

Mental Health Research Network **3A's Committee (Adoption Allocation and Advisory)** **The Criterion of User Involvement**

This document sets out what the NIHR MHRN 3A's Committee mean by the criterion of user involvement in the adoption of a study onto the network.

There are several ways users can be involved:

1. They may have minimal consultation rights over a project. This may be through individuals or user organisations.
2. They may have more substantial consultation rights. Again, this may be through individuals or user organisations and proposers should explain details of the consultation, such as whether consultees have access to supporting documentation.
3. As well as being involved at the proposal preparation stage, service users may be may be involved as Steering Group Members. It is preferable that Steering Group members are part of the design phase of a project.
4. As well as 2 and 3 above, service users be employed as researchers in a project. If this is the case it must be made clear in the application and service users involved in a project must, of course, be paid the going rate for the job.

The 3A's Committee would like to see project applications move from 1 to 4 but realise this may be difficult in the short term. However, the aim should be to move from 1 to 4 in the longer term.

What does not constitute user involvement?

1. The inclusion of participants as merely 'subjects' in a project does not constitute user involvement.

Focus Groups

Running focus groups with consumers is an ambiguous area as sometimes these groups treat their participants as 'subjects' and sometimes the groups constitute the first level of consultation above. The 3A's Committee takes the view that focus groups are admissible as meeting the criterion of user involvement only when they constitute true consultation. For example, members of focus groups advising on a study should have had the opportunity to read the proposal or a shortened version of it and other supporting documentation (e.g. pilot schedules). Applications should make clear whether this has been done. If focus groups are convened only to gather opinion in a general sense then this will not count as user involvement.

Payment

The MHRN commissioned a comprehensive policy to cover payments for those involved in the work of the MHRN and research in general.

The policy is in three parts

Part A: covers benefit conditions and systems around paid and voluntary involvement.

Part B: is the model payment policy for the NIHR MHRN Hubs

Part C: service user and carer participation; helpful benefit rules and benefit pitfalls to avoid.

All documents can be accessed via the [MHRN website](#).

INVOLVE, the NIHR user arm, has recently published guidance on payments to service users who are involved in research. It is available at:

<http://www.invo.org.uk/pdfs/PaymentGuideWEB240510.pdf>

It is strongly recommended that researchers consult these documents.

Sometimes there are problems with welfare benefits restrictions. There is a specialist Citizens Advice Bureau in Milton Keynes that can advise on this. The MHRN has a subscription to the helpline which can be accessed via the local MHRN or via the MHRN Coordinating Centre via mhrnppi@kcl.ac.uk

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User Member of the '3As' Committee, 14th July, 2010