

Guidance on Annual Progress Review Processes, Extensions and Interruptions of Studies as a result of Covid-19 Impact



We know that you will be worried about the impact that the current situation will have on your research degree studies and your ability to progress and complete your degree. We have therefore established a set of overarching University principles, guidance and information for Doctoral and MPhil students in all faculties, which will be supplemented with more detail from your Academic Units/Disciplines.

Principles of our support for you:

- Our aim is for you to progress and complete your research studies according to your original timetable wherever possible, and to minimise any delay to the completion of your project. This may require adjustments to your project plans, for which we will provide you with appropriate support;
- Our evaluation of theses will take account of the different activities that can be undertaken during Covid-19 restrictions, but we expect that both the quality of the thesis and the integrity of the qualification will remain, as befits 3 years of full-time study (or part-time equivalence);
- We will review and take account of your individual circumstances during this period, including the difference in approach being taken by external funders, as appropriate.

Specific Guidance

Annual Progress Review Processes

1. In the **2020 APR process** students will be able to record in an up to 500-word statement their present situation and impacts being felt. This can be as an attachment to the normal submission. It is recognised that by the next APR (Spring 2021) it may be clearer what effect the Covid-19 impact may have had, indeed some students may not need or want to alter their programme of study or their submission deadlines for a variety of reasons.
2. In any **statement** and/or application relating to impact, students should express the impact through a description of the key reasons for academic impact (see examples in table below), but also as an estimate of the impact on their time related to their studies/productivity. For example: 'I have only been able to work for half a day rather than a full day because of home schooling duties, so 50% of my time has been affected. It is important to record mental health/stress issues as well as other issues such as looking after children. It is understood that while severe illness issues or applications for extensions and interruptions based **solely** on ill health should be dealt with via sick leave procedures in the usual way, many people will find that the stress of the situation will provide some limit on concentration to study. If this is significant in affecting studies, it should be described and recorded.
3. It is recognised that **students at different stages** will feel impact differently. While there may be some commonalities which relate to stages of study e.g. first year studies may feel disruption related to their project design development and research training most acutely, second year students may feel disruption according to data collection and access to labs/studios/populations for study, and other facilities most acutely, while students towards the end of second

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year/third/fourth may already have their data and be writing up, so the issue is about whether the time to concentrate on this is disrupted.

However, we recognise that for some students an extension to their minimum candidature, submission deadline or an interruption of studies will be necessary. Due to the current situation, we have relaxed conditions for considering these.

For all extension/interruption requests and/or for continuing impacts of Covid-19 disruption, the start of the lockdown period is deemed to be 1st March 2020.

All requests relating to Covid-19 should be discussed with supervisors prior to submitting a request in ePortfolio (using the Mitigations form) and supervisors will review and signoff requests in the ePortfolio.

Extensions to Minimum Candidature

4. To support students whose primary research has been disrupted due to the Covid-19 situation, we will be supportive of tuition fee-free extensions beyond the normal end of minimum candidature. This will enable students to complete the primary research they need in order to achieve the expected quality for a 3-year PhD study (or equivalent for a part-time student). It may take account of the need to alter the research design and methods in response to the Covid-19 disruption.
5. While we recognise that students may be feeling impact on their studies now and may be worried about their present situation, they **should apply in advance of the end of their minimum candidature period** as it most likely that the exact need in terms of time will become clearer towards the end of this period (FT PhD students normally have a 3-year period of minimum candidature, PT PhD students have a 6-year period of minimum candidature.). It is important that students continue **to discuss with supervisors and record the issues on ePortfolio** that affect them throughout their studies.
6. Students should therefore be assured that if they find they need an extension of time when they get to the end of their minimum candidature, or they realise that they should have had an interruption of studies (see below), they can apply for this. Each case will be examined individually and sympathetically. The mitigations form on ePortfolio should be used for students to complete relating to recording the Covid-19 impact.

Extensions to Thesis Submission Deadline

7. Currently, those students due to submit by **30th September 2020** can apply for a fee-free extension of up to 3 months to their submission deadline.
We will review this '30th September 2020' date at the end of July 2020 and will consider extending and/or adjusting this period as the situation progresses and we will inform you of any changes to this.
8. Extension requests should be submitted using the mitigations form on ePortfolio, in advance of the thesis submission deadline, so that they can be considered before the deadline has passed.

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When applying for an extension to minimum candidature or thesis submission deadline, you should consider the example extension timeframes and requirements for application (all years) below. (It is recognised that there is a difference in activity and productivity in research projects and different stages. An assessment of the impact of Covid-19 should be assessed in terms of a percentage change).

Length of extension	Example reasons (these are for guidance only and not exhaustive)
<p>1-2 months</p> <p><i>i.e. relatively limited impact</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of general/minor well-being impacts (physical and mental health) due to Covid-19 • Evidence of an inability to access support as quickly and regularly as normal from supervisory team • Evidence of issues accessing external research institutions/repositories/travel and fieldwork for research. • Accommodating new plans due to thesis changes as a direct result of Covid-19 • Evidence of difficulties establishing working from home (e.g. access to laptop/IT/quiet working environment) • Evidence of difficulties maintain usual pace/productivity in analysis and writing
<p>2-3 months</p> <p><i>i.e. significant impact</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of relatively significant well-being impacts (physical or mental health, bereavement) • Evidence of caring responsibilities (e.g. children or vulnerable groups) • Evidence that student needed access to university facilities and University closure impacted thesis completion • Evidence of persistent difficulties maintain usual pace/productivity in analysis and writing
<p>4-6 months</p> <p><i>i.e. very significant impact</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of very significant well-being impacts (physical or mental health, bereavement) • Significant and/or full-time caring responsibilities (e.g. children or vulnerable groups) • Unable to complete research/data gathering/fieldwork as planned as a result of covid-19, and alternative plan not possible or involves significant delay • Evidence of significant difficulties maintain usual pace/productivity in analysis and writing
<p>6 months +</p>	<p>Evidence of severe impact, however It is likely that an interruption/suspension of studies may be most appropriate.</p>

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Interruptions of Study

9. Due to the current situation, we will be supportive of **Retrospective interruptions**. These may be particularly useful for self-funded students for example as this would mean a suspension of fees as well as a stopping of the normal expectation in terms of the time frame for submission. The normal expectation is that students are not expected to carry out any work on their academic study during an interruption, however we will be flexible on this and we understand that students would normally keep in touch with supervisors during this period.
10. Funded students may prefer to apply for extensions because of the specific terms of their funding which means that interruptions are not suitable.

If you have any queries regarding this guidance, please contact your [Graduate School](#).

Further information in relation to Covid-19

- Detailed and separate FAQs for Postgraduate Research students are available at: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/wellbeing/coronavirus-updatedinformation/>)
- Guidance for Doctoral and MPhil students and PGR Supervisors is available at: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/student-resources/PGR/FormsPolicies.htm>