

1

3 month extension

- a) Although improvements have been, I am still incredibly disappointing that the 3 fee-free extension still is only an extension to the registration period. This is not at all helpful to the many students such as myself who's funding ends after 3 or 3.5 years, meaning we don't really get any benefits to this, unless we want to be paying to also work for free just to get the extension. Can the university please consider this extension to not be one on top of registration, but to be one that is based on funding end date? Otherwise, this is helping very few people.
- b) Many PhD students are funded for less than 4 years, and will not be around to take advantage of any extensions at the end of registration. Why is the proposed fee-free registration extension only available at the end of the registration period? Wouldn't many students benefit more from a fee-free period starting when their funding runs out?
- c) Following your answer to a question last week indicating that the university 3 month extension for PhD students commences after the end of registration, could you please clarify the rationale for this position. I, I think along with everybody else, had assumed it was a supportive gesture that would extend the active research period to 3 years and 3 months, to account for the impact of CV and allow extra time for research activities (it is now more like 4-5 months). My understanding now is that I would have to work through the whole of the fourth year, without stipend funding, and would have to pay appropriate fees on top, before I even arrived at the university fee free extension- is this correct?

A significant proportion of students continue to the end of their registration (thesis submission deadline) and so this additional 3 months will still benefit many students – some may have funding to the end of their registration, and some may not. When introduced for those already in their final year, this was to relieve the immediate pressure on those with an impending deadline, where any delay could have resulted in them exceeding their deadline. The extension of this provision to apply to all students was in direct response to requests from students.

There exists a number of options for those students where funding is due to end – including transferring to part-time study (to potentially seek part-time work to supplement their income – see <https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/find-flexible-remote-working-opportunities-for-doctoral-students/>) and transferring to Writing-Up status (with the associated significantly reduced fee – see <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/coronavirus-advice-to-doctoral-students/#suspensions-extensions-and-temporary-change-to-writing-up-status>), as well as seeking support from the Hardship Fund.

I note the suggestion about whether the fee-free part of the 3-month extension could be brought forward to the point when funding ends (for funded students). Since the decision to award the 3-month extension was made by Senate, any change to this would require Senate approval (i.e. it is not in the Doctoral College's authority to grant). I shall make enquiries and then report back as soon as possible.

2

Funding

- a) Research funding provided for uses such as equipment, lab activities, conference attendance etc is currently just sitting in the bank, and for students whose funding ends soon, there may not be a chance to apply that project money to its intended research uses, since labs have been shut and most are still shut, and other activities and expenses are also non-existent. Could that money be partially repurposed to pay for PhD students' living expenses/wages so that they can support themselves during any potential extension?
- b) In a document published by the Doctoral College & Professor Jeremy Bradshaw dated 24th March 2020: ([https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/funding-and-income-guidance-for-doctoral-students/attachments/Coronavirus advice to students 24 March 2020 - Funding.pdf](https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/funding-and-income-guidance-for-doctoral-students/attachments/Coronavirus%20advice%20to%20students%2024%20March%2020%20-%20Funding.pdf)) the doctoral college outlines guidance from the UKRI t&c's highlighting "Where self-isolating undermines a student's ability to finish their doctorate within the funded period, an extension should be considered. In keeping with UKRI T&Cs, we would expect these to be costed extensions" the document further goes on to say "University of Bath's University Research Student Allowances (URSA) will align with the UKRI guidance (above)." From this, am I to understand that an URSA funded Chemistry PhD student, who has been unable to carry out critical research activities due to the closure of laboratories for a significant period of time, will be eligible to apply for a costed extension to cover a stipend and if so could you please provide some reassurance on how this will be enacted upon? (application procedure, etc.)

Regarding funding for Research Training Support/Bench Fees, this funding is crucial to supporting research activities once students are able to return to their research activities. Instead, the University has actively sought funding from a variety of other sources to boost the Hardship Fund for doctoral students to apply.

The quote cited from my correspondence of the 24th March 2020 refers specifically to Research Council registered students, and is from the UKRI guidance. Since 24th March 2020, some additional funds have started to come through from UKRI to individual training grants to support the most urgent of the UKRI-registered, final year cases. However, the UKRI offer is limited to UKRI-registered students and no funding has been identified to extend that level of funding to non-UKRI-registered doctoral students. Having reviewed the University's financial situation since March, it has subsequently been confirmed that the University is not able secure sufficient funds to apply the same procedure for non-UKRI-registered doctoral students. The University is therefore not able to fund extensions for students funded from the University Research Studentships Account (URSA).

3

Writing up stage

- a) I enquired to my department about the offer that was made to temporarily adjust to 'writing up' status while it is not possible to engage with field research and then convert back to full status when research can resume. I was informed that this is not available to 2nd year students. I had thought that was the whole point of making the offer and adapting the availability of the status? Isn't it most likely 2nd year students that would need this? I feel as though 2nd year researchers are getting the short end of the support during this period. My situation is becoming more and more desperate. As my young family struggle ever more with finances. I cannot justify that I have been paying full fees since March with virtually nothing to show for it.

We are bound by University Regulations, which limits this to those students who have completed the minimum period of study for their programme and mode of study. Self-funded students have been advised from the start of lockdown to apply for a suspension if they cannot continue with their studies. We have been encouraging any students facing financial difficulties to apply for the Hardship Fund.

4

Tier 4 visa holders

- a) How is [it] going with the policy of suspension for Tier 4 visa holders? The Vice chancellor's letter to students on 11th June said it is on discussion but no update since then. This policy is the most useful for a self-funded international student.

The UK Government's UK Visa & Immigration service (UKVI) regulate what universities can and cannot do in relation to international students. The University's Student Immigration Services (SIS) closely monitors government policy, and then refines their guidance accordingly – which we all then have to follow. International students must check the generic [information from SIS](#) but in particular <https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/advice-for-international-students/> and <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/coronavirus-information-for-tier-4-visa-holders/> (which was updated this week) as these both relate specifically to the Covid19 situation.

5

GTA teaching

- a) I understand that teaching will continue to be online, and students can continue to their studies remotely as well. Does this mean that there will also be opportunities for Graduate Teaching Assistants (PhD students) who are not coming back to campus? Will there be work opportunities for us remotely, given that many of us rely on such opportunities to be able to fund our studies?
- b) Is the University committed to maintaining GTA teaching levels across faculties as a vital source of income for PGRs and precondition for many ECR positions? In light of the increasing pressure placed on Early Career Researchers in the current economic situation, how is the University responding to support PGRs? Is the University in negotiations with other HE institutions to address the issue of hiring stops and their impact on ECRs? At what stage are plans to more effectively include PGRs in such negotiations and increase the student's body representativeness?

Plans for teaching in the 2020/21 academic year are still evolving. It would be fair to say that this is an extremely complex process against a background of continuing uncertainty about how the situation may evolve. What is clear is that programmes and units will continue to run. There may well be many more small-group face-to-face sessions, supporting larger group online lectures. While the teaching arrangements for the next academic year are yet to be finalised, early indications are that there will be ample opportunities for PGRs to teach.

The Centre for Learning & Teaching (CLT), who are responsible for providing training for doctoral students who wish to teach, has been reviewing its training to best-support doctoral students who may be looking to deliver sessions through alternative modes of delivery.

A new page <https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/plans-for-summer-and-the-2020-21-academic-year/> has been created, which will develop as plans are firmed-up.

6

Return to campus

- a) Is it possible for a list of research groups to be published for when the groups are being phased back in? So far we have only heard through word of mouth which groups are involved in the pilot schemes and have been allowed back. If you're not part of the groups being introduced back you have no idea which groups will be the next lot to be allowed back in and resume research activities, and then which lot after that etc. I know exact dates can't be confirmed but a rough idea of when different groups will be allowed back and in which order would be a lot more useful than hearing incomplete facts through friends and colleagues.

As I announced in my previous two emails, the process of reopening labs is continuing. I can announce that we plan to open 63 labs in the next three weeks. Crucially, the process continues to balance the need for core support measures and infrastructure, along with social distancing requirements.

All activities are managed centrally and overseen by the Deans, working with technical support teams and Health & Safety teams. The process is therefore not managed by the Doctoral College and so we have to seek updates which we then pass on to students: We are currently in discussion with Prof. Jonathan Knight, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), and will circulate an update on the situation very soon.

We continue to update <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/guidance-for-doctoral-students-on-returning-to-campus/>. Just this week we included an update from the Library, and we will include any updates as soon as we receive them.

7

Home working equipment

- a) Based on the University's recommendation to continue working from home, will it provide financial support for home office equipment that is in line with health and safety requirements?

As advised from the start of lockdown, all students (and staff) should perform a workstation assessment (see <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/coronavirus-advice-to-doctoral-students/#resources-and-it>). If you need specific equipment then you should contact your department.

Students are able to request to visit their offices to retrieve possessions, data, equipment, etc. (see Essential Visiting Procedures at <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/guidance-for-doctoral-students-on-returning-to-campus/>).

Disabled students should contact Student Services for advice and, depending on their funders, they may receive funding to purchase equipment to use at home.

8

Equality impact

- a) I am wondering about the University's management commitment to an equalities impact assessment to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on PGRs. At what stage is this assessment, and how would it be accessible so that its results can inform any actions to mitigate the adverse impact of the pandemic? How is the University assuring that equality, diversity, and inclusion are embedded as principles in its approach to supporting Ph.D. students during this pandemic?

We recognise that many groups of students may be under additional pressures. I want to reassure you that all of our services, including Student Services, Counselling & Mental Health, Disability Service, Student Immigration Services and the Doctoral College, have reviewed and increased the levels of support that they offer, recognising that students are having to access this support from off-campus. All of our University support services respond sensitively, professionally and in confidence, and so I encourage all students to raise any issues with us. I would also welcome your thoughts on how we can further improve all of our support, including to specific groups.

A number of working groups have been established by the University to ensure all students are fully supported through the ongoing situation, including planning for the next academic year. For example, the Aspirations Statement from the Resilient Curriculum Working Group includes the following statement, which is actively informing the planning for the coming year:

During the 2020/21 academic year, the University of Bath aspires to:

.....

- ensure that achieving exceptional student experience grounded in equality, diversity and inclusivity is central to all our endeavours through using our physical resources generously and innovatively

Communication of changes

- a) how [are] new policies about registration and fees [re. three month fee free extension period for non-final year doctoral students and the option to temporarily change to a period of writing up] are to be implemented? I emailed twice to the University but no one responded to my queries.

Implementation of the 3-month extensions of registrations is not straightforward, having to be actioned on an individual basis, and so will take time to implement for all current final year students. The DC will email other students as they start their final years to identify who will need these extensions: at which point they will then be implemented as soon as possible.

Students wishing a temporary change to Writing-Up status should follow the standard instructions at <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/guidance-and-forms-for-doctoral-students/> by completing [PGR10 form](#).