

Students and training grants

Updated 11 November 2020

This document was updated on 11 November 2020 to reflect the publication of the UKRI COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extension Funding Policy.

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

In April 2020 we announced a policy that allowed funded extensions of up to six months for UKRI doctoral students in their final year of study whose work has been affected by the pandemic and these extensions have been submitted to UKRI. Guidance was also provided that ROs could agree extensions for students in other years on a case by case basis using grant underspend.

In April we also committed to conduct a review of the policy, which we have now published in our report [Review of Extensions for Students Impacted by COVID-19](#) ('the UKRI Review').

The [UKRI COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extension Funding Policy](#) sets out how we will respond to the report's recommendations relating to support for UKRI students not in their final year. The Phase 2 policy statement should be read in conjunction with this guidance document and the [UKRI Terms and Conditions for COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extensions](#). Our [Equality Impact Assessment](#) of the policy is also available.

The Phase 2 policy statement recognises that it is very unlikely that doctoral students will be able to fully replicate the originally proposed training experience. Whilst this will be disappointing, the priority for students now is to adapt and adjust research projects to mitigate the delays caused by COVID-19. With support from their supervisor and research organisation, they should seek to complete their research to a doctoral standard within their funding period.

All students and their supervisors should explore, if they have not done so already, what can be done to adapt their doctorate to ensure they can complete it within their funded period. This could mean adapting the research question, approach, or methodology, providing that this still enables the student to conduct a doctoral-level research project. For some students this could result in their research project being different from that originally proposed.

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 up to 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) can be considered separately from TGC 8.2, if it forms 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

Following an announcement on 9 April 2020, extensions for students with funding end dates between 1 March 2020 and 31 March 2021 were supported by UKRI for up to six months. All extensions for this group of students had to be made and reported by universities to UKRI by 8 October 2020.

Under the initial policy, case-by-case extensions were also permitted for students with a funding end date on or after 1 April 2021. Where case-by-case extensions were agreed, these were supported by training grant underspend.

In November 2020 we published our [COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extension Funding Policy](#). This sets out our policy relating to additional support for UKRI students for situations where adaptation and mitigation may not be possible, on a needs-priority basis. Applications for UKRI-funded student extensions through the Phase 2 funding policy are managed centrally, by the RO where the student is registered, not by UKRI.

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 and inclusive processes which recognise the disruption caused to academic programmes and also the impact of the pandemic on individual personal circumstances of students.

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 usually support costs for this period (such as continuation fees).

In the current situation, extensions to the submission period are allowed at the discretion of the RO, but, consistent with our position on submission outside 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 an 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 some 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.

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 to return to clinical service, then we will agree an extension to the studentship. We do not expect clinical doctoral students to request additional salary costs for this time, as this will be covered by the NHS for the clinical sessions. We may 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 more 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 extensions under the Phase 2 policy.

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.

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

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 International 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. Training grant holders should consider what provision is usually made for new students and how this may need to be adapted to accommodate current working practices. Additional costs over the universities normal provision for students may incur. Possible requests are covered below.

As broadband is now considered a utility, UKRI will not cover the costs of providing broadband or enhancing it. 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), nor would we expect the grant to cover office equipment (e.g. computer) if the university normally provides these for students. 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 RO to discuss undertaking a new needs assessment. This includes students who may wish to access DSA for the first time.