Dear Student,

Since I last wrote to you, your PGR Directors have been working hard on your behalf and have been in regular contact with me, reporting on the main topics covered in PGR town halls or otherwise brought to their attention. On this basis I have been working with the other Colleges (through the newly formed Doctoral College – for information about this and regular updates about local PGR training and support available see <https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/DoctoralCollege>) and with the newly formed university-wide Adaptation and Renewal Teams (ART) to ensure that your needs as PGR students are represented in all University discussions about Covid-19 mitigation and preparations for the next academic year.

As you may know, we have put into place a protocol for remote vivas, which I'm glad to say has been operating smoothly according to feedback from examiners, and we have moved towards remote annual reviews in each School. The review will be an opportunity for you to indicate how the health crisis and the consequent lockdown have affected your research, and to discuss the length of any extension you may wish to take. A University-wide PGR student survey will also be circulated in the next week or so and I would be very grateful if you could take the time to complete this – its results will help guide university support strategies.

However, I do not need to wait for the outcome of that survey to know that there are a number of key concerns for you:

**Access to University Buildings**

In tandem with the Scottish Government's announcement last Thursday about a move to Phase 2 University Estates are now working on a plan to allow interim access to University buildings. I have indicated to Estates that you are often working in very challenging conditions and may be expected to start preparing for teaching in the next academic year, and have urged them to make sure you are included in any plans for interim access.

**Access to University Libraries**

Access to university and research libraries is governed by Scottish government rules and according to the latest official advice some activity may be permitted in Phase 2. In the meantime, the library has indicated that you can try to get e-copies purchased by the library via the Request A Book service: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/using-library/request-resources/resource-purchase-request/student-request-a-book-rab>  The Inter Library Loan service is also operating for e-copies: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/using-library/request-resources/ill>

**Final-Year Extensions**

The University FAQs clearly state that 'we will offer an unfunded interruption or extension, as appropriate, to all affected PhD, MPhil and MScR students to match the duration of closure of the University. This does not mean you must use this facility, but it is there in case you need it'. In practice, you should request extensions as normal with the usual extension request form, but with the reassurance that these are looked at very sympathetically. If you are granted an extension on the ground of disturbance caused by Covid 19 and receive a continuation fee invoice, please contact us at cahsspgconcess@ed.ac.uk and we will arrange the fee waiver for you. **If you need further reassurance, we will just remind you that extensions can be requested even in normal circumstances, and even then the vast majority of them are granted.**

**Non Final-Year Extensions**

We understand your research may be affected and hope that we will be able to support you. The fact that support for extensions is only confirmed for final year students does not mean that you are being forgotten. This situation is impacting you and the support you will need will depend on how long the current restrictions last and if/when we can go back to something that resembles the old normal. There is of course an element of financial uncertainty as we are unable today to commit any funds for two or three years from now, but above all there is the fact that right now you are in a situation where it is not possible to know whether to postpone or adapt your PhD plans as they exist. We realise that it offers little reassurance, but for now all we can do is reaffirm our commitment to supporting you.

We (the College Deans) have raised at School, College, University and UKRI-level the need for further funds to support you and will continue to do so. We will work with others in this University to contribute to both short(-ish)-term conversations such as prioritising return to buildings, studios, and labs, as mentioned above, and long-term ones such as the impact on visas. The impact of Covid 19 is likely to shape policy for years to come, and our role will remain to make sure you are taken into consideration in this process.

**IT Support**

The key message is that the University is still here to support you but we are more limited in what we can offer without the face-to-face option. We are relying on most staff and students to be able to use their own device as best they can, but we will do what we can to help when something goes wrong.

The University issued laptops on long-term loan to students in the past two months until our existing supplies were exhausted. Lead times for new laptops from our suppliers have been lengthened because of the pandemic.

1. Contact IS Helpline as soon as you have a problem - <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/help-consultancy/contact-helpline>

2. If there is a hardware problem Helpline will try as much as they can with you remotely but will advise seeking assistance from a number of local hardware shops such as <https://www.pcdoc.co.uk/laptop-repairs-edinburgh/> who are still operating throughout the pandemic

3. Seek financial support to assist with repairs or purchase of a new computer - <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19/current-students>

The main challenge has been dealing with troubleshooting problems at a distance which is obviously more difficult that being able to operate the machine directly, but we have a number of remote support tools that allows a degree of visibility as long as your computer can connect to the internet.

**Preparation for Online/Hybrid Teaching**

As always, many of you will be contracted to teach in the new academic year. This will be highly challenging for many of us and I have been assured by the Director of the Institute for Academic Development that its expert team are working on training specifically aimed at GH tutors, which will complement the training you receive in your School. You should check out all the PGR support and courses offered by IAD at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development>.

**Careers Support**

You can contact the Careers Service at careers@ed.ac.uk and a Careers Consultant in your School, if available.

Some useful links:

University of Edinburgh Careers Services: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/careers>

Access events, workshops, jobs and internships on our portal MyCareerHub: [www.ed.ac.uk/careers/mycareerhub](http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/mycareerhub)

CV, application and interview advice: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/application-interview-advice>

The Careers Horizons conference this year will be a series of webinars, please see:<https://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/postgrad/phd/events/phd-horizons-careers-conference>

**Student Counselling**

Counselling services have been training staff and will soon be able to provide brief therapy remotely. The reduction of their offer stems from the fact that remote counselling is a different skill and they want to make sure their service is always ethical and safe: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling/services> You should still contact them as they can signpost you to other resources during a one-off appointment, including your GP.

Note this list of external resources: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling/other-services-external-organisations/general-counselling-options>

**Hardship Fund**

The Hardship Fund set up in April has been providing financial support to many students, with an average of c. £1000 awarded to each student. I would urge PGR students to apply to this fund. Full details can be found at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19/current-students>

Please also continue to check for updates to the covid-related FAQs at the same address given that the situation is changing quite rapidly (with the national alert level lowered last Friday, for example) and as all University services continue to work hard to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

All best wishes,

Stephen Bowd

Postgraduate Dean of Education

College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences