

Message to students and supervisors – 20/3/20

Subject: Coronavirus (COVID-19) update from the Medical Sciences Division Graduate School

MSD PGR Cov-19 20/3/20

(We are sending messages via multiple channels, so it is possible you will receive the same message more than once. This reference is included to help you identify duplicates and ensure you know when information was issued in a rapidly changing situation.)

To: MSD PGR Students, MSD PGR Supervisors

In the context of the public health emergency in the UK we are anxious to reassure post-graduate research students and their supervisors that the Medical Sciences Division and Graduate School will do everything it can to support them fully towards the successful completion of DPhil and MSc(research) degrees.

The current situation is evolving rapidly nationally and within the university and it has taken time to work out the best strategies to apply – we apologise for any additional anxiety or distress this has caused. The leadership team of the Graduate School will be meeting at least weekly throughout this crisis and can be contacted directly at any time with specific questions or concerns:

Graduate School Director: Rob Gilbert, gilbert@strubi.ox.ac.uk

Graduate School Administration: graduate.school@medsci.ox.ac.uk

1. **Your health, both physical and mental, should be your number one priority.** Students and supervisors should make whatever adjustments are necessary to work and plans to ensure they can remain safe during the public health emergency. That means if you have any symptoms or need to self-isolate then you should do so and only return to work when you feel safe to do so. Similarly, we all have responsibilities to one another. Please make sure you are looking out for friends and colleagues too.
2. **Students should keep in regular contact with supervisors.** Supervisors are encouraged to work with students to ensure that, where possible, there are ways to keep research moving forward. This may include restructuring the project so that current work can be done remotely, or students focusing for now on writing up part of your thesis, or working on a paper or review article. For students on structured DPhil programmes with taught components and first year lab rotations, you should consult your programme directors but similarly will most likely be unable to do lab-based work at this stage and need to consider alternatives.
3. **All deadlines will be extended wherever necessary.** If students have deadlines for transfer, confirmation or submission then the disruption caused by coronavirus will be fully allowed for. It is likely that all but essential experimental work will cease in university labs before long, and we are working on the basis that we will need to retrospectively suspend the whole of Trinity Term for most of our students.

4. **You remain a student of the university and if you receive a stipend it will continue to be paid.** Any need for extra payments at the end of your funding period will be dealt with at a Divisional and University level when the situation is clearer and we can take stock of the situation. **To help with this, and managing retrospective suspensions of study, we are asking you to complete the attached form together with your supervisor** to keep track of any situation which may impede your ability to continue with your studies. This may include, but is not limited to: inability to continue experimental work, the need to self-isolate, falling ill, needing to care for others, and mental health concerns. Please start completing this form now and keep it up to date as the situation develops.
5. **Clinically-qualified students** who return to clinical work will be treated the same as all other students – retrospective suspension of studies for any periods away will be granted. Specific stipend or salary arrangements will vary depending on DPhil funding arrangements but again we are committed as a Graduate School to ensuring that, when time allows, you will be enabled to successfully complete your studies. You may have received an email call for medical, nursing and physiotherapy staff, if not it is available [here](#). Those of you on a fixed time away from your clinical training should be contacted by your home HEE office as to how they will record your return to clinical work to meet this emergency, if not let them know. A joint statement has been issued by funders and is available on the [Royal College of Physicians](#) website.
6. **Students with limited time to complete their studies**, for example due to professional, study or working commitments such as a job or further course to start or clinical service to return to, and who are in their final year, should seriously consider starting to write up now and reasonable impacts on the thesis contents will be allowed for. Of course those needed to return to clinical work should make that their first priority and they will be supported to complete their thesis when time allows.
7. **You are reminded that if you are planning to go ahead with a transfer or confirmation assessment or final DPhil/MSc(research)** then these can now for this period be held remotely with permission from your Director of Graduate Studies, who will check with you that appropriate means of communication are set up for all parties.
8. **If you are a Tier 4 visa holder** then by maintaining regular contact by email or online conferencing with your supervisor and/or DGS as appropriate you will be able to ensure you maintain your visa status.
9. **Colleges** are doing their best to support students, alongside all other parts of the university. If you have any concerns about requests or instructions concerning accommodation in your college you are welcome to contact the Graduate School as above for advice. **International students**, especially, will be experiencing specific difficulties relating to the current situation. We are working with colleagues across the university to do our best to ensure you have the support you need.

We appreciate that many of you will find the current situation stressful. You are not alone. Keep in regular touch with your friends and family by online platforms (Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom, etc.) if you aren't able to spend time with them in person. **Don't underestimate the importance of frequent communication, even where you think you have nothing much to say.**

Please also note that the University Counselling Service remains open for consultations conducted on-line:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling?wssl=1>

For other information, the University's [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): advice and updates](#) page is an important source of information and is updated frequently.