

Dear students

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge both of the Open Letters from many of you, sent to senior management on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020, and the letter from HSS FDSC. I very much welcome your thoughts and concerns regarding Financial Support/Registration and (separately) Returning to Study, including the opening of labs. I shall attempt to at least explain where things stand at the moment, which will address some of the issues raised by these letters in this communication, but I must ask for your patience since some matters raised will need further work before I can respond meaningfully to the points made.

Acknowledging all the hard work done by the Doctoral College (DC), which continues to provide you with support and guidance, I am hugely grateful for their patience as the senior management team strives to steer the University through the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges imposed by severe financial constraints on all activities. As the DC's representative in the University Executive Board and Senate, among other decision-making bodies, I continue to seek decisions on key aspects relating to funding and registration.

I also want to stress the importance of keeping safe and well during this period and to remind you that the Wellbeing Service <https://www.bath.ac.uk/professional-services/wellbeing-service/> is still available if you feel like you might need support.

### Registration and Funding

At its meeting yesterday afternoon, Senate approved a paper proposing that the 3-month fee-free extension to registration (thesis submission deadline) be rolled out to all current doctoral students. Recognising that not all of you will need this extension, the mechanism will be that as you enter your final year of registration, the DC will contact you to ask if you would like the extension.

I have also continued to raise the question of how non-UKRI-funded students can best be supported financially. I would like to add that a lot of work has gone into contacting charities, non-UKRI funding agencies and philanthropists. We recognise the increasing financial strain on many students due to the duration of the pandemic, and we are seeking to boost the Hardship Fund and simplify the application process. The Hardship Fund webpage (below) now includes the **COVID-19 non-furlough scheme hardship fund** (to assist students who due to the nature of their employment at the University of Bath do not qualify for the University Furlough Scheme and are facing financial hardship due to COVID-19) as well as the **University Hardship Fund** (for those students who are experiencing financial difficulty and are unable to meet basic or unexpected additional costs from other sources of support, and for those who have experienced a change in financial circumstances due to unforeseen events). Further information can be found at: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/applying-for-the-university-of-bath-hardship-fund/>.

We recognise that some students, whilst able to continue with *some* aspects of their studies, are having to put on-hold key research activities such as lab work, field work or data collection activities. These students are often only able to commence or continue writing-up. The first consideration should be to adapt your project or to suspend your studies, but we recognise that for some students these are not a viable options. If you are in this position, and you have completed the prescribed minimum period of study for your programme, you are now able to apply for a **temporary change in registration to Writing-Up** status (paying the Continuation fee) for a specific period of time, after which you will return to full registration and full fees, to resume full research activities. The advantage of this change is that you will be charged a significantly-reduced fee during this period.

As we near the stage when many full-time first-year PhD students are due to have their confirmation exams, I want to remind you that **confirmation extensions** are possible if your ability to prepare has been adversely affected by COVID-19. The process for requesting an extension is not difficult as all we need is an emailed rationale from you and evidence of your supervisor's support – sent to [doctoralprogrammes@bath.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralprogrammes@bath.ac.uk).

We realise that we now have a lot of advice on our page <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/coronavirus-advice-to-doctoral-students/> but that sometimes not everyone is aware of the page, or of the details in it. We aim to continue to revise and update it, but I wanted to remind you that the page contains a wealth of information. For example, it appears that some students were not aware of the guidance that we published soon after lockdown commenced on how some self-funded students who cannot continue with their studies might wish to consider suspending their studies – which includes advice for students to discuss their specific cases with their supervisors, with the DC and, for international students, with the Student Immigration Service <https://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/student-immigration-service-important-information/>.

We also realise that the full extent of issues and delays due to Covid19 may not yet be obvious to many of you at this stage. I would therefore like to remind all of you that it is essential for you to **keep a log of any delays due to the pandemic**, should you at some stage in the future need to make a case for an extension. We have recently updated the guidance <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/coronavirus-advice-to-doctoral-students/#supervisory-meetings> to include examples of the types of things that you might wish to record.

### **Returning to study and work**

Noting your thoughts and concerns about returning to the labs and offices as described in the open letter outlining, the DC has been working with senior management on guidance for doctoral students. This guidance has been published at <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/guidance-for-doctoral-students-on-returning-to-campus/> this afternoon. I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the safety of you and those around you is uppermost in our priorities. Whilst closely following government guidance, the university is gradually rolling-out the opening of specific research facilities, with increasing numbers of you being able to access these resources.

Government guidance currently states that those who are able to work from home should continue to do so. Therefore, we do not currently plan to open offices (for staff or students) until that guidance changes. We will, however, continue to monitor progress and respond to any changes in Government guidance.

Given the local nature of these research facilities, you should consult with your department for any advice regarding specific labs, offices and other resources.

### **How to raise queries, and more generally your views, and our communications to you**

Some of you have asked for clarity over who you should contact with regards to specific aspects. Recognising this issue, we will be updating our pages with the following guidance:

- queries regarding **your own registration** – including suspensions, extensions, changes to registration status (e.g. full-time vs part-time, or Writing-Up) – contact your programmes administrator through [doctoralprogrammes@bath.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralprogrammes@bath.ac.uk)

- queries regarding **access to departmental resources or spaces** – contact your PGR Director of Studies (<https://www.bath.ac.uk/teams/list-of-directors-of-studies-by-department/>) or Head of Department (<https://www.bath.ac.uk/teams/our-academic-leadership/>)
- queries about **UKRI funding extensions** - contact [doctoralcollege@bath.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralcollege@bath.ac.uk)
- **feed your views in to the University and to seek a University response** - contact the Student Union Postgraduate Officer [SUpostgrad@bath.ac.uk](mailto:SUpostgrad@bath.ac.uk)

Regarding the last point, I have been working with the SU in recent weeks to develop a process whereby they raise issues with DC at the end of each week and then I will respond to them in my (new) series of regular email updates to you (this email being the second one). (These updates will also be reflected in the weekly Doctoral Digest and in the DC revising our Covid19 page <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/coronavirus-advice-to-doctoral-students/#impact-on-funding-and-income>.) Going forward we are ensuring that departments also receive these communications.

Some of you have asked for a live Q&A session with Doctoral Senior Management as they feel that some questions have not been addressed in the written updates received so-far. Given that we have only just established our regular sessions with the SU, I would prefer not to trial a separate Q&A session at this stage as I fear that this would simply repeat what we are now telling you in my emails and what is being added to our webpage. But I am happy to review this in due course.

I also recognise that, at times, we have tended to wait until we have a resolution to an issue before we have then informed you – the result being no news at all. I realise that this can be frustrating. In my email last week and in this email today, I have tried to explain those issues that have been resolved and where we are with those that have not yet reached a resolution. I shall continue to use this approach in all future correspondence.