

## Policy Statement

### UKRI COVID-19 PHASE 2 DOCTORAL EXTENSION FUNDING POLICY

In April 2020 we announced our policy to support students we fund through the lockdown period and beyond. This included additional funding to cover extensions of up to six months for UKRI-funded doctoral students in the final year of their programme, whose training was disrupted by COVID-19. For students not in their final year, flexibility was given to grant holders to assess their needs on a case-by-case basis and use underspend in the grant to meet the cost of any extension required.

In April, we also committed to conducting 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'). This policy statement sets out how we will respond to the report's recommendations relating to support for UKRI students not in their final year. This policy statement should be read in conjunction with *UKRI COVID-19 students and training grants guidance* and *UKRI Terms and Conditions for COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extensions Funding*.

#### ***Adapt and adjust research projects***

As a result of the pandemic, 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 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.

We are committed to working with Research Organisations (ROs), regulators, supervisors, doctoral researchers and other funders to co-create and embrace new ways of working to ensure the quality of doctoral training and the doctoral degree is undiminished and that doctoral students are part of a healthy and supportive research culture.

#### ***Additional support on a needs-priority basis***

We acknowledge that adaptation and mitigation may not always be possible, and that additional support may be required for some students to complete their research project within their funding period. In line with UKRI's Terms and Conditions of training grants<sup>1</sup>, extensions to studentships can be granted due to medical, parental or other leave purposes, where required. All UKRI-funded students also have access to the Disabled Students Allowance<sup>2</sup> to help with additional expenditure for the costs of study-related requirements that may be incurred as a result of disability, mental health or specific learning difficulties. Students should be supported in making full use of these mechanisms if required.

To help contribute further to the support required for those students most in need, UKRI will award ~£19 million of additional funding across around 100 ROs. This will enable support for extensions for UKRI-funded doctoral students who are unable to mitigate the delays and impact of COVID-19 on their research project, on a **needs-priority basis**.

Priority for extensions should be given to those who are unable to mitigate delays of COVID-19 or adjust their projects. Based on the UKRI Review findings, students in this priority group include students who at the time of the Review were in their penultimate year of funding and have now gone into their final year of study (funding end date before or on 30 Sept 2021). UKRI also recognises that for some students in other stages of their doctoral studies project adaptation and mitigation may not be

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/files/funding/ukri-training-grant-terms-and-conditions-pdf/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/skills/funding-for-research-training/>

possible, for example disabled students, those with long-term illness, are neurodivergent, or who have caring responsibilities. The funding provided is not intended to cover 'time lost' due to COVID-19, but rather to address circumstances where, even with adjustments and mitigation, the student will be unable to complete their doctoral research within the funding period.

### ***Allocation of additional funding***

The UKRI COVID-19 Phase 2 Doctoral Extension Funding will be given directly to ROs through block grant awards, to be active for 1 year. Applications for UKRI-funded student extensions through the Phase 2 funding policy will be managed centrally, by the RO where the student is registered, not by UKRI. Each block grant award has been calculated and allocated based on UKRI-funded doctoral student data as provided through Je-S. UKRI will advise ROs of the value of their organisation's allocation for student extensions directly. There is a small number of universities who are not receiving an allocation and we will be in touch with them directly to discuss options for supporting their UKRI-funded students.

The allocation will not provide funding for all UKRI-funded students and extensions should be allocated on a needs-priority basis. The allocation may be used to support funded extensions for UKRI-funded students who have **not submitted their doctoral thesis** and have **not already received** a UKRI-funded extension under the initial UKRI policy. Where an extension is agreed by the RO, existing UKRI training grant underspend should be utilised in the first instance. Extensions will not be available for students with a funding start date of 1 March 2020 onwards, as the expectation is that doctoral students at the beginning of their training should be actively managing and planning their research proposal in accordance with the current circumstances.

The UKRI Review does not indicate a need to provide additional funding beyond this allocation. Research by its nature requires flexibility and adaptability. We urge all those who are supporting UKRI-funded students to continue fostering and developing mitigation routes and to plan new studentship projects with the current climate in mind as needed.

Prior to receiving the Phase 2 funding, ROs will be required to submit a Governance Plan confirming they will follow the UKRI process and expectations for managing and prioritising this allocation and providing details on how they will ensure equal access to the funding. This Governance Plan will need to be submitted to UKRI and approved before the allocation is awarded – see *Guidance on completing the UKRI COVID-19 Phase 2 Training Grant Governance Plan* for more information. Use of the UKRI COVID-19 Phase 2 funding allocation should ensure in broad terms:

- The aims of the allocation as summarised above are met
- 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 RO are aware of the process implemented by the RO and have equal access and consideration in the decision-making process, irrespective of discipline
- The decision-making process is not an onerous or burdensome one for the student and is sensitive to the additional stress and anxiety that students may be experiencing
- Extensions are provided by ROs on a needs-priority basis
- That costs are provided for stipend (or equivalent) and fees at the agreed UKRI contribution level (as per the Terms and Conditions) – costs cannot be used to cover the extension of co-funding costs from non-UKRI sources, including institutional sponsors or the public/private/voluntary sectors.

ROs will also need to provide evidence of the appropriate use of the Phase 2 funding in a Final Report and via Je-S.