Student research: can recent research governance developments help?

Context

- It is well documented that research capacity within the therapy professions is underdeveloped and that opportunities to engage in research training must be therefore be created and seized (Department of Health 1994, Ilott and Bury 2002, Healey and Jenkins 2009).

- Over the last decade the development of bureaucratic research governance procedures has had a negative impact on research education and training; largely due to the difficulties associated with gaining the necessary permissions and approvals to conduct research within tight academic timeframes (Corr et al 2006).

- Recent research governance developments have aimed to correct this and make the research process more accessible (Pettican and Bostock 2009).

These developments are presented and analysed below for their potential to enable pre-registration student research:

Anna Pettican – Lecturer in Occupational Therapy, University of Essex; and member of the South London Research Ethics Committee (1) National Research Ethics Service – arpett@essex.ac.uk

Professor Susan Corr – Professor of Occupational Science, the University of Northampton – Susan.Corr@northampton.ac.uk

Developments

- The launch of the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) – a single system for applying for the multiple permissions and approvals that are required when undertaking research within the NHS. The IRAS has replaced previous online methods of applying for ethics approval and now enables applications to a range of regulatory authorities.

- Second edition of the Governance Arrangements for Research Ethics Committees (GAfREC) – publication now imminent. The consultation edition proposed that certain types of study will no longer require approval from an NHS ethics committee (for example, if the only NHS connection in the proposed study is that it involves NHS staff, then under the proposed new arrangements the researcher may only have to gain approval from their University ethics committee). However, details and practicalities are still to be finalised in the second edition publication.

- Proportional ethics review and the 'fast-track' screening pilot – for research proposals that contain 'no material ethical issues'. Time from submission to decision is likely to be 14 days, as opposed to the usual 35 days when review by a full ethics committee is necessary. Results of a current South London and Surrey pilot will ultimately determine how, when and where the 'fast-track' process is rolled out in the future.

Assisting research

- Students and supervisors can learn to use the IRAS by completing the online training module, which is available at: www.myresearchproject.org.uk. Completion of initial 'filter questions' allows only information necessary for your specific proposed study to be entered into the IRAS. Multiple forms are then populated with all the necessary information so that the researcher is only required to enter information once.

= Streamlined research application process.

- Students and supervisors must stay abreast of research governance developments, in particular the imminent publication of the second edition of the GAfREC and the implications of its contents. Changes to the types of study that require NHS ethics review could enable the realistic completion of empirical research studies within academic timeframes. Research supervisors must also become familiar with the proportional review framework, in order to be able to supervise students in developing proposals that are suitable for 'fast-track' proportional review.

= Project timescales reduced and therefore enabling empirical research studies to be completed within defined academic timeframes

Conclusion

- We must be cognisant that there is a careful balance to be struck between increasing the efficiency and accessibility of research procedures, and maintaining the safety and quality of the research we undertake.

- Research is integral to the continuing development of occupational therapy, and staying abreast of research governance developments will enable us to effectively utilise the available resources and conduct high quality research more smoothly (Pettican and Bostock 2009).

References:

Corr S, Beaulieu K, Griffiths S (2006) Research governance, not research 'smotherence'. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation,* 13(2), 56.

Department of Health (1994) *Research and development in occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech and language therapy: a position statement.* London: DH.

Healey M, Jenkins A (2009) *Developing undergraduate research and inquiry.* York: The Higher Education Academy.

Ilott I, Bury T (2002) Research capacity: a challenge for the therapy professions. *Physiotherapy,* 88(4), 194-200.

Pettican A, Bostock J (2009) UK research governance developments: opportunities for therapy research? *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation,* 16(5), 289-295.

Note: The work contained within this poster did not require research ethics approval.