GCU
Glasgow Caledonian University

University for the Common Good
The Graduate School

COVID-19-Related Extension Policy and Process for Research Students

Status	Date
Consultation: Executive Board	15 June 2020
Consultation: Research Continuity Group	15 June 2020
Consultation: Graduate School Team	15 June 2020
Consultation: Chair & Secretary of Research Degrees Committee	15 June 2020
Consultation: Equality and Diversity Advisor	15 June 2020
Consultation: GS Research Degree Administrators network	17 June 2020
Consultation: PgR Rep COVID group	17 June 2020
Consultation: GS Research Degree Leaders network	17 June 2020
Consultation: Executive Board	23 June 2020
Final approval: Research Degrees Committee	7 July 2020
Final approval: Executive Board	29 June 2020
Publication on Website	7 July 2020

Last reviewed: July 2020

COVID-19-Related Extension Policy and Process for Research Students

1. Purpose

This policy covers the principles and processes for extensions of time and funding where research students have significant interruptions to their research studies due to the COVID-19 situation.

2. Principles

Noting a corroborating source (where one exists) for each stated principle, the University is committed to:

- ensuring all doctoral students are supported in completing their research projects to a doctoral level. *UKRI* and *UKCGE* *guidance*
- maintaining the quality of students' research and the standard required for the research degree to be awarded. *UKCGE guidance*
- treating all PgR students fairly, using flexible and inclusive processes that are sympathetic to the disruption caused to academic programmes and recognising the impact of the pandemic on individual personal circumstances of students. *UKRI guidance*
- protecting mental health and wellbeing of students. *UKCGE guidance*
- publishing the criteria for extensions and applying these consistently across all PgR student applications. *UKCGE guidance*
- implementing an application process with minimal burden on students. *UKCGE guidance*
- providing financial support mechanisms so that a student's funding source is not compromised.

3. Eligibility for extensions of time and funding

3.1 Extensions

All research students, at any stage in their programme, who are continuing as registered students in study, but have their studies significantly disrupted by COVID-19, are eligible to apply for an extension of time and, if a funded student, for an extension of funding. The extension of time is the time required to adjust to the disruptions and recover the research plan. If approved, time and funding for the extension are added at the end date of the registration period and the end date of the funding, respectively. Research students wishing to extend their time and funding should apply using the process and form described in this policy.

3.2 Suspensions of studies

Those students who have significant disruptions to their research and wish to stop their studies to undertake, for example, full-time paid employment during the COVID-19 pandemic, should not apply for an extension but instead apply for suspension of studies. As per normal, during suspension of studies, the 'clock' is stopped on the studies and any studentship funding payments are suspended. Upon return to study, the student would return to take up the remaining time and funding in their research programme. Research students wishing to suspend their studies should apply using the normal RDC3s *Application for Suspension of Studies* form.

3.3 Absences due to illness

Those students unable to study, due to illness (including illnesses related to COVID-19) that lasts for longer than two months, should not extend. They should instead provide medical evidence and suspend their studies, as well as any studentship funding payments after it is known that the illness

will be lasting longer than 2 months. Research students who are absent due to illness for longer than 2 months should submit the RDC3s *Application for Suspension of Studies* form as per the normal process for absence due to illness.

3.4 Financial support beyond funding extensions

Any student, including research students, struggling financially as a result of COVID-19, can apply to the GCU Common Good Support Fund especially set up by GCU to help with financial hardship. Research students can find an application form [here](#) and they can contact the Student Funding Team for advice at funding@gcu.ac.uk.

Further advice on paying tuition fees and other sources of financial support during COVID-19 can be found on the [GCU Coronavirus latest webpages](#) under **Student FAQs on Fees and Financial Support**.

The [Student Funding webpages](#) also provide advice on financial support. Students, with queries regarding financial support, can contact the Student Funding Team at funding@gcu.ac.uk

4.   Research Recovery Plans for all research students

4.1 Initial work of the supervisory team and research student

- Develop research recovery plans and individualised support needs plans for each research student.
- Wherever possible, adjust the research project to enable completion within the normal timeframe to enable students to move forward in their careers in a timely way.
- Identify COVID-related risks going forward, and put mitigations in place where possible, revising their research project risk register.
- Identify the time needed to make adjustments to the research project and return the project to the trajectory it was on prior to disruption.
- Document revised timeframes for the research, including timings for the intermediate milestones such as RDC2, as well as the end dates. Documentation should appear in the supervisory meeting records, annual reports and as an updated timetable or Gantt chart.

4.2 Extensions of time

- If the student and supervisory team make the assessment that the studies have been significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 situation, they can make a joint application for extension of time.
- The extension of time requested is the time needed to adjust to the disruptions and recover the research plan.
- The expectation, from the evidence of the *GCU Survey of PGRs*, is that, for a substantial proportion of students, the extension time will be between 3 to 6 months; however, each student will have individual personal and research project related circumstances which should be reflected on by the student-supervisory team, when identifying the time needed to recover the research plan.
- In the first instance, the student-supervisory team can apply for extensions of time up to a maximum of 6 months if in their final years (e.g. years 3-4 full-time FT PhD, years 4-6 of part-time PT) and up to a maximum of 3 months if in their first few years (i.e. years 1-2 FT, years 1-3 PT PhD). This is on the basis that students in their first few years will have more capacity to recover lost time.

- If it becomes apparent that further time is needed to recover the research plan, the student-supervisory team can apply again, each application being for up to a maximum of 3 months.
- Some examples of different case studies arising from the survey responses, will be provided in the guidance to help student-supervisory teams gauge what might be appropriate extension times to request.

4.3 Extensions of funding and financial relief

- Where students are receiving funding through GCU at the time of the COVID-19 disruption, extensions of time will be supported with matched extensions of funding. Thus if the student-supervisory team application for a second year full-time (FT) student receiving funding has 3 mths extension of time granted, then their maximum registration period will be extended to 4 years and 3mths and their funding will be extended to 3 years and 3 mths.
- For full-time students who have completed their 3 years funding and who are in their 4th year, there will be no continuation tuition fee charged during 4th year, as per normal, nor for any time extension granted at the end of the maximum period of study due to the COVID-19 situation.
- Where students are self-funded, no further tuition fee will be charged for the extension of time granted due to COVID-19.
- Students who are externally funded should follow their funder's guidance and apply to their funder for extension of time and funding in the first instance. If there is no opportunity to receive extension of funds from their external funder, these students may apply to GCU for extension of time and financial support.

4.4 Timeframes for application for extensions of time and funding

- The University will have a flexible approach to timeframes in which applications for extensions due to COVID-19 can be made, recognising that the COVID-19 situation is evolving and may have far-reaching consequences that require further adjustments to the student's research recovery plans.
- The timeframe for application for extensions of time and funding due to COVID-induced disruption will be open for three years to cover the full period of study to completion of students who are in their first year at the beginning of the COVID pandemic.
- This application process remains open for use also in the possibility of further COVID pandemic lockdowns in the future.
- **For students at year 3-4 FT, year 6 PT or approaching RDC2 deadline:** Students who are nearing the end of their normal funding period (e.g. year 3 FT) or their maximum study period (e.g. year 4 FT, year 6 PT) or who are approaching an intermediate milestone deadline, such as RDC2 (e.g. year 1 FT, year 2 PT), should apply for an extension of time due to COVID-related disruptions as soon as the process opens.
- **For students whose funding ends in June:** Recognising the emergency situation for these students, occurring before the application process is fully open, these students should contact the School's Senior Postgraduate Research Tutor (and Chair of the School's RPAB) to request an automatic 1-month extension of time and funding should this be required. If such students wish to apply for further extensions of time and funding, they may do so through the process outlined in this policy. They may apply for up to a further 5 mths maximum, which, along with their automatic 1 month, gives a maximum total of 6 mths.

- All other students should apply for an extension of time due to COVID-induced disruptions when they have the opportunity to put their research recovery plans into effect and can revise their plans and the time needed to recover with greater knowledge and understanding of the COVID-related 19 impact on their research. This could be once the University is in phase 4 of the Scottish Government's Recovery Plan.
- Student-supervisory teams are also welcome to apply earlier to receive the assurance of a time extension in the interim and may apply for further extensions of time if needed once unknowns become known.

5. Criteria for extensions of time

The following are possible and non-exclusive circumstances eligible for an extension of time. They arise from GCU student responses to the *GCU Survey of PGRs* and are also corroborated by the *UKCGE* guidance. Student-supervisory teams may select one only or a combination of these criteria in their application for extension of time:
- Unable to collect data and the impact cannot be mitigated.
- Unable to undertake fieldwork and the impact cannot be mitigated.
- Unable to access GCU lab facilities and the impact cannot be mitigated.
- Unable to access other resources required (please specify) and the impact cannot be mitigated.
- Unable to meet effectively between the student and supervisory team.
- An impact on the supervisory team that has affected supervision or progress of either research or writing, such as illness.
- Family/caring responsibilities.
- Challenges with maintaining focus in current circumstances and stress.
- 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 COVID-19 and evidenced in the case.

6. Process

6.1 *Application form*

The application will be processed using a special COVID-19-Related Extension Form, that will request brief information on:
- Student data, so that the university can monitor the inclusivity and E&D aspects of the process.
- Student funding data, so that the University can implement the appropriate matched funding and financial support linked to the time extension granted.
- Student status (international, EU, Home) data, so that the University can implement the appropriate support and visa advice for international students related to any time extension granted.
- A jointly-signed statement from the student and supervisor on the impact of COVID-19 that might cover some, but not necessarily all, of the above-listed criteria.

6.2 *Application process*

- The special COVID-19-related extension form request will be added to the suite of extension and suspension of studies forms RDC3, namely:
  RDC3s: Suspension of Studies
  RDC3e: Extension of Studies
  RDC3c: COVID-19-Related Extension of Studies

  and will be processed following the standard process for RDC forms for approval through School RPABs.

- In the first instance of implementation of the process, special meetings of the School RPABS will be convened to expedite COVID-19-Related Extension applications.
- Recommendations on applications for extension of time and/or funding will be made to the Vice Principal Research and communicated by the VP Research to the applicant within one week of the respective RPAB.

6.3 *Quality standards and Consistency*

- Consistency of standards for approval of the extensions of time and funding are ensured through the use of School RPABS Research Progression and Awards Boards. The membership of each School RPAB includes experienced supervisors from the School and cross-university membership with the Chairs of each RPAB (the Senior PgRTs Postgraduate Research Tutors) sitting on the other School RPABS as voting members. Each School RPAB also includes the Director of the Graduate School, the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee and the Senior Registry Officer (RPG).
- Workshops for supervisors and for PgR students on the new policy and process will be delivered by the Graduate School, enabling opportunity for research students and supervisors to ask questions and come to a shared understanding of the policy and process.
- Quality assurance of the process and monitoring of the E&D characteristics are the responsibilities of the Research Degrees Committee RDC as per normal. Review of the Extension scheme and its E&D characteristics will be reported to RDC 6 monthly.

7.   Appeal of Decision on Extension

- If the student and supervisors cannot agree on the extension time needed to recover the research plan due to the COVID-19 pandemic, advice and mediation should be sought from their postgraduate research tutor or the senior postgraduate research tutor prior to the RPAB. The PgRTs will facilitate the student-supervisory team to agree on the extension time and put forward a joint application for extension.
- If the student-supervisory team cannot agree on the extension time, then the student may submit to the RPAB their independent request for consideration alongside the supervisory team's recommendation using the RDC3e form. The respective RPAB will make final recommendations to the VP Research.
- In the case where the Board could not reach a decision or the student wishes to seek reconsideration of the decision on the grounds of new evidence not previously submitted to the Board, a Research Degree's Committee Review Panel will be convened to consider each case, chaired by the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee (or nominee) and two other members of the Research Degrees Committee. The student should submit their case for reconsideration in writing, including any additional supporting documentation, within 14

days of notification of the RPAB's decision. (A request for a review will not normally be considered if it is submitted outwith the 14-day period unless the candidate can provide good reasons why the delay has occurred.)

- There shall be no appeal from the decision of the Review Panel. The Research Degree's Committee Review Panel will make final recommendation to the PVC Research.