

You SAID, we ASKED
(PGR Student provision in light of COVID-19)

- There were concerns raised that for those PGR students who had submitted their theses and were waiting on sitting their viva, that ALL face to face vivas were postponed until further notice.

Whilst all face to face vivas are postponed, students can request the option to sit their viva virtually, so that they are able to complete their PhD on time, should they want to. We have been reassured that here, the University wanted to give students the opportunity to sit their viva at a later date, due to COVID-19, if they did not feel prepared or ready to do so. The following guidance can be found here:

<https://www.keele.ac.uk/intranet/coronavirusupdates/guidanceonresearchandpgractivity/> (under the tab "Postgraduate Research").

- We have been informed that PGR Students have been told there is no opportunity for extension.

Not true. You can apply for an extension should you feel you need one (this is not just for those in their final year). In the first instance, you MUST speak to your supervisor so that you can discuss your progress and the process of taking an extension. This must be done on a case by case basis, due to the complex nature of research. The Keele Doctoral Academy can also offer further support in explaining the process. You are also encouraged to document any disruption you may have to your studies in your PDL.

- PGR students were dissatisfied with the ways in which guidelines had been communicated to students, adversely to undergraduate students. The time taken to deliver communications left students feeling anxious and concerned.

The KPA raised these concerns with the University, who could only apologise for the delivery of the guidance. Communications going forward will be more clearly communicated and reassuring. The "vagueness" of communications will be clarified on the Keele Doctoral Academy's COVID FAQs webpage, so that students will be able to identify a clear path in their studies going forward. The length of time taken for the message to be delivered was down to the late release of UKRI guidance on extensions. This meant that the University then had to choose how to take their approach.

- PDLP guidance was not clear. The options provided did not fit circumstances within the PDLP.

We raised this issue. As a result, some work is being done to change the PDLP and it's options surrounding disruptions to study. We hope that this has now been resolved. If it has not, please get in touch with us so that we can flag this further.

- It seemed that self funded students were actively being encouraged to “drop out” in order to receive further student loans.

On flagging this, we were told that the student loans company still needs to do some work in reviewing this. We were however, reassured that it was being chased. The University was not trying to encourage students to do this, but were instead letting self funded students know that this was currently the only guidance given by Student Finance England. Times are ever changing and we hope to have more information soon from the loans company. We will continue to chase this on behalf of our self funded PGR students. If you are experiencing any hardship, the University is actively encouraging students to apply to the Hardship Fund. The simplified COVID-19 form can be found here: <https://forms.gle/7SATwC9WNSp1tqHj6>. The University will also be updating their web pages so that it is a more accessible form. In the meantime you can send an email to student support, who can provide further advice about completing the form, should you need it.

- How will supervisors be keeping in touch and supporting their students?

Supervisors have ALL been sent guidance on keeping in touch with their students and are actively encouraged to check in. Supervisors also meet regularly with the KDA for guidance on best practice and delivery of supervision in light of the pandemic. We can appreciate here that this is very much dependent on the supervisor and school. The University has therefore asked us to keep an eye on students who are receiving poor quality supervision, or are not being contacted. If this is you, please do get in touch with us, so that the issue can be ratified.

- Training for Research Students - is this still taking place?

KIITE will still be providing training opportunities for all research students. They have a number of online training activities and videos to ensure that your research is being carried out properly and adheres to GDPR and research ethics. Full training for researchers can be found at the following address:

<https://www.keele.ac.uk/academicdevelopment/research/>. The KDA have also released some information on how to carry out work in light of the pandemic. The advice can be found at the following address:
<https://www.keele.ac.uk/study/postgraduateresearch/kda/covid-19resources/>

- What if my research is predominantly fieldwork or based in the lab?
As the University has suspended all face to face teaching, this may impact severely on those students who are conducting lab or fieldwork. In the first instance, the University requests that you speak to your supervisor to establish if any of your work can be carried out from a “desk-based” perspective, or whether or not any additional work can be undertaken outside of the lab. This is why you are advised to keep your PDLP up to date, where your research has been hindered by something outside of your control. You are asked to discuss other opportunities with your supervisor, head of faculty or the Keele Doctoral Academy. They will work through the issues on a case by case basis.
- I am experiencing financial hardship as I can no longer work as a result of social distancing. Many students are self funded that could also be experiencing similar issues.
The University is actively encouraging PG students to apply for the University Hardship fund. This application process has been simplified in light of COVID-19, and applications have been extended so that more students are able to apply. The simplified form can be found here:
<https://forms.gle/7SATwC9WNSp1tqHj6>. *The University will also be updating their web pages so that it is a more accessible form. In the meantime you can send an email to student support who can provide further advice about completing the form, should you need it.*
- If you need further guidance, or you have read through the feedback and are still not getting the correct information from your school or supervisor, please get in touch with us. The Keele Doctoral Academy’s FAQ page is also a good place to find out about leave of absences and extensions and what those might look like. You can access these web pages by clicking on the following address:
<https://www.keele.ac.uk/coronavirus/adviceforpgrstudents/#who-should-i-contact-if-i-have-a-school-specific-question?>

- If you want to contribute to the wider discussion about the challenges for PGR students in the UK, students are working from a number of different universities to understand major impacts on research in light of COVID-19. Student-led surveys have been conducted into the impacts that PGR students are facing. This survey has been launched nationally, in an effort to bring these issues to light in the HE and research sector:

https://socsi.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3jTVbmdPIn0Vnvl