

14 April 2020 Email about Graduation / Certificates

As communicated previously the Summer Graduation Ceremonies are cancelled this year. As you might have read on the University website, “you will have several options:

- to attend in-person ceremony in Winter 2020 or Summer 2021
- to attend a virtual graduation
- to receive their certificate and not attend a ceremony

Further information on the options and how to confirm your preferred option will be provided by the end of April.”

The usual way things work is that you would first graduate and then your certificate would be sent out to you. Things are a bit different this summer. We have received clarification that certificates will still be printed at the end of July, so this means Student Administration will still need sufficient time to organise this.

If you wish to receive your PhD certificate this summer the deadline for submission of the final copy of your thesis via PURE is 29 May.

07 April 2020 Email to first year students

I am writing about the Confirmation and annual review process for 2020. As you know the PGR Conference will not take place, and this will have an impact on the presentation requirement of your Confirmation process. We discussed the possibilities:

- Postponing the conference: as we don’t know how long the current situation will last this is not realistic.
- Holding an online conference was decided against, both because PGR hasn’t got the resources or the confidence to transfer such a big event to an online setting and because asking 150 of our students and colleagues to spend an even longer time on any of the videoconferencing platforms would be a bit unkind.
- Waiving the presentation requirement of the Confirmation process: at this time this is the most realistic option.

Therefore we have decided that we would go ahead with that third option. For students who will have their Confirmation process this Spring, there is no requirement to present your work as part of the process.

A couple of important points:

- You will be given the choice between a presentation and a poster at the next PGR conference to make up for this.
- The normal timeline for the Confirmation process is 6-9 months after your start date. If you can keep to this timeline, it’s great. Considering the circumstances however it is fine to aim for the whole process (confirmation + annual review form) to be completed by month 12. If there is a further delay we will ask advisors to keep in touch with us to let us know so that we can have a record of this and make sure we follow-up where necessary.

Annual review form

All students who started in September 2019 will receive an automated email from EUCLID on 1 May to let them know that their online annual review form has been created. If you started in October,

then this will be on 1 June, etc. Completion of the annual review form normally comes a couple of months after your confirmation panel. You will still need to upload your confirmation report, and your supervisor will need to upload the confirmation panel report to the annual review form, but it is fine to condense the process time wise unless your panel thinks that it is not appropriate. If issues were identified in the confirmation form then an annual review meeting – in addition to the earlier confirmation meeting - will be required. Otherwise, the student, supervisors and advisor only need to complete the online form.

Refer to PhD handbook for more details.

6 April 2020 General PGR update

Working from Home expenses:

We've had a lot of enquiries about different aspects of working from home and would like to confirm the following:

- If you have no internet access at all at home, you can contact covid19@ed.ac.uk, this is a central service designed to provide assistance with these matters.
- If you are having equipment issues (broken laptop or keyboard, mouse, etc.), please email it.geos@ed.ac.uk. There is a limited amount of resources available and the team will try to help where possible.
- If you are needing stationery or have other small expenses (e.g. a webcam) related to working from home that you would normally not be able to claim outside the official procurement route, you can claim up to £50 against your RTSG account.
- If you have any other needs please contact your supervisor and then get in touch with us on the PGR Team.

Central Hardship funds:

The University has now announced support for students who are experiencing financial difficulties as a result of Covid-19. This represents hardship funding they receive from the government and university funds. The financial support can be used to cover any exceptional costs students may have incurred in relation to accommodation, subsistence, and travel. You will find more information on this page: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-funding/financial-support/additional-financial-assistance/covid-19>.

GradTalks and GradSchool:

You will hopefully have seen the email from GradSchool. The new Committee is currently organising remote GradTalks. These will be live at on the GeoSciences PGR Students Team – if you haven't joined it yet just [click here](#).

Our new GradSchool Committee for the year ahead is composed of:

Chair: Chris Holdsworth

Secretary: Ben Harris

Treasurer: Hugo Bloem

Vice Chairs: Rory Leslie (Grant), Shawn Bodden (Drummond), Elise Gallois (Crew)

Social Secretaries: Mylène Receveur (Grant), Lizzie Telford (Drummond), Helen Waters (Crew)

Doctoral College

We're now all part of the new Doctoral College. It is a new structure to help coordinate information, training and support for postgraduate research at the University of Edinburgh. In practice, it means

that this PGR Team now has a forum to hear what other Schools are doing; we can steal their good ideas, and they can steal ours, the desired result being a better experience for all Research Students.

You can read more about the Doctoral College on [this Sharepoint site](#) and follow its news on Twitter @UoE_Doc.

26 March 2020 General PGR update

Supervision

Until further notice, all supervisory meetings have to take place remotely. Supervisors and students are asked to draw up plans for ongoing, on-line supervision.

Sickness leave, for example due to acute viral infection

This is covered by the usual rules and procedures in place for managing absences and Authorised Interruptions of Study (AIS). Given the current circumstances, the College Office may need to consider approval of retrospective Authorised Interruptions of Study where this is appropriate. 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 the University is aware of your circumstances, you must email the Student Immigration Service (studentimmigration@ed.ac.uk) and provide the dates and details of your Authorised Interruption of Study.

Disruption of research progress by closure of facilities

If you are completely unable to continue any aspect of your studies, you must talk to your supervisor and decide if you should take an interruption of studies. Please get in touch with us to discuss this. However we ask that wherever possible you keep working on your PhD until further notice.

Discuss with your supervisors what tasks can reasonably be completed while working remotely. For some, where significant remote scholarly activity related to your postgraduate degree is possible, for example in the form of thesis or paper writing, progress may be less greatly impaired. For others, this will impede research progress and will potentially impede completion of your degree.

Requests to extend your period of study will not be submitted until 2-3 months prior to your submission date. The present situation is likely to have an impact on your submission timeline whether you are due to submit in the next few months or in three years. This is why you should **keep a record of current issues impacting progress that can be then be provided as evidence for any future extension requests**. It will be a log of lost time due to lack of access to appropriate resource, a period of illness, the need to attend to caring responsibilities, etc. Extension requests will of course be considered sympathetically but will be made on a case-by-case basis, so it's important to know how much all this will have impacted YOU and YOUR PhD.

On the topic of the attendant issues around funding to cover extensions for students funded by the School/University, we acknowledge that new policy will have to be developed to permit special consideration. In the coming weeks we will be exploring every option to alleviate and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your research. We will communicate further information about this as soon as possible.

Tier 4 Visa holders

Tier 4 visa holders' supervisors should keep using EUCLID as they would do normally to record engagement. [The Student Immigration Service](#) will be able to provide the most up-to-date advice

and guidance relating to absences directly linked to Covid-19 and the impact on visas so please do encourage students to contact this team if they are at all concerned.

Studying away from Edinburgh (Leave of Absence)

Normally, students need to complete a request for a formal Leave of Absence when studying away from Edinburgh. In current circumstances, there is no University requirement to record or approve a formal Leave of Absence. Students must, however, inform supervisors (or Graduate School in supervisor's absence) of their location if not in Edinburgh.

ASSESSMENT

Annual reviews and Confirmation process

It is important that such reviews continue to occur in a timely fashion (taking into account any period of AIS). Whilst reviews cannot be undertaken in person for the time being, they may take place via video link. Written material can be reviewed by the assessment panel remotely and signed off on EUCLID.

We will be in touch again next week about the confirmation process for first year PhD students. As you know the PGR Conference is cancelled, which has an impact on the presentation requirement of this process. We will update you asap.

Submission of Thesis

For the time being, all thesis submissions (examination copy and final award) should only be made electronically. Students should not send in any printed versions.

Final oral examination

Given current uncertainty, the postponement of oral/viva examinations, or delay in their organisation, may be the best strategy. However, current policy allows for oral examinations by video link. This option should now be considered if all parties are in agreement. Please refer to the Postgraduate Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study <http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/> and the guidance for conducting oral examinations by video link https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/videolinked_phd_oral.pdf. The preferred way to host a remote viva is via video-conferencing. Please note the student and examiners must be in full agreement for this method of examination. If there is any concern about conducting a viva in this way then there may be no alternative but to postpone the examination.

Graduation

Graduation ceremonies in Summer 2020 will not be running. We currently expect that degree certificates for students entitled to graduate this summer will be printed and mailed by the end of July 2020, with graduates being offered a series of options:

- to defer to an in-person ceremony in Winter 2020 or Summer 2021
- to attend a virtual graduation
- to receive their certificate and not attend a ceremony

If you have any immediate concerns regarding graduation, you should contact infopoint@ed.ac.uk

17 March 2020 General PGR update (with obsolete info removed)

Please make sure you regularly check the Advice pages at the links below, these are continuously updated:

Student information page at: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19/current-students>

Staff information page at: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19/staff>.

Supervision meetings & Tier-4 Monitoring

The same Tier-4 Contact Points (i.e. one meeting per month) are still applying, but it is expected engagement will be recorded through remote contact with your supervisor, i.e. Skype/Zoom. One-to-one meetings with supervisors can take place remotely whether or not you are on a visa.

Field work / Travelling / Going Home

You will have received emails advising you that all field trips are cancelled, and all non-essential travels abroad should be cancelled as well (please see the emails from Simon Kelley and John Watt).

In cases where your family is not Edinburgh/UK-based and you wish to go home to them, this would be considered essential travel. Please talk to your supervisors if you are planning to do this so that you can discuss whether this would require a leave of absence only (=study away) or an interruption of studies. If you are needed at home to take care of vulnerable relatives and/or will not be able to work, you will be able to request an interruption of studies.

Please make sure you check:

- Whether there are any travel restrictions in place already or advice from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)
- If you are funded, please liaise with your funder to talk about any potential interruptions.
- Please contact Student Immigration if you are on a visa and need to request an interruption.

If you are contacting our Health & Safety Manager, John Watt, the same rule applies as above with our IT Team: please be patient.

Many of you will have many other questions. As I said above these are unprecedented circumstances and everyone is working very hard to try and keep up with the developments. This is affecting all of us, staff or students (or both, like most of you). Different people will react differently to situations, and if you are extremely anxious please remember that there is a number of sources available to you:

- you can speak to us on the PGR team
- the [University Chaplaincy](#) (it doesn't matter if you are not at all religious, they are there to support all members of the University community),
- the Residence Life team (if you are staying in University accommodation), and
- the [Students' Association Advice Place](#)
- [Student Counselling Service](#) have many online resources to help manage stress and anxiety

Every team in the School and the wider University is working hard to be as flexible and supportive as possible. If you have any specific concerns please do contact us.