Important update in light of the COVID-19 pandemic relating to research projects and activity

Given the exceptional nature of the situation arising as a result of COVID-19 pandemic, there are a number of considerations that should be given to research activity. In the event of further concerns, please raise them with your HoD/School Director of Research, or Alicen Nickson, Director of R&I. Please note R&I services remain ‘open for business’.

1. Remote Working

At present (17 March 2020) we are being encouraged to work from home where possible. In some cases this will be possible for research projects, particularly those in the stages of writing up, or for many which use online sources.

2. Research Projects

For projects which depend on face-to-face interaction, or the use of College facilities such as laboratories, the following should be taken into account. Principal Investigators (PIs), in discussion with Heads of Department or appropriate line manager, should decide on the how best to proceed with their specific project bearing in mind:

i) The ease with which teams can work virtually.

ii) The point at which a project is at. For example, if there is one more week of a large data run to be undertaken consider whether you wish to complete this. If a new experiment is being undertaken which will require lab presence for the next month, you should consider delaying this. You should check with your funder to ensure an extension is possible.

iii) Where research has included face-to-face work interaction with participants, this should cease and please see the ethics guidance below.

iv) If research can only be done face-to-face consider the impact of suspending the project. For example, our early enquiries suggest a delay with a project is likely to be seen favourably by the Research Councils and extensions would be supported (see section 6 below). However, stopping some of our research at present might mean considerable research data is at risk (many months of work).

v) Overseas field work will need to be delayed, at this point we are not suggesting rebooking those trips. Staff should seek any possible refunds from travel suppliers and then seek further recourse with College Insurance Internal GCRF cluster leads have been given further information on mitigation plans for our internally funded projects. Hilary Lynch continues to be the contact for this information.

vi) UK research field work/archival visits – the government is advising against non-essential travel. Please consider whether your trip is essential and check that any facility is open before you travel. Please ensure that your line manager approves UK travel and that you undertake the usual H&S checks.

vii) There is increased chance that more staff will be working alone in buildings and they are advised to follow our lone working policies.

3. Campus Research Facilities

A research planning group has been meeting with the Technical Managers to set out contingency arrangements for campus research equipment. In many cases our facilities can be shut down without long-term affect, if we need to do that. Some will need periodic running and Technical Managers have been putting mitigation plans in place to support this.
We have some facilities that need to be maintained, such as greenhouses. ‘Christmas’ operation plans are already used and TOMS have put together similar support plans, including mitigation for staff unavailability.

4. **PhD Students**

A separate communication has been sent to all PhD supervisors and students outlining processes and procedure changes at this time. Further communication is being prepared to cover the new situation.

5. **Research Ethics**

The College Research Ethics Committee (CREC) requires all 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. If this isn’t possible the research must be paused, until the situation changes and College advice alters.

In addition, Ethics Committee has temporarily suspended the requirement for approval of modifications that relate only to changes to participant interactions from face-to-face to remote, unless there is a substantial change to the protocol as a result of the change.

5.1 **Research Ethics - Guidance for those who need to pause their research:**

You must inform your participants that the research has been paused. It will be key that in whatever communication you send to participants that you describe how any actively enrolled participants will be managed, particularly concerning any safety monitoring/follow-up etc where applicable.

5.2 **Research Ethics - Guidance for those who will conduct their research remotely**

A. I have not yet begun data collection but have ethical clearance to do so. I will amend my recruitment plan to recruit and interact remotely.

Unless the changes made to the way in which you interact with participants result in a substantial change to protocol, you will not need to submit a modification request. Simply update your recruitment documents to outline how you will remotely interact and then proceed.

B. I have already begun data collection and will now change to remote participant interaction.

Unless the changes made to the way in which you interact with participants result in a substantial change to protocol, you will not need to submit a modification request. Simply update your recruitment documents to outline how you will remotely interact with participants and use this version moving forward. Any already active participants must be informed of the switch to remote interaction and be provided with the updated participant information sheet. It is important that you make clear to participants that if they no longer wish to participate owing to this change, or for any other reason, that they are free to withdraw at any point.

5.3 **Research Ethics – Guidance for new submissions for ethical clearance**
Researchers may continue to submit applications for ethical review. However, you are not permitted to begin data collection which requires any face-to-face interactions with participants in person until further notice. The following options are possible/appropriate:

1. Obtain ethical clearance for a project involving face-to-face interactions with participants in person.

   i. If you wish to commence data collection immediately you must amend these interactions to be conducted remotely as outlined above.

   ii. If it is not possible to conduct your participant interactions remotely then you must then wait until you are advised by the College that face-to-face interactions can recommence before you begin any data collection in person.

If any further advice is required, please contact ethics@rhul.ac.uk

6. Funded Research

3.1 Impact on Grant Management

Most funders are taking a realistic approach to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on grant management. Please see Appendix 1 below outlining the positions of key funders. Web pages are in the process of being produced to host information and will be kept up-to-date as the situation progresses.

One of our main funding bodies, UKRI is taking a pragmatic approach. For instance, where travel is impacted, if researchers or students cannot travel due to government/official advice, or it poses a risk to the individual (due to an underlying medical condition etc), this can be charged to the grant in line with any other cost. If that cost cannot be absorbed by any overall underspend on the grant then UKRI will cover that small addition. In the same circumstances, no cost extension requests to grants would be allowed.

If PIs need further information at this stage, are aware of further funder updates, or would like a specific funded added to the list, please email researchservices@rhul.ac.uk

3.2 Partners and Contracts

PIs should ensure that they keep any project partners up to date with any issues, delays or changes to the project. In the event of delays or suspensions, we may need to agree alternative arrangements with partners.

PIs are also encouraged to review the contract terms, particularly if it is a ‘non-standard’ funder (ie not included in the Appendix 1 list), of their award to identify any further risks which may arise as a result of the specific terms of their award and the impact of the current pandemic.

If you have any concerns or need further information with regards to your research contract, please email researchcontracts@rhul.ac.uk. Please note that you should expect to receive a response from this email account within 10 working days.
Appendix 1

Guidance from research funders about the impact of COVID-19 on grant management

BRITISH ACADEMY

Award holders should follow the advice of their institution and that of the government.

The British Academy encourages award holders to investigate, where necessary, all possible alternative ways of continuing to progress their research. However, they understand that the outbreak may impact on the activities associated with some awards and will treat all requests for no-cost extensions to awards and requests for virement of funding between cost headings sympathetically. These should be requested in the usual way.

If you have been unable to recover costs from a travel operator or insurance, costs can be charged to grants. Grants often end with an underspend and the British Academy expects award holders to be able to absorb these costs through this and other re-arrangements in their budgets.

- Full statement from the British Academy

BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION

Research grants

If research institutions shut down for a period of time the British Heart Foundation (BHF) will continue to pay the salaries of staff funded on grants for the same duration. Details of all staff affected must be provided in order to ensure payments are honoured.

If clinical research staff funded on grants are asked to support front line NHS staff, the BHF will also continue to pay salaries, recognising that these costs may be subsequently recoverable from the NHS.

They are are prepared to support requests for no cost extensions to grants to cover any delays caused by the suspension of research.

If suspension of research is prolonged and costed extensions are required they will consider requests on a case by case basis.

Grants for small meetings

The BHF will honour the payment of grants for small meetings which are postponed and rescheduled within one year of the original date due to COVID-19. Details must be provided as soon as a decision is made to delay the meeting.

If meetings need to be cancelled and cannot be rescheduled they recognise that some costs may not be recoverable. In these instances the organisation should cancel the meeting at the earliest opportunity to obtain maximum refunds of any costs already incurred in order to mitigate the cost to the BHF. Full details must be provided before we will release any funds.
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

General guidance

While we are currently awaiting clarification from the Commission on the general situation in relation to research and innovation funding, any projects which have been affected by COVID-19 containment measures should refer firstly to Article 51 of the Annotated Model Grant Agreement covering force majeure, which stipulates that beneficiaries should contact the Commission, or relevant executive agency, to discuss issues that may affect the implementation of projects. We expect further guidance to be made available on the Funding and Tenders Portal shortly. It is also worth noting that the staff of the Commission Services and Agencies are now working remotely and that there is a specific warning on the Funding and Tenders Portal that, due to this non-standard way of working, delayed responses are expected for queries submitted to the IT helpdesk.

Call deadlines

So far, call deadlines have been extended for both Societal Challenge 6 (now 19 March 2020) and Research Infrastructures (now 14 May 2020) calls. Applicants intending to submit to calls on the Funding and Tenders portal should check the ‘Topic updates’ section of their specific topic to see if their deadlines have been extended. Further information on possible changes to Horizon 2020 call deadlines is expected to be available on the Funding and Tenders Portal shortly.

European Research Council

The ERC have posted a statement on their website stating that they are doing their utmost to remain fully operational during this period, that grant management activities continue as normal (although technical issues may slow some processes down) and that panel evaluations are currently being organised remotely. They do not currently anticipate any delays to evaluations or application deadlines.

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions

The Research Executive Agency (REA) have released a statement advising grantees and fellows to follow the travel advice provided by national authorities and to cancel or postpone all non-essential travel where possible. REA will adopt a flexible approach towards projects that fail to meet grant agreement obligations due to the COVID-19 containment measures, and may apply the rules on force majeure, or extend the duration of projects. Projects will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and grantees and fellows should speak to their project officer if they require support.

Erasmus+

The Commission has released a statement explaining that it will apply maximum flexibility in the implementation of the programme, within the limits of the applicable legal framework. To deal with participants being unable to travel, or return home, due to COVID-19 restrictions, Erasmus+ National Agencies are now permitted to invoke force majeure clauses whereby they may accept additional costs up to a maximum grant amount. Planned activities may also be postponed by up to 12 months per project. Following the Commission’s statement, the UK National Agency has published dedicated travel advice for regions affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Furthermore, the UK government has issued its own advice for UK education providers regarding staff and student overseas travel and project participants are advised to speak to their providers...
about arrangements. Participants under 18 are advised against all overseas education trips, while those over 18 who are due to travel should consult their education institutions on whether the travel should continue as planned. For any UK participants already overseas, they should continue to monitor the latest FCO travel advice and comply with any COVID-19 control measures put in place in their current host nation.

Creative Europe

The Commission has released a statement saying that it understands that containment measures may have consequences for Creative Europe projects, and are adopting a position of maximum flexibility in regards to implementing the programme, while still working within the applicable legal framework. They are also in close communication with the national Creative Europe desks.

COST Actions

The COST Association has recommended that, from 13 March 2020 to 3 April 2020 (minimum), all physical meetings, training schools and short-term scientific missions be suspended or cancelled. They encourage participants to explore video conferencing and remote networking tools as an alternative. Any participants currently attending COST events should follow the instructions of the host country and host institution.

FORD FOUNDATION

The Ford Foundation will contact grant holders individually to discuss arrangements. They recognise that the kinds of flexibility required may include postponing or cancelling activities, delaying grant deliverables, or delaying submission of proposals or reports.

They are willing to formalise changes to grant agreements, specifically:

- for grantee partners receiving project support, converting current project grants to general support
- changing grant payment schedules
- grant funds will not be rescinded if a programme, conference, or other grant activity is cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19

Full message from the Ford Foundation

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE (IDRC)

IDRC acknowledges that project activities may be delayed, the responsiveness of the project personnel may be impacted by measures taken at their workplace, the preparation of technical and financial reports may be delayed, and that the organisation of meetings, events, and travel plans may be affected.

If events organised through IDRC-funded projects must be cancelled or postponed, they will consider the costs associated with the changes as allowable project expenses, provided they align with IDRC policies. For future events, IDRC suggests that recipients purchase cancellation insurance or travel, accommodation and venue bookings that are at least partially refundable. Additional
costs for planning in this way will also be considered acceptable, provided it allows for reimbursement or credit in case of cancellation.

In addition, travel for participation in events directly sponsored by IDRC has been suspended.

IDRC is committed to supporting its recipients and to the successful completion of the projects it supports. They invite recipients to reach out to their IDRC project officer to discuss the impact on their project and the specific areas where difficulties and higher costs may be of concern.

- Full message from IDRC

LEVERHULME TRUST

The Leverhulme Trust will allow reasonable changes to budget lines and/or no-cost extensions to grants to enable grant holders to manage their research in the best way for their circumstances.

Contact grants@leverhulme.ac.uk to agree extensions and budgetary changes in advance.

- Full statement from the Leverhulme Trust

NIH

When delays occur because the applicant or recipient organisation is officially closed or unable to submit grant applications due to the effects of COVID-19, the NIH will consider accepting applications late, on a case-by-case basis, under certain circumstances.

- Full NIH policy on grant applications

The NIH has introduced flexibilities applicable to NIH applicants and recipients where the entity is conducting research activities related to or affected by COVID-19, relating to:

- pre-award costs
- extension of post-award financial and other reporting
- prior approval requirement waivers
- cost-related flexibilities/expenditure of award funds
- extension of closeout
- extension of single audit submission

- Full details of flexibilities introduced by NIH

The NIH has issued guidance on clinical trials and human subject studies affected by COVID-19. They encourage recipients to consult with their institutions about potential measures to protect participants and research staff. Recipients may submit late financial and progress reports if research is delayed due to COVID-19, and may carry over unobligated balances on active grants without requesting prior approval.

- Full guidance on NIH-funded clinical trials

Frequently asked questions on proposal submission and award management related to COVID-19 are also available:
NIHR

Clinical and academic health and care professionals currently funded by NIHR who are working on
topics other than COVID-19 should prioritise frontline care, where requested to do so by their
employing organisations. Similarly, research staff with other relevant skills, such as pharmacists and
laboratory technicians, should also prioritise support to frontline care. In addition, researchers
should consult with their employers to make facilities which currently support research studies
available for frontline care.

This will mean that many research studies funded by NIHR, or supported by NIHR (via the Clinical
Research Network and other NIHR infrastructure) may need to be paused, to free up NIHR-funded
staff to help bolster the frontline response to COVID-19. In addition, NIHR recognises that award-
holding organisations may need to pause research studies for locally determined public health
reasons.

However, clinical trials or other research studies which are funded or supported by NIHR should
continue if discontinuing them will have significant detrimental effects on the ongoing care of
individual participants involved in those studies. These are clinical decisions which will need to be
made on a case-by-case basis by local decision makers on the basis of local risk and capacity
assessments.

All organisations holding NIHR awards that are paused will, in the short term, continue to receive
payments from DHSC in line with existing NIHR contractual payment schedules. This will be
reviewed and, if necessary, payment schedules will be updated as usual following the annual
statement of expenditure. Where necessary, contract deliverables will be rescheduled, allowing
staff to concentrate on frontline care and COVID-19 research.

ROYAL SOCIETY

The Royal Society's offices will be closed from 5pm on Wednesday 18 March and all staff will be
working remotely. Grants teams will still be contactable via grants@royalsociety.org or +44 (0)20
4751 2666.

Applications

All funding programmes and calls currently remain open for applications in line with advertised
dates. The Royal Society will endeavour not to make any changes to application deadlines,
interview dates or decision dates.

Some grant committee and panel meetings will take place remotely and they will be in contact with
any affected applicants.

If an applicant's institution is closed and unable to approve and submit an application, the Royal
Society can do this on their behalf, with agreement from the institution.

Awards
To minimise the impact of the global health situation on award holders, the Royal Society will provide as pragmatic support as possible, recognising the impact of the coronavirus on research is significant and evolving.

The Society is working with award holders and their organisations as well as the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to ensure that fair and appropriate support is in place.

They will be aiming to minimise the impact of the coronavirus on funded activities as far as possible.

- **Full statement from the Royal Society**

**UKRI**

UKRI’s office-based staff are being advised to work from home where possible. If you need to contact a member of its teams please do so via email and/or mobile phones in the usual way. If you were due to visit one of UKRI’s office locations, institutes/research establishments or Catapult for a pre-arranged meeting, please contact the relevant team before setting off.

UKRI has contingency plans in place to prioritise its core operations but there will inevitably be some disruption.

UKRI is working to understand the nature of any impacts on its funded projects to ensure the appropriate support or advice is in place via its Councils and grants teams. This work is ongoing.

UKRI is taking a very pragmatic approach. For instance, where travel is impacted, if researchers or students cannot travel due to government/official advice, or it poses a risk to the individual (due to an underlying medical condition etc), this can be charged to the grant in line with any other cost. If that cost cannot be absorbed by any overall underspend on the grant then UKRI will cover that small addition. In the same circumstances, no cost extension requests to grants would be allowed.

- **Full statement from UKRI**

**WELLCOME**

**Applications**

All funding schemes and calls remain open for applications. Application deadlines, shortlisting, interview and decision dates will not change.

**Awards**

Wellcome will follow the policy of the employing organisation if any staff employed on a grant:

- are unwell
- need to self-isolate
- have caring responsibilities for someone affected

They will supplement the grant for salary costs less any recoverable statutory pay. See their [sick leave policy](#) for more information.
They will pay the following costs for staff called away to work on the Coronavirus response for one month or more (for example carrying out clinical duties):

- grantholder – the running costs and salaries of anyone employed on the grant
- fellow – fellow's salary (unless provided from elsewhere), running costs and salaries of anyone employed on the grant
- member of staff employed on a grant – salary, unless provided from elsewhere (for example, the NHS)

Wellcome will pay these costs and extend the grant for the period of time staff are away.

For other grants which may be affected (for example, if an organisation closes), Wellcome will look to minimise the impact on funded research activities wherever possible. This might be an extension or supplement to the grant, where it's not covered by insurance.

- Full statement from Wellcome