants • Code of Practice for Ethical Review of Research by Undergraduates • Advisory note: Storage and retention of research data • Advisory note: Ethical issues in on-line research • Advisory note: Ethical Guidance for Practitioner Researchers
<p><i>As a temporary change to the University Ethics Policy we are not requiring ethics amendments for changes to research projects related to adapting research materials to involve remote data collection methods or interactions unless there is a substantial change to research protocol or the research involves participants considered high risk in terms of COVID-19.</i></p>	<p>Where ethical approval was originally given for face-to-face interactions with participants these can resume without an ethics amendment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Enterprise Integrity Framework • Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants • Ethical Procedures for the Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants • Code of Conduct: Practice for Research Involving Human Participants • Code of Practice for Ethical Review of Research by Undergraduates • Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct