

Doctoral College Coronavirus update

Return to campus: pilot

22 May 2020

This is one of a series of occasional updates for doctoral students from the Doctoral College – [previous updates can be found here](#). It's important to also check the [University's student advice](#).

Dear student,

I want to bring you the latest information on reopening our laboratories following the email from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer on 7 May.

Many of us are able to work remotely in response to the pandemic, however a large number of our research colleagues are dependent on access to specialist equipment and the teams that support it. The [government guidance](#) issued on 11 May is clear: work from home if you can, but those who cannot work from home should go to work. That communication from government also included [specific guidance on how laboratory work can be safely re-started](#).

I know that many colleagues want to resume their laboratory-based research as soon as possible, and pilot research trials were announced in the email from Bernie Morley and Keith Zimmerman on 7 May. Since then there have been a series of discussions which I have been involved in throughout this week about how we can enable this to proceed and when it might happen. What we all recognise is that this must be safe, sustainable and equitable.

We want to move quickly, but carefully. Our approach has been to initiate a small number of pilots and use them to develop our procedures, and to identify hurdles to inform the accelerated reactivation of laboratory-based research that is to come.

Over recent days my research colleagues, Nicky Kemp and I have been working closely with Technical Services, Estates and HR to assess the facilities and activities involved and consider their re-activation in light of current national guidance. We have developed a process by which laboratory activities can be re-configured and assessed for safe working, with input from our trade unions.

Considerations have had to start with revisiting specific risk assessments already in place for lab-based activities, but also include social distancing, appropriate provision of hand sanitiser and enhanced cleaning procedures, and on to signage, use of shared facilities and new protocols within buildings, to consideration of work rotas in the context of the carrying capacity of laboratories and buildings, and how staff and research students might travel to campus.

I am pleased to say we are now in a position to launch the first of our pilots, which will be laboratories in 6WS housing the Physiology Research Group from the Centre for Nutrition, Exercise and Metabolism (CNEM) based in the Department for Health. Research activity in this lab is scheduled to commence, to an agreed rota. Further pilots will join over the coming period, and we will provide an update on our plans for the acceleration of laboratory re-openings and how this will be planned and approved.

This has been a great effort by all involved in extraordinary circumstances, and I would like to thank everyone who has helped make this possible.

Regards,

Professor Jonathan Knight

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)