

Sent via email on 15th July 2021

Sent on behalf of Rich Harris, SWDTP Director

Dear all,

I am writing concerning the most recent guidance from UKRI about further action to support doctoral students affected by COVID-19.

To summarise, we are now permitted to offer extensions to all UKRI funded students whose research has been impacted by COVID-19 **and who are unable to mitigate the impact or adjust their projects to complete on time**. We also have the flexibility to consider, **in exceptional circumstances**, further requests from students who had an earlier request turned down or who have already received an extension under Phase 1 or Phase 2.

Whilst this is good news, it is important that expectations are suitably framed. The guidance reaffirms the need for students to mitigate the impact on the project, wherever possible, adjusting their projects, if required, to complete on time. Every effort to do so will need to come ahead of any extension request. It is also clear that the flexibility we have is only for exceptional cases. This will be a targeted action, determined by exceptional need.

You can read the guidance at <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UKRI-240321-PolicyStatementFinal.pdf>.

There you may note that:

- The priority remains for students to adapt and adjust research projects to mitigate the delays caused by COVID-19, where possible, to complete their research to a doctoral standard within their original funding period. New students should develop their projects from the outset with any future restrictions and limitations in mind;
- Requests for an extension should normally be considered 6 months prior to the end of the student's current funded period; and
- the majority of extension requests are expected to be for up to 3 months of UKRI support (although longer requests are, in principle, permitted).

If you are interested in exploring the possibility of a funded extension, then you should begin by talking it through with your supervisors. If they are in agreement, they (preferably, rather than you) should arrange to contact your local institutional administrators who will, in turn, raise it with the SWDTP. We will then begin a process of dialogue with all concerned. At the present time, the local administrators are:

Bath: Ana Bullock, aprb20@bath.ac.uk

Bristol: Anna Wallace, swdtp-bristol@bristol.ac.uk

Exeter: Anna Dolman, A.E.Dolman@exeter.ac.uk

Plymouth: Sarah Kearns, doctoralcollege@plymouth.ac.uk

UWE: Vicky Nash, graduateschool@uwe.ac.uk

However, if, for any reason, you do not wish to discuss it with your supervisors then you can contact the administrators directly. Please keep in mind that the request should normally be considered 6 months prior to the end of the current funded period. If you are further from that point, then it is important that you continue to retain evidence that may support your application when the time comes.

I understand this policy will not alleviate everyone's concerns. However, I hope it gives some reassurance that where there are major setbacks due to COVID that cannot be mitigated in other ways then there we do have some flexibility to offer support where it is most needed, considering individual circumstances on a case-by-case basis. It is something of a 'last resort' policy, if other measures have proved unavoidably insufficient, but it is helpful to know it is there.

If you remain worried or concerned, please do contact us at the SWDTP: swdtp-enquiries@bristol.ac.uk

With best wishes,

Richard

Director, SWDTP