Research guide for branches

Managing research recruitment enquires

# Introduction

This guide is aimed at Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) branches (Specialist Sections and regions). It will support members of the branch National Executive Committee (NEC) who have responsibility for handling requests for assistance in recruiting occupational therapists as research participants, but may also be useful for requests relating to participation in evaluation and audit projects. It should be read together with the RCOT project ethics and governance policy (PE1-22) and process (PE2-22).

This guide covers:

• Receiving a research recruitment enquiry.

• Processing an enquiry.

RCOT and its branches (Specialist Sections and regions) often receive enquiries about recruiting RCOT members as research participants.

In line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018, and in the best interest of its members, we can’t allow researchers to use any of our, or our branches’, data sources to contact members directly.

However, we realise that branches can provide a valuable way of contacting occupational therapists working in a particular speciality or region of the UK. Although we can’t share membership lists or contact details, branches can highlight research recruitment opportunities or projects on behalf of the researcher to their members by including details of the project in Specialist Section/region e-newsletters. This might include providing a link to an online survey (if appropriate).

Each branch will have their own criteria in terms of who they are able to assist. For example, they may decide to prioritise requests from post-graduate researchers or members of that Specialist Section, or requests that relate to research that addresses a relevant research priority. The decision about who they can help, and the assistance that can be offered, will normally be made by the Research and Development (R&D) Lead for the Specialist Section or Chair of the branch, in liaison with other NEC members as appropriate.

### **Receiving a research recruitment enquiry**

The Specialist Section R&D Lead/Chair or region Chair will normally be the first point of contact within the branch for research enquiries related to participant recruitment. Researchers should be encouraged to contact the RCOT branch at the earliest opportunity, and **before** finalising their recruitment strategy and submitting their proposal for ethics review. This will allow them to determine whether it is realistic to include recruitment via the branch within their proposal.

**Researchers should remember that there are no guarantees of the likely response rate when recruiting occupational therapists via RCOT Specialist Sections or regions**.

### **Processing an enquiry**

When an enquiry is received a standard email reply to send to the researcher will provide consistent information and support to members. A template is suggested in appendix A, together with a form for the researcher to return to the branch (appendix B) providing details about their research and the support requested. There are several important requirements when processing research recruitment requests, including project sponsorship and whether appropriate ethics approval/permissions are in place. Using the templates in appendix A and B will help ensure these aspects are covered.

#### **Ethics approvals and permissions**

Ethics review and approval are fundamental components of research activity. The branch should be satisfied that an appropriate review and approval, as well as the necessary permissions, are in place for the project before agreeing to circulate the information. Therefore, confirmation of the ethics approval/permissions that project has must be received before circulating any project recruitment information to members.

There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to review and approval processes, which can be affected by the characteristics of the research participants (e.g., whether they are people who access health and care services, or employees) and where the research is taking place. Recruitment of people who access services or carers via RCOT branches is not advisable, given the potential complexities associated with ethical requirements and local permissions.

Learners, students or researchers requiring ‘gatekeeper’ permission to support an ethics committee approval submission should be advised that the agreement is only provisional and will be subject to evidence of ethics approval being provided before circulating any information to members. An example email/letter to a research ethics committee regarding the process the branch could use to contact their membership on the researcher’s behalf is provided in appendix C.

#### **Research sponsorship**

Any research being undertaken must have an organisation willing to take on the role of research sponsor; sponsors are usually the organisation employing, funding or supervising the researcher. RCOT branches should ensure that the researcher has provided details of who is taking on this role. The research sponsor takes overall responsibility for the initiation and management of the project, ensuring researchers have the necessary skills and resources, and that arrangements are in place for the appropriate conduct and reporting of the project.

#### **Data protection**

Researchers must not be given access to members’ personal data or contact details. Information can only be circulated via e-newsletters.

#### **Feedback and dissemination**

It is good practice for researchers to develop dissemination plans which include providing information about project outcomes to participants. RCOT branches can choose to make dissemination plans a condition for providing assistance. For example, they might ask the researcher to submit an article for a Specialist Section/region e-newsletter, or to present their results at a branch study day or conference.

**Keeping a log of research support provided**

To keep track of and review research activity supported by the RCOT Specialist Section or region we recommend that a log of the activity is kept, especially if a follow up report for publication in an e-newsletter or study day/conference is required. This can also be used as part of your annual monitoring activity. A template to record activity is suggested in appendix D.

### **Circulating requests to members**

#### **E-newsletters**

If Specialist Sections/branches agree to support the request and put information in their e-newsletter, then timing of the request is important. The researcher must send their information to the Specialist Section/branch by the **5th of the month** as RCOT requires a draft of the newsletter by the 10th of the month and the e-newsletter is circulated by the end of the same month.

There is some flexibility, but if the deadline of the 10th is missed or the newsletter is already full, requests may not be published for another month. We appreciate this is not as flexible as we would like but we have a high volume of requests and must balance these against other newsletter content. Reminders for participation cannot be sent.

#### **Using social media to reach potential participants**

Using social media such as Twitter or Facebook, is a great way to raise awareness of studies and reach potential participants. The researcher can use their own accounts to share information and can tag relevant groups, including RCOT and its branches as any member of the public can.

RCOT branches often receive requests asking them to re-tweet Twitter posts about participant recruitment for studies or projects. If the study has not been reviewed through the branch process, then it should not be re-tweeted via the official RCOT branch twitter handle as the quality or ethical approval for that study has not been checked.

Studies that have been reviewed through the branch process should mention, as part of their ethics approval, that they will be using social media as part of their recruitment strategy. If they do then it is fine to re-tweet, but if not, then these should not be re-tweeted through the official branch Twitter handle. Of course, other members of the specialist section or regional group may pick up the tweet and re-retweet and that is the point of social media.

This is a tricky area, but the RCOT branch should not support a study that hasn’t been through the review process, or if the researcher hasn’t said they will use social media as part of their recruitment strategy in their ethics application.

**4. Checklist for research recruitment enquiries**

The following checklist should be used to help branches ensure that the request meets research governance requirements:

* Is the research topic relevant to the profession and branch membership?
* Does the research question relate to one of the top 10 research priorities for research in the UK?
* If applicable, have RCOT/Specialist Section membership number(s) been provided?
* Is the research sponsor identified?
* How will data protection requirements be adhered to?
* What type of methodology is planned and is it appropriate for your members (e.g. online survey, interviews)?
* What evidence of ethics review/approval and permissions has been provided?
* Is the participant information available?
* How will the project outcomes be disseminated to branch members?

# Appendix A – research support request email template

## Please use RCOT SS/branch header template

Dear
Thank you for your enquiry regarding accessing members of RCOT Specialist Section [name] to invite them to participate in your research. With respect to the Data Protection Act and General Data Processing Regulations, names and contact details of our members cannot be given out or disclosed in anyway and we are unable to email members directly. However, potential participants may be approached via our RCOT- [Name] monthly e-newsletter as follows:

1. By asking members to contact the project lead or yourself directly, if interested in contributing to the research. The researcher or project lead will be responsible for drafting the text.
2. A link to an online survey can be included in the e-newsletter with the relevant information. Similarly, the researcher/project lead will be responsible for drafting the text.

**What to do next?**

* To help you with your request, please could you return the attached **Research Support request** **form**, along with a copy of your research proposal/project brief, participant information sheet, consent form and evidence of the appropriate ethical approval for our consideration. Please make clear why your request is relevance to our members.
* [**delete if N/A**] If you do not have ethical approval yet and are requesting a letter of support from RCOT [name] for an ethics committee application, please still complete the attached form and provide the protocol, participant information sheet and consent form.
* If we accept the request, I will then send you an **article submission template** to complete the text you want in the newsletter. We may edit your text depending on available space in the newsletter.

**Timing**

We require your information at the **start of the month** as RCOT requires a draft of the newsletter by the 10th of the month and it is circulated in the third week of the same month. If you send me your request by the fifth it should go out by end of the same month. There is some flexibility, but if we miss the deadline of the 10th or the newsletter is already full, your request will not be published for another month. We appreciate this is not as flexible as we would like but we have a high volume of requests and must balance these against other newsletter content.

**Follow up**

If we support your request, you are required to provide a written summary of the outcome of your research for our newsletter and implications for clinical practice. This can be formal/academic or informal, including reflections on your research journey. We can discuss when appropriate and I am happy to look at a draft. If you are a student/learner please provide an alternative email if your university account will have expired, by the time you have completed your research.

If you have further queries, please don’t hesitate to ask.

With best wishes, Name, R&D Lead, RCOT Specialist Section [name].

# Appendix B

### Request to circulate research/project information to RCOT Specialist Section/region - [insert name] membership

|  |
| --- |
| Researcher’s name |
| Member of: [Insert name of RCOT Specialist Section/region] | YesPlease provide membership number: | No |
| Contact details Telephone:Email: |
| Title of study: |
| Name of research sponsor (usually a trust, employer, university): |
| Ethics approval obtained | Yes Please provide reference number, name of reviewing body and attach evidence of approval: | No Please state why: |
| Research protocol/project brief | Please attach a copy |
| Participant information sheet (if appropriate) | Please attach a copy |
| Signature: (or digital signature and attach to email)Date:  |

Please return to: (Insert name, NEC designation, RCOT SS/region name and return email address).

# Appendix C

## Example email/letter RCOT branch support for ethical approval purposes

RCOT branch logo here

[NHS] Research Ethics Committee

Insert: Your address

Insert: REC address

[Date]

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am the [INSERT name, NEC designation, RCOT SS/region name]. We often receive requests from researchers asking that we contact our membership to invite them to participate in research studies. As a [Specialist Section/region], we are very keen to support research activity, and have received a recent request from [insert name of researcher] for the [insert name of study/reference if applicable].

For your information, researchers normally make an initial enquiry directly to me, or via RCOT and the following criteria will be assessed:

• The research proposal is of good quality and has relevance to our membership.

• The study has received favourable research ethical approval and this evidence (the approval letter/email/ethical approval number) is made available.

If these criteria are met, we would normally support an application that we receive. An invitation to participate is distributed to our members via our e-newsletter on the researcher’s behalf. We currently have approximately [insert number] members, but there can be a slight fluctuation in numbers throughout the year.

This letter supports permission to be put in contact with our membership in principle, subject to ethical approval and evidence of this approval being provided to me.

Yours faithfully,

Signature

[INSERT name, NEC designation, RCOT SS/region name]

# Appendix D

**Template RCOT Specialist Section/region research request log**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Project number | Name | Contact | Member Yes/No If yes, insert number | Project title | Date request rcvd | Date email sent to researcher | Date request form rcvd | Research/ project protocol attached? Y/N | Participant info sheet rcvd? Y/N/NA | Evidence of ethical approval provided. Y/N or N/A | Date confirmation of support sent to researcher | Date report rcvd |
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