

Doctoral College Coronavirus update

Return to campus: pilot update

1 June 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,

Our recent announcement regarding [reopening our research activities on campus](#) noted that government guidance was that those who could work from home should continue to do so, but that those who cannot work from home should go to work. I am pleased to confirm that the Physiology Research Group from the Centre for Nutrition, Exercise and Metabolism (CNEM) returned to laboratories in 6WS last week. The Mason Lab in 4S and the laboratories of the Centre for Sustainable and Circular Technologies which make up the rest of the pilot, are restarting their activities in the coming days.

Informed by the government's [specific guidance on how laboratory work can be safely re-started](#), research colleagues have returned on a rota basis to enable social distancing and we have been collating initial feedback to ensure pilot participants are safe and compliant in their working environment, within their buildings and on campus. The use of rotas and other practices including staggered arrival times and one-way circulation systems in buildings may be required in order to allow the maximum number of researchers to re-engage with their laboratory work.

We are also innovating to optimise laboratories for reduced capacity, including shift work. The learnings from these pilot activities are enabling us to develop practical procedures and scalable solutions so that more of our research community can return to work. It must be recognised that not all laboratories will be able to reopen safely and in a way that is consistent with current guidelines, and that the timescales for different laboratories will vary.

As a result of these learnings, I am very pleased to announce that the University Executive Board has agreed that from today 1 June we will seek to scale up laboratory-based research activities on campus, whilst continuing to adhere to the latest government guidance. This scale-up will be managed and prioritised by the Deans with support and advice from technical staff, and will be overseen by a new Research Pilot/Scale-Up Group, which will continue to consult with the research community, Technical Services, Estates, the Trades Unions and HR and ensure a uniform approach.

I would encourage all PIs to begin the risk assessment process and discuss new operating protocols with all members of their research groups. In this way, they will be best able to assess the steps that would need to be taken to ensure safe working, as well as the appetite amongst the members of the group for returning to the laboratory, in anticipation of the prioritised re-start programme. Guidance will be available through your Head of Department. Research staff and doctoral students who wish and are able to re-engage with laboratory-based work should indicate that to their PI/Supervisor and ask what the status is for their particular laboratory.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone who has helped us get to this stage, including the participants in the pilot laboratories and members of the Research Pilot/Scale-Up Group, and most especially those members of support staff from Technical Services to Estates staff who really make this possible.

Best wishes, and take care.

Jonathan

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