

## **POLICY GUIDANCE: PGR Extensions to Studentship Funding (COVID-19):**

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### **Context**

1. The ability of PGR students to maintain progress in their studies may be impacted in a variety of ways by the COVID-19 outbreak, including but not limited to:
  - Closure of university/external research facilities
  - Disruption to planned fieldwork or data collection
  - Physical or mental health matters
  - Childcare or other caring responsibilities
  - Leaving the UK/returning home
2. One or a combination of such factors may impact a PGR student's ability to progress their research during this period. The extent of impact may range from minor (as a guide, up to one month's delay does not in normal circumstances warrant special mitigation measures) to major (e.g. several months' delay due to loss of materials/data through lab closures).
3. Where PGR students require more time to complete their thesis due to COVID-19 impacts, an **Extension to the Period of Study** may be sought. This is covered under our COVID-19 Policy on Extension to the Period of Study.
4. Where PGR students require additional funding to complete their research – i.e. where the student is in receipt of a studentship, and where the disruption to the programme of study falls within the student's funding period – an **Extension to Studentship Funding** may be sought from the University or from funding bodies, where the eligibility criteria is met.
5. The award of extended studentship funding will not necessarily require an extension to the period of study. Where the award of any additional funded period means the student will exceed their maximum period of study, an extension to the period of study will be considered for approval in parallel. In all other cases, an extension to the period of study should be sought separately from additional studentship funding, if it is needed.
6. Approval of an extension to the period of study does not constitute an extension to studentship funding.

### **Purpose**

7. This document sets out the University of Exeter's policy and process for application for extended studentship funding due to COVID-19 impacts.
8. The process for requesting more time to complete a research degree will be set out in a separate COVID-19 Policy on Extension to the Period of Study.

### **Scope**

9. This policy is intended to support postgraduate research students in the completion of research which was planned to be undertaken during the student's funding period and which has been disrupted due to COVID-19 impacts.

10. The policy will support applications – on a case-by-case basis – for funding extensions of between 1 and 6 months.
11. Funding will be extended on the same basis as the original studentship award (e.g. as applicable: full fees/stipend; partial fees/stipend; fees only). Funding will cover fee and stipend costs only, not RTSG or other project costs.
12. The policy covers studentships awarded by the University of Exeter and funded from the following sources:
  - a. Studentships funded solely by the University of Exeter from institutional monies (for example, the VC Scholarships, QUEx, International Excellence, College-funded awards and awards funded from philanthropic donations)
  - b. Studentships funded by the University of Exeter in collaboration with non-UKRI external partners (for example, industry or charity)
13. Where studentships are part-funded in collaboration with external organisations, Exeter is only able to cover the University's contribution to the cost of studentship extensions.
14. We will liaise with external funding partners on their ability to commit additional funds to support the cost of extensions proportionate to their contribution to the studentship. Where partners are unable to commit additional funds, the period of funding extension granted will be limited accordingly (e.g. on a studentship funded 50-50 by Exeter and an industry partner, a six-month extension may only be funded for 3 months if the partner is unable to contribute.)
15. Students who are in receipt of a studentship which is administered by the University but is wholly funded by income from an external (non-UKRI) funder, should therefore still apply through this process to provide information to support the Doctoral College, Research Services or Innovation, Impact and Business in liaising with funders or other (e.g. industry/charity) partners with regard to their policy on provision of funded extensions to projects.
16. Where funders have announced their own policies on extended studentship funding – e.g. **UKRI** and the **Wellcome Trust** – those policies take precedence and we will put in place additional/parallel processes where necessary to meet funder requirements and timelines for funding extension applications.
17. Self-funded students will be able to apply for a fees scholarship in respect of any approved extension period linked to COVID-19 impacts – this will be managed under a separate process and is not within the scope of this policy.
18. For directly sponsored students (e.g. those funded directly by overseas governments or national/international scholarships schemes) are not within the scope of this policy. We can provide support in liaising with your sponsor to ascertain what provision they will make for extended financial support.

19. PhD candidates are funded through fellowships which require them to be employed as members of staff (in receipt of salary rather than stipend) are not within the scope of this policy. We will work with the funding body to establish their policy on funding extensions. (E.g. Marie Curie ITN, NIHR and Wellcome clinical fellowships).

### **Eligibility**

20. In light of the scope of the policy, PGR students will be eligible under this policy where their funding period ends on/after 01 March 2020 (and started prior to 01 March 2020).
21. PGR students in any year of study (who meet the eligibility criteria on funding period above) are eligible to apply if progress in their research has been impacted by the pandemic.
22. Students must be in receipt of a studentship within the scope of the policy.
23. Students who are on an interruption of study for the duration of the COVID-19 restrictions period will not normally be eligible (since the research activity is paused and research degree programme and funding timelines adjusted accordingly). There may be exceptions to this, depending on the particular funding arrangements, and students should seek advice from the PGR Support Team as needed.
24. Students who are interrupted for part of the duration of the COVID-19 restrictions period may seek a funding extension where specific COVID-19 impacts on research occur outside of the period of interruption.

### **Criteria**

25. It is recognised that COVID-19-related disruptions to research degree programmes may be temporary, partial, and/or capable of mitigation. Applications are invited and will be assessed in this context.
26. Causes of disruption will include:
- PGR student redeployed to work on COVID-19 related research
  - Project impact (e.g. postponement of critical activities where alternatives are not available and impact cannot be mitigated.)
  - Personal impact (e.g. additional COVID-19 related caring responsibilities)

### **Expectations**

27. Students and their supervisors have been encouraged to explore whether changes to the research project are possible and would reduce the length or need for an extension. This could mean adapting the research question, approach or methodology, providing that this still enables the student to conduct research at a level appropriate to their programme.
28. Where a student is currently unable to conduct research, we would expect concentration on desk-based work at this time (where possible). For example, conducting literature reviews that had been planned for later, draft thesis writing, preliminary data analysis, etc.

29. The length of extension requested should be commensurate with time lost, taking into account the effect of any mitigating actions to reduce the length or need for an extension. Extensions of between 1 and 6 months can be requested.
30. Many students will have been able to make full or partial progress on their research programme, and therefore we do not expect that all students will require a funding extension, and that many extension requests will be of less than 6 months' duration.

### **Application Process**

31. Applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
32. Students and supervisors will be requested to provide – via an application form – information about the nature of the impact, any steps taken to mitigate the extent of the impact and reduce the length of the extension, and the duration of extension requested.
33. A College panel will be convened to consider applications and recommend decisions on the award of funding extensions.
34. The Dean of the Doctoral College and the DVC Research & Impact will have oversight of outcomes from College panels.

### **Timescales**

35. Applications will be considered on a phased basis. This is intended to allow for current circumstances to settle and for the extent of impacts (and period of extension required) to be fully appraised. It will also enable us to manage the administration of a potentially high volume of extension requests in a prioritised manner.
36. In the first phase it is proposed that applications are invited from:
  - a. Students whose funding period ends between 01 March 2020 and 30 September 2020. College panels will meet to review applications during June 2020. Panel decisions will be reviewed at institutional level. Outcomes will be communicated to students as soon as possible after panel decisions have been ratified.
  - b. Students whose funding includes a contribution from external partners (and whose funding period ends any time on/after 01 March 2020 and started prior to 01 March 2020). This will allow us to initiate discussion with partners on the availability of additional funding to support extensions.
37. The next phase will consider applications from students whose funding period ends between 01 Oct 2020 and 31 Mar 2021. Deadlines and panel dates for this phase will be confirmed soon.
38. Timelines for students with later funding end dates will be confirmed as soon as possible.
39. Timelines may need to be reviewed as further funding body policies emerge.