

COVID-19 and post-graduate research students

Dear Postgraduate Research Student,

First, I hope you are remaining safe and well. I am very sorry that the COVID-19 pandemic means that you have to work remotely from home. And I know that some of you will also have caring responsibilities or other circumstances that limit your ability to carry out research. The University, through your supervisors, School and College, is trying our very best to ensure you manage this difficult time and that your studies progress as efficiently as possible during this 'once in a century' crisis.

Specifically, I wanted to reassure you that we are working hard to minimise the impact of the enforced temporary closure of University buildings, including laboratories and libraries, upon your degree. Despite this, we know that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused dislocations to some research projects and research degrees.

I am sure that you are now getting used to your supervisory and other meetings taking place by remote links. I am very grateful to all of you for accommodating the changes to your education and research driven by these global events. These are new approaches but seem to be working pretty well in many settings. The University has acquired extra bandwidth and new technologies to support us all in remote working. Please do check in regularly with your supervisors, other academic and technical colleagues and fellow students. It is good to keep in close contact, for your educational needs and your wellbeing.

We want to help you complete your degrees as close to your previous timing as possible. And we can reassure you that we will maintain the high standard of an Edinburgh research degree that you have been working towards so diligently. We also recognise that some lack of access to material doesn't lower the quality of a research degree.

For those of you at the end of your research, this period of home working may be a good opportunity to write up your thesis, plus any papers and other outputs. For those of you at the start of your studies, COVID-19 disruption may necessitate adjusting your project objectives to the conditions under which we all now live. That is fine, adjusting to changing circumstances is part of research. Your supervisors will help you through this. It is training in problem solving and teamwork.

If you are mid-way through your research it may be rational to adjust your work plan, using this time of remote working to analyse results, prepare papers and reports, compile literature reviews, write that all important synthesis, or draft parts of your thesis. Discuss this with your supervisors please. They are there to support you. We will adjust our deadlines to ensure that COVID-19 delays are not detrimental to your progression, and will delay assessments where necessary without penalty.

Those of you with caring responsibilities, or who are significantly ill with COVID-19, may be unable to spend any time on your studies. There may also be others who, after discussion with your supervisors, cannot continue research for more than a few weeks. In these cases, it would be sensible to interrupt your studies for a period.

You may well have concerns about how you will finish your programme if you have funding only for a fixed period. We are taking the following actions to alleviate this situation.

- 1) Keep research going where possible.** This includes you and your supervisors making adjustments to your project, where feasible, to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.
- 2) However, if your research is significantly affected, then please use extension or interruption as the means for managing impacts on progression (temporary suspension of studies may affect stipends).** We will **offer an unfunded interruption or extension, as appropriate, to all affected PhD, MPhil and MScR students** to match the duration of closure of the university. This does not mean you must use this facility, but it is there in case you need it. An extension may have implications for your funding but see note 5 below for what we are doing to mitigate this. Please request extensions/interruptions through your College PGR committee. For those with Tier 4 visas, you should be able to interrupt for longer than 60 days in the current circumstances without the withdrawal of your CAS, however please

check your situation first with the University's [Student Immigration Service](#).

- 3) We will **waive continuation and matriculation fees while the university is shut** for those that require this.
- 4) With other universities **we are encouraging research funders to extend studentships** to enable degrees and projects to complete where home working causes delays. UKRI now offers some support for extensions (<https://www.ukri.org/news/coronavirus-impact-on-ukri-supported-research/>). For those of you on multi-university CDTs we need to agree a common process with partner universities. Work to achieve this is underway.
- 5) For those of you affected by the disruption, **we will develop needs-based and equitable criteria to determine appropriately targeted underwriting of your stipend for up to the duration of the COVID-19 shut down**. Specifically, we will either:
 - a) Negotiate with funders to provide additional stipends for students interrupting/extending during this COVID-19 closure period.
 - b) On a needs-basis, pay for extension of stipends which are required in the next few weeks for students with end dates during the disrupted period.
 - c) offer access to mitigation funds, on a case-by-case basis, to self-funded and school-funded students.

We will be in touch again with information about how this will operate.

Our research students are a key part of Edinburgh's community, discovering knowledge to make the world a better place. The University will support you to continue to achieve your goals through this challenging time.

Kind regards

Jonathan Seckl

Senior Vice Principal