Framework for Group Approvals

1. Last academic year, a case arose that exposed an issue with common understandings of the use of protocols for group approval for Undergraduate and Taught Masters ethical approvals. This document seeks to clarify these protocols

2. The purpose of these protocols is that they can be applied to relatively non-intrusive, low risk and low-level research projects undertaken by students of undergraduate and taught Masters programmes

3. These group approvals can cover:
   a. A module, where the range of sorts of projects and methods used are fully articulated and explained
   b. A group of projects within a module (including dissertations), where the range of sorts of projects and methods used are fully articulated and explained
   c. Sequential years by a renewal request annually, where the same substantive structure and methods are being used each year.

4. They are not to be applied to:
   a. Staff research (unless there is a case made for particular sequences of research project with similar structure and methods, in which case there should be prior discussion and approval for such an application given by the Chair of the REC)
   b. PhD and MRes students
   c. Taught Masters and undergraduate research projects that are intrusive or medium or high risk

5. There are constraints to such group approvals:
   a. The names and a brief synopsis of each project has to be provided sufficient to be able to make an assessment of risk and intrusiveness. This enables any projects considered to be of high risk or intrusiveness to be removed and considered for approval separately
   b. The projects must use the range of methods outlined in the way in which they are outlined and accounted for in ethical approval, with no variations beyond the specifications given.
   c. This means that applications can specify a number of methods and their operation that cover ALL projects – and then individual synopsis can briefly state what particular elements of the range of methods they are selecting.
   d. The application can be developed in its constituent parts by the students and/or by tutors who develop the boundaries of the relevant research practice. However, the final application must be the responsibility of the tutor.

e. Tutors should have clarity that they need to sequence applications into the calendar of RECs, giving sufficient time for approval; and for possible referral back to them of projects. This might require applications to be submitted relatively early in the module in order to account for referral back for amendment.

f. Neither Chair's Action nor 'additional REC meetings' should be regarded as an appropriate way of dealing with applications where they are delayed by problems with the project that require referral back. It is the responsibility of tutors to ensure that the application is timely in relation to student assessment and progression, and repeated problems with meeting ethical standards are not the responsibility of the REC. Chair's Actions are at the discretion of the Chair but it should be made clear that they should not be assumed.

6. The Procedure for group applications is:

   a. From 2020-2021 academic year, any undergraduate/taught Master's module that wishes to take advantage of a group approval must submit for the end of September/up to the second week of October one of two documents. These documents can be approved by the Chair – who may ask for changes based on their judgement of the time-frame suggested - and reported to the REC

      i. A brief document that declares that group approval will be sought with a clear timeline for the application in relation to the module assessment dates.

      ii. A brief statement that specifies a continuation of an approved application – with the same structure and methods – where there is the intention that the provision continue

   b. The group application:

      i. Should be made through the standard ethical approval form – which can be slightly amended by the individual RECs – so that it contains all relevant detail

      ii. It should include appendices that:

         1. Give, where relevant, titles and brief synopses of all projects covered by the application – names of student, title of project and brief outline, including what methods are selected from the group approval

         2. Include the relevant advice given to students as to the scope and constraints to working under a group approval

7. Group Approvals: impose a number of duties for the tutors who use them:

      i. They must incorporate into their curriculum such methodological and ethical content in teaching and preparation as enable their students to either design and deliver or deliver the relevant research practice in an ethical fashion. Where modules require students to engage in designing their research practice, this is a matter for the module, but that practice must be constrained by the overarching group application

      ii. Students therefore must be conversant with good practice when they are engaging in research practice

      iii. The tutor has overall responsibility for the group approval being followed by the student group.