# **Important update: Research projects involving face-to-face participant interaction and COVID-19 (update 17 July 2020)**

This statement replaces and supersedes the notification circulated to all staff on 24 March 2020.

1. Given the exceptional nature of the situation arising as a result of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the College Ethics Committee requires all ongoing research involving human participants to make changes to how participant interactions are conducted. This applies to staff and students’ research.
2. The Government are now in the process of easing lockdown restrictions. However, until further notice the College position remains that ethics approval, in most cases, will only be granted where protocols can be adopted to allow researchers to conduct participant interactions remotely (that is, where there is no physical co-presence of researcher and participant). Projects will generally be granted ethical approval for such remote data collection. Please be mindful that not all remote platforms support confidentiality and this should be explicitly considered. Many subject associations have recently updated their advice about this. (The only exception to this is where the participant interaction is taking place within College buildings under the circumstances described in paragraph 7 of this document).
3. Where it is not possible to conduct participant interactions remotely, you may adopt a different methodological approach to your research which does not involve direct interaction with participants (for example, secondary data analysis) or the research must be paused unless the participant interaction is taking place within College buildings, as specified in this document (see paragraph 7).
4. We recognise that collecting data from human participants remotely is not as nuanced as collecting the same data in person, however, at this time College’s view is that in most cases the additional safety of remote data collection outweighs the minor benefits of collecting the same data in person. This is in line with current scientific advice, and we will continue to follow this advice. Please be assured that we are monitoring the situation closely and will communicate any further changes at the appropriate time

**These rules apply whether the research is routine or sensitive.**

1. **Students** - The College expects that most UG/PGT students will continue to use the approaches agreed when the lockdown period began and does not anticipate a change to this approach for any taught student currently in the data collection phase of their research project.
2. The College has begun the process of re-opening buildings, a process which is overseen by the College Health and Safety Committee.
3. Where access to a building has been restored and a suitable risk assessment (which has been approved by the College Health and Safety Committee) is in place, ethics approvals for in person data collection may be reinstated. This can occur only where it is essential for the researcher and the participant providing data to access the building. So participants are only allowed to access College buildings if the research relies upon equipment (for example EEG or fMRI machines) which can only be found in these buildings, and that this access has been approved by the College Health and Safety Committee.
4. At this stage in our Covid-19 response, the Health and Safety Committee do not sign off individual research projects, instead they sign off the frameworks which allow research to be done with minimised risks for a given type of activity. Any researcher who wishes to have their research approach considered should raise the matter with their DREO (or, for students with their supervisor) in the first instance. If there is sufficient interest for a given type of activity the necessary (health and safety and ethics) approvals can then be sought.