



## COLLEGE OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

### UPDATE ON IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREES

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<i>Main updates in this version</i>	n/a

Dear All,

As you know, the current viral pandemic has exerted extreme pressure on all affected countries, including the University sector, and the University of Edinburgh's response to this has been publicised, is being kept under review, and is evolving where required. There are regular updates to the staff and student FAQs and we strongly recommend you visit the site frequently.

**University Covid-19 Update webpage:** <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19>

This message for supervisors in CSE is supplementary to such University and Government guidance and relates specifically to the conduct of postgraduate research degrees within the College Science and Engineering.

**Please note the CSE College Office staff can be contacted via email at [pgrcse@ed.ac.uk](mailto:pgrcse@ed.ac.uk) for assistance on any PGR matter relating to current student progress.**

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### RECRUITMENT & ADMISSIONS

Many doctoral training programmes and other postgraduate degrees are in the process of recruitment at present. Adaptations to normal procedures demanded by the pandemic are generic to all student recruitment efforts, and are summarised at this web link: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19/prospective-students>

### SUPERVISION

Until further notice, all supervisory meetings have to take place remotely. Supervisors and students are asked to draw up plans for ongoing, on-line supervision.

### RESEARCH

Nearly all research degrees will be subject to some disruption by Covid-19 illness itself and/or by mitigation measures put in place by Government and University. Some of these are covered by existing guidance, while for some issues, extraordinary measures will be required.

NB: Annual progression is covered under 'Assessment' section below.

## Supporting students whose research progress is impacted

### **Sickness leave, for example due to acute viral infection**

This is covered by the usual rules and College procedures in place for managing absences and *Authorised Interruptions of Study (AIS)*. Given the current circumstances, the College Office may need to consider approval of retrospective Authorised Interruptions of Study where this is appropriate.

If a student is a Tier 4 visa holder and will be interrupting their studies for over 60 days due to the Covid-19 outbreak, there should be no impact to their Tier 4 visa at this time. To ensure the University is aware of a student's circumstances, they must email the Student Immigration Service ([studentimmigration@ed.ac.uk](mailto:studentimmigration@ed.ac.uk)) and provide the dates and details of their Authorised Interruption of Study.

### **Time off work due to self-isolation or disruption of research progress by closure of facilities**

Self-isolation mandated by current guidance may lead to significant time off work even in the absence of acute sickness. Closure of research facilities may have a similar impact on research progress. For some, significant remote scholarly activity related to the postgraduate degree being studied will be possible, for example in the form of thesis or paper writing, and for such students, progress may not be greatly impaired. For others, however, this will impede research progress and will potentially impede completion of the research phase of the degree. This has implications for possible extension requests, with attendant issues around funding to cover such extensions. It is acknowledged that new policy will have to be developed to permit special consideration in such cases.

Whereas AIS requests must be submitted at the time of the interruption, requests to extend the period of study should not be submitted until 2-3 months prior to the student's submission date. However, there should be a record kept by the student of current issues impacting progress that can be then be provided as evidence for any future extension requests.

Where a student is unable to continue their research studies at all, AIS is more appropriate.

### **UKRI statement regarding impact on UKRI research**

This is available at: <https://www.ukri.org/news/coronavirus-impact-on-ukri-supported-research/>  
See 'Training Grants/Students' section.

### **Tier 4 Visa holders**

Please continue to record the engagement of Tier 4 visa holders using EUCLID as you would do normally. [The Student Immigration Service](#) will be able to provide the most up-to-date advice and guidance relating to absences directly linked to Covid-19 and the impact on visas so please do encourage students to contact this team if they are at all concerned.

### **Studying away from Edinburgh (Leave of Absence)**

Normally, students need to complete a request for a formal Leave of Absence when studying away from Edinburgh. In current circumstances, there is no University requirement to record or approve a formal Leave of Absence. Students must, however, inform supervisors (or Graduate School in supervisor's absence) of their location if not in Edinburgh.

## ASSESSMENTS

### Annual progression reviews

It is important that such reviews continue to occur in a timely fashion (taking into account any period of AIS). Whilst reviews cannot be undertaken in person for the time being, they may take place via video link.

Written material can be reviewed by the assessment panel remotely and signed off on EUCLID.

NB: Best practice is for the review panel to include an individual who is not part of the supervisory team (Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students, 3.1), however, this is not mandatory.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/copsupervisorsresearchstudents.pdf>

### Submission of Thesis

For the time being, all thesis submissions (examination copy and final award) should only be made electronically. Students should not send in any printed versions.

### Final oral examination

Given current uncertainty, the postponement of oral/viva examinations, or delay in their organisation, may be the best strategy. However, current policy allows for oral examinations by video link. This option should now be considered if all parties are in agreement. Please refer to the Postgraduate Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study <http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/> and the guidance for conducting oral examinations by video link [https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/videolinked\\_phd\\_oral.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/videolinked_phd_oral.pdf). The preferred way to host a remote viva is via video-conferencing. Please note the student and examiners must be in full agreement for this method of examination. If there is any concern about conducting a viva in this way then there may be no alternative but to postpone the examination. Please contact Graduate School Administrators for additional guidance where a remote viva is planned.

## GRADUATION

Graduation ceremonies in Summer 2020 will not be running. We currently expect that degree certificates for students entitled to graduate this summer will be printed and mailed by the end of July 2020, with graduates being offered a series of options:

- to defer to an in-person ceremony in Winter 2020 or Summer 2021
- to attend a virtual graduation
- to receive their certificate and not attend a ceremony

If students have any immediate concerns regarding graduation, they should contact [infopoint@ed.ac.uk](mailto:infopoint@ed.ac.uk)

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We know that many students will be very anxious about the effects of isolation and other impacts. These are matters still under discussion at a university, and indeed sector-wide level. We can assure colleagues that we will make sure that the particular needs of CSE students are considered in these discussions. We will issue updates as the situation develops.

All of us in the College wish you all well at this time of anxiety and uncertainty.

Dr Antony Maciocia  
Dean of Postgraduate Research, CSE