

Guidance and Regulations governing the COVID-19 Doctoral Research Student Funding Extension Scheme

1. Introduction

The University has agreed to provide a significant funding package to allow doctoral research students who meet the criteria below to apply for COVID-19 related funding extensions for the sole purpose of enabling the timely submission of the doctoral thesis.

This scheme replaces any previously announced COVID-19 related extension policy.

If the progress of a research project has been impacted by COVID-19 and doctoral research students wish to apply for an extension to funding under this scheme, they should complete an [application form](#) in consultation with their supervisor.

The funding available for extensions will depend on:

- the type of existing funding that a doctoral student is already in receipt of (see categories below);
- when that funding (or for one category, the candidature) ends;
- the validity of the COVID-19 related case that is made.

Students in receipt of a mixture of funding would have each funding stream treated as in the classification below. Examples of how this would apply are supplied in Appendix A.

In order to distribute the funding most effectively, and to ensure we consider the COVID-19 impact on an individual, we will be considering each case of a funding extension on its own merits, testing the exclusively COVID-19 related underpinning reasons and assessing the need for the extension.

2. Eligibility

Currently applications for funding extensions are only open to students on doctoral programmes by research, whose funding ends in the 'eligibility window' of 1st March 2020 to 31st March 2021 (inclusively), who have not yet submitted their thesis, and who fall into the categories below. In what follows is termed the 'eligibility window'.

The policy will be reviewed by the University at a later date to consider doctoral research students whose funding (or relevant candidature) ends on or after 1st April 2021.

Funding Streams: The following is a broad list of the funding extensions streams that are open for students whose funding ends within the eligibility window above.

If a student wishes to seek a COVID-19 related extension, but is not sure which stream they fall into, they should submit an application anyway using the form provided. This will trigger a Faculty evaluation of the eligibility, funding streams and validity of the case.

Examples of how the scheme applies to doctoral students in receipt of a mixture of funding streams are supplied in Appendix A.

Funded by UKRI: Doctoral research students funded by a UKRI training grant should have already been contacted by their CDT/DTP or Faculty Graduate School. Such students do not need to make a

further application if their funding ends between 1st March 2020 and 31 March 2021. If a student think that they are receiving funding from UKRI but have not been contacted, they should email the relevant Faculty Graduate School.

Please note:

- UKRI students who have already applied for the UKRI component of a funded extension, should be informed if they have been successful as soon possible by their Faculty Graduate School or their CDT/DTP team.
- UKRI are undertaking a review of their policy for doctoral students they fund and whose funding finishes on, or after, 1st April 2021. Further information on any UKRI policy governing funding extensions for that cohort will be announced by them once the review is complete.

Funded by the University of Southampton: Doctoral research students in receipt of funding from the University of Southampton which ends in the eligibility window and whose thesis submission date can be demonstrated to have been significantly impacted by COVID-19, may apply for up to six months of funding extensions for payment of fees and stipend.

Externally funded, where the student receives their fees and/or stipend via the University of Southampton: Doctoral research students in receipt of funding which ends in the eligibility window and whose thesis submission date can be demonstrated to have been significantly impacted by COVID-19, may apply for up to six months of funding extensions for fees and stipend. The University of Southampton will then contact the external funder on behalf of the student to ascertain if they are prepared to fund the extension.

Please note:

- This may require sharing information relating to the case with the external funder.
- As the University does not have control over the external funder's decision, if the external funder is not able to extend their funding, any extension period granted may be shorter than that requested, or if they are the sole funder, may not be granted at all.

Self-funded students (including students who directly receive funding from external bodies but NOT via the University of Southampton): Self-funded doctoral research students whose funding or candidature ends within the eligibility window and whose thesis submission date can be demonstrated to have been significantly impacted by COVID-19, may apply for a waiver of tuition fees for up to six months. If these students require additional funding for living costs, they may make an application to the hardship fund.

Students whose funding ended before 1st March 2020, who are now self funding and not in nominal registration, may apply as self funded students.

Students in Nominal Registration: In transferring to nominal registration, under University Calendar Regulations, it has been certified that all research and data collection have been completed, and that they have produced a significant portion of the draft thesis. Therefore, students in nominal registration are not eligible to apply for a funding extension as part of this scheme. They can apply for a candidature extension if their progress has been delayed due to the COVID-19 situation, under normal University process.

3. Mitigation

Before making an application, all doctoral research students and supervisory teams should discuss the progression and scope of their projects in an ongoing COVID-19 situation. All possible avenues for repurposing the project with an aim to submitting within the remaining period of funding should be considered, and relevant mitigating action taken.

In having that discussion, the attention of students and supervisors is drawn to paragraph 5 of the University Code of Practice in respect of the minimum requirements for the award of a doctoral degree.

4. Impact Log

All doctoral research students, however funded and irrespective of end-date of funding or candidature, should now maintain a COVID-19 impact log. Doctoral research students must use the template spreadsheet provided.

Students applying for an extension should attach and upload their COVID-19 impact log to the application form.

The impact log should contain details of the COVID-19 impact on the progression of the project and any mitigation processes that have been carried out. It should cover the period from 1st March 2020, and should be regularly maintained by students and their supervisory teams.

The impact log must demonstrate:

- why the extension is needed, and how it was exclusively related to COVID-19;
- that the COVID-19 related impact occurred within the student's funded period, or in the case of self-funding students, their candidature period;
- why no alternative, viable mitigation to submit the thesis without the need for an extension was possible;
- that the work to be undertaken during the funded extension is exclusively related to the research project (see invalid reasons below).

The supervisory team must be able to certify the compliance of the application with these criteria on contact by the relevant Faculty. Supporting documentation, where available, may also be uploaded.

The Impact Log may also be uploaded to PGR Tracker and/or produced for consideration as part of evidence submitted for standard Progression Reviews.

5. Timing of Application

Applications for funding extensions should only be submitted within three months of the end of the existing funding period (which may be different from the end of candidature). This is to ensure that the extension is appropriate to an individual's circumstances when considered. Self-funding students may only submit an application within three months of their end of candidature.

If a deadline is more than three months away from the end of funding, it will not be possible to fully assess how critical the COVID-19 impact has been upon the research and what remaining work may be needed to complete the research to a doctoral standard.

6. Extension Details

6.1. Funding Extension Coverage

Any funding extensions granted will be confined to fees and stipends. Extensions for RTSG, project costs, conference attendance and travel costs are not covered. If required, such funding would need to be sourced on a case by case basis from a relevant funder (excluding UKRI who have not permitted such extensions).

6.2. Level of Funding Extension

The level of any stipend that a student paid during their doctoral studies should not change during the funding extension. If a co-funder is unable to provide funds for the extension, this may impact the length of the extension that is available, or whether any extension may be granted at all

Any extensions to fees will be at the level of the fees in place at the time of the end of the original funding period. Fee waivers may not be spread over a longer period, nor increased in value, e.g., by a change between full or part-time registration.

In the event of such a shortfall in the funding for the extension, there must be no reduction in the level of fees or stipend to lengthen the extension.

6.3. Length of Funding Extension

Applications for this scheme may be for up to six months, but should only be made for the actual time required to complete research project to the level required and submit a thesis capable of meeting the [QAA minimum requirements for a doctoral degree](#).

When evaluating the extra period of time that may be required, the emphasis should be on the **quality** of the thesis, **rather than the quantity** of material that

- it might contain;
- it might have originally been planned to contain;
- it might be desired to contain.

Applications will be evaluated by Faculties based on the individual circumstances of the case. The duration of any funding extension granted may be the same as that applied for, it may be shorter, or the application may be declined.

Applications for funding extensions longer than six months will not be considered.

The funding of any extension will only start once the initial funding has ended. In the case of self-funding students, this will be when their maximum candidature has ended.

Students who received a three-month fee waiver under the previous COVID-19 PGR extension scheme may apply to this current scheme, but any fee waiver granted under this scheme will be capped at three months.

Payments will cease at the end of the funding extension, or within the next month following the submission of the thesis, whichever is the sooner.

Whilst waiting for a response from a co-funder, the University may grant a shorter period of funding extension than was applied for. The duration of the extension may be amended once the decision of the co-funder is known.

If any of the external funders decline to fund the extension, any funding granted may be for a shorter period than that which was applied for. Where no external funder is able to provide additional funds, this may mean that no funding extension may be provided.

6.4. Extensions to the Extensions

Only one application per doctoral research student is permitted. Once the period of any funding extension ends, any fee waivers and/or stipend payments will cease. No further funding extensions to the approved funding extension will be permitted.

If a funding extension finishes before the end of maximum candidature and the thesis is still not submitted, the normal tariff of fees will apply and be chargeable for the remainder of candidature. This applies regardless of whether the candidature has not been extended, has been previously extended, has been extended as part of this or another scheme, or is subsequently extended at or after the funding extension has ended.

6.5. Extensions to Candidature

Depending on the relative end dates of funding and of maximum candidature, if a funding extension is granted, an extension to candidature may, or may not be required.

An application for an extension of candidature may be triggered simultaneously as part of this funding extension application.

6.6. Periods in Suspension

Before making an application for an extension, students should consider whether their circumstances are such that a suspension might be more appropriate. During a period of suspension, fees are no longer payable and any stipend payments stop. The candidature clock stops, so that a student may be free to undertake or address responsibilities arising from their specific situation, or to earn income to support later studies. Students should discuss the merits of this with their supervisory team or other relevant staff member.

6.7. Tier 4 Visas

Students studying on a Visa should discuss the implications of any funding extension with the UK VISAS Team.

7. Submitting an Application

A student wishing to apply for a funding extension should undertake the following.

- Check their eligibility criteria.
- Discuss the extension with their supervisory team. If a student does not wish to disclose sensitive personal issues to their supervisor, they should discuss their case with their Doctoral Programme Director, PGR Senior Tutor, or other relevant staff member, who may be able to replace the role of the supervisor in supporting the application.
- Complete the online application form, no more than three months before the end of their funding, or by the end of the eligibility window, whichever is the earlier. For self-funding students this should be within three months of the end of their maximum candidature.
- Students should answer all the required questions, and upload the Impact Log and evidence.
- Respond to any further requests for information

7.1. Completing the Application

When completing their application, student should state what has been achieved since 1st March 2020 and during the period of lockdown (e.g. thesis writing, data analysis, paper writing etc.) as well as the disruptions they may have had to their research.

The supporting case must include details of the reasons for the extension to the funding request. A non-exhaustive list of eligible (and ineligible) reasons for an extension is provided below.

The case should make clear how the student and/or their research have been impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The case should include a statement referring to any correspondence that has taken place with a(n external) funder or a link to information that a funder may have publicly published regarding its ability to provide a funding extension.

Applications that do not make the case that the delay has been exclusively due to a COVID-19 related impact will be rejected.

All text entries should be concise and no more than 2000 characters.

7.2. Evidence

Students should provide as much evidence to support their application as they can. The University is aware that during lockdown it may not have been possible to gather the level of evidence that may normally be required, and will take this into account. However, applications unsupported by any evidence (e.g., the Impact Log) will be rejected. The University may review the level of evidence required as the pandemic situation evolves.

7.3. Assessment of extension request

The funding request will be evaluated against the evidence supplied in the application form, i.e. the COVID-19 related case made, the impact log and any other evidence supplied.

The University may request additional information or evidence from the student, supervisory team, or other relevant parties.

7.4. Valid reasons for extension:

The following is a non-exhaustive list of circumstances relating to extension requests. The list may be altered during the lifetime of the scheme without notice.

The application form asks applicants to select from the following list and then to expand with a narrative explanation on each that apply.

- You or someone in your household became ill with COVID-19.
- An exclusively COVID-19-related impact on your supervisory team, such as illness, that has affected your supervision or progress of either research or writing.
- Redeployment to work on COVID-19 related research or other action but only where the redeployment time could not be accommodated under other policies, such as suspension.
- Interruption of data collection due to closure of an experimental laboratory.
- Interruption of data collection due to cancellation/postponement of fieldwork.
- Postponement of critical activities where alternatives are not available, and impact cannot be mitigated.

- Lack of access to physical academic resources (texts, equipment etc.) essential to the progression of the project.
- Increased caring responsibilities exclusively as a result of COVID-19.
- Specific impact resulting from remote working as a result of a disability or being at higher risk of coronavirus.
- Significant impact on mental wellbeing as a result of COVID-19 due to, for example, lack of access to mental health support.
- Financial impacts, either personal (self financing students only) or on the research activity.
- Impacts related to any protected characteristics (e.g. age, disability, race).
- Other considerations that can be specifically attributed to COVID-19 and evidenced in the case.

7.5. Invalid reasons for extension:

- Illness unrelated to COVID-19 (students should use existing processes and speak to their Faculty Graduate School Office for further advice or options available to them).
- Substantial **undocumented** reduction in contact with supervisors (except due to COVID-19 health reasons affecting supervisory team).
- Reduction in contact, social or otherwise, between peers.
- Postponement/cancellation of conferences or workshops.
- Delay/postponement of progression reviews. The three-month extension of progression reviews granted at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, is not *per se* a reason to extend the funding period or candidature. The underpinning research project may have continued to make progress regardless of the postponement of the progression review.

7.6. Permitted activities during funding extension

The time spent in funding extensions must be exclusively to complete the research project and to submit the doctoral thesis. The funding extension must not be used for:

- writing or publishing papers, reports or monographs (whether previously planned or not);
- pursuing new avenues of research, additional projects or follow-on work;
- undertaking any work that is not directly related to the submission of the thesis, including staffing/helping to run laboratories or equipment, undertaking teaching, outreach, placements or other activities;
- attending conferences, workshops or undertaking non-essential training.
- any other activities unnecessary for the submission of the thesis.

The programme of work to be undertaken during the funded extension must realistically be able to be completed during the extension and to be included as part of the submitted thesis.

The thesis should be submitted as soon as possible, during any granted funding extension period or at the earliest opportunity afterwards (and before the end of maximum candidature – extended or otherwise).

8. Outcome

Each application will be considered by a panel in the relevant Faculty Graduate School, chaired by the Faculty Director of the Graduate School.

The panel may seek further information from the applicant, their supervisory team, funders and other relevant staff members, including the Doctoral Programme Director.

The full period of funding extension applied for may be granted, some of it, or none. The decision of the University in respect of any funding provided under this scheme is final.

9. Review of Policy

This policy, and/or guidance, may be reviewed and amended or withdrawn at any time. Notifications of changes will appear on the University website on which these Regulations and Guidance are posted.

Appendix A: Mixed Funding Examples

A student who has made a successful case for a funding extension, but who is funded by a mixture of sources would be treated in proportion to each funding stream that they were in receipt of at the last (non-extended) payment.

Example 1: 50:50 UKRI:UoS funding, 6 month extension. Student may receive up to 3 month stipend funding from UKRI, up to 3 months from UoS. Fees for up to 3 months would be sought from UKRI, the remaining 3 month fees would be waived.

Example 2: Fees only UKRI (e.g., EU student), stipend from UoS, 6 month extension. UoS may fund up to 6 month stipend extension.

Example 3: 50:50 UKRI: Externally-funded, 6 month extension. Student may receive up to 3 months funding from UKRI. External funder would be approached for funding for the remaining 3 months.

Example 4: 30:70 UoS:Self funding, 5 month extension. Student may receive up to 1.5 months funding from UoS. The student would be referred to hardship fund for any remaining funding.
