**Post Graduate Research FAQs in Relation to COVID-19 – May 28th 2020 Update**

This document has been produced to address issues for PGR students and their supervisors as a result of COVID-19 and its disruption to research activity, following government advice for universities to close research facilities except for maintenance, care and/or essential research activities (for example associated with understanding and addressing the outbreak), as well as restrictions on non-essential travel. We recognise that this is a rapidly evolving situation, and where we need to change to follow new government advice or university procedures, the document will be updated accordingly.

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|  | **General Advice, Mitigation, Extension and Interruption** |
| What do I do about the impact of the coronavirus situation on my research? | We know and appreciate that this is a difficult time and that many researchers will be worried about the impact of the current situation on their research. This is an unprecedented situation and it is impacting on researchers and research globally.  We recommend that you discuss your research plans with your supervisors and consider how you can minimize and mitigate the impact of the coronavirus situation on your work. Working from home/elsewhere should provide you with the opportunity to undertake valuable research activities such as catching up on literature, writing parts of your thesis/publications, undertaking data analysis or online training all of which will contribute towards the progress of your thesis. We appreciate, however, that for some people working at home may not be easy, depending on personal circumstances. If you are in a position where working from home would present additional difficulties, then you should discuss options with your supervisors.  Discuss and decide on how you will keep in good contact with your supervisors if you, and/or they are working remotely. Our advice is that, however frequently you normally see your supervisor(s), you should maintain regular and frequent contact with them over the coming period. You can consider platforms such as Teams, Skype, or Zoom for contact, for example, ensuring that everyone has access and knows how and when your meetings will be run. Where you do not have access to video-conferencing facilities, email and/or phone are suitable alternatives.  In the case of a serious impact on your work, you should keep a record of the effect on your project in order that you can complete a PGR Covid19 Impact Statement in support of requests for extensions or other mitigations during the pandemic or once it is over. This can be found on the Doctoral School website.  <https://doctoralschool.lincoln.ac.uk/coronavirus/>  One of the key skills of successful researchers is their ability to deal with problems and uncertainty and for research students this is one of the areas that specifically form part of program outcomes (which examiners use to evaluate your thesis). For example, doctoral PGR students need to demonstrate the ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems. |
| What impacts can be considered as supporting evidence for extension requests and other mitigation due to pandemic? | Examples of potential impacts are given below, based on guidance provided by UK Council of Graduate Education.  An impact on the supervisory team that has affected your supervision or progress of either research or writing, such as illness.  Redeployment to work on Covid19 related research or other action but only where the redeployment time has not already been accommodated under other policies.  Postponement of critical activities (including fieldwork or placements) where alternatives are not available, and impact cannot be mitigated.  Caring responsibilities.  Specific impact resulting from remote working as a result of a disability or being at higher risk of coronavirus.  Lack of access to mental health support if needed.  Financial impacts, either personal or on the research activity.  Impacts related to any protected characteristics.  Other considerations that can be specifically attributed to Covid19 and evidenced in the case. |
| Will the University give me an extension to my period of registered study if it is impacted by disruption? | Where Covid19 disruption means you cannot submit your thesis within normal period of registration, you can apply for an extension of up to 6 months. The PGR Extension to Period of Maximum Registration form can be found on the PGR Office portal  <https://universityoflincoln.sharepoint.com/sites/StudentAdministration/PGROffice/SitePages/Home.aspx>  Extension requests should be submitted via your local PGR administration, normally 3 months prior to end of your normal end date and you should log impact of Covid19 on the PGR Impact Statement during disruption, which can be submitted with extension request. Where extensions are granted on grounds of Covid19 disruption there will be no additional fee.  If you are considering making a request, discuss this with your supervisors and also consider the consequences for your finance and visa status. |
| Can I interrupt my studies during period of disruption? | All PGR students can normally apply for up 2 years of interruption and where students need to interrupt due to Covid19 disruption, supporting evidence (Extenuating circumstances or PGR Covid Impact Statement) will only be required if interruption period will exceed this 2-year allowance. The interruption form can be accessed via the PGR Office portal page or directly on:  https://ps.lincoln.ac.uk/services/registry/Assessments/interrupts/SitePages/Home.aspx  Normally interruptions would mean suspension of university services such as ICT account or supervisory support. We, however, recognise that providing support during this period of national crisis is important, so during interruption, whilst you should not be progressing your research work, we will continue to provide access to ICT facilities, students services and supervisory support as you plan for a return to research.  Interruptions can have implications for your funding or study visa, so as well as contacting your School and supervisors prior to applying for interruption, you should seek advice on funding and visa implications from University support services. (See FAQs on funding and visas) |
|  | **Research Restart** |
| When will I be able to return to resume work using university facilities? | Research laboratories and facilities have been closed except for essential maintenance or critical research work, but we are now exploring re-opening facilities in line with changing government guidance on travel and safe working. We advise that you discuss potential to return to work with your supervisors and where appropriate update risk assessments to take on board Covid19 related issues, in particular social distancing and hygiene. Facility managers will be updating safe working practice for specialized research facilities and updates will be shared with the research community as facilities re-open. |
| My work involves human participants. What should I do? | Research involving face-to-face contact with human participants continues to be suspended. Where work requires human participation, alternatives to face-to-face meetings should be used, such as phone or video conference. |
| The Government is relaxing travel restrictions. How will this affect research activity? | Public Health England have indicated that travel for work purposes can be undertaken so long as the work cannot be conducted at home and the workplace has suitable operating procedures for safe working. Safe operating procedures are being put into practise to allow return to work at the university and relevant researchers will be informed as facilities re-open. Outdoor fieldwork in the UK with suitable social distancing and hygiene may resume, once suitable risk assessments have been completed.  Check for up to date information and advice from Public Health England regarding travel to work or field sites and the F[oreign and Commonwealth Office](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) as international travel restrictions are relaxed. |
| I am meant to be going to a research conference – will I be able to go? | Research conferences would be considered non-essential travel and many organisations will be cancelling or postponing such activities or re-organising as virtual or video conferencing. We advise that you do not plan to travel, and you should not make new bookings or commitments to travel for such meetings in the next couple of months.  Check with the organisers on whether they are considering cancellation, keep a close eye on travel advice from the [University,](https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/coronavirus/) F[oreign and Commonwealth Office](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) and [Public Health England](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england) as well as the destination country in travel is overseas. |
| I am currently undertaking research work overseas. What do I do? | If you are currently working overseas, your School and supervisor should have already been in contact to discuss your circumstances. If you have not heard from them, please contact your supervisor or School directly. The situation is evolving rapidly - you may become subject to new restrictions while you are overseas and may be required to self-isolate upon your return. |
| My project involves working with a collaborator somewhere else. How will that be affected? | You should explore means of continuing collaboration remotely or deferring until travel restrictions are relaxed to allow visits to other sites and consider how you can make an adjustment to the project to allow this to be deferred.  If deferring travel, ensure that you check for up to date information from the University, F[oreign and Commonwealth Office](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) and [Public Health England,](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england) to determine ongoing restrictions on travel, either within the UK or to your collaborator location. Talk to your host and check whether they have any plans or procedures in place that you also need to take into account; the host country may not accept UK travellers for example, or there might be a possibility of restricted travel home, or the risk of quarantine either in your destination, or when you return to the UK. |
| There are elements of my research in progress which I will not be able to complete if I have to stop working at the University site - what should I do? | Schools and Colleges are putting plans in place for situations such as these, but they need to know your plans in order to support or mitigate your research. We will work with you to help identify and minimise the effect of any changes that might impact your research progress. In exceptional circumstances it may be possible to allow elements of work to continue but this will need clear justification (including consideration of alternatives) and risk assessment to include risks associated with Covid19 outbreak.  If your work is affected in this way, talk to your supervisors as a matter of urgency. You should aim to adjust the overall project design to accommodate problems generated by the impact of Covid19.  In the case of a serious impact on your work that cannot be mitigated, you should keep a record of the effect on your project in order that you can complete a PGR Covid19 Impact Statement. |
|  | **Supervisory Support** |
| How will my supervision continue if we are home-working? | During a period of home working, the work to be done should be discussed and agreed between you and your supervisors as usual, including agreed progression targets/milestones and meetings. A normal schedule of supervision can be maintained using alternative methods to face-to-face meetings as appropriate (consider Teams video meetings, Skype, Zoom, Facetime, for example). If you are unable to contact your supervisors because they are all ill or unavailable, then you should continue with the work that you agreed. |
| Who should I contact for advice if my primary supervisor is unavailable? | All our PGRs should have at least two supervisors. In your planning conversations with your supervisory team, you should identify, who you should talk to if your primary supervisor is unavailable. If none of your supervisors are available, you can contact your School who will be able to advise. |
|  | **Health and Wellbeing** |
| I think I have contracted Covid19, what should I do? | If you are concerned and need information on Covid19 or other illnesses, you can use [NHS 111 online](https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19) to find further information and advice. If you suspect that you might have Covid19, you should follow Public Health England advice for reporting this, and self-isolate. If you are ill, you should contact your supervisors and School for advice on academic impact. |
| I have been ill and unable to work; do I need to inform the university. | In the case of short-term, self-limiting illnesses lasting less than four weeks (which we hope will be the case for most people sick with Covid19), the expectation is that the period of absence is normally accommodated within the registered period of study.  If illness prevents you from working for more than 4 weeks, then you should collect evidence in case you need to apply for extenuation, extension or interruption.  Tier 4 students will need to complete an Approved absence form available through PGR Office if unable to work for more than 4 weeks. |
| What do I do if I have an underlying health condition that makes me more susceptible to Covid19 infection? | Please discuss any proposed changes to working practices with your supervisor.  If you are in one of the vulnerable categories, or you have members of your family living with you who are, we would advise supervisors to be as flexible as possible. |
| I have caring responsibilities – how can I manage my project if I have to change my working hours because my caring responsibilities change? | You should speak with your supervisors to plan how to adjust your working patterns to accommodate any changed personal circumstances. The amount of work that you can do without impinging on your caring responsibilities should be discussed so that this is clear and is suitable to meet the adjusted timelines. There should be no pressure or obligation for you to undertake more work than you can accommodate along with your other responsibilities, if you are obliged to work remotely because of a University partial or full closure. |
| I am worried that I will feel isolated whilst I am working remotely. | The Doctoral School is planning a range of activities and guidance to help PGR researchers maintain a sense of community and network whilst they cannot get together face to face. Please check our website <https://doctoralschool.lincoln.ac.uk/> or twitter feed @UoLDocSchool for more information.  Student Wellbeing is open for PGR students and further information on support during Covid disruption can be found on their website.  https://studentservices.lincoln.ac.uk/ |
|  | **Fees, Funding and Visas** |
| I am concerned that requesting an interruption or extension may affect my funding. Can the University provide general advice? | Yes. In addition to consulting supervisors regarding implications of extensions and interruptions, the Funding Advice team can advise regarding implications for funding such as government loans and sponsorship.  They can be contacted on [fundingadvice@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:fundingadvice@lincoln.ac.uk) |
| What does no fee extension mean? | The no fee extension covers students who need more time than the normal enrolment period (e.g. 4 years for FT PhD student, 16 months for FT Masters by Research) to submit their thesis for examination.  Extensions of up to 6 months can be approved where supported by Covid Impact Statement with no additional fee charged by the University for that period of extension beyond the normal enrolment period. |
| I am in receipt of a University scholarship. How will Covid19 affect my funding? | Internally funded PGR students can apply for an extension to funding in accordance with UKRI guidelines. These cover PGR students whose funding was due to end between 1st March 2020 and 31st March 2021, where Covid19 disruption has had a material impact on ability to complete project during the originally funded timelines. Students in their final year of funding who meet criteria for funding extension will be contacted by their Colleges. |
| I am worried about my visa status, what should I do? | Students with questions about their visa or immigration status should contact the International Advice Centre on Internationaladvice@lincoln.ac.uk or call +44 (0)1522 837080 |
| I am a Tier 4 visa holder and will be continuing my research from overseas, is there anything I need to do? | Yes, please complete the online ‘[Change of Circumstances’](https://ps.lincoln.ac.uk/services/registry/Assessments/Tier4ChangeOfCircumstances/SitePages/Home.aspx) form, in the ‘Change of Study Location’ category, to inform us of the planned dates you will be studying or otherwise based overseas. If the dates you enter change, or are extended, please submit a further form.  It is important that you do this to maintain the sponsorship of your Tier 4 visa. If you have any questions please email [tier4visa@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:tier4visa@lincoln.ac.uk)” |
|  | **Advice for Supervisors** |
| My researchers have caring responsibilities – how can I manage the project if they have to change their working hours because their caring responsibilities change? | Conversations should centre around management of project, including suggestions on adjustment to focus and timelines. There should be discussion of the amount of work that could reasonably be undertaken from home, with no pressure or obligation to work remotely if personal circumstances preclude transfer of normal working hours to the home environment e.g. if care is being given to small children or elderly relatives. |
| What do I do if one of my researchers has an underlying health condition that makes them more susceptible to Covid19 infection? | We appreciate that researchers in one of the vulnerable or with caring responsibilities may be particularly concerned at this time. We advise supervisors to be as flexible as possible about working arrangements and not to put pressure on people or require them to disclose personal information. |
| I am due to take PGR supervisory training in order to be part of a supervisory team. Will this be delivered during Covid19 disruption? | Doctoral School is delivering training online. Upcoming training events will be advertised on the Doctoral School site and can be booked online. |
| I have new students due to start or am PGR considering applications. Can new PGR students join the university? | New starters should be advised that October 1st 2020 will be next PGR Induction period.  Exceptions for earlier starters can be made where projects can commence with off campus delivery, for example split-site overseas students, or where early stages of research are not reliant on campus-based facilities but will need to be approved by School.  New starters should also consider deferring start date (for example to February 2021), where social distancing or other protective measures may restrict access to key research facilities.  For overseas students requiring CAS support, contact International admissions ([intadmissions@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:intadmissions@lincoln.ac.uk)) for current UKVI advice if start dates are delayed. |
| Why is the University of Lincoln guidance different to that of my friends and colleagues who are researchers at other Universities? | All universities have been working to urgently provide guidance to their staff and students. This needs to consider the types of research that they undertake, the breadth of disciplines and build upon existing policies and regulations.  We recognise that you may hear about different approaches and arrangements being put in place elsewhere but please ensure that you are following the University of Lincoln guidance. |