

Changes to Undergraduate and Masters level Student Research involving Health & Social Care September 2021

Background

In March 2020 the UK wide Health Research Authority (HRA) paused student research approvals to create capacity for urgent COVID-19 research. Due to the continuation of the pandemic and also other reasons (e.g. previous poor quality research and staff resources; move towards team based research) as from 1 September 2021, the HRA introduced new eligibility criteria for **standalone student research**.

The new criteria have been developed following a review, supported by the Wessex Institute at the University of Southampton, with input from students and course leaders across the UK.

As UHI programme leader for the MA Health & Wellbeing and Pg Cert Healthcare Quality Improvement Dr Rachel Erskine took part in these discussions in late January and early July 2021 to produce these new criteria plus provide ideas for options of alternatives.

These changes are designed to ensure students' experience of research reflects how modern health and social care research is conducted. It aims to ensure students have the best learning experience of health and social care research and to maximise the time students spend getting a broad appreciation of modern, team-based research. It is important to students, educators, and employers (research, health, social care and wider) that undergraduate and all types of master's students gain an understanding of, and experience in research.

New Eligibility Criteria

Undergraduate level: Health and social care research applications from students working at undergraduate level **are no longer being accepted** for NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC) review; HRA and HCRW Approval; and/or Research and Development (R&D) study-wide review in Scotland and Northern Ireland. This then has implications for university level ethics applications including UHI Haplo.

Master's level: Applicants should complete the [student research toolkit](#) in the first instance, to check eligibility. **Some health and social care research applications from students working at master's level e.g. PgT and MRes are no longer being accepted** for Research Ethics Committee (REC) review; Health Research Authority and Health and Care Research Wales (HRA and HCRW) Approval; and/or R&D study-wide review in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Again, this then has implications for university level ethics applications including UHI Haplo.

Doctorate level: Applicants **are eligible to complete health and social care research, subject to relevant approvals being in place.** Applicants may find it useful to complete parts of the toolkit to understand if HRA and HCRW Approval (or equivalent in Northern Ireland and Scotland) and/or NHS Research ethics review is required.

Therefore UHI cannot approve projects from undergraduate or Masters students that previously would have required NHS REC approval.

Suggestions of Alternative Approaches

The [UK Policy framework](#) states that a 'research culture' can be created by promoting students' awareness of health and social care research, research ethics and public involvement, and enabling them to develop skills in research methods. Recommendations (non-exhaustive list) of alternatives to research requiring NHS and university REC or R&D study-wide permissions.

- Research in areas other than health or social care
- Health or social care research that doesn't involve patients, service users, NHS staff as participants or identifiable samples/tissue or identifiable data
- Secondary research that does not require REC or R&D study-wide review such as literature, rapid, scoping or systematic reviews or maybe audits or service evaluations
- Public/stakeholder involvement that does not require REC or R&D study-wide review and does not itself put individuals at risk or put pressure on health or social care services

- Developing a proposal/plan/strategy for good public involvement and/or dissemination
- Health and social care project protocol/proposal development (stopping short of submission). [IRAS \(the Integrated Research Application System\)](#) itself can be used to prepare an application form and export this to PDF (without submitting for review)
- Mock review panels. Having developed a project protocol/proposal (or using pre-existing exemplars), students could form a mock REC and/or research funding committee, mentored by experienced researchers, and play the role of both applicant and committee member. This would give students a much richer and more rounded experience of research and research governance
- Shadowing of a range of research teams roles, for example statisticians, trial managers, data analysts.

Many of the above alternatives could be developed in teams, with students taking on different roles within a multi-disciplinary team. This would provide a better experience of modern team science than many stand-alone student projects.

To help masters and doctorate level students plan their research, HRA have created [a new student research toolkit](#). The toolkit has been designed to pull together the resources a student will need to understand what approvals are required and whether they are eligible to carry out their research in the UK. It is worth being mindful that supervisors should be within research active departments or have completed an IRAS application since 2019 (within last 2 years). It contains links to existing decision tools, as well as some new ones developed especially for students and Q&A.

WebLinks

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/uk-policy-framework-health-social-care-research/>

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/about-us/news-updates/new-student-research-eligibility-criteria-live-from-1-september/>

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/research-planning/student-research/>

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/research-planning/student-research/student-research-toolkit/>

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/research-planning/student-research/question-and-answers-student-eligibility-criteria/>

<https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/> - this is the link to IRAS

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/research-planning/student-research/question-and-answers-student-eligibility-criteria/>