



RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE OF THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION (EDUREC)

## **GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH AND RESEARCH ETHICS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

### **1. Introduction**

Research practices within the Faculty of Education should be aligned with the North-West University's Research Ethics Policy and as such “the North-West University (NWU) wishes to ensure that all research conducted under its auspices is conducted in accordance with national and international ethics standards and statutory requirements and in line with its Vision and Mission” (NWU, 2018). This is done in acknowledging the three main general principles of *beneficence and non-maleficence*, *distributive justice* and *respect*. In terms of *beneficence and non-maleficence* the risk of harm by research must be addressed and with regard to *respect* the well-being and safety interests of participants are also acknowledged.

To adhere to these principles and the requirements set out by the South African government guidelines are set for research within the Faculty of Education. Take note that these guidelines may change according to changes in national and institutional directions.

### **2. Guidelines for research and research ethics during the COVID-19 pandemic**

2.1 The primary guiding principle is that researchers (in this document this term includes principal investigators, co-researchers, promoters, supervisors and postgraduate students) and participants should adhere to governmental (<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>) and institutional guidelines (<http://www.nwu.ac.za/coronavirus>).

2.2 Ethical clearance procedures and processes are handled through the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) as published online for EduREC (<http://education.nwu.ac.za/research-and-innovation/research-ethics-committee-education>) for low risk studies and NWU-EMELTEN-REC (<http://education.nwu.ac.za/nwu-emelten-rec/about-us>) for medium, high risk and/or studies with vulnerable populations.

2.3 The relevant ethics committee must be informed about any adverse events (which may imply negative or harmful effect physically or mentally on the researchers or participants) or unforeseen incidents related to the research and relevant research ethics.

2.4 Any major changes made to research methodology (such as changing the research design or removing whole interventions) due to the COVID-19 context should be communicated to the relevant scientific committee and a revised ethics application form be submitted to the research ethics committee. Researchers should also take note that extension of ethical clearance (provided for a period of one year) will not be automatically extended and this must be requested from the relevant research ethics committee.

2.5 Face-to-face research is discouraged during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and will only be allowed after written permission from the relevant research entity (or ROE committee) and ethics committee. Such a request must include a motivation for face-to-face interaction explaining why online research would not be feasible for the study, how governmental access and travel restrictions will be adhered to, how safe working conditions in terms of governmental and institutional guidelines will be ensured and what information will be provided to research participants in this regard. Revised informed consent forms and information letters – indicating the risks and measures put in place by the researcher – should be submitted to the research ethics committee.

2.6 Research by means of online contact is recommended. Researchers are reminded to still adhere to approved recruitment and informed consent practices. Changing your research from face-to-face data collection to online data collection will also involve a formal request to the relevant scientific committee and research ethics committee. It is requested that researchers submit revised informed consent forms to the research ethics committee.

2.7 Researchers and research participants in face-to-face contexts should adhere to safe social distancing principles by wearing masks and keeping a distance of more than 1,5m between individuals. In addition, any equipment used in the research process should be thoroughly cleaned and hand sanitizer (with at least 70% alcohol content) should be available during the data collection period. The number of individuals involved in the data collection process should be kept as low as possible.

2.8 Face-to-face research should be avoided with research participants or researchers who are currently positive for COVID-19.

2.9 Researchers who have already obtained permission to access schools and other research sites must reconfirm the status of such permission and also adhere to additional provincial and site-specific regulations that might be in place.

2.10 Any issues or questions must be raised with the relevant chairperson of the ethics committees: EduREC at [jako.olivier@nwu.ac.za](mailto:jako.olivier@nwu.ac.za) and for NWU-EMELTEN-REC at [lukas.meyer@nwu.ac.za](mailto:lukas.meyer@nwu.ac.za).

*EduREC (15/06/2020)*