20 March 2020

We write as Vice-Principal (Research and Innovation) and Convenor of UTREC, with an announcement about research involving human participants. This position has been arrived at following discussion in the Principal’s Office and at UTREC. The guiding principles behind this position are to:

- minimise risk to researchers and participants given the realities of the current situation,
- facilitate the continuation of research via remote methods, whilst being clear what types of activity cannot be undertaken remotely at this point in time for ethical reasons, and
- manage this situation in a manner that minimises the workload of researchers, members of School Ethics Committees (SECs) and professional services staff during this unprecedented period.

**Until further notice, all research activity involving travel or face-to-face interaction with participants must now stop.**

Researchers must consider whether they can adapt their research to conduct participant interactions remotely. If this isn’t possible the research must be postponed.

New applications will only be accepted at this time if they relate to research that does not involve travel or face-to-face interaction with participants.

This is in line with the approach being taken by other Universities and the NHS.

Guidance will be released as soon as possible, which will:

- Note that voluntary postponement of research activities is a choice researchers are entitled to make, although there is no certainty about when the current situation will change.
- Indicate best practice for remote participant interaction in research studies, to facilitate the planning of those who wish to make such a amendment to their project.
- Indicate options of research methodologies that require no direct participant interaction for those planning new projects, e.g. analysis of secondary data.
- State what types of activity are not ethically appropriate to conduct through remote interaction at this point in time, and thus comprise an ‘exclusion’ list of what types of ongoing activity must be postponed and cannot transition to remote methods at this point in time.

Following production of this guidance, developing template applications (for new projects and amendments) and putting in place expedited ethical approval processes for their processing will be explored.

Given the impending deadlines for undergraduate projects, UTREC has devolved the power to SECs as to how they wish to handle changes to undergraduate projects, and noted that SECs are empowered to waive such amendment applications.

Staff in RIS, liaising with members of UTREC, are working very hard on producing the guidance as soon as possible. Please bear with us and trust we will be in further contact asap. As soon as the guidance is ready, we will cascade it as we have this statement.

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