



**UK Research  
and Innovation**

## **Implementation Guidance for Training Grant Holders**

### **Extensions for doctoral students impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic**

Issued 24 April 2020

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the policy first published by UKRI on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020, the UKRI guidance for research and innovation communities related to the Covid-19 pandemic on the UKRI website and the UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions and Guidance.

#### **1. Purpose**

The aim of this document is to provide UKRI training grant holders and research organisations with further details on how they should implement the UKRI policy, announced on the 9<sup>th</sup> April, that an extension of up to six months is available for all UKRI doctoral students in their final year of study whose work has been affected by the pandemic. It sets out the process training grant holders should follow to confirm which students are eligible and the length of extension they require. Please note that UKRI's standard Training Grant Terms and Conditions continue to apply, except in the circumstances outlined below.

The decision to offer a funded extension to those in their final year of funding reflects the immediacy with which a decision needed to be made for these students, given they are in the final stages of their PhD. As set out at the end of this document extensions for students not in their final year may be granted on a case by case basis.

UKRI recognises that there are a lot of uncertainties in the higher education system at the moment due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and would like to reassure our training grant holders that we appreciate their support as we develop, at pace, amended policies to support UKRI's cohort of doctoral students as much as possible. UKRI has committed to keeping the situation under regular review to ensure that we continue to evolve our approach based on evidence from our training partners.

#### **2. Implementation principles**

Our guiding principles in designing support for our students during this period are:

- We are committed to ensuring all doctoral students are supported in completing their research projects to a doctoral level, and are funded to do so.
- All students should be treated fairly, using flexible, generous and inclusive processes that are sympathetic to the disruption caused to academic programmes and recognise the impact of the pandemic on individual personal circumstances of students.

We expect training grant holders to follow these principles when reviewing whether students should receive the extension. However, training grant holders should **not** place an onerous burden of proof on students to provide evidence to justify their extension. In implementing this guidance, training grant holders should engage those research organisations with whom their students are registered and seek to harmonise expectations and processes as much as possible/practical.

We have carried out an initial equality impact assessment on this approach to implementation. We expect all training grant holders and research organisation to take action to make sure students, particularly those in under-represented groups, are not disadvantaged at this difficult time.

### **3. Eligibility**

Students who are funded by UKRI<sup>1</sup>, whose funding end date is between 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, who have not submitted their doctoral thesis and whose work has been affected by the pandemic are eligible for an extension. For the removal of doubt, students who were paid in advance, whose final payment was made in February 2020 but whose funding end date is between 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 **are** eligible.

Students whose funding finished prior to 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 are **not** eligible for this extension.

Students registered on Je-S (by 1 March 2020) are considered by UKRI to be a core part of the training grant cohort, even if they do not meet all the UKRI standard Training Grant Terms and Conditions, and so they are eligible to be considered for an extension by the training grant holder. The training grant holder must discuss these cases with their lead Research Council before a decision is reached.

Eligibility of students should be determined by the training grant holder, and students are not required to apply to UKRI for any extension. Further details on what information is required are below.

We ask training grant holders to consider eligibility for extensions where there have been periods of long-term absence<sup>2</sup> (as set out in TGC 6.1.1 and TGC 8) to minimise the possibility of disadvantage for students:

- Students who have previously received an extension for long term absence and have an adjusted funding end date that now falls between 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 are eligible.
- If the period of long-term absence was started before 1 March 2020 and continues beyond this, the revised funding period should be used to consider eligibility for an extension.
- If the period of long term absence<sup>2</sup> arises in the period between 1 March 2020 and 31 March 2021, the original funded period should be used to consider eligibility for an extension and the extension should be added to the revised funding period.
- Where an additional six-month extension would take them over the maximum period of extensions normally allowed, students are eligible for these awards. Extensions for COVID-19 are exempt from the 12-month limit in section 6.1.1 of the UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> In this document, UKRI funding refers to training grants awarded to organisations from the seven Research Councils (AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC, STFC) but does not include skills funding from Innovate UK (e.g. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships) or funding from Research England.

<sup>2</sup> Other than Covid-19 research impacts

The Annex to this guidance document contains some worked examples of the circumstances above, which we hope will be helpful to training grant holders in determining eligibility of students.

#### **4. Implementation process**

This section summarises the process training grant holders should follow:

- In discussion with students and supervisors, the training grant holders should determine which students are eligible for the extension, whether they require it and for how long. Training grant holders should provide students with contact details of alternative professional staff in case students do not wish to disclose sensitive personal issues to training grant holders and/or supervisors.
- For co-funded projects, the training grant holder should contact partners to explore the possibility of co-funding for students.
- Prepare with the student and their supervisor(s) a short description (up to half a page) of the case for their extension, including: how the student and research programme are affected by the pandemic; and the time needed to complete doctoral work.
- Complete the submission requested for UKRI by 29 May 2020. This will include which students are eligible for the extension, the length of extension required by each student and the case for their extension. It will also ask for information on co-funding. Training grant holders should also inform UKRI of instances where the student does not require the extension (see section 7 for more details).
- UKRI will review the information submitted by the training grant holder, confirming the student is UKRI funded and that there is a supporting statement setting out the basis for the extension. Following this, UKRI will confirm with the training grant holder the additional funding that will be provided.

#### **5. Costs covered by the extension**

The additional funding is to only cover the UKRI contribution to the stipends and fees of these students. It is not covering other costs such as the Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) or other research costs that may have arisen as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. These costs should be met from other sources, including the training grant, institutional or external sources.

For fees-only students, the extension will only cover their fees, no additional funding from UKRI will be provided to fund these students' stipends.

The funded extension is offered to all eligible students impacted by the pandemic. Should discussions with supervisors and students indicate that they do not require the full six months to complete their research programme to a doctoral level, partial awards covering a reduced extension should be made. This funding is only to enable students to complete their doctoral work. It should not be used, for example, to provide additional resources to carry out more research beyond doctoral work or time for writing papers once doctoral work is complete.

Generally, we do not expect an extension to be granted on the basis of the need to undertake a placement. However, an exception for placements that are critical to completing the research project or that are an integral part of the training scheme should be made. Extensions should not be given to support other placements. We recognise that this means some students will not get the training experience they expected, but priority must be given to support students to complete a doctoral-level research project.

UKRI recognises that some students will be impacted more than others and so may require more than six months' extension. Funding for longer extensions beyond six months if critical for completion should be treated in a similar way to other extensions for students not in their final year, i.e. considered on a case-by-case basis (see section 9), supported through the training grant in the first instance through any underspend with training grant holders feeding information to UKRI on the overall funding required for the extensions. This information will feed into the review and monitoring of this policy.

If students submit during the period of the extension, in line with current UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions they will receive funding for the remaining quarter and then payment will cease.

If, for medical, parental or other leave purposes, a student seeks to further extend their studentship beyond the six months, training grant holders should permit this in line with standard UKRI Terms and Conditions of training grants.

Any under-spend will be recouped from institutions at FES stage, if necessary.

## **6. Co-funded students**

We are unable to cover the full cost of extensions of studentships co-funded from non-UKRI sources, including institutional sponsors or the public/private/voluntary sectors. We are only able to cover the costs of the UKRI contribution, including where that contribution is from multiple UKRI training grants. We hope that funding partners will be able to offer the remainder of the additional funding required but understand many organisations are also facing uncertainty and financial constraints. Institutions and/or supervisory teams are expected to take responsibility for these discussions with their partners, keeping students and research organisations informed.

Where funding partners are under financial pressure, we encourage them to prioritise support for current students above the co-funding for future studentships. We recognise that this might restrict/reduce future studentships as a result.

If a funding partner is not able to contribute to the costs of the extension, training grant holders can consider flexible use of UKRI funding in the best interests of the student such as reducing the length of the extension granted, so long as the stipend remains at the level the student normally receives<sup>3</sup>.

Training grant holders should keep their Research Council informed of changes to match funding commitments, through normal annual reporting processes and through the information required in section 7. As ever, should training grant holders wish to discuss particular cases, they can contact the appropriate UKRI Research Council studentships team (contacts below).

## **7. Information Required from Training Grant Holders**

Once developed, UKRI will provide training grant holders with a survey to provide us with information of which final year students' work has been affected by the pandemic and are eligible for an extension. The training grant holders should inform us of the students that they believe are 1) eligible for the extension 2) students who are ineligible as they have submitted or 3) final year students they do not consider to have been affected by the pandemic situation and therefore do not require the extension.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, if the student is funded 50% by a UKRI training grant and 50% by a company unable to match this, the extension could be reduced to 3 months but the value commensurate with a 6-month extension claimed.

In addition to the above we will be requesting that training grant holders provide information on the student's stipend and fee levels, the value/proportion of these supported by UKRI, and at least preliminary indications from funding partners about their ability to co-fund the extension. This is important to ensure we have a full and accurate understanding of the costs of the extensions granted and to inform further modelling of future anticipated costs arising from the changes to extension policy introduced due to COVID-19. UKRI has committed to reviewing our position within four months and so training grant holders are asked to submit this information by 29th May 2020.

We will be monitoring the impact of this policy on particular groups of students, to ensure its implementation is in line with our stated principle that all students should be treated fairly. In order to do so, we encourage training grant holders to ensure JeS diversity data are up to date and correct, as we will be using this dataset alongside the data provided for the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020 as part of the analysis and monitoring.

## **8. How funding will be provided to research organisations**

Once the information on those students eligible for the extension is received from training grant holders and cross-checked with the information held by UKRI, in most cases funding will be provided as additional funding streams to existing grants, rather than new grants being issued. This will then be included in subsequent pay-runs as normal for such funding streams.

## **9. Extensions for students not in their final year**

Extensions for students not in their final year may be granted on a case by case basis. As set out in our COVID-19 guidance, extensions can be approved by training grant holders when students are unable to work, or their progress is impeded by closure of their research organisations/COVID-19 restrictions and or caring responsibilities, supported through the training grant in the first instance through any underspend with training grant holders feeding information to UKRI on the overall funding required to support the extensions. However, you may feel it more appropriate to delay formal decisions on what length of extension is appropriate until the full impact is better known.

UKRI has committed to reviewing this position within four months of the 9<sup>th</sup> April announcement. In addition to reporting case-by-case extensions granted through future Annual Reports, as part of this review we will contact you again in June to get an understanding of the emerging impacts on students in earlier years of study. We recognise this is a very early point to do this and will not hold you to estimates provided. However, this information will be important in advising medium/long-term planning around future UKRI doctoral strategy and provision.

We do not expect you to have made final decisions about future case-by-case extensions at this point.

## **10. Contacts**

AHRC [dtp@ahrc.ukri.org](mailto:dtp@ahrc.ukri.org)  
BBSRC [dtp@bbsrc.ukri.org](mailto:dtp@bbsrc.ukri.org)  
EPSRC [students@epsrc.ukri.org](mailto:students@epsrc.ukri.org)  
ESRC [tdbpolicy@esrc.ukri.org](mailto:tdbpolicy@esrc.ukri.org)  
MRC [students@mrc.ukri.org](mailto:students@mrc.ukri.org)  
NERC [researchcareers@nerc.ukri.org](mailto:researchcareers@nerc.ukri.org)  
STFC [Studentships@stfc.ac.uk](mailto:Studentships@stfc.ac.uk)

## ANNEX

### WORKED EXAMPLES OF LONG-TERM ABSENCE AND GRANTING 6-MONTH EXTENSIONS

[NOTE: these are illustrative and not exhaustive. Any queries should be directed to the relevant UKRI Research Council studentship contact, as shown in Section 10]

#### Example 1

*Students who have previously received an extension for long term absence and have an adjusted funding end date that now falls between 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 are eligible.*

Original funding end date 30 September 2019. Six-month absence due to, for example, long term illness bringing the next funded period end date to 31 March 2020. They are eligible for an extension of up to six months.

#### Example 2

*If the period of long-term absence was started before 1 March 2020 and continues beyond this, the revised funding period should be used to consider eligibility for an extension.*

Original UKRI funding end date of 30 September 2020. Maternity leave for nine months, from 1 November 2019, returning to PhD work on 1 August 2020. The revised funding end date is 30 June 2021, so they are not eligible for this final year costed extension. (They will be eligible for any disruption to their doctoral work to be considered by the training grant holder on a case by case basis.)

#### Example 3

*If the period of long-term absence arises in the period between 1 March 2020 and 31 March 2021, the original funded period should be used to consider eligibility for an extension and the extension should be added to the revised funding period.*

A student with a funding end date of 30 September 2020, has 7 months month adoption leave from 1 June 2020 returning on 1 January 2021. Their doctoral work may have been disrupted in the period 1 March 2020 to 1 June 2020. The revised funding end date following adoption leave is 30 April 2021. They are eligible for an extension of up to six months, to be added on from 30 April 2021.