



Frequently Asked Questions

How did you make the decision to allocate an additional £19m?

UKRI has conducted a review into our initial policy and the impacts of the pandemic on doctoral students. The Review findings indicate that there is a need for additional support for a sub-set of students with the rest more able to adapt their projects in order to complete within their existing funding period. We have allocated the funding required to act on the report's recommendation.

The focus of the support is on those students who are least able to adapt their projects sufficiently to complete in their existing funding period. It is not to support time lost during the pandemic. In the Review we identified penultimate year students, who will have now entered their final year of funding, and those with additional support needs such as disabled students, those with long term illness, who are neurodivergent or who have caring responsibilities as groups that may find it most difficult to adapt projects to complete within their funded period.

How is UKRI offering support to PhD students through the new lockdown?

Our Policy Statement sets out the support we will be providing to our students in response to the review of our initial policy. Feedback from ROs is that they remain open despite tighter national restrictions, albeit operating with significant restrictions. They have already worked hard to create COVID-safe environments and practices, many prioritising access for doctoral students. Within our Review Report we have emphasised the importance of ROs provision to support student's health and wellbeing and we will continue to engage with sector on this and how it can be further developed.

Does UKRI not consider doctoral students important enough to give blanket extensions?

Students have not been affected equally and the impact on their ability to complete their studies will also vary. A blanket approach would not ensure all students are treated fairly and get the support they specifically need to be able complete their studies and would not be an appropriate use of public money.

How have you co-created this latest policy development?

A clear recommendation from our review is that UKRI should engage fully on our policy development regarding talent and skills. In developing our latest policy, we have taken clear steps in this direction by holding representative focus groups with students and university leaders; carrying out quantitative and qualitative surveys; and holding in-depth conversations with sector partners such as UK Council for Graduate Education. Our engagement approach has been balanced with the need to respond quickly to the situation and provide clarity in how we can support students through this period. We have already increased resource for specifically UKRI Talent and Skills engagement to address the recommendation in the Phase 2 Doctoral Extension Review and wide, listening consultation is a key outcome.

Did you engage widely on your initial support?

Our initial COVID-19 policy response was developed at pace to be announced in March and April. While our aim was to respond quickly to ensure students, grant holders and ROs had some certainty on the future of their projects, we acknowledge that our decision to announce the policy prior to consultation or communication with ROs limited their ability to respond quickly and coherently to students. Likewise more prior consultation with representative groups of students and supervisors may have been valuable in shaping the policy for optimal effectiveness. Our approach has been strengthened and in developing the latest policy we engaged with a broad range of groups and used tailored communications to update communities.

How can you ensure STEM doesn't get prioritised over Arts for instance?

All UKRI students should be treated fairly and considered on a needs-priority basis irrespective of discipline. ROs have been required to provide a governance plan to UKRI confirming they will conduct a fair, open, and transparent process and detailing how they will ensure equal access to the funding.

Will my PhD be as valuable given that I've got to amend my project to such an extent?

The nature of research examined at the end of doctoral training is likely to be different to before; for example, analyses may be different, fewer datasets may be analysed in more depth or research may be conducted in different ways, using different tools. Research explores the unknown, often requiring us to change our plans and develop creative solutions. COVID-19 is a significant challenge that requires us to adapt and evolve the way we conduct research.

We know that research organisations (ROs) have thought carefully about what is required for the award of a doctoral degree and many already have guidance in place to take account of the impact of the pandemic on your research, including on your thesis or other outputs.

Are you saying we'll still be working from home until the end of my funded period?

No. We are not able predict how long the pandemic will continue to place restrictions on our lives. We are all learning how we can continue to work under the current situation and ROs are open, albeit operating with significant restrictions to make them COVID-secure. Doctoral students need to find ways of continuing their doctoral studies despite the environment in which they are studying; adapting to new ways of working and planning projects around restrictions. Those whose funding ends in the 20/21 academic year are likely to be less able to make extensive adaptations compared to other students and so may need extra support to complete their studies.

How do I find out how to apply for this funding?

Your research organisation will make you aware of the process. All UKRI-funded students registered at the research organisation should be made aware of the process being implemented.

How do I know if I am eligible?

You first need to fully explore adapting your project with your supervisor. Following this, if you still need an extension in order to complete this adapted project within a funded period, you should follow the process provided by your research organisation. To be eligible to be considered for this funding you must be an UKRI-funded doctoral student who started your funding period before 1 March 2020; have a funding end date from 1 April 2021 onwards; have not submitted your doctoral thesis; and have not already received a UKRI-funded extension under the initial UKRI policy (this will include if you have had an extension agreed to be funded through grant underspend). All eligible students should have equal access and consideration in the decision-making process, irrespective of discipline.

What do I do if I don't get the funding I requested?

We recognise that students may not have all the training opportunities that were originally hoped for and their research project may look different. Our priority is to support students to obtain their doctoral qualification. Many students will be able to adapt and adjust their projects and complete a doctoral level qualification within their existing funding period. Those students most in need will receive this additional funding.

I am a final year student but missed out on the previous allocation – will this funding be open to me?

No. A separate support package was announced in April specifically to support final year students. They are not eligible to be considered for this funding.

I need a longer extension due to long-term sick leave/absence – how can I extend?

UKRI is not able to provide further extensions to students who have already received a UKRI funded extension related to the pandemic. However, the standard [Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#) already make provision for absences in a number of instances such as illness. You should talk to your training grant holder about how these conditions apply to your case.

What is the appeals process?

Your RO will make you aware of the process.

Applying for funding is stressful – how will UKRI mitigate the impact on students?

In order to receive funding, ROs must confirm they will meet our process and expectations for the allocation of funding. This includes the need to ensure the process is not onerous for the students. However, ROs will need some information in order to consider your needs compared to other students. In addition, UKRI has a responsibility to ensure the appropriate use of funding. It is not unreasonable for the university to expect you to explain why you need to receive additional public money.

How will UKRI monitor and ensure equality of opportunity and fairness in the allocation?

ROs are expected to ensure that all UKRI-funded students are treated fairly, using an inclusive process that recognises the impact of the pandemic on individual personal circumstances of students. All UKRI-funded students registered at the university should be made aware of the process being implemented and have equal access and consideration. ROs are required to submit a governance plan confirming that they will meet our process and expectations for the allocation of funding and details on how they will ensure equality of access. They will then be required to report against the governance plan and provide details of the students granted extensions.

Is there an impact assessment of this allocation and the process?

We have published an Equality Impact Assessment which is available on our website.