

T: 0131-244 3575  
E: euan.dick@gov.scot

By email

To all Universities in Scotland delivering Health and  
Social Care degrees

Your ref:  
Our ref: A25951726  
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Dear colleague

## **UNIVERSITY STUDENT RESEARCH IN NHS SCOTLAND**

With the start of a new academic year, I am writing to ask you to ensure that students undertaking health and care research are adequately supported by your institution. We are increasingly receiving feedback that the approaches used in some courses may not provide students with an effective introduction to current health and care research models. NHS Scotland staff take a facilitative approach to applications for ethical opinion and many student-led applications are creating disproportionate impact on the health research system. This is having a downstream impact on the support the research ethics service is able to provide to other studies.

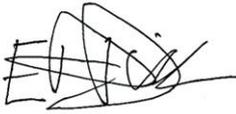
Although some universities encourage Masters students to take part in research led by experienced researchers, there are a significant number of cases where students with no prior experience, and inadequate supervision, are expected to develop a research idea, design a study, gain approvals, and conduct a study on patients in the NHS within a period of a few months. Alternatively, to reduce the regulatory requirements for research, they are encouraged to undertake research on NHS staff but then create an impact on NHS service delivery.

In 2018 on a UK-wide basis the Health Research Authority produced a number of aids to assist supervisors and students on their Student Research webpage . <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/research-planning/student-research/> From this academic year we will be expecting supervisors to help their students to achieve compliance with the expectations set out below, drawn from the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research (2017).

We are also seeking your support as we explore further opportunities to ensure that students have the best possible learning experience of research. We plan to discuss proposals to set further expectations relating to health and care research undertaken for educational purposes at meetings of the CSO's Stakeholder Group. Our intention is to ensure that we continue to support the development of the next generation of high calibre researchers in the health & care sector in the most proportionate way. If you would be interested in working with us, please get in touch.

On the following page, I have outlined our expectations and provided a number of links and I would welcome your support to disseminate this to all academic staff supervising health or care research applications.

Yours faithfully



**Euan Dick**  
Head of Chief Scientist Office

**Scottish Government expectations of students and supervisors is that they will work within the UK Policy Framework for Health and Care Research <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/uk-policy-framework-health-social-care-research/> as follows:**

1. Students should not normally take the role of Chief Investigator (CI) at any level of study. This position is articulated in the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research (para 9.3)
2. Undergraduate students should normally be directed to do low risk research and discouraged from undertaking research which interfaces directly with patients in accordance with the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care research (para 9.3)
3. Course leaders/supervisors are encouraged to develop and lead research projects that individual students at Masters' level and below can contribute to at different stages. This position is articulated in the published UK policy framework for health and social care research (para 9.3) and the Student Research webpage on the HRA website. It is also included in the content of the e-learning module for sponsors and academic supervisors.
4. Students from non-health related courses involved in accessing patients or their data in the NHS setting should be offered a co-supervisor with a health-related background to help them negotiate their way through the research process.
5. Universities and colleges should accept the role of sponsor for all educational research conducted by their own students unless the student is employed by a health or social care provider that prefers to do this. This is included in the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care research (paragraph 9:12).
6. Sponsors of educational research should ensure that their supervisors are competent to fulfil this role. Please note that the HRA has developed a bitesize online training module, available on the Student Research webpage on their website, produced specifically for supervisors and launched in December 2018 to support this. <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/research-planning/student-research/>
7. Supervisors should ensure that students have completed the online training package available within the Integrated Research Application System known as IRAS <https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/> before they submit a live application. Currently over 25% of student applications are missing key information or documents.