



NIHR shared commitment to public involvement, participation and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic: *Response from NIHR ARC WM*

Magdalena Skrybant, PPIE Lead

On 16th April 2020, the NIHR confirmed its commitment to Public Involvement, Engagement and Participation (PIE) during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can read the full statement [online](#). The new Director for the Public Voice, [Jeremy Taylor](#), stated:

“Health research should be a shared enterprise with patients, carers and communities. COVID-19 has not changed this. Indeed, the public contribution to research on the pandemic is vital. Let’s renew our commitment to partnership working.”

The Senior Leadership Team for NIHR have developed [eight Commitments](#), which are aligned to the [UK Standards for Public Involvement](#). The Commitments will help ensure that PIE is maintained and progressed during this period.

We at NIHR ARC WM share this commitment to maintain and progress PIE during this period. The examples below demonstrate how we are

doing this at this time. We will continue to work with our public contributors and the wider ARC WM community to shape not only how we maintain meaningful involvement, engagement and participation during these challenging times, but also how we encourage innovation and development.

Now, more than ever, we need to work in partnership with our local communities to ensure that we continue to improve the way health and social care is designed and delivered.

Our Commitment will be available on our ARC WM website and this will be a living document, which we will continue to develop.

If you would like further information about our approach to Public Involvement, Engagement and Participation, please contact our Public Involvement Lead, Magdalena Skrybant (m.t.skrybant@bham.ac.uk).

We will stay informed and keep contributors and colleagues informed – in a timely way – of developments across NIHR research (commissioning and programmes) that relate, or are relevant to, COVID-19 (*UKPI Standards: Communication*).



National COVID-19 research and opportunities

Our Public Involvement Lead, Magdalena Skrybant, has already circulated opportunities for involvement in national COVID-19 initiatives and will continue to share these as they become available through national networks. This includes the NIHR 'Be Part of Research' website, which has been updated in response to COVID-19.

ARC WM COVID-19 research

Through regular communications, public contributors in the ARC WM community will be sent information on how each Theme is working during COVID-19, including information on any COVID-19 projects.

Feedback will be provided to public contributors that are involved in COVID-19 related projects in a timely manner.

We will reach out to emerging COVID-19 and other research funding programmes and activities to offer support and help facilitate effective PIE, including helping to adapt methods and approaches where needed (*UKPI Standards: Support & Learning*).



ARC WM's Public Involvement Lead is the first point of contact for researchers wanting to involve/engage the public in research. The Public Involvement Lead will provide ongoing support to researchers with suggestions for how the public can be involved in shaping the research and discussing mechanisms for involvement, which are informed by discussions with public contributors in the ARC WM network.

Our Public Involvement Lead has sent communications (via email/post) to public contributors, and is also contacting them on an individual basis to identify preferred means of communication during this period, as well as to identify any barriers to involvement, engagement and participation and how these might be overcome.

We will involve the public and patients in planning ahead for how COVID-19 may affect work, to develop contingencies and to manage risks (*UKPI Standards: Governance*).



ARC WM has recently recruited public contributors to be either Community and Public Involvement Contributors (16 Advisors recruited) or members of the wider ARC WM community.

ARC WM's Public Involvement Lead will ensure that there is regular communication with our Contributors and keep them updated with developments in ARC WM.

ARC WM Community and Public involvement contributors have received a letter from ARC WM Director, Richard Lilford. Throughout this period, ARC WM Contributors will receive a virtual induction to ARC WM, as well as each of the Themes, and a range of materials will be made available.

We will be flexible, and co-develop adaptive ways of working, which demonstrate understanding of – and are responsive to – the needs and concerns of individuals, groups and communities whilst respecting Government and institutional guidance (*UKPI Standards: Working Together*).



ARC WM's Public Involvement Lead will continue to work with researchers and public contributors to identify and develop appropriate and practical ways of working in the current situation. This includes using electronic communication, video conferencing platforms and mail or telephone communication.

We will identify and review support needs for adaptive ways of working (e.g. remote or digital) and work together to address these (*UKPI Standards: Inclusive Opportunities; Support & Learning*).



ARC WM's Public Involvement Lead will be responsible for gathering feedback from researchers and public contributors on the methods of communication from ARC WM and different ways of working.

Where relevant, support/guidance may be created and shared on alternative ways of working (e.g. how to use digital technologies). In particular, ARC WM's Public Involvement Lead will ensure that mechanisms for involvement are as inclusive as they can be.

Reporting what works and what doesn't work on the platform curated by the Research Design Service on alternative ways of conducting Public Involvement during COVID-19.

We will share skills, knowledge, ideas and resources freely and in a timely way to support effective PIE, and to help identify and address obstacles across the system (*UKPI Standards: Support & Learning*).



ARC WM's News Blog will serve as a platform for sharing and discussing the latest resources, either those developed by NIHR ARC WM or outside NIHR ARC WM, with the wider ARC WM community. Information will also be made available on the Public Involvement pages of the NIHR ARC WM website.

Any resources created by ARC WM relating to public involvement during COVID-19 will be uploaded to the NIHR Learning for Involvement website.

ARC WM's experiences of working with public contributors during COVID-19 will be uploaded on the shared resource curated by Research Design Service West Midlands, to share learnings/best practice on PIE during COVID-19.

Resources will also be shared through various communities, including the West Midland's regional network for Public Involvement, Public Involvement and Lay Accountability in Research (PILAR), and the network of ARC Public Involvement Leads. Being part of such communities is an effective way for sharing resources/best practice relating to public involvement in COVID-19.

We will ensure that patient and public contributors continue to be recognised and rewarded appropriately for their effort, and adapt how we do this together (*UKPI Standards: Impact; Working Together*).



ARC WM will uphold existing mechanisms for recognising public contributors for their input to research projects. This includes acknowledgements in reports, publications.

Public contributors will continue to be offered an honorarium for involvement and any out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed. Researchers in ARC WM will use the 'Opportunity for Involvement' template to ensure that, prior to undertaking an involvement activity, there is transparency about the nature of the involvement and expected commitment.

ARC WM's Public Involvement Lead will work with host institutions to ensure that, wherever possible, payment will be timely. If there are delays in processing payments, communication will be maintained with public contributors throughout.

We will agree appropriate contact plans (e.g. between public/patient contributors and Leads, or between Leads), to support each other's social contact and emotional wellbeing (*UKPI Standards: Governance; Communication*).



Public Contributors in ARC WM will receive regular communications from ARC WM. ARC WM's Public Contributors are encouraged to provide feedback on the frequency and content of notifications.

In all communications, it is clear that engagement/participation/involvement in NIHR ARC WM activities during this time is completely voluntary and that ARC WM appreciates that contributors may have competing demands on their time. Contributors

will have the opportunity to opt out of receiving communications during this period.

ARC WM's Public Involvement Lead will respond as soon as possible to public contributors and provide signposting to further information/support as appropriate.

Included in communications is information made available through host Universities/NIHR on health and wellbeing during COVID-19.