

COVID-19: Advice for Researchers (v2)

20 March 2020

The unprecedented nature of the outbreak of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) requires King's to put in place measures to safeguard our community of staff, students and visitors and to enable the continuation, where possible, of time-critical research activities.

Staff will appreciate that as this is an uncertain and evolving situation, these arrangements may change at short notice due to national guidance. Any changes to this guidance will be reflected in updates to the [FAQs for researchers](#) on the King's Coronavirus webpages, and on the [RMID area of the intranet](#); this will be supplemented by communications through faculties. Please do check these sources regularly.

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Research Update

In response to evolving Government policy, and to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our staff and research students, from Friday 20 March we will start implementing plans to temporarily close some of our buildings from until Friday 27 March until the end of May 2020 at the earliest.

It is important to emphasise that many research activities can continue, with staff working flexibly and accessing King's systems remotely where needed. Examples might include grant and paper writing, remote supervision and reviewing aspects of our REF efforts.

In particular, we would like to encourage colleagues to continue with development and application of external grants: funders have assured us that they are supporting the grant application process at this time.

RMID Support

RMID is working hard to ensure that it can continue to support research during this period. Research development, pre-award, contracts and post-award as well many other research support activities will continue with colleagues working flexibly from home.

Details of the Heads of RMID units, available to answer any questions you may have, are on the [RMID guidance page](#).

Laboratory-Based Research

Colleagues should now put in place the plans that you have developed to pause temporarily your lab-based research from Monday 23 March onwards. Your plans should enable this work to be restarted effectively when this becomes possible.

Research facilities and the Biological Services Unit will be running only with limited, essential staff support only after Monday 23 March. Full details of the current operation of these facilities can be found on the [RMID guidance page](#).

Human Participant Research

- Clinical Research

It is vital that staff follow the regularly updated NHS guidelines for patient-facing clinical research, provided by our partner trusts, along with NIHR advice as available. Please also see the [MHRA advice on clinical trials](#).

Our partner trusts are changing their clinical practice, retraining and redirecting staff to provide the capacity and resilience needed to manage the outbreak and operating clinics via Skype and phone.

Principal Investigators should follow the approach adopted by NHS partners such as at Guy's & St Thomas', King's College Hospital and SLAM: classifying their clinical research studies into those that can be suspended (thereby redeploying clinically-qualified research staff to support frontline clinical service) and those that can continue. Studies that continue must be mindful of the added precautions needed to reduce the risk of spread of infection.

Clinical studies that do not require face-to-face interaction can continue. Some face-to-face studies could be adapted, to allow this as an alternative to face to face interactions. Please see latest [HRA advice](#), and where appropriate MHRA advice, for adapting existing clinical studies in relation to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Methods may be adapted for appropriate research into COVID-19, and new studies into COVID-19 prevention, treatment or mitigation may come forward.

Although the initial suggestions will come from the PI, this will need to be agreed by the NHS R&D leadership which is planning optimum use of resources and facilities as well as patient and staff safety.

- Participant Interactions

Volunteer studies that have approval from the HRA and participant studies that have approval from the College Research Ethics Committee (CREC) are required 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. **Either change must be made by Monday 23 March.**

Funders and relevant study steering committees should be consulted regarding changes to methods. Volunteer studies that have approval through the HRA (please see the [latest advice](#)), can ask for rapid turnaround to have their studies adapted. The CREC 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. Please note that such changes would normally require a modification and will again when this situation has passed.

○ Exceptions

Exceptions will be made in *some* cases for ongoing school-based research where the researcher is a teacher conducting research within their own school during normal teaching hours.

Further information and guidance on how to action these changes to participant interactions can be found on the [Research Ethics Office website](#).

Further information is also available in the [FAQs for researchers](#) on the King's Coronavirus webpages.

Interactions with Funders

King's is continuing to engage with funders around this national issue in collaboration with other Russell Group universities.

The major grant funders are developing national strategies to cope with the effects of the virus on their work: these will evolve over time. Research Grants & Contracts is maintaining a [regularly-updated webpage](#) with information from major funders on their response to Coronavirus.

All funders will be sympathetic to requests to delay work and adjust project timescales. The EU is “applying the maximum flexibility [it] can in the implementation of the programme, within the limits of the applicable legal framework.”

Where possible, colleagues with new grants involving laboratory or clinical research should look to delay their start dates. In projects with multiple work packages which involve other components, such as secondary data analysis or systematic reviews, please consider whether it is possible to reorganise the order of study components.

It is important that PIs contact their project officer or equivalent at their funder at the earliest opportunity, if they feel that there will be a material impact on delivery within current grant funding envelopes and timescales, to discuss ways to mitigate effects. Where King's is not the lead in a research programme, PIs should notify the project lead/coordinator instead. Please copy your regular Post-Award contact into these emails so they are aware of the situation, can offer advice and take action at the appropriate time. In the case of the major grant funders, the Research Grants and Contracts team would not formally request extensions until it is clear how long a particular suspension or extension is required for.

The following questions may help to shape your approach to the funder:

- How is novel Coronavirus necessitating the cancellation, postponement, or restructuring (such as moving to virtual forums) of supported project activities?
- Do you anticipate any changes in the expenditures of the grant because of the situation around Coronavirus?
- Do you anticipate extensions to the duration of your grant because of the novel Coronavirus-related circumstances?
- Would a “non-cost” extension work. or would you require additional funding, for instance, to keep staff on the project?

You are advised to document, as much as possible, the disruption that you experience, in order to assist with future discussions with funders. We will be providing a centralized reporting template/framework as soon as possible; in the meantime please liaise with your faculty research support.

- **Research Contracts**

Research funded by contracts rather than grants e.g. Industry and Government (including NIHR), is likely to require a legal process to suspend the work, based on the terms of each individual contract.

The Research Grants and Contracts Team will initiate discussions with these funders as soon as possible to place contracts formally into abeyance.

- **Contact details for the Research Grants and Contracts teams**

The Research Grants and Contracts teams at King's should be your principal point of contact when requesting delays to your grants and contracts. The team is putting in place measures to ensure that they can continue deliver a service to the community, including triaging and prioritising the most critical work (such as approving appointments, opening accounts, accepting awards and submitting grants to deadline).

Director of Research Grants & Contracts: [Paul Labbett](#)

- [Post-Award Team](#): (for all research grants and contracts administrated by Research Grants & Contracts)
Head of Team: Eva Bjorndal
- [Research Grants Team](#): (for NIHR, EU and NIH funding)
Head of Team: Daniela Amadio
- [Contracts Team](#): (for contract funding from industry and government)
Head of Team: Laura Weiss

Postgraduate Research Students

Postgraduate research students should discuss with their supervisors the impact of this situation on their research. Please also look out for local information, provided by your faculty or department. FAQs for PGRs are available on the [King's Coronavirus webpages](#).

Postdoctoral Researchers and Research Staff

Postdoctoral researchers and research staff should discuss with their Principal Investigator/line manager the impact of this situation on their research. Please also look out for local information, provided by your faculty or department. Further information will be added to the [online FAQs](#).

IT Guidance for Researchers

IT are currently preparing more detailed guidance for researchers, which will be available on the King's Coronavirus webpages, however please be aware of the following:

- You can check how best to access certain systems /applications on [our Remote Access intranet page](#).
- Some systems can only be accessed via an SOE (standard operating environment) device. This simply means using an approved King's laptop or other device which has the relevant security controls in place.
- Help us understand your requirements by completing these forms - [Gaining remote access as a researcher](#) ; [Gaining remote access \(non-researchers\)](#).
- To access your data, in the majority of cases you can access the data you need if it is stored or can be migrated onto OneDrive or SharePoint. Our IT Service Desk can help you do this. However, not all data is suitable for this purpose due to different research agreements and security specifications. [Contact our IT Service Desk](#) for further guidance.

- Working remotely: We have provided guidance on getting up to speed on the IT you need for remote working via our [Digital Skills Hub](#) and will be adding more detailed guidance to this Hub in due course.
 - Using MS Teams
- [Guidance for setting up a Microsoft Teams site](#)
- [Guidance for adding external users to Microsoft Teams meetings](#)
- Mac users must download the MS Teams client. [Instructions are available here.](#)

Our IT Service Desk is open 24/7, 365 days a year to support you in gaining access to what you need and getting you up to speed on key tools such as Skype and Teams.

Advice on Remote Working

King's has produced [tips for remote working](#), along with a guide on [preparing managers and teams for new ways of working as a result of COVID-19](#). You can also find [tips for managing virtual teams](#) on the King's Coronavirus webpages.

Further Information

Further guidance is available in the [FAQ for researchers](#). Please send any additional questions, not answered by this guidance or the FAQs, to rmidcovid19@kcl.ac.uk.

King's Research Response to COVID-19

We are aware that many of our senior PIs are supporting national and international expertise within the Government's four-part action plan. This includes making sense of the emerging data, applying existing knowledge quickly to produce better guidance for practice and to learn ways to lessen the impact of Coronavirus and find treatments and prevention.

King's has an important opportunity and responsibility to use our research expertise in support of the international response to the COVID-19 (novel Coronavirus) outbreak. This goes beyond efforts to find treatments – for example into the effects of the outbreak on mental health (including through isolation), broader social and economic questions for society, the functioning of healthcare systems (including in developing countries), and more directly-linked studies of immunology and physiology.

We are therefore offering pilot funding for King's research teams to engage rapid research on this topic. Through the [King's Together](#) programme, we will offer grants of up to £20,000 for groups of researchers to start work, across all disciplines.

To apply, please send a 1-page summary of your proposal to kingstogether@kcl.ac.uk by 20 March.