# UKRI COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extensions: Guidance for Applicants (University of Exeter)

## **Context**

UKRI announced[[1]](#footnote-1) on 11/11/20 its COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extensions funding, which is distributed via the allocation of a block grant to Universities. Our Governance Plan for the management of this allocation at Exeter was approved by UKRI in December 2020.

The Phase 2 allocation follows a review by UKRI of its Phase 1 support (announced in April 2020) for students impacted by the pandemic. Phase 1 covered i. final year students (those with a funding end date up to 31/03/21) and ii. case-by-case extensions for non-final year students (funded from underspend within the “home” Training Grant).

## **Scope of the Phase 2 funding**

The UKRI COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extensions allocation[[2]](#footnote-2) is to support funded extensions on a **needs-priority basis**, for those who have been unable to mitigate delays of COVID-19 or adjust their projects in order to achieve doctoral outcomes within their funding period.

All students and their supervisors should explore, if they have not already, what can be done to adapt their doctorate to enable completion within their current funded period. This could mean adapting the research question, approach, or methodology. For some students this could result in their research project being different from that originally proposed.

This funding is not intended to cover ‘time lost’ due to COVID-19, but rather to address circumstances where, even with adjustments and mitigation, the student will be unable to complete their **doctoral research** within the funding period.

Based on its Review findings, UKRI expects the priority group to include students who have recently gone into their final year of study (funding end date before or on 30 Sept 2021), or those students in other stages of their doctoral studies where project adaptation and mitigation may not be possible, for example disabled students, those with long-term illness, who are neurodivergent, or who have caring responsibilities. However, all students who meet the eligibility criteria may apply.

The limited funding available means it will not be possible to fund extensions for all eligible students.

## **How to apply**

Students who are eligible to apply for extended funding under Phase 2 are invited to complete (with supervisor support) and submit an application. Applications will be considered in **one round only** in order that all cases put forward by eligible students can be considered together to meet UKRI’s requirement for the fair distribution and prioritisation of funds. The application form is available on the [Doctoral College website](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/support/coronavirus/temporarypolicies/).

## **Deadline for applications**

The closing date for applications is **midday**, **01 February 2021**.

If your circumstances may prevent you from meeting the application deadline, please contact us in advance of the deadline day (and no later than Friday, 29 January) to discuss this. Unless you have contacted us in advance of the deadline and we have agreed with you reasonable adjustments in light of your circumstances, the application deadline of midday Monday 01 February will be final; late applications will not be considered.

## **Student Eligibility**

Please check your eligibility for the UKRI Phase 2 funding carefully before you apply. If you are unsure whether you meet any of the criteria, please contact us for guidance: [pgr-extensions@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:pgr-extensions@exeter.ac.uk). You will be eligible for ‘Phase 2’ funding if:

* 1. You are registered on a research degree programme at the University of Exeter.
  2. You have not submitted your doctoral thesis
  3. You have not already received a COVID-19 extension from UKRI or from your DTP/CDT
  4. Your **funding start date is before 01 March 2020**\*
  5. Your **funding end date is after 31 March 2021**\*\*
  6. You are at least 50% funded by UKRI (AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, NERC, MRC and STFC)
  7. You have made all reasonable attempts to mitigate the delays of Covid-19 by adapting and adjusting your research, but there are circumstances which mean that even with adjustments and mitigation, you will be unable to complete your doctoral research within your funding period.

*\*For students on a 1+3 programme in which the first year is a formal taught programme resulting in a Masters qualification, applicants will need to demonstrate immitigable delays to doctoral research which had started before 01 March 2020.*

*\*\* This refers to your funding end date as it was at the announcement of the Phase 1 policy on 9 April 2020; please contact us if you are unsure whether you meet this criteria.*

## **Information required for your application**

We aim to keep the process as lean as possible, however, in line with UKRI requirements, we need to allocate the limited funding on priority basis, to those students with the greatest need. This means that we will need to gather sufficient information for the panels to be able to prioritise applications. The application process therefore asks you to provide information on:

1. For context, the nature of the impact of Covid-19 on you and/or your project and how this impact has affected the progression of doctoral research
2. What steps have been taken to adapt or adjust the research project to mitigate the delays caused by COVID – for example, adapting the research question, approach, or methodology
3. The reasons why mitigation of delays due to Covid-19 has not been possible, or is insufficient to support completion of doctoral research within your current funding period. This might include (but is not limited to):
   * 1. the limitations of what adaptations to the research could be implemented in the remaining funding period;
     2. limiting factors within the research environment (such as lack of access to the resources, facilities or field sites needed to support adaptations or adjustments)
     3. individual circumstances limiting the student’s own ability to make adjustments (such as long-term illness, caring responsibilities, disability or neurodivergence)
4. Details of the remaining doctoral research to be undertaken and the timelines for completion of this work.

Note that panels will be cross-disciplinary, therefore you should present your case in lay terms, for a non-specialist audience. You should also read carefully the section within this Guidance on how the information you supply will be used by the panel to assess your application.

#### Submitting sensitive or confidential information

If you do not wish to discuss personal, confidential or sensitive information relating to your individual circumstances with your supervisor, please contact [pgr-extensions@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:pgr-extensions@exeter.ac.uk) for advice on how to submit this information separately and confidentially to the panel for consideration.

#### Evidence and supporting information

General circumstances

You may submit with your application form any supporting documentation or evidence which is relevant to your case for extension. This is not mandatory, and should only be provided in corroboration of your case and not in lieu of completing the form itself. Panel assessment will be based on the information provided in the form.

Individual circumstances

Students who are applying for extensions on the basis of health or wellbeing circumstances – such as long term illness, disability or neurodivergence – may currently have formalised University support in place. You are asked to indicate within your application if this is the case. In such cases, to minimise the need for you to submit any new evidence, we will seek confirmation from the University Wellbeing Team, or your student record, of your individual circumstances as described within your application.

If the University wellbeing services teams are not aware of your condition, or if you have additional evidence for your condition not covered by formalised University support or not available in your student record, you should attach evidence to your application (typical evidence would comprise existing medical certification).

Sensitive information attached as evidence to your application or from University Support Services will be treated confidentially and only shared with the Chair of the extensions panel(s) where strictly necessary.

#### How the information you provide will be used and who will see it

Your application form and any separate confidential statements will be received by Professional Services staff within the Doctoral College, who will conduct pre-panel checks on eligibility and on the completeness of your application.

Your application form and any separate confidential statements will then be shared with members of your College extensions panel and with members of the Institutional extensions panel. This includes specialist panel members/advisors where applicable, such as colleagues from our EDI team or from Wellbeing Services. Details of panel membership will be made available on the Doctoral College website when available.

## **Supervisor support of your application**

You should discuss your application with your supervisors and seek their input into the preparation of the case for your extension (unless there are sensitive or confidential grounds for the extension which you do not wish to discuss with your supervisors, and which you choose to submit separately and confidentially to the panel). You and your supervisor should both sign the statement in Section 5 of the application form before you submit your application.

## **Length of extension**

The UKRI terms and conditions indicate that extensions should normally be **up to 3 months**.

When assessing the length of extension you require, please consider the minimum amount of time you now need to complete your doctoral research, after taking into account the adjustments you have made/will make to mitigate delays caused by Covid-19.

Note that the additional funding is intended to cover only the completion of the doctoral research, and not wider elements of the research degree programme such as training events, conference attendance or publication writing.

Your period of study will be automatically extended commensurate with your funding extension; i.e. you will not need to make a separate application for an extension to your thesis submission deadline.

#### Exceptional circumstances

UKRI indicates that in exceptional circumstances, a longer extension may be considered, if funds are available. Our estimate of demand against our funding allocation suggests that it is unlikely that we will be in a position to support longer extensions.

You do have the option to indicate in your application any exceptional circumstances which mean a longer extension may be needed. In the event that the level of demand on the funding allocation permits, we will use this information to consider exceptional awards of greater than 3 months.

## **How applications will be assessed by the panels**

The panel(s) will review and prioritise applications based on assessment of the following criteria:

1. The extent to which all reasonable steps have been taken to adapt the doctorate to enable completion within the current funded period
2. The reasons why it is not possible to fully mitigate the delays due to Covid-19 and the associated risk to completion of doctoral research within the current funding period
3. The remaining doctoral research to be completed (to confirm that the activities are required to meet the standard for a doctoral award) and the timeline for this

The panel will assess your application against a defined set of assessment outcomes which will provide a mechanism for evaluating cases based on the criteria above. This will support the allocation of funding on a priority basis, for those students with the greatest need.

In assessing the case for the extension, the panel will not weight one type of research above another, and will not rank one type of impact above another. You are asked to describe the impact of Covid-19 on your research for context only. The assessment will focus on the criteria above.

The appropriateness of the timeline will be reviewed by the panel – this will not influence the assessment of the need for the extension in itself, or the prioritisation of the case, but may result in award of a different duration of extension than requested.

## **What the funding will cover**

If you are awarded an extension under the UKRI Phase 2 allocation, the funding will support the cost of your fees and stipend for the extended period. Stipend will be paid at the standard UKRI rate. If you have a fees-only award, you will not receive stipend. Other costs (e.g. training or research costs) are not eligible.

Funds cannot be used to cover non-UKRI contributions (for example where students are co-funded). Where a studentship is part-funded by UKRI and part-funded by the University, Exeter will support the cost of its portion of any extension awarded. Where a studentship is part-funded by a third party, we will liaise with the sponsor on their ability to contribute to the cost of any extension awarded.

## **What happens after my application is submitted?**

The timeline for the application, review and decision making process is provided in Appendix 1.

**Step 1: Pre-panel checks**

This form will be reviewed by the PGR Support team to check your eligibility for the UKRI Covid-19 Phase 2 funding and to make sure that you have provided all the information requested in sufficient detail to support the panels in their assessment of your case, and in prioritising cases deemed eligible for funding. The team will contact you if any further information or clarification is needed at this stage.

**Step 2: College panel**

Your application form, any supporting information you have provided and any confidential information which you have submitted separately will be shared with a panel convened within your academic College (sensitive or confidential evidence – e.g. medical certificates – will not be passed to the panel, but may be viewed by the Panel Chair). This forms the first phase of the review and assessment of extensions applications. The panel will make recommendations on the prioritisation of your application.

**Step 3: Institutional panel**

Recommendations from all College panels will be reviewed by an institutional panel chaired by the Dean of the Doctoral College. This panel will complete the overall prioritisation of applications.

**Step 4: Liaison with Training Grant holders**

From the overall institutional prioritisation list, a prioritised list of applications for each Doctoral Training Grant will be extracted. This will be shared with Doctoral Training grant holders (i.e. your “home” DTP/CDT) in order to establish in the first instance (as per UKRI terms and conditions) the extent to which applications can be funded from available underspend within that training grant.

**Step 5: Final funding decisions**

After taking into account applications which can be funded by the “home” Training Grant, the remaining list will be reviewed to establish how many applications can be funded from the block grant allocation to Exeter.

**Step 6: Communication of outcomes**

Outcomes will be communicated to students and supervisors.

## **Panel membership**

The panels will include members or advisors with the relevant expertise to assess applications within the disciplinary context, and also those with the expertise to consider the needs of disabled students, students with long-term illness, those who are neurodivergent, or who have caring responsibilities. This will ensure that assessment of the reported impact on doctoral work, of the reasonableness of mitigation measures or of stated barriers to adjustment, is guided by expert opinion.

## **Appeals**

UKRI has advised that the University should allow appeals solely on the grounds that the University’s published process has not been followed. You may appeal on this basis**.** Information on how to appeal will be available on the Doctoral College website soon.

## **Other support mechanisms**

Where relevant, you may wish to consider whether existing support mechanisms could help to enable adaptation and adjustment of your research, or to mitigate delays. For example:

1. Whether an interruption under normal UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions for medical, parental or other leave purposes may be appropriate
2. Whether access to the Disabled Students Allowance to help with additional expenditure for the costs of study-related requirements that may be incurred as a result of disability, mental health or specific learning difficulties, may help to facilitate adjustments and adaptations mitigate Covid-19 delays

## **Appendix 1: Timetable for application and assessment process**

**UKRI COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extensions – Assessment Framework (UoE)**

**January**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 04/01/21 – 22/01/21 | Collate information from DTPs on awards made up to 31/12/20 and any underspend |
| 12.30pm on 13/01/21 | DPGR consideration of final guidance and application form template |
| 15/01/21 | Call for applications circulated to all eligible applicants |

**February**

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| --- | --- |
| Midday on 01/02/21 | Deadline for applications (unless reasonable adjustment is agreed prior to deadline) |
| 02/02/21 - 12/02/21 | Pre panel checks on applications completed, Wellbeing Services input provided and any queries with students/supervisors resolved |
| 15/02/21 – 26/02/21 | College level panel meetings (assessment and prioritisation) |

**March**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 01/03/21 – 05/03/21 | University level panel to meet |
| 08/03/21 – 12/03/21 | Liaison with DTPs on underspend (if information is not available pre-panel) |
| 08/03/21 – 19/03/21 | Review final awards to be made from block grant |
| 22/03/21 – 26/03/21 | Communication of outcomes to applicants |

1. Announcement: <https://www.ukri.org/news/doctoral-students-advised-to-adjust-projects-for-covid-19/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Full policy: <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/UKRI-11112020-COVID-19DoctoralExtensionsPolicyPhase2PolicyStatement.pdf>); terms and conditions: (<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/UKRI-11112020-COVID-19DoctoralExtensionsPolicyPhase2TermsAndConditions.pdf>). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)