COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extension Funding Policy – Frequently Asked Questions

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Questions from students

How did you make the decisions around support for UKRI students?

We recognise that this is an extraordinarily difficult time for many doctoral students.

In order to be as transparent as possible we have set out the considerations in providing support to students on our website:

www.ukri.org/our-work/tackling-the-impact-of-covid-19/guidance-for-applicants-and-awardholders-impacted-by-the-pandemic/supporting-students-through-the-pandemic

How is UKRI offering support to PhD students through the new restrictions? UKRI has allocated over £60 million to doctoral students, including £19.1 million for students who started before 1 March 2020. The funding has been allocated to research organisations who have put in places processes to allocate this to the students who most require support.

We have provided them with guidance on how to allocate this support. For more information see:

- the Governance Plan guidance: https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/UKRI-11112020-COVID-19DoctoralExtensionsPolicyPhase2GovernancePlanGuidance.pdf
- the Terms and Conditions, which you can find on our website: https://www.ukri.org/our-work/tackling-the-impact-of-covid-19/guidance-for-applicants-and-awardholders-impacted-by-the-pandemic/

How can you ensure STEM doesn't get prioritised over arts subjects?
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. We are continuing to engage sector bodies to ensure that students and examiners have guidance.

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.

My funding is due to end before 31 March 2021, but I 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?
Our standard [Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#) already make provision for absences in a number of instances such as illness and you should talk to your training grant holder about how these conditions apply to your case.

Recognising the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic our normal Terms and Conditions for sick leave will not be applied to COVID-19, or new or exacerbated conditions linked to the pandemic and the government response to it. This means that ROs can use their discretion around the requirement for a medical certificate and sick pay is not limited to 13 weeks within any 12-month period.

Is there an upper limit on how many weeks sick pay can be claimed?
For cases relating to COVID-19, sick leave can be claimed for up to 28 weeks within a 12-month period.

We recognise that there may be some students who are currently near to reaching this limit. In these instances, the Training Grant holder should review the situation on a case by case basis and as an exception, may provide an extra one-month extension to support the students transition back to study

What support is there if I am shielding?
If you are shielding, and are not able to work from home, you can use your shielding letter to claim sick pay. You should receive sick pay for the period of your shielding letter. Students can claim for more than one period of shielding.

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 were 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.

Questions from research organisations and training grant holders

Policy announcement

Why has UKRI changed the process to award funding to ROs?
UKRI has listened to feedback from grant holders, university management and students during our review of the initial policy, this highlighted some of the challenges allocation to individual training grants presented, and this process has been changed in response.

What were the challenges and how will they be addressed by a different funding model? (NEW)
We recognise that consistency within cohorts is important to students and grant holders, but we have had to balance that with the strong messages from the review of the importance of ensuring fair and equal access to extensions regardless of council, scheme, and grant. Whilst all approaches have their challenges, the RO based process better enables fair access and consideration across the diversity of UKRI's student population and maximises the ability to target the funding where it is most needed. It also allows for constraints that are geographic or RO specific to be considered consistently across students and to ensure that no discipline is disadvantaged or otherwise.

When will the funding be made available?
UKRI will be making the funding available to the ROs as soon as possible after their governance plans have been approved and in the next available pay run. The deadline for the submission of governance plans was the 7 December 2020 and UKRI will seek to have reviewed the plans and confirmed ROs can commence the allocation by the end of December 2020.

Which ROs have been granted an allocation?
All ROs who have been granted an allocation for the Phase 2 funding have been informed and a list will be published following Governance Plan approval.

How does the £19M committed for the Phase 2 policy compare with the cost of the final year extensions (under the initial UKRI policy) and will all or most students who need an extension be able to receive one based on the likely grant allocation?
As was announced in April, funding for extension of up to six months was made available to support final year students. We have not fully finalised this process so are not able to confirm how much this will cost but estimates in May suggested this would be broadly in line with the funding allocated.

The number of students who can benefit from Phase 2 will depend on the amount of extra time they need, their co-funding status, the stipend and fee they receive, and the total money available through the two funding sources (new allocation & grant underspend).

In total, we anticipate that more than half of all UKRI-funded students will have received stipend and fees extensions by the end of Phase 2.

Are funds for supporting extension being provided for up to six months, as previously? If not, what is the guidance on duration?
Our policy guidance gives details of what extra support is available. Like the final-year extension policy, UKRI is not applying a blanket extension period. The majority of extension requests are expected to be for up to 3 months of UKRI support. Where exceptional circumstances apply, extensions of longer than 3 months will be possible if funds are available.

Phase 2 funding
How was the allocation made to my RO?
The UKRI Review found that the students most likely to need additional support are those who, at the time of the Review, were in their penultimate year (and who are now entering the final year of their doctorate) and who have not already been supported by the final-year extension policy. On this basis we calculated a block award of funding for ROs based on a maximum of three months extensions for UKRI students with an end date between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2021, before any COVID-related extension was applied. ROs will have the flexibility to use the allocation to support the students in other stages of their doctorate who are most in need of an extension, on a needs-priority basis.

What's the allocation algorithm in terms of council split or training grant type? Allocations have not been made on the basis of grant type or by council. We have looked at the number of students registered at a RO to determine the proportion of the additional funding each should receive.

What will this funding cover (e.g. only stipend and fees or other costs)?
The Terms and Conditions give details on what costs the funding will support. Funding will only cover the **agreed UKRI contribution** to the stipend (or equivalent) and tuition fee of students. A continuation fee for a student can be supported where this replaces a tuition fee. UKRI will only pay a tuition fee (or a continuation fee where this replaces it) during the student's extended funded period. We will not pay other fee types e.g. bench or college fees, and continuation fees cannot be drawn outside the funded period e.g. a writing-up period.

Costs cannot be requested to cover non-UKRI contributions e.g. co-funder contributions.
In exceptional circumstances, animal maintenance costs can be requested from the UKRI funding, if fully justified. Funding to support other research or project costs can be met from the students original training grant existing Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) funding and institutional or external sources.

What happens if the student is co-funded? Could a 50% UKRI student receive a fully funded shorter extension if the funding partner can't provide any additional costs?
Funding will only cover the agreed UKRI contribution level to the stipend (or equivalent) and fees of students. Costs cannot be requested to cover non-UKRI contributions (for example where students are co-funded), including institutional sponsors or the public/private/voluntary sectors. Students should not be studying unfunded or below the UKRI minimum stipend. If co-funders are unable to contribute towards the cost of an extension, the UKRI contribution can be used to fully support a shorter extension.

We do not require funds for student extensions, are we able to use the funding for alternative purposes, such as workshops on adapting your research or managing your research in a pandemic?
These funds can only be used on student extensions through stipend and fees payments, as detailed in the Terms and Conditions. If your RO does not require the Phase 2 allocation you should decline the award.

Phase 2 student eligibility
Which students are eligible to be considered for this funding?
The policy covers all UKRI-funded doctoral students who:
- have a funding end date from 1 April 2021 onwards
- started their funding period before 1 March 2020
- have not submitted their doctoral thesis
- have not already received a UKRI-funded extension under the initial UKRI policy (this includes students not in their final year who have had an extension agreed to be funded through grant underspend).

Although **eligible** to apply for support through the Phase 2 policy, funding has been provided to support extensions for students who are unable to mitigate the delays and impact of COVID-19 on their research project, on a **needs-priority basis**. The Review indicated that students in this priority group include those now in their final year (funding end date before or on 30 Sept 2021) and those in other stages of their doctoral training where adaptation or mitigation may not be possible, for example disabled students, those with long-term illness, are neurodivergent, or have caring responsibilities. However, ROs have the flexibility to use the allocation to support the students in other stages of their doctorate who are most in need of an extension and **must** offer the opportunity to apply to all eligible students.

Will this funding be open to students who have already received funding/an extension from UKRI regarding COVID-19?
No, students whose training grant holder has already confirmed an extension due to the pandemic, supported from a UKRI source (whether additional funding or from underspend), are not eligible for this funding.

Can students who were considered on a case-by-case extension under the initial policy (those with a funding end date from 1 April 2021 onwards) but were not successful, apply again via the Phase 2 process after 1 Jan 2021? What about if their extension was approved but they now need a longer extension?
Students with a funding end date from 1 April 2021 onwards, who have had an extension request turned down can be considered under the Phase 2 policy. This recognises that they may, for example, have been turned down because underspend was not available to support them. If they were turned down because the case made wasn't considered to be strong, we would suggest they only apply if their case has changed.

Students with a funding end date from 1 April 2021 onwards, who have had a decision to support an extension under the initial COVID-19 policy, cannot be considered for a revised extension period.

Will this allocation be open to students in their first year?
Providing a student began their funding period before 1 March 2020, students in their first year will be eligible to be considered. Apart from in exceptional circumstances, first year students are likely to be a low priority for additional support compared to other students. We strongly advise, if they have not already done so, that students speak with their supervisor to decide how to adapt and adjust their project so that they are able to complete a doctoral project within their existing funding period.

Previous extensions have changed end dates, how do we ensure this funding is made available to the correct cohort?
ROs will be running a centralised process for making decision and they should factor this into the process. UKRI have provided detailed guidance on eligibility/priority expectations and require ROs to submit a Governance Plan agreeing to UKRI's process expectations, which includes ensuring that all eligible UKRI-funded students, including those registered at the RO but not necessarily based at the RO, have equal awareness and access to the funding.

I only have one student, is this funding open to him/her?
Yes, providing they are a UKRI-funded student and meet the eligibility criteria specified. ROs have been issued with guidance on how to make decisions on who should receive the extra support.

Are NC3R students eligible to apply?
No, NC3R students are not eligible to apply for an extension via the Phase 2 funding. Students should liaise with their supervisors and NC3Rs directly about extension considerations and options.

Phase 2 process
Who will be the named award holder for the Phase 2 funding?
Each RO has nominated an individual training grant holder who will have overall responsibility for the management and reporting of the award. This includes submitting the Governance Plan to UKRI for approval.

Can we start our application and assessment processes before your confirmation of our Governance submission?
We recognise the importance of providing students with certainty as soon as possible. However, it is important that we have approved the RO's Governance Plan before application and assessment processes commence. We do though encourage you to do as much preparation as possible so that once we have provided feedback on your Governance Plan you can commence the process. The deadline for the submission of governance plans was the 7 December 2020 and UKRI will have reviewed the plans and confirmed ROs can commence the allocation by the end of December 2020.

What is the role of the 'home' Training Grant award holder in the decision-making process?
Annex 1 of the Governance Plan template outlines that we expect ROs to have a clear process for engaging all relevant home Training Grant award holders, i.e. the grants from which the students are currently funded.

In the Terms and Conditions, we indicate that at a minimum, it is expected that the home training grant holder should confirm if students are eligible to apply to the central RO process (e.g. they have not already received a UKRI-funded extension under the initial UKRI policy) and once a prioritised list of students has been determined for funded extensions, to confirm if the home training grant has any **existing** underspend.

More broadly, home Training Grant award holders provide an important source of advice and support for students and their engagement will be important in ensuring students understand the support available and how to apply for it. They will be able to advise ROs on the information they already hold on the needs of students.

The home Training Grant holder should confirm that funding will be available to support research costs for any prioritised students as these will not be supported from the COVID-19 Phase 2 Training Grant.

Can it be allocated as a blanket extension for all students whose funded period is due to end by 30 September 2021?
No, funding should be allocated to students on a **needs-priority basis**. The ability of individual students to adapt their doctoral project will vary depending on personal circumstances and the time remaining in their funding period. It is up to ROs to decide how best to allocate the funding to students on this need-priority basis through an open and fair process.

Do students apply to the university/RO where they are registered or to the training grant holding organisation?
Students should apply to the RO where they are registered.

If students do a joint degree and are jointly registered, which of the 2 ROs should these students apply to?
As per standard Training Grant terms and conditions, you will have chosen a principal RO and registered the students on Je-S under that organisation. The student will need to apply that RO.

Decision-making process
If ROs have multiple 'waves' of applications, how do you suggest we should ensure equity across the waves?
It is up to the RO to determine how this will be implemented and will need to be outlined in the RO's governance plan. If you wish to consider waves of applications, you must ensure fairness across all allocations. All decisions under Phase 2 need to be made in financial year 2021/22 as spend needs to take place in this period.

How do you recommend that students are prioritised - a rank ordered list or banding?
The detailed process in which students are prioritised will be determined by the RO, which should be detailed in the Governance Plan. We would advise that ROs should consider banding for the reasons set out below.

In a rank ordered list, we would expect you to work down the list, making awards in priority order. Once the Phase 2 allocation and underspend have been used, then no further awards would be made, i.e. if there is no funding available for the 9th ranked application, you could not fund the 10th application on the list, even if underspend is available.

Banding would allow you to group awards of equal merit. In other words, you may have four applications that are of equal priority for funding. If the block allocation has been used but, there is underspend for two of the four applications, you could support those two applications. You must have a process for determining allocation within a band if you only have the block allocation to draw on. In the example, if there is no underspend available for any of the four applications and the block allocation can only support two applications, you need to have a transparent process for determining which two will be supported. You cannot distribute the funding across the four applications as all applications need to be fully funded.

Multi-RO programmes

My training grant has students registered at a number of ROs – how do I find out the process for each university and the grant holder?
You should contact each RO where your students are registered to confirm local processes.

How will we manage the fact that ROs will be running different processes and therefore students on the same training grant may be treated differently?
ROs will run a centralised process that recognises the impact of the pandemic on individual personal circumstances of students. We believe this is the best option to treat all students fairly and, on a needs-priority basis, regardless of which UKRI council, scheme, or award the students are supported from. However, we recognise that for multi-institution awards this may lead to individual students within cohorts being treated differently. We ask that you make it clear to your students that they are being considered as part of their university's process and not by their training programme.

Can participating institutions in a DTP decide to pool the UKRI funding together? (NEW)
No – the funding will need to go through the ROs individual process, in line with the Phase 2 policy.

Underspend

What constitutes underspend?
We do not wish to negatively impact on the experience of existing students, therefore, home training grant holders should not seek to generate additional or new underspend that may impact the current student offering. We do not consider uncommitted funds allocated by UKRI to support future cohorts of students to be underspend. In developing this policy, we have considered the need to maintain our investment in the future research and innovation workforce and through this additional funding we are seeking to avoid a reduction in the number of students we are able to support.

Where we have already committed to fund a student through grant underspend is this still allowed?
Yes, where you have already granted an extension on a case-by-case base under the initial policy, using grant underspend, we expect you to honour this commitment.

Do we need to 'notify' UKRI of any underspend funding allocations we decide on before 31st Dec?
UKRI has committed to continue monitoring the impact of COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. We will be able to confirm at a later date how these decisions fit into our monitoring plans, but could fall as part of the revision of current annual monitoring for training grants to include COVID-related information.

How will the underspend be considered in the decision-making process/paying for prioritised extensions?
The decision for the extensions will sit with the RO who need to put in place a fair, open and transparent process. The Training Grant Holders will be approached to confirm underspend levels to cover extension costs. Where there is no underspend to use, the funding will be allocated by the RO from the block grant.

We are part of a multi-institutional Training Grant award; how should we allocate any available underspend across the different partner institutions?
Our initial advice was that available underspend should be allocated on a first comes basis across partner institutions. We listened to concerns raised by award holders that universities which could move more quickly would get priority, possibly leaving others without access to the funding. As an alternative, Training Grant award holders are permitted to determine an initial allocation for each university. If you choose this approach you should be mindful of which students are eligible to be considered in Phase 2.

What about where there is no underspend available in the home training grant? Additional funding has been allocated to universities to support prioritised extensions where there is no grant underspend available.

Can underspend from UKRI training grants be vired to the central extensions pot to be managed by the RO? Or does the underspend remain with the training grant holder? Underspend cannot be pooled centrally or across UKRI DTPs/CDTs. Training grant holders have responsibility for any underspend on the award. We would expect ROs to approach Training Grant holders if an extension for a student supported by that training grant has been prioritised, to confirm if there is underspend available. Underspend will be used in the first instance, before drawing on the block allocation.

Can underspend from one Training Grant be used to support a student on another? Underspend from one Training Grant cannot be used to support students on another unless exceptionally agreed by the Research Council that awarded the grant.

If future cohort numbers stay the same, can we still use underspend? If using the underspend will not affect future cohorts agreed with your Research Council or the opportunities available to current students, Training Grant are able to use it. There may be more underspend than usual given that normal activities haven't been able to take place this year or have moved online e.g. cohort building events.

Can funding provided as part of NPIF grants intended to support existing students be used for COVID-19 extensions? These students are UKRI students and are eligible to be considered. As with other training grants, should an extension for an NPIF student be prioritised, any underspend from the NPIF grant should be used before the Phase 2 allocated funding.

Phase 2 administration
Do studentship payments from the home Training Grant need to be suspended in order to receive the Phase 2 grant money? The Phase 2 grant funding needs to be used in the 2021/22 financial year (April 2021-March 2022). We have recommended suspending payments from the home Training Grant to ensure that Phase 2 payments can be provided within this timeframe. However, students whose funding end date occurs early enough that they can complete payments on their home Training Grant and then receive payments from the Phase 2 grant for their extension (within the 2021/22 financial year) can do so without requiring a suspension of payment.

The Phase 2 Training Grant is for 1 year, what if the student's extension outlasts the period of the grant? We envisage that all payments will be possible within the one-year period of the grant. Section 4.2 of the terms and conditions indicates that payments to students awarded an extension should be made directly to the student and the payment from the home Training Grant be suspended for the duration of the agreed extension rather than it be added at the end of their current funding period.

Can the Phase 2 Training Grant be extended? All ROs need to spend the funding within the one-year period of the award. If, for any reason, this may not be achievable, you are asked to contact UKRI as soon as possible to discuss whether exceptionally a no cost extension can be provided. We will not provide further funding.

If a student is not successful in being prioritised for an extension by the central RO process what can be done to support them financially? Home Training Grant holders cannot provide UKRI support for COVID-19 related extensions to students who were unsuccessful in obtaining an extension via the Phase 2 policy. However, home

Training Grant holders could consider the standard (business as usual, pre-pandemic) policies to support students.

We have already provided support for these students; how will it be reimbursed?
ROs and Training Grant holders cannot be reimbursed from this UKRI support for any funding they have already allocated to their students, even if that extension has been agreed with support from a non-UKRI source.

Following the initial policy, announced 9 April 2020, we have put in place a process to consider students requests for case by case extensions, can we continue this?
You can continue your current processes and agree extensions up until 1 January 2021, provided you have sufficient underspend to support them. By this point UKRI will have approved ROs centralised process and all requests for extensions will need to be considered under this.

Can home Training Grant holders award extensions after 1 January 2021?
From 1 January 2021 all applications for COVID-19 related extensions must be made through the RO at which the student is registered, as part of the Phase 2 policy. Prior to this date, training grant holders can continue to consider and award extensions on a case-by-case basis supported by underspend.

If we have underspend from the funding provided for final year student extensions, do we have flexibility to reuse these funds for additional student extensions?
No, this will need to be returned to UKRI.

Reporting and monitoring
What equality, diversity and inclusion data will UKRI expect ROs to collect for reporting purposes?
If ROs record students on Je-S against the Phase 2 Training Grant correctly, we will be able to collect the information from the student's Je-S record on the home Training Grant.
UKRI will be collecting data on successful applicants only. We would recommend ROs also collect applicant data to monitor their processes and, if required, make any necessary adjustments to their processes.

What will the final reporting process entail?
All students receiving funding from the COVID-19 Phase 2 Training Grant need to be recorded against the COVID-19 Phase 2 Training Grant Je-S record in the usual way (see the Governance Plan template and Phase 2 funding Terms and Conditions for more detail). The Je-S record will not show Research Council or discipline and it will be necessary to report on this separately. We will also ask for details of students who were prioritised for funding and supported via underspend, rather than the RO block Training Grant.

The final report will ask you to confirm funding details and the process you followed in making the allocation. Our starting point will be to extract the data from Je-S, which therefore needs to be accurate. We will also require you to report on the reasons for extensions, these will be the same categories as for Phase 1, as follows:
- lack access to research resources and facilities
- interruption of data collection and/or fieldwork
- increased caring responsibilities
- health and wellbeing affected
- other – specify

A Final Expenditure Statement will be required in the usual way. We may also ask for an interim report to check the initial allocation for each student.

What impact will extensions have on submission dates and rates?
Where extensions are granted the RO must ensure that the students submission date on Je-S is also updated. UKRI recognises the impact the pandemic will have on overall submission rates and the need for this to be taken into account when looking at the results of future submission rate surveys and how these results are used. We will provide further guidance on this in due course.

Do we need to apply for a no-cost grant extension via Je-S if the funded extensions takes the student's end date beyond the current training grant end date?
Yes. These extensions should be requested through Je-S in the normal way.

Sick Leave

Normally sick leave for students is limited to 13 weeks within any 12-month period, is this the case for COVID- related illnesses?
No, we're asking research organisations to treat sick leave caused by the pandemic differently to our normal sick leave policy. 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 means that ROs can use their discretion on the requirement for a medical certificate and sick leave extensions are also not limited to 13 weeks in length in a 12 month period.

Is there an upper limit on how many weeks sick pay can be claimed?
For cases relating to COVID-19, sick leave can be claimed for up to 28 weeks within a 12-month period.

We recognise that there may be some students who are currently near to reaching this limit. In these instances, the Training Grant holder should review the situation on a case by case basis and as an exception, may provide an extra one-month extension to support the students transition back to study

How are ROs to determine whether a medical certificate is needed?
In the early stages of the pandemic, it was difficult to obtain fit notes due to the pressures on the NHS.

The government has provided guidance in relation to SSP and the evidence required and UKRI want to ensure that the same flexibility is given to students. Evidence may include:
- An isolation note from NHS111
- Notification from the NHS or Public Health Authorities that they need to self-isolate
- Shielding note from their doctor or Public Health Authority advising them to shield
- a letter from their doctor or healthcare professional confirming the date of their procedure if they've been advised to self-isolate before going into hospital for surgery
- a fit note from their doctor or a hospital (sometimes called a sick note) - if they have any other illness

What about students who are shielding?
If a student is shielding, and are not able to work from home, they can use their shielding letter to claim sick pay.

They should receive sick pay for the period detailed in their shielding letter. Students can claim for more than one period of shielding.

What does 'not being able to work from home' mean in this context?
UKRI are following government guidance in relation to shielding. Where a student cannot work at

home, due to a lack of equipment, flexibility has been granted to provide this equipment. Guidance on providing equipment and can be found at the end of the [Guidance for Students and Training Grant holders](#) document.

When should we use the Phase 2 process and when should we use sick pay for COVID-related illnesses? (NEW)
Both routes are accessible and you should consider what will be best for the individual student. The focus of the Phase 2 funding is an inability to adapt projects enough to finish in an existing funding period: it is not to make up time lost. Our sick policy for COVID-19 related illnesses can be accessed at any point during the students funding period and is not limited to the normal 13 weeks within a 12 month period.

The costs of sickness should be covered by grant underspend in the first instance. As part of the standard process for managing awards, we would expect award holders to set some funding aside to cover the costs of sick leave, maternity leave, etc. This means that if there is underspend when a sickness claim is submitted, the appropriate amount of underspend should be ringfenced. For claims submitted before Phase 2 decisions are made, this will mean a reduction in the amount of existing underspend that can be made available to the Phase 2 extensions process. Once Phase 2 applications are closed, all new sickness claims will need to be considered under the normal sickness condition.

What do we do if a student was ill in [May] and we told them to hold off on making a claim so they could include it in an extension case? (NEW)
Under normal circumstances, students are not allowed to make sickness claims retrospectively. However, before the Phase 2 extension policy was confirmed we know students may have been advised to delay making a claim with the expectation that it would form part of an extension case. This recognises the UKRI advice to include sickness in extension cases. As the focus of Phase 2 is not on time lost, you may feel that it is not the most appropriate route to support this period of sickness. UKRI is therefore making an exception that periods of illness between March and November 2020, can be supported retrospectively, providing that the RO is happy with the evidence provided for the time period being claimed. Outside these dates the policy remains that retrospective claims are not eligible and students need to ensure they claim in a timely manner.

What happens if a student has a mental health problem and is unable to apply during the period of the Phase 2 decision-making process? Can they be supported past the period of the Phase 2 Training Grant? (NEW)
The block grant is time limited, so it is important that decisions on extensions are made in a way that fits with this. However, ROs have the flexibility in how they run the Phase 2 extension process. We would encourage ROs to consider how the process can support applications or make allowances for students in this kind of situation while meeting the terms and conditions of the funding. In addition to this, outside the Phase 2 extension process, sick leave is available.

Have UKRI considered long COVID and the experience of students who are affected by it? (NEW)
We have already approved longer sick leave and more flexibility – we encourage training grant holders to use the flexibility given in these instances.