Supplementary operational guidance for examining DClinPsy theses – issued in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak

We recognise that during the current situation trainees at various points of their programme may have difficulties with carrying out research related activities such as:

• gaining ethical approval, particularly for those with proposals reliant upon data collection from NHS services.
• data collection, either due to their own circumstances during the government imposed restrictions or due to a lack of available participants.

In circumstances where trainees’ research recruitment is interrupted or disrupted by the current Covid-19 outbreak, we are following national guidance in asking that the focus of vivas, to assess research competency, be appropriately flexible to accommodate those circumstances. There is no reduction in standards of assessment of research competency, but the content of the thesis itself and the work completed may be different to what is usually presented. However, trainees should be able to justify approaches to data handling and analysis due to circumstances outside their control. In addition, they should be able to be clear as what analyses would have been applied and how, had recruitment been optimal.

In such circumstances, the following are examples of options that are currently considered as acceptable:

1. For the empirical paper, restructuring to make the existing data set suitable and sufficient. This could be achieved by limiting the scope of the project by restricting it to a specific subgroup or by limiting the range and scope of coverage. We would expect the paper to acknowledge the limitations on inferences that the restricted approach imposes.

2. Recast the main empirical chapter as a pilot study. Guidance for the requirements of a pilot study are provided in the attached document by Arain, M., Campbell, M. J., Cooper, C. L., & Lancaster, G. A. (2010).

3. If the literature review involves secondary analysis of published data (i.e., meta-ethnography, meta-synthesis or meta-analysis) then this analysis may be recast as the main empirical paper in the thesis. In such cases the thesis would have two empirical papers, (1) a reanalysis of published data (the meta-analysis, etc.) and (2) a second empirical paper with more limited aims and scope (i.e., either 1, 2, 4 or 5 here).

4. If there are severe restrictions on data collection and the literature review is not a meta –analysis but a systematic review, then the main empirical paper to be written with a detailed description of the proposed data analysis that would have been conducted and with interpretation and consequences for the different possible outcomes of the analysis. This should include consideration of any likely limitations of the study (had it been conducted), implications of the expected findings and avenues for future research. Any existing datasets (that may be small/limited) may be analysed as indicative of the true outcomes.

5. Trainees may wish to focus their empirical work on a secondary dataset.

Other appropriate alternatives may also be presented for examination.

If you have any queries about the above, please do discuss these with your internal examiner, or feel free to contact Ian Smith, the Research Director of the DClinPsy (i.smith@lancaster.ac.uk), to discuss.