



20th March 2020

Coronavirus (Covid-19): important information for research students

To: All PhD students

Dear Colleagues,

First of all, I do hope you and your families are remaining well during these uncertain times.

Our first priority as we navigate this major public health crisis is the safety of our staff, students and visitors. We must of course comply carefully with the Public Health advice but we must also support you as a student and as a contributor to our research community. Today we have the following advice for you and your supervisory team. Of course, circumstances may alter and our advice may have to change, but this is where we are today.

The University remains open but many of us will change how we work and study; some or all of the time. We have moved some activities to remote working. Asking people to work and study at home, if they can, minimises levels of occupancy and reduces contact for those whose work necessitates their presence on campus. Keeping our research facilities open means we can continue with crucial projects, including efforts to address the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Where it is possible to keep a key laboratory or facility open safely, and where we can maintain levels of hygiene that enable essential research to continue, then we will support continued 'lab' working.

1. The University is open but, like other staff, our PhD students are encouraged to work from home where their supervisors state that this is feasible for their studies. Many library-based and data-based projects can probably be continued from home. Indeed, the main library is staying open (on self-service terms and restricted hours) and we are looking into ways to ensure that non-digital key materials can continue to be accessed.
2. If your research involves attending the University, perhaps because of a laboratory, clinical or fieldwork component, then you and your supervisors should discuss and agree a plan of campaign to allow you to make progress as fast as is feasible under the unusual circumstances of the Covid-19 emergency. Of course, it would be a good time to concentrate on the non-lab parts that can be accomplished remotely. If current campus work is important then, broadly, where it's possible to keep a key laboratory, field site or core facility open safely, and where we can maintain levels of hygiene that enable crucial research to continue, then we support continued 'lab' working where practical.
3. For the avoidance of doubt, supervisors have the responsibility both to clear PhD students to do work on campus and manage the safety protocols for this and, where a student really feels that they are at risk or have some other challenge, to manage approvals NOT to be on campus. Supervisors should inform the School of your agreed plans please.

4. If you or your supervisors are unsure then we recommend they escalate the specific circumstances to the Head of Graduate School/Director of Postgraduate Studies/Head of School who will help with appropriate decision-making.
5. Where a student and supervisor agree that a formal Authorised Interruption of Studies is required due to Covid-19 then that should be approved through the usual channels via your School or College. If you are a Tier 4 visa holder and will be interrupting your studies for over 60 days due to the Covid-19 outbreak, there should be no impact to your Tier 4 visa at this time. To ensure we are aware of your circumstances, you must email the Student Immigration Service, studentimmigration@ed.ac.uk and provide details of your Authorised Interruption of Study. There is no need to record a Leave of Absence for this period. Please ensure your supervisor is aware of where you are working.
6. Beyond this, your Head of College and the University's research policy group will help decide how best to proceed (and will learn lessons from across the University to help others). But we expect almost all decisions to be made locally by you and your supervisors. You are the team that really understands the specific circumstances of you, your supervisory team and the immediate thematic group environment in which you are working. This is the right setting to understand the individual combination of factors (nature of your research, personal situation, funding constraints, etc).

Finally, we wish you well through this challenging time.

Kindest wishes,

Jonathan Seckl
Senior Vice Principal

Colm Harmon
Vice Principal Students