

Dear Doctoral Student,

I am writing to provide a few updates on recent developments that we hope will help you and your peers. We are grateful to those who have taken the time to answer our monthly pulse surveys. These provide a very helpful gauge of your happiness and alert us as early as possible to pressing issues. The January survey shows that the new lockdown has raised anxiety levels and has further exacerbated feelings of loneliness. You also raised some issues around the library, and, in past surveys, you also raised the concern that the disruption may affect the quality of your thesis.

We have no single solution for loneliness, but we are asking Graduate Schools to continue looking for the best ways to help you engage with your peers and staff and hope these will start to alleviate some of the feelings of isolation. The situation has been compounded by home schooling which a few of you and many of your supervisors will now be doing. The university provides a number of services to help your mental state run through the Advice Place, Student Counselling service and the Chaplaincy. Access to these is for all students at all levels. Links to these can be found on our Doctoral College sharepoint site:

<https://uo.e.sharepoint.com/sites/DoctoralCollege/SitePages/Essential%20Links.aspx>

In some cases, you may need to take a break from your studies, and you can be assured that interruptions of study will be available in these and other circumstances. Extensions of study are also readily available for those who need them. There is also a good network of postgraduate research programme representatives in Schools, Colleges and the Doctoral College and if you have any concerns or suggestions, they would be delighted to hear from you.

Click & Collect is now available for University of Edinburgh students and staff to request items from the Main Library and University Collections Facility. All requests should be placed through [DiscoverEd](#). Full information on the Click & Collect service is provided at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/library-services-update-2020-21/click-and-collect>.

The University has also agreed emergency concessions for students including for research students. The key change is that **you are now permitted to submit a statement of disruption to the Board of Examiners in your College**. University regulations do not permit you to communicate directly with your examiners except to arrange the viva, but you may submit a statement of disruption when you submit your thesis to College. This can be a short document or an email text. You must still meet the key criteria for award, and we should be clear that these are not changing. Experience over the last few months has shown that internal and external examiners are able to see beyond the disruption and still evaluate the criteria well. All three Colleges have reported no change to the outcomes of thesis examinations and vivas. Consequently, we do not feel that it should be necessary to submit such statements, but we wish to allow it for your peace of mind. As always, please do discuss the matter with your supervisor(s). For those undertaking taught courses as part of their doctoral degree, you can take advantage of additional concessions agreed for taught students. For further information see the FAQ pages: <http://edin.ac/39ySMOV>.

Finally, you will have seen that there is a process running at the moment for UKRI-funded students to apply to a limited fund to provide funded extensions for those most in need. We are now ready to open a similar process to students who have funding from the University (for example, School, College or PCDS funding) or are funded by a UK body such as a charity who cannot provide such extensions. The scheme will have the same eligibility as the UKRI one and will be run by the Colleges and Schools. We aim to have more details of this ready in a week or two. The hardship fund is also

still open for those who are in real financial need: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-funding/hardship-funding/postgraduate-research>.

All the best,

Stephen Bowd, College of Arts Humanities and Social Science

Paddy Hadoke, Robert Semple, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

Antony Maciocia, College of Science and Engineering

On behalf of the Doctoral College