

Research activity restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Advice from DVC and PVC Research, Deans and Research Office

At time of writing, health authorities' advice is that Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) may be transmitted through 'Close Contact' defined as face to face contact for 15+ minutes, or in the same closed space for 2+ hours, as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 when that person was infectious.

Many research activities may fit this definition of 'Close Contact', including research data gathering involving in-person interaction with human research participants, research conference attendance and other research travel.

It is critical that members of our communities remain as safe as possible, while ensuring minimal disruption to research activities. The following guidelines will ensure we are able to do this.

1. Travel

- 1.1. All non-essential domestic and international staff travel through Laureate Australia has already been cancelled. Research Centre Directors are requested to check and ensure that none of their researchers are undertaking international or domestic travel for TUA research purposes that uses alternate funding sources.
- 1.2. Networking and other professional activities should be attended online rather than in-person.
- 1.3. Funding support for local conferences is suspended until further notice.

2. Research Projects

- 2.1. All research projects which involve potential in-person contact with human research participants (including focus groups, personally administered surveys, workshops), should either
 - amend the project methodology to no longer include in-person contact (note that doing so will require an HREC approved amendment, as described in section 4.3), or
 - immediately suspend until further notice.
- 2.2. Researchers need to consider how their project will be impacted by social distancing measures and [State and Commonwealth government restrictions](#), and whether it can proceed and still achieve its stated research objective(s). If it is not possible to continue, the researcher should contact their Research Centre Director and the Research Office for assistance with a strategy to amend or temporarily suspend the project.

3. Higher Degrees by Research (HDR)

HDR students will be required to follow the advice of the Australian Government and Torrens University policy and advice. Research project work involving close contact with human research participants previously approved by the Torrens Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) will need to suspend human participant interactions until further notice. Students should contact their supervisors to discuss electronic/digital alternatives to human contact. International HDR students considering travel should seek the advice of Torrens international student services and follow [State and Commonwealth government restrictions and advice](#).

- 3.1. Meetings and interactions between supervisors and HDR students should be conducted online (Zoom, Blackboard, email) wherever possible.
- 3.2. Supervisors who require further advice about their students' research and how to adjust the project to remove or minimise in-person contact should contact their Research Centre Director and the HDR Office hdr@laureate.edu.au.
- 3.3. Where these restrictions on gathering of specific data from human participants will affect a student's candidature progression and the timeline for completion, the student must contact their supervisor and consult the Associate Dean: Higher Degrees by Research to explore alternative arrangements.

4. Human Research Ethics Approval

- 4.1. Any new applications to the Torrens HREC for projects involving human research participants will be screened before review by the committee. Those applications deemed to involve in-person close contact will not proceed to review until further notice, per [NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct 1.7\(a\)](#).
- 4.2. Any in-process applications to the Torrens HREC which have been returned to the applicant for amendment will not proceed to re-review until further notice, if the project methodology involves in-person close contact with human research participants.
- 4.3. For any research project involving in-person close contact with human research participants which has previously been approved by the Torrens HREC,
 - the researcher shall temporarily suspend in-person close contact research activities and, where possible,
 - submit to the HREC an amendment to the project with a revised methodology that does not require in-person close contact.

5. Research Grant Funding

- 5.1. While grant applications may continue, researchers are asked to take into account current [State and Commonwealth government restrictions](#), and possible future restrictions and social distancing measures. Researchers are encouraged to include such considerations into their project proposals and contingency plans to make their applications as robust and competitive as possible.
- 5.2. Grant applications may continue where the funding body's conditions allow for a delayed start to the project (eg. NHMRC, DFAT)
- 5.3. Torrens researchers are encouraged to engage with and follow the guidance provided by their research funding bodies such as the [ARC](#) and [NHMRC](#) on conditions for applications and active grants, and discuss with their Research Centre Director and the Research Office as soon as possible.

6. Research Collaborations

- 6.1. If any external collaborator or stakeholder (partner institution, industry partner, etc) for a research project implements separate restrictions due to COVID-19 which will affect the project, the researcher asked to advise their Research Centre Director and the Research Office as soon as possible.
- NOTE: This includes institutions administering a project on which a Torrens researcher is a co-investigator.

7. International Visiting Scholars and Fellowships

- 7.1. All support for international visiting scholars and research collaborators is suspended until further notice.
- 7.2. All support for applications for external Fellowships requiring travel or in-person contact outside of Torrens is suspended until further notice.

Any staff with questions about these recommendations, or about the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Torrens research activity should contact the Research researchoffice@laureate.edu.au