

## **Further update from the UREC re amending your ethics approval due to COVID-19 – 24 June 2020**

Following the below communication issued by the UREC in March, the UREC has reconsidered the situation in light of further University guidance and has issued the following statement:

The University has now provided guidance regarding the resumption of overseas research projects, stating that approval must first be obtained from the relevant Faculty Director of Research & Innovation.

Where a researcher wishes to commence face-to-face overseas research, they must ensure that they have valid ethics approval in place to cover this form of data collection. If University of Sheffield ethics approval is currently only in place for virtual means of data collection, an amendment must be submitted for ethical review and approval IN ALL CASES.

This can be done by emailing the details of the approved application and the proposed changes (including any revised participant information sheets/consent documentation, and details of communications to any existing participants) to your departmental Ethics Administrator ([https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.581957!/file/Ethics-Administrators.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.581957!/file/Ethics-Administrators.pdf)), who will arrange for the amendments to be considered by the original lead reviewer wherever possible (NB. some departments have a specific form for this purpose).

The email/form should outline any potential for the amendment to impact upon the health, safety or wellbeing of the participants and should detail how any resulting risks will be minimised. Details of the amendments process, as set out in the Ethics Policy, can be found in section 3.1.8 on this page: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure/proceduralelements>

Please note that the temporary policy set out in the statement on 24 March 2020, enabling amendments to low risk projects to be made without ethical review, ONLY applies to cases where the amendment relates to changing participant interactions from face-to-face interviews/meetings to remote mechanisms. Where the amendment relates to changing interactions from remote mechanisms to face-to-face mechanisms, the risks to both participant and researcher are potentially higher and, as such, ethical review must take place in accordance with the standard process for dealing with significant amendments.

If researchers have any queries about amending their ethics applications as a result of the current situation, they are advised to contact their departmental Principal Ethics Contact or Ethics Administrator in the first instance. Departments can seek further guidance on the application of the above advice by contacting Lindsay Unwin in Research Services ([l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk)).

For research where ethics approval has been obtained, or is being sought via an external organisation (such as the NHS or another university), the researcher should consult the relevant organisation's guidance on amendments to ethics applications.

## **Update from UREC re amending your ethics approval due to COVID-19 – 24 March 2020**

The University has recently issued guidance for researchers in response to the current outbreak of coronavirus, stating that qualitative research which requires face-to-face contact with participants must not continue.

As a result, the UREC is aware that many researchers will be looking at revising their research methods in order to undertake their research remotely, either via tele- or video conferencing for example.

It is likely that this will result in a change from what was stated in their original ethics application; in these circumstances, the following guidance should be followed:

For research where ethics approval has been obtained, or is being sought via an external organisation (such as the NHS or another university), the researcher should consult the relevant organisation's guidance on amendments to ethics applications.

For research where ethics approval has already been obtained via the University's own Ethics Review Procedure, it is likely that an amendment to the approved ethics application will need to be submitted. This can be done by emailing the details of the approved application and the proposed changes (including any revised participant information sheets/consent documentation, and details of communications to any existing participants) to your departmental Ethics Administrator ([https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.581957!/file/Ethics-Administrators.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.581957!/file/Ethics-Administrators.pdf)) (NB. some departments have a specific form for this purpose).

The email/form should outline any potential for the amendment to impact upon the health, safety or wellbeing of the participants and should detail how any resulting risks will be minimised. Details of the amendments process, as set out in the Ethics Policy, can be found in section 3.1.8 on this page: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure/procedure/procedureelements>.

**\*\*PLEASE NOTE:** In the current exceptional circumstances, in order to facilitate the process, it has been agreed that **ONLY** in cases where the research does not involve any vulnerable people, sensitive topics, or other significant risks to the participants or the researcher, **AND** where the amendment only involves changing participant interactions from a face-to-face interview/meeting to a remote one, i.e., tele- or video meeting, this does not need to be classed as a significant amendment. This means that the amendment does not require consideration by one of the original ethics reviewers, and the Ethics Administrator can proceed to uploading details of the amendment to the ethics application. Ethics Administrators should consult with their Principal Ethics Contact to agree whether this situation applies to individual amendment requests when they are received.

If the research involves vulnerable people, sensitive topics, or other significant risks to the participants or risks to the researcher, then the changes should be classed as a significant amendment and will require consideration by one of the original ethics reviewers, to ensure that the proposed changes are appropriate given the nature of the project. **\*\***

For research where an ethics application is currently undergoing the ethics review procedure, the researcher should contact their departmental Ethics Administrator to discuss what stage of review it is at, and what the best course of action will be (e.g. whether a new application will need to be submitted, or whether the reviewers can recommend compulsory changes as part of the standard review process to allow the necessary amendments to be made).

If researchers have any queries about amending their ethics applications as a result of the current situation, they are advised to contact their departmental Principal Ethics Contact or Ethics Administrator in the first instance. Departments can seek further guidance on the application of the above advice by contacting Lindsay Unwin in Research Services ([l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk)).