

Students and training grants

Updated 28 May 2020

This section was updated on 28 May to include our initial equality impact assessment. We have also updated guidance sections on: Student Health and Wellbeing (sickness policy update); Extensions (clarity on the fee type that can be charged); Part-time students (additional section added clarifying consideration of extension lengths and mode of study changes); and Additional costs (home working by students: expansion of Disabled Student Allowance guidance.)

The following information is for UKRI research council programmes that support doctoral students. This is relevant to training grant holders, research organisations, doctoral students, and co-funding partners.

We recognise that many students are unable to complete essential tasks or experiments in order to be ready to submit their thesis, for example, if their lab or library is closed, field work cannot continue, they are part of a particularly vulnerable group, or have additional caring duties.

Students whose funded period has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic should continue to receive their stipends from their research organisation while the lockdown is in place.

Students should discuss their individual needs with their supervisor or programme director. That may include requesting an extension where it is necessary, modifying their programme or other measures. Research organisations are best placed to look at a student's individual needs.

Professor Rory Duncan, UKRI Director of Talent, [wrote an open letter to students](#) on programmes funded by UKRI on 24 April setting out some of the steps we are taking to support them.

Grant holders should also refer to [Implementation Guidance for Training Grant Holders: Extensions for doctoral students impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic \(PDF, 192KB\)](#) (published 24 April).

We have carried out an [initial equality impact assessment \(PDF, 151KB\)](#) on this approach including considering the impact on those with caring responsibilities or being asked to shield as part of the UK COVID-19 pandemic response. We expect all training grant holders and research organisations to take action to make sure students, particularly those in under-represented groups, are not disadvantaged at this difficult time.

Student health and well-being

We recognise that this is a challenging time for students and we are doing what we can to support the students we fund. Should a student experience mental health issues or an exacerbation of an existing mental or physical condition as a result of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, then we would encourage students to discuss this with their doctor and access support available at their institution.

We are committed to supporting the needs of all our students. Those with disabilities and chronic illness should continue to seek support through our existing support mechanisms, such as the [Disabled Student Allowance](#) (see the additional costs - homeworking section), as well as talking to supervisors and other university staff about the specific impact of COVID-19 on them and their research as part of discussions on extension requirements.

TGC 8.2 of the [UKRI standard Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#) on sick leave normally requires a medical certificate and provides for costed extensions for sick leave upto 13 weeks in a 12 month period. Recognising the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic this condition will not be applied to COVID-19, or new or exacerbated conditions linked to the pandemic and the government response to it. This ensures those who are ill due to the pandemic

are not disadvantaged compared to those experiencing other disruptions such as shielding or additional caring responsibilities.

The sickness period of students who are ill with COVID-19 or a COVID-related condition (for example increased mental health issues due to lockdown) should therefore be considered separately from TGC 8.2. Instead, it should form part of an extension case. Universities are asked to satisfy themselves that there is enough evidence that the student has had a period of sick leave without putting an undue burden of proof on the student (it may not be possible for the student to obtain a medical certificate at this time).

Extensions

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. 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.

The eligibility of students should be determined by the training grant holder, and students are not required to apply to UKRI for an extension. In discussion with students and supervisors, the training grant holder should determine which students should receive an extension and for how long. The training grant holder 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.

Please note that UKRI's standard [Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#) continue to apply, except in the circumstances outlined below.

Students with funding ending between 1 March 2020 and 31 March 2021

Students are eligible for an extension of up to six months if they are funded by UKRI, their funding end date is between 1st March 2020 and 31st March 2021, they have not submitted their doctoral thesis and their work has been affected by the pandemic.

[The funding was announced on 9th April 2020](#). The decision to offer additional funding to support extension for those within this period reflects the immediacy with which a decision needed to be made for these students, given they are in the final stages of their doctorate.

For the avoidance of doubt, students who were paid in advance, whose final payment was made in February 2020 but whose funding end date is between 1st March 2020 and 31st March 2021 are eligible.

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.

The additional funding is to only cover the UKRI contribution to the stipends and fees of these students. In line with the [UKRI standard Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#), UKRI will only cover a tuition fee. Separate college and bench fees for example may not be charged. If still in their funded period, a continuation fee for a student could be supported where this replaces a tuition fee. Continuation fees for students outside their funded period will not be supported. Funding to support other research costs that have arisen as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic should be met from the training grants existing Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) funding and institutional or external sources. While additional RTSG funding cannot be drawn from the grant for the period of the extension, the existing RTSG funding can be used.

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

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.

Any under-spend will be recouped from institutions at the final expenditure statement stage, if necessary.

Duration of extensions

Should discussions with supervisors and students indicate the student does 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.

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.

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 with funded period from 1 April 2021 onwards, i.e. considered on a case-by-case basis, 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.

Students with current funding ending on or after 1 April 2021

This section provides information for students whose current funding ends on or after 1 April 2021.

Extensions for these students may be granted on a case-by-case basis. Extensions can be approved by the training grant holder when students whose work has been affected by the pandemic, for example, they are unable to work, or their progress is impeded by closure of their research organisations/COVID-19 restrictions and/or caring responsibilities. However, it may be

appropriate to delay formal decisions on what length of extension is appropriate until the full impact is better known.

Students registered on Je-S 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.

Evidence for case-by-case extensions

We expect a light touch process for deciding case-by-case extensions with up to one page detailing the length and reasons for the extension for each student.

We are not providing a specific list of evidence types that should be provided. What evidence is required will depend on the individual student and project. We would expect a case to have been made that the ability of the student to submit a doctoral-level thesis within the existing funded period has been detrimentally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and that, despite any action taken to mitigate the disruption, an extension is required.

- The priority for extensions should be to provide support that enables the student to complete their research project. As the duration of disruption increases, it is unlikely that students will be able to fully replicate the originally proposed training experience. Whilst this may be disappointing for students, in these exceptional circumstances, the priority needs to be completing the doctoral research.
- Students and their supervisors should 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 a doctoral-level research project.
- Where a student is currently unable to conduct research, we would expect concentration on desk-based work at this time if possible. For example, conducting literature reviews that had been planned for later, draft thesis writing etc. We understand that this may be impacted by caring responsibilities and will become increasingly difficult as the duration of remote working increases. Supervisors should work with their students to keep the situation under review.

Funding for case-by-case extensions

Where an extension is agreed this should be 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.

Only the UKRI contribution to the stipends and fees for the student should be drawn from the training grant for the period of the extension. In line with the [UKRI standard Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#), UKRI will only cover a tuition fee. Separate college and bench fees for example may not be charged. If still in their funded period, a continuation fee for a student could be

supported where this replaces a tuition fee. Funding to support other research costs that have arisen as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic should be met from the training grant's existing RTSG funding and institutional or external sources. While additional RTSG funding cannot be drawn from the grant for the period of the extension, the existing RTSG funding can be used.

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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.

We do not wish to negatively impact on the experience of existing students; therefore, training grant holders should not seek to generate additional underspend by reducing the student offer.

Training grant extension requests

We do not expect you to have made final decisions about future case-by-case extensions yet and ask that you do not submit training grant extension requests at this point. If this causes an issue due to the current training end date, please contact the appropriate Research Council to discuss.

In addition to reporting case-by-case extensions granted through future Annual Reports, as part of a review of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic we will contact training grant holders 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 training grant holders to estimates provided. However, this information will be important in advising medium/long-term planning around future UKRI doctoral strategy and provision.

Unfunded students still to submit thesis

We encourage students to write up within their funded period as far as possible. We do provide students with the flexibility to submit outside of this funded period, but we do not support costs for this period (such as continuation fees).

In the current situation, extensions to the submission period are allowed, but, consistent with our position on submission outside of the funded period, no funding will be available for this.

Students should check with their institution if they are unsure of what their latest submission date is.

Early submission following a granted extension

The [Standard UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#) will apply. 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.

Exceeding maximum extensions allowed

Where an extension is applied to a student's funded period due to disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this may be done so in addition to any extensions covered by the Standard UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions, even if this would exceed the maximum extension allowed as detailed in section 6.1.1.

Part Time Students

We fully recognise that many students will be unable to work their usual hours during the crisis. The purpose of the extensions is, in part, to ensure that these students can complete their studies. They do not need to move to part-time modes of study.

However, there may be circumstances in which a student wants to change their mode of study in response to the pandemic, for example where it has resulted in changes to personal or household circumstances (such as a partner no longer working), or as part of redeployment activity. In such cases a change in the mode of study is permitted, whether from full to part-time or vice versa. We will allow the number of mode changes to exceed the maximum set out in the [UKRI standard Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#) where the additional mode changes are directly related to the pandemic.

For students who have recently changed their mode of study resulting in a revised funding end date, we advise that you use the funding end date the student had on 1 March 2020 to decide which extension guidance to use.

The extension policy for all students, regardless of funding end date, is that the length of an extension should reflect the level of additional effort required by a student to complete their doctoral research. Unless there will be additional difficulties in completing their doctoral research as a result of studying part-time, a part-time student experiencing the same level of difficulty, over the same period of time, as a full-time student, might be expected to receive the same extension length (e.g. both receiving a six month extension, not 12 months for a 0.5 FTE student). If a student wishes to change their mode of study for an extension period, the length of extension should be altered to maintain the research effort supported.

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Redeployment

Medical personnel

We are aware that due to the coronavirus outbreak that there is an increase in demand on the clinical service and that students may be asked to undertake additional clinical sessions. Although we expect clinical doctoral students (e.g. Clinical PhD Fellows) to fully concentrate on their research, we understand that this is an exceptional situation and we are fully supportive of any decision to reduce the time spent on research during the outbreak.

If students do decide to reduce the time spent on research, then we will agree an extension to the studentship. This applies to all clinical doctoral students as they will be unable to undertake office-based work. We do not expect clinical doctoral students to request additional salary as this will be covered by the NHS for the clinical sessions. We will support some modest consumable/running costs, e.g. maintaining animal colonies during the absence period. As the situation is currently uncertain please do not extend a studentship or request a grant extension (if needed) until the student returns to research full-time. However, students may wish to consider whether a suspension would be appropriate. If there will be any on-going expenditure for the student (e.g. animal maintenance, staff costs other than yourself etc.) then an extension would be required.

COVID-19 related research

If it has been agreed that a student's doctoral research project can be repurposed towards COVID-19 research, their funding can continue as normal. A costed extension to cover the time needed to adapt the research direction could be covered, in the same way as other case-by-case extensions.

Where a student is undertaking COVID-19 research outside of their doctoral studies (e.g. seconded), in the first instance the funding for the individual during this time should come from the COVID-19 research funding and the studentship suspended if possible. We will consider supporting some modest consumable/running costs (e.g. maintaining animal colonies) during the absence period, but if such on-going expenditure is required then a studentship extension would be required.

Recruitment

Offers for October 2020 starts

UKRI acknowledges the need for flexibility for students due to start their doctoral studies in October 2020. This situation will be reviewed nearer the time, but we would encourage research organisations to indicate the potential for late starts in offer letters. Many universities already accommodate postgraduate students starting at different times during the academic year, depending upon the training programme they are joining.

Events, activities and placements

Placements

Students currently on international placements

Some of our funded students may currently be overseas as part of their studies (e.g. at facilities, in collaborating institutions or undertaking fieldwork). Doctoral Training Partnerships, Centres for Doctoral Training, and equivalents should be in regular contact with their students on such placements. Students and their supervisors should check their insurance cover for any

repatriation to the UK in cases of pandemic. Any additional costs associated with returning to the UK should be met by the training grant.

Students funded on a Long Term Attachments (LTA) by STFC should check with the supervisor about resuming their LTA at a later date. Supervisors must keep STFC informed of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students undertaking LTAs, particularly regarding insurance coverage. STFC can provide funding if the STFC insurance cannot cover costs.

Future placements

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.

Where the ability to conduct a placement is critical to completing the research project, or is an integral part of the training scheme, this should be considered as part of discussions for the need and length of an extension.

UKRI Policy Internships

Students taking up a UKRI Policy Internship can continue to receive an extension to their funded period as normal. In addition, a further extension period may also be granted in line with the guidance for disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Placements should be conducted within the student's new funded period. Unfortunately, some hosts may now be unable to accommodate a placement, in which case these should be cancelled.

Short-term events and activities

In some cases, a student will not require an extension to their funded period due to disruption to their research as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, short activities or events (such as conferences and training courses) may have been postponed that the student had planned to attend.

For activities/events that are postponed to a date after the training grant end date

Providing the student can and wants to attend the new date please request a training grant extension in the usual way. We will apply a no-cost extension to the grant to allow them to attend. Recognising the exceptional circumstances, we will allow the cost of attending this activity to be drawn from the grant even though it is beyond the student's funded period, providing it takes place before their thesis submission.

For activities/events that are postponed beyond the student's funding end date but not the training grant end date

Where the event still falls before the grant end date, UKRI will not apply a grant extension as this is unnecessary. However, we will allow the cost of attending this activity to be drawn from the grant even though it is beyond the student's funded period, providing it takes place before their thesis submission. We will not cover any other costs outside the funded period as per our standard UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions.

Co-funding

Extensions

See extensions section.

Studentship support

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.

UKRI maintains good relationships with a range of co-funders. We will continue to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their ability to honour funding commitments for current students.

Additional costs

See Travel section in the main COVID-19 guidance.

Costs for home working by students

Students might not be set up for extended periods of working from home and additional costs may be incurred. Possible requests are covered below.

As broadband is now considered a utility, UKRI will not cover the costs of providing broadband or enhancing it. Internet service providers have relaxed data caps at this time so we would not expect charges to be incurred for those breaching their plan's data cap.

Office equipment - UKRI will not provide extra funding to programmes for office equipment, however, the purchase of equipment to support students' homeworking may be considered by the training grant holder and the costs drawn from the grant should they wish to allow such support. We would not expect equipment specifically intended for research purposes to be purchased (e.g. high-power computing equipment). Principles for agreeing equipment purchases should be determined to ensure all students supported by the training grant are treated fairly. As an example, UKRI's approach to supporting its own staff is that:

- Total purchases must not exceed £500 and should enable office-type work.
- Equipment may only be purchased where the individual does not have existing equipment (such as their own monitors) that can be utilised.
- All equipment purchases must be agreed in advance with the line manager. In the first instance, the individual is required to purchase the equipment and then claim this cost back, but alternative arrangements can be explored for staff unable to do so.
- Any equipment purchased remains the property of UKRI.

The costs specifically related to facilitating the studies of those with a disability should continue to be requested through the [Disabled Student Allowance](#) scheme. We would encourage students who have altered or new needs as a result of the pandemic response to contact the Disability Adviser or named contact on disability matters at their research organisation to discuss

undertaking a new needs assessment. This includes students who may wish to access DSA for the first time.