RESTORING UOW RESEARCH OPERATIONS (STAGE 1)
PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES
Updated 1 July 2020

Glossary:
ADR = Associate Dean Research
CMT = Crisis Management Team
FMD = Facilities Management Division
HDR = Higher Degree Research students
PPE = Personal Protective Equipment
WHS = Workplace Health and Safety
UA = Universities Australia

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES (ADAPTED FROM UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA)[1]

- Research staff who can attend work safely should do so, in line with the university's recovery plan.
- Appropriate supervision must be in place for all researchers on-site to ensure that both physical distancing and appropriate health and safety measures are undertaken.
- Research students should be adequately supervised on-site by a staff member with appropriate expertise.
- Technical support staff and core facilities staff should be onsite as required to continue to support research.
- Inductions will continue, including additional information on physical distancing and other requirements, either in person or in virtual mode if necessary.
- Research team leaders should determine what research work can be undertaken on-site, and who needs to be there to do it. They will take into consideration requirements of the research, expertise of researchers, and appropriate supervision.
- Consideration of a roster of researchers can be developed, where necessary, to ensure that research can be completed with optimal compliance to physical distancing requirements.
- Essential meetings to be held outside in the open air, in large venues that allow physical distancing or via video conferencing or phone.
- Shared research areas must establish suitable cleaning processes to be completed prior to commencing and prior to finishing in the area, provide hand hygiene products and suitable waste disposal bins and maintain regular cleaning and waste disposal programs.

2. UOW PRINCIPLES

- We prioritise the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and students.
- We observe Government guidelines on physical distancing.
- Not all staff and students can return to campus in Stage 1.

---

[1] Universities Australia, Principles and Protocols for Reducing the Potential Risk of COVID-19 Transmission at Universities, June 2020, available at: https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/publication/principles-and-protocols-for-reducing-the-potential-risk-of-covid-19-transmission-at-universities/

- COVID Safe Plan checklist and action plan, endorsed by the WHS Manager or delegate, will be required for research to return to campus (or to commence at third party and off-site destinations).
- Those working productively from home should continue to do so.
- Those identifying as vulnerable to COVID-19, or living with someone vulnerable, should continue to work from home.
- Those who are unwell should stay at home.
- Researchers on campus must comply with local COVID-19 Management Plans (i.e. number of people per room/lab/building, practise healthy hand washing hygiene, and clean workspaces before and after use).
- We recommend downloading the COVIDSafe app for contact tracing.

2.1 Oversight
- CMT will advise of UOW interpretation and application of government distancing requirements.
- CMT will endorse recommendations to allow research to resume at each stage.
- COVID Safe Plan checklist must be completed, and endorsed by the WHS Manager or delegate.
- Research involving people or animals will need to be approved by ethics committee.
- Local COVID Safe Champions will monitor that COVID safety is implemented.

2.2 Timing
- There is no certainty over timing of decisions/triggers for increasing or decreasing on-campus presence.
- Physical distancing requirements may change more than once, even into future years.
- Some research will need to be dual mode (on-campus/remote) for Stages 1 and 2 of return.

2.3 Process
- CMT can advise, via FMD, of operational room capacities while distancing measures are in place.
- Some buildings/rooms may not be suitable to be opened while distancing measures are in place.
- Research arrangements will be managed by local WHS officers and COVID Safe Champions, who will endorse COVID Safe checklists and actions, implement priorities for return to campus, and monitor implementation of COVID safety.

2.4 WHS
- UOW COVID Safe procedures will be updated in line with Federal Government and Safe Work Australia[2]/NSW[3] requirements.

3. TRIGGERS TO CONSIDER CHANGES TO ON-CAMPUS RESEARCH

A variety of circumstances may trigger a review of on-campus research, including:
- Revised advice on application of physical distancing requirements at UOW, e.g:
    - Change to the the maximum number of people permitted to congregate indoors,
    - Change to the required area allowance per person.
- Revised advice on adjusted room capacities.
- Benchmarking; other institutions' responses.

---

[2] Safe Work Australia, National COVID-19 safe workplace principles, 29 April 2020, available at: https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/other-resources/national-covid-19-safe-workplace-principles
[3] NSW Government, COVID-19 Latest Updates, available at: https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19

4. RESEARCH RETURN TO CAMPUS

Research that cannot be conducted from home - ie that requires on-campus facilities, laboratories, infrastructure, equipment, materials, or studios may be approved for return to campus, subject to risk assessments, and UOW research priorities. Similarly, clinical research, research with human participants, off-site research with third party facilities may be considered. In Stage 1, office-based research that can be performed at home will not normally be approved for return to campus.

During Stage 1, return to on-campus research will be coordinated at a local level by ADRs, WHS managers and nominated "research return to campus" champions (for e.g., each School, Centre, Institute).

Documentation of COVID Safe Plan checklist and actions, and ethics approval if required, will need to be provided and endorsed, as per WHS approved processes.

4.1 UOW General Principles
General principles are provided here, though we recognise that local manager expertise should drive implementation at the organisational unit level. In addition, UOW researchers should ensure they follow UA Specific Guidelines for lab based research, fieldwork, studio-based research, office based research, animal houses, and research involving clinical human participants (see Appendix 1).

4.1.1 Documentation
- Researchers wishing to return to campus must complete the COVID Safe Plan checklist that outlines general personal safety and physical distancing requirements.
- Any actions required must be outlined in the COVID Safe Plan, e.g. cleaning procedures, how numbers returning to the building/unit will be limited to meet physical distancing requirements (e.g. staggered work hours - AM/PM, alternating days or weeks working from home).
- Any actions required must be implemented prior to work commencing. Specific risk management plans may be requested prior to local, Faculty or Central approval.
- If the move to face to face research involves vulnerable people **or** any changes to the protocol approved by the HREC the proposal to recommence face-to-face research/changes must be submitted to the HREC and approved before commencing the face to face activity. Consent has been sought from researchers and participants to engage with the research during COVID-19 restrictions.
- Large research groups or teams who share working spaces should use rotation rosters to minimise numbers in shared workspaces at any one time.

4.1.2 Priorities
Should there be limits to the number of people who can return to research in a particular unit, priority should be given to:
- Honours research and HDR students;
- Postdoctoral researchers;
- Early career researchers and their teams;
- Women researcher leaders and their teams (The Rapid Research Information Forum, led by Chief Scientist Alan Finkel, and hosted by the Australian Academy of Science noted[4] that the COVID pandemic has disproportionately affected women researchers);
- Indigenous research leaders and their teams;
- Researchers who have been unable to work from home (ie due to poor internet, caring responsibilities during work from home, those with no suitable work space at home etc);
- Researchers funded on external contracts/grants with upcoming milestones;

---

[4] Australian Academy of Science, Impact of the pandemic on Australia's research workforce, 8 May 2020, available at: https://www.science.org.au/covid19/research-workforce

- Research professional/technical staff, lab supervisors, research assistants who cannot work from home;
- Researchers working on time-sensitive projects, or who require access to specialist on-campus facilities or infrastructure;
- Researchers working on critical pilot studies for targeted major external funding applications.

4.1.3 Broad requirements for approval of research return to campus
- PPE appropriate to the task must be used at all times.
- Personal hygiene practices must be supported – soap and hand sanitiser must be readily available.
- Procedures for cleaning desks and training equipment before and after use must be outlined.
- Shared workspaces (e.g. hot desk) should be minimised. If unavoidable, an approved disinfection protocol between shared workspace users must be implemented.

5. CONSIDERATIONS FOR OFF-CAMPUS RESEARCH

Similar considerations will be made in assessing what research can be undertaken at locations off-campus, such as in hospitals and other clinical settings, national facilities and other institutions, in line with those organisations' approvals, safety controls and protocols.

Written confirmation will be required from a relevant authority from the 3rd party organisation that the activity is approved to occur within their facilities and any conditions or limitations that apply to that support. HDR candidates will also require the endorsement of their Principal HDR Supervisor before proceeding. Evidence must be provided that the nature of the work requires that it be undertaken off campus, in a third party facility. The third party organisation must have a COVID Safe Plan in place, and provisions to ensure compliance with physical distancing guidelines and adherence to safe work practices.

Researchers planning to conduct off-campus fieldwork, including research at third party facilities must comply with and complete COVID Safe Plans, taking into consideration the principles outlined above and UA requirements at Appendix 1, as well as the following:

5.1 Physical Distancing
- Where is the research best located? (physical distancing requirements and research appropriateness should be justified).
- Consider whether research with humans can be conducted by telephone or online to minimise exposure. Review NSW Government[5] information on at-risk vulnerable groups and review need for face-to-face research.
- Attendance of people at research site must not exceed recommended numbers for inside and outside gatherings and visitors to a home or community site.
- Ensure adequate support for researchers and participants i.e. experienced researcher providing support for a less experienced researcher in planning and/or at site / support people for participants if required.
- Signage, physical barriers or floor markings must be used to indicate circulation, movement and facilitate distancing requirements.
- Restrictions on time spent together, particularly for at-risk, vulnerable populations.

5.2 Hygiene
- Ensure hygiene for participants and researchers during travel to and from the research site.
- Hand sanitiser is available and used at beginning and end of interactions by researchers and wherever possible participants (exception being if the research site is the participant's home).
- Disinfectant wipes available to clean any surfaces before and after interactions if necessary; this may include throughout the interaction (e.g. handling the same object).

---

[5] NSW Government, COVID-19 Latest Updates, available at: https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19

- Best practice of doors and windows being opened in naturally ventilated facilities wherever possible.
- Questionnaire completed by participants prior to research activity (i.e. collection of data, may be filled in on-site).
- Home visits must undertake appropriate risk assessment regarding exposure of research team to household members recently returned from overseas or a close contact of someone with COVID19.
- Appropriate PPE used when conducting patient assessments or taking body fluid samples.

5.3 Equipment (if applicable)
- Shared equipment is subject to hygiene requirements and must be cleaned at the beginning, end and between each person's use.
- Appropriate disposal of PPE.
- Use of faculty / shared vehicles is subject to practicing appropriate hygiene and sanitation of the vehicle and minimising the numbers of passengers per vehicle.

5.4 Contact Tracing
- Researchers will record and file contact details of all people present including researchers, participants, and any other people present such as carers or support workers.
- Attendance recorded (minimum details). Information will be shared with the research site.

5.5 Consultation
- Report any concerns about the implementation of procedures to Head of School/Unit or WHS Unit.
- Written or verbal consent that participants or third parties are aware of and accept UOW procedures.
- Vulnerable communities (e.g., patients in health care facilities or residents in aged care facilities) may require evidence of influenza or other vaccination – research leader to check additional requirements before working on-site.

5.6 Ethics
- If the move to face to face research involves any changes to the protocol approved by the HREC these changes must be submitted to the HREC and approved before being implemented.
- If the project was approved pre-COVID any proposal to recommence face to face work with vulnerable people has been approved by the HREC.
- Written permission for the research to resume/continue at an external site has been sought from the site and provided to the HREC and Faculty/Research Unit.
- Consent sought from researchers and participants to engage with research during COVID restrictions.

Planning for the resumption or commencement of any research activities, regardless of location, must include how the activity would be rapidly shut down, should restrictions be reintroduced.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of:

- **Researchers/team leaders** to complete COVID Safe Checklist and Action Plan, promote hygiene, ensure hygiene requirements are in place (e.g. sanitiser in each room, instructions for use), ensure roster established and utilised to maintain physical distancing, and ensure entry records are kept for contact tracing purposes.
- **COVID Safe Champions** to provide local assistance to researchers preparing COVID Safe Plans, monitor and report to Heads of School/Unit on implementation of Plans to ensure compliance with requirements.

- **WHS Manager/Unit** to endorse all completed COVID Safe Checklist and Action Plans, checklists and required actions.
- **Heads of School/Unit** to review COVID Safe Checklist and Action Plans and required actions prior to implementation in their areas, following endorsement of plans by WHS Unit.
- **Facilities Management** to assist faculties with room capacity numbers, protective screens, relocating furniture, and reviewing building and research space suitability and room capacity for use in Stage 1 distancing requirements.
- **CMT** to advise of UOW application of government distancing requirements and endorse recommendations to allow research to resume at each stage.

Appendix 1: Universities Australia Specific Guidelines for Research, June 2020 (Section 5.2.2)

UA recommends that If the following guidelines cannot be managed in line with physical distancing requirements, a risk management plan (i.e. strategies to be implemented to minimise risk) is required before approval can be provided.

A. LAB BASED
- Physical distancing controls must be established and adhered to within laboratory spaces, including managing access to equipment and workspaces.
- Each lab must develop a physical distancing plan which allows research to continue within guidelines and which may consider staggered access times to facilitate research.
- Each lab must review cleaning protocols and regularly disinfect high touch surfaces, such as benches, door handles, etc. The opportunity for increased ventilation by adjusting air conditioning, where appropriate should also be considered.
- Each lab must ensure relevant PPE is used, where appropriate, to avoid contamination and for personal protection.
- Essential visitors (including contractors) are allowed where physical distancing can be established and managed.
- The process for managing external participants, volunteers and sample collection must be developed in line with physical distancing to the greatest extent possible.

B. FIELDWORK
- Research team leaders should consider how researchers can access the site safely, including determining what form of transport is appropriate and parking availability.
- Activities must comply with physical distancing, wherever possible.
- The number of participants must be minimised with consideration as to how interactions may be completed without physical contact or staggered over different periods of time.
- Sufficient PPE, disinfectant and cleaning products must be made available in the field.
- Emergency response plans must be established in case of incident.

C. STUDIO BASED
- Physical distancing measures must be established and adhered to within studio spaces.
- Consideration may be given to staggered access times to facilitate activity.
- The numbers of participants in activities must be minimised to support physical distancing and consideration given to alternative arrangements to physical contact such as use of technology to enable reduced physical contact (e.g. video conferencing, remote camera, etc).

D. OFFICE BASED
- Office based research can resume, ensuring physical distancing is in place in shared office environments.
- Shared workspaces (e.g. hot desk) must have an agreed disinfecting protocol prior to use.
- Strict hygiene and physical distancing must be applied, particularly in lunch rooms or eating areas. Large and long meetings should use video conferencing to support physical distancing.

E. ANIMAL HOUSES
- The number of people in the animal house must be limited, including a roster to avoid cross contamination and to enable access only where essential.
- Restriction on visitors must be in place and consideration given to alternative methods for access (e.g. via remote camera).
- Use of appropriate PPE must be in place.

F. CLINICAL/HUMAN PARTICIPANT
- Participants in a vulnerable risk group or are unwell should be advised not to participate until further notice.
- Clients and staff must maintain physical distancing requirements where possible.
- Where physical distancing is not possible, risk-based strategies must be implemented.
- Cleaning and disinfecting protocols must be developed for communal equipment and areas.
- Minimise the number of participants and consider how interactions may be completed without physical contact (e.g. via video conferencing).

REFERENCES

Australian Academy of Science, *Impact of the pandemic on Australia's research workforce*, 8 May 2020, available at: https://www.science.org.au/covid19/research-workforce

Australian Government, Department of Health, *COVIDSafe app*, 3 June 2020, available at: https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app

NSW Government, *COVID-19 Latest Updates*, available at: https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19

Safe Work Australia, *National COVID-19 safe workplace principles*, 29 April 2020, available at: https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/other-resources/national-covid-19-safe-workplace-principles

Universities Australia, *Principles and Protocols for Reducing the Potential Risk of COVID-19 Transmission at Universities*, June 2020, available at: https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/publication/principles-and-protocols-for-reducing-the-potential-risk-of-covid-19-transmission-at-universities/