

Research degree theses and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Where possible, research students should adapt their research activities to address disruptions caused by Covid-19 restrictions, but it may be necessary to submit a statement with their thesis on the impact of disruptions on their work. Examiners will consider this statement in relation to the scope and volume of the research student's work but will always uphold the requirements for the award of research degrees (see the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#) para. 5 to 7). The quality threshold for the award remains unchanged and there must be no compromise in the integrity of the examination or the award.
- 1.2. This policy covers all research degrees and is in force for submissions (or resubmissions) made on or after 8th February 2021 until 31st July 2022. The University may decide to extend this period depending on circumstances.
- 1.3. Adjustments to research projects are a common part of doctoral study, but the Covid-19 pandemic has, in many cases, created noteworthy changes to projects. Research students may wish to reflect on the impact of the pandemic on the design and conduct of their research, including through discussions that form part of the Progression Review process. Faculties and Schools may have discipline-specific advice for students in place that aligns with, and complements, this policy. Any redesigns to the project will form part of the narrative of the work and should be included in the relevant section of the thesis. Suspensions and extensions (see the [Regulations Governing Special Considerations and Suspension of Candidature for Postgraduate Research Students](#)) may also be appropriate ways of mitigating the impact of the pandemic but will not always be sufficient on their own. Even where redesigned research activities are discussed in the thesis and/or where suspensions or extensions have been granted, research students may wish to provide a statement to their examiners on how the impact of Covid-19 restrictions has changed their project.
- 1.4. The focus of this policy is on assessment and the submission of a statement with a thesis submitted for examination.

2. The decision to include a Covid-19 statement

- 2.1. Any research student who submits a thesis in the timeframe permitted by this policy may submit a Covid-19 statement in the format set out below. A statement is not compulsory and should only be submitted where a research student wishes to highlight the impact of the pandemic and the steps taken to adjust their research activities.
- 2.2. Research students should discuss the submission of a Covid-19 statement with their supervisors, but the decision to submit a statement ultimately rests with the student.

3. Covid-19 statement format

- 3.1. A Covid-19 statement must not be incorporated into the thesis that is to be submitted for examination, but instead should be submitted as a separate document. The statement must not be included in the final thesis that is submitted for deposit with the Library.
- 3.2. The statement, which must not exceed 800 words (and will not contribute to the maximum word count of the thesis), will form a summary of any planned research activities disrupted by Covid-19 restrictions and the extent to which it was possible to adapt the work in those changed circumstances. The following may be included:
 - 3.2.1. Details of any planned research activities curtailed by the pandemic because of, for example, lack of access to facilities, libraries, archives, research participants, fieldwork, etc. Information on any curtailed training should be included only insofar as it relates to the impact on research activities and on the thesis.

3.2.2. An acknowledgement of the anticipated contribution and value to the thesis if those research activities had not been curtailed and what was possible to include in the thesis in the circumstances, including where alternative choices were made to adapt the work and whether there are any weaknesses that could not be overcome. This does not obviate the need for a relevant discussion of any Covid-19 induced alternative methodologies, applied changes or limitation of the scope of the project in the relevant sections of the thesis. However, all such discussions in the main text should focus on the effect of Covid-19 on the project and not the effect on the student.

3.2.3. Any other relevant factors on the impact of Covid-19 on research activities and on the contents of the thesis.

3.3. Issues arising from illness, disability, bereavement, or any exceptional circumstances not related to disruptions to research activities caused by the pandemic must not be included, as there are standard mechanisms to address those issues (see the [Regulations Governing Special Considerations and Suspension of Candidature for Postgraduate Research Students](#)).

4. **Guidance for examiners on Covid-19 statements**

4.1. Examiners must maintain academic standards in relation to the criteria for awards as set out in the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#) (para. 5 to 7). Where a Covid-19 statement is submitted with the thesis for examination there can be some flexibility in the consideration of the scope and volume of the work produced, but not on its quality or on the quality thresholds for the award.

4.2. The examiners' consideration of the scope and volume of the work produced in the thesis may take into account where curtailed research activities have reduced what was possible in the period allowed. The thesis must however still satisfy the standards required for the award.

4.3. The examiners must discount any information in a Covid-19 statement that does not relate to disruptions to research activities caused by the pandemic and to the content of the thesis.

4.4. The examiners' recommendation is a matter of academic judgement and therefore it is their decision on what allowance to give to any limitations in the volume and scope of the thesis due to the impact of Covid-19. Examiners must consider closely the result of pandemic-related disruptions in the production of the thesis and decide whether in their academic judgement the thesis meets the criteria for the award of the research degree.

4.5. The examiners' joint report and recommendation must incorporate an overview of their consideration of a Covid-19 statement, if one has been submitted with the thesis, and their determination of the impact on the scope and volume of the thesis within the context of maintaining the academic standards required for the award.

4.6. Any thesis amendments or resubmission required by the examiners must take into account any allowance made by them on the limitations in volume and scope of the thesis due to the pandemic. Examiners must consider what amendments are necessary to meet the criteria for the award and must not require additional work aimed only at addressing where research activities have been curtailed by Covid-19 restrictions.

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