

Restricted Access Guidelines for Research at the Interface with Society

1. Permission to conduct research in the community should only be granted for essential work that is time sensitive and cannot be conducted remotely. All other work including meetings should continue be conducted remotely via Teams etc.
2. Researchers must comply with all standard ethical and regulatory [requirements](#), ensuring always, in line with basic ethical principles, that the benefits from the research outweigh any risks. This document relates only to additional requirements associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. National guidelines must always be adhered to. Currently guidelines have been issued by the Government ([Return to Work Safely Protocol](#)) and [HSE](#) but other national guidelines may be made available in due course.
4. Extra care must be taken when interacting with [vulnerable groups](#), including older people whether living at home or in residential care, subjects whose immune system is compromised, homeless people, international protection applicants, refugees etc. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an urgent and time-sensitive requirement for research with these groups. HSPC guidelines should be followed scrupulously and ethical approval will be required. Where it has already been secured, the application will need to be revisited in light of the current situation.
5. A letter of authorisation must be secured from the Head of College and VP Research and Innovation before commencing research which involves community interaction. In the case of MA students, programme directors should submit the paperwork in batch on behalf of all students involved in the programme.
 - a. The following plans and assessments must be produced by the PI/supervisor in order to apply for a letter of authorisation.
 - i. A COVID-19 Response Plan (detailing the provisions that will be implemented to ensure adherence with [COVID-19 control measures](#) and UCC's [Health and Safety Policy](#)).
 - ii. A full risk assessment where required which accounts for both Covid-19 public health pandemic risks and for Occupational H&S Risks. Template to be found on the [RCBT webpage](#). Where RAs have already been completed, they need to be revised for COVID-19 public health pandemic risks before submission.
 - iii. Confirmation of ethical approval where required. Where ethical approval has been secured prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the application may need to be amended to address issues raised by the current situation i.e. consent forms may need to be amended.
 - iv. A letter of assurance (for research at interface with society) must be completed by the PI/Supervisor on behalf of the group of researchers involved. Templates can be found on the [RCBT webpage](#).
 - b. All documentation should be submitted to the Head of College and VP Research and Innovation for review. Once approved, a list of researchers involved in the study and a schedule of work can be sent to the HoS/Director of RICU who will issue a letter of authorisation.
 - c. Researchers must have a copy of the letter of authorisation with them at all times.
6. All PIs/Programme Directors must consider the following in their compliance plan:

- a. All researchers must follow the [‘steps to follow before returning to work on campus’](#) including the [UCC Pre-return to work form](#) and [induction](#). MA students will need to follow a separate process.
 - b. They must ensure that researchers are briefed on any COVID-19 protocols in place in the location in which they will carry out the research.
 - c. Clear electronic records must be kept of researchers going out into the community. Information on where they travel, when and with whom should be stored at academic unit level where researchers are based. Full details of the names and contact details for each person they meet, when and where and for how long must be stored at School/RICU level not just by PI.
 - d. Travel plans for each researcher involved must be submitted as part of the compliance plan. Researchers must travel alone to the research site unless already sharing accommodation with co-workers.
 - e. If necessary, to refuel a vehicle during research trip, government guidelines should be followed.
 - f. If there is overnight accommodation involved, this must be single occupancy.
 - g. Plans for meals/rest breaks must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Scheduling breaks will help to assist in this.
 - h. If PPE equipment is required due to the nature of the research activity, this needs to be acquired at local level. Where additional PPE is not required, national guidelines should be adhered to.
 - i. Controls and protocols need to be put in place in relation to how any incidents that might occur would be managed.
 - j. As per the Government’s Return to Work Safely Protocol, a response plan must be put in place for dealing with suspected cases of COVID-19 that might arise during the off-site work.
7. When conducting off-site research, researchers must comply with UCC’s Health and Safety Policy as well as UCC guidelines on [social distancing](#) and [hygiene](#). In addition, they should also comply with the following:
- a. Sharing of equipment should be discouraged.
 - b. Any equipment being used by multiple people will be sanitised using suitable spray or wipes between uses.
 - c. Should a suspected case of COVID-19 arise, researchers should follow HSE advice and immediately contact their line manager as well as the Student Health Department at 021 490 2311.
8. It must be clearly communicated to all researchers that **they need to stay at home if demonstrating symptoms of COVID-19**. Note that the Government’s [Return to Work Safely Protocol](#) requires that employers must issue a pre-return to work form for workers to complete at least 3 days in advance of the return to work to seek confirmation that the worker, to the best of their knowledge, has no symptoms of COVID-19 and also confirm that the worker is not self-isolating or awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test. For the complete list of symptoms, please refer to the [HSE Website](#).

All protocols and compliance plans must adhere to UCC [Health and Safety Policy](#), Compliance Checklist / Access Protocol and the Government's [Return to Work Safely Protocol](#).