

Email to all PhD/EngD students

Subject: Support to complete your degree

Dear Doctoral Student,

I hope you are well and managing to progress your research. I know that the last few months since March have been tough. Everyone has had to adjust their way of working to varying degrees and I suspect that further adjustments may be needed as we go into the New Year. We are pleased that much of the University's research is now open, albeit under the constraints of social distancing and other measures. My purpose in writing to you today is multi-fold.

Firstly, I would like to thank those of you who took the time to complete the "Pulse" survey. We are currently examining the responses. I am pleased, on the one hand, that the vast majority of you are receiving good support from your supervisory teams. I encourage those who are not to raise the issues with your PGR advisors or Graduate School. On the other hand, the University is very concerned that only half of you feel you have adequate access to social interaction. While we should not be too surprised by this during the constraints of the pandemic, we have been encouraging Schools, Deaneries and Institutes to facilitate virtual social gathering wherever possible.

Secondly, I would like to remind you that if you are facing financial hardship, you can apply to our hardship fund (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-funding/hardship-funding/postgraduate-research>). This is ring-fenced money from the Scottish Funding Council for use by research students in financial need, for example, if you are self-funded and your financial situation has changed due to the pandemic or if you had a scholarship and it has now come to an end and you have run out of money.

Thirdly, should you have a scholarship then we have provided extensions for up to six months for those in their final year either funded by the Scottish Funding Council or from other external sources such as UK Research and Innovation Councils (UKRI). For those in earlier years who have been seriously affected by the pandemic, we are currently locating further funds to allow us to offer support to complete your studies. We must be realistic here and say that it is unlikely we can support all requests to extend funding due to time lost. We shall target the money available to those who are least able to adapt, with particular attention to those with disabilities, caring needs, long-term illnesses or who are neurodivergent. For others, we expect that the earlier you are in your study the more feasible it will be to make adjustments. For those who have UKRI scholarships, you will know from the letter UKRI sent you on 11th November that this is the model they are asking institutions to adopt.

Fourthly, for those of you with UKRI scholarships, we will be writing to you separately in a few weeks with the details of the process to apply for extensions under the new COVID-19 Phase 2 funding policy. This is for students who started before 1st March 2020 and whose funding ends after 1st April 2021. We are proposing to UKRI that the process should be equitable across the entire University with a central panel making consistent decisions. We expect the process to take place in January/February with decisions available in March, but we will provide details of the timeframe when we contact you directly.

Irrespective of further extension support, please remember that those who fall sick during studies (including with mental health problems) may be entitled to up to 13 weeks paid leave (effectively an extension) as normal under the terms and conditions of awards. If you have a disability, you can

access the Disabled Student Allowance and you should contact the Student Disability Service (disability-service@ed.ac.uk) to discuss new or revised needs.

Finally, you will have received an email from Gavin Douglas concerning rapid COVID-19 testing for all students who intend to travel within the UK for the winter break. This applies to research students and you are invited to take such tests to minimise the risk of spreading the virus to your friends, family and wider community when you travel home for the winter break.

With best wishes,

Antony Maciocia

Dean of Postgraduate Research

On behalf of the University of Edinburgh Doctoral College

<https://ue.sharepoint.com/sites/DoctoralCollege>

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/students/welcome-back/continuing-your-studies/postgraduate-research-programmes>