Frequently asked questions (FAQs) for Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs)

The University of Manchester recognises that PGRs may have specific concerns about the ongoing coronavirus outbreak. Please visit this page for updates and visit the FAQs on Research, Staff and Students for additional information, including on health and travel advice.

How do I contact my local PGR support team?

- Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health or email the Doctoral Academy
- Faculty of Humanities and
- Faculty of Science and Engineering

I think I may have contracted coronavirus (COVID-19). Do I still need to report this to the University?

If you feel unwell and think that you may have the symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), you should follow the latest advice from the NHS. PGRs should also inform their supervisor and local PGR team, and check here for further information.

Will I have any access to my study and research areas?

No. In line with the UK Government’s latest advice about coronavirus (COVID-19), the University will be closing all of our non-essential sites until further notice. This includes all teaching and research buildings both on campus and in associated clinical sites and the Library - although electronic library resources will still be accessible. Further information.

Should I stop working now that non-essential facilities have closed?

No. PGRs will be required to continue working on their research remotely, if possible, until further notice. Please follow guidance issued by IT Services on support to work remotely and discuss with your supervisor tasks that can be reasonably completed whilst remote working. If your main supervisor is unavailable, please liaise with your supervisory team.

Some useful links relating to data management include:

- https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/igo/data-protection/
- https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/rbe/ethics-integrity/data-mgmt/
- https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/coronavirus/faqs/working-from-home/

What if I am unable to continue my research remotely?

PGRs should work from home wherever possible. If you are unable to continue working, you should discuss an interruption or extension request with your supervisor and PGR team, depending on the length of time you are impacted. Keeping a log of any lost time is strongly advised whether that be due for example, to lack of access to appropriate resource, a period of illness, you need to attend to caring responsibilities, or a return to clinical duties.

Will my University desktop PC work at home?

Desktop PCs will not work from home. IT services have provided guidance on how to access your University PC via a Virtual Private Network (VPN) and remote desktop connection. Please check here.
Can I apply for an interruption or extension to my research?
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, including information on extensions and interruptions requests.

Should I return home?
It is a PGR’s decision as to whether they return home (where they are able) whether you are in the UK or overseas, but please continue to work remotely if you can. PGRs should inform their supervisor and local PGR support team of their decision.

I am due to submit my thesis, is this still possible?
Yes. All PGRs are required to submit their thesis electronically but the University will not require hard bound submission of the thesis during this period of remote working.

I have a viva scheduled, will this still go ahead?
Now that the University has moved to a position of remote working and until further notice, all vivas should either be conducted remotely or postponed to a later date. If vivas go ahead remotely, internal examiners should record that all participants are happy to proceed remotely. The normal policy on applying for permission to conduct the viva remotely will be waived during this period. Given the current circumstances, please use the technology that most suits the participants of the viva (e.g.: Zoom, Skype). If you have any questions about the examinations process please contact your local PGR support team.

I live in University accommodation. Will I need to leave?
If you are residing in University accommodation please contact the Accommodation Office on accommodation@manchester.ac.uk for updates. Alternatively, out of working hours the Hall ResLife Team.

Are the University wellbeing support services still available?
Yes, the University’s support services the Big White Wall (free online mental health and wellbeing support 24/7) are also available to all PGRs. There is also useful advice on the PGR Life wellbeing page.

How can I look after my wellbeing whilst working from home?
We recognise that during this uncertain time remote working is not easy. Here are some excellent ideas how to manage this and stay well.

- If you can, set up a dedicated workspace in your house, it will help to differentiate between ‘research’ and ‘off’ time and create a boundary between relaxed, social space and workspace. There is some useful guidance here and from NHS England about how to sit at your desk correctly - try adapting this to your at-home set up.
- Maintain a routine, this will look different depending on your circumstances, but can include things like getting up and ready as you usually would, taking a morning and afternoon walk instead of your commute, and taking regular breaks away from your workspace.
- If you have caring responsibilities, speak to your supervisor about how to manage your research work around these. It is likely that this will be a changing situation and will require ongoing discussion.
• Try and define the hours you will be working and resist the temptation to check-in outside of these hours.
• Even if you are isolating with symptoms, light exercise is recommended, try these at home and at your desk.
• Make use of the many online resources including podcasts and apps on mindfulness and wellbeing.

I receive stipend payments, will these continue?
Yes, stipend payments will continue as normal. Any issues should be discussed with your local PGR support team.

I also work as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). What happens to that role now that we have moved to remote working?
GTAs will be expected to deliver their scheduled, contracted teaching online where possible. In all circumstances, GTAs will receive payment for the work they were contracted and scheduled to undertake, whether they are able to deliver this online or not.

What happens if I fall ill?
GTAs are advised to follow the latest advice from the NHS website if they are displaying the symptoms of coronavirus. In these cases, options for GTAs and the person they usually report to include agreeing that GTAs will deliver their scheduled, contracted teaching online where this is possible, however it is recognised that some activities, like delivering lab-based demonstrations, will not be able to take place.

GTAs are entitled to sickness absence pay and Special Leave pay for their contracted periods. PGRs with Graduate Teaching Assistant and ResLife responsibilities should also follow guidance issued to staff.

My home government wants me to return, should I leave?
Some governments are recalling their students or wish their students to return to their home country immediately. If this is the case, we will use our best endeavours to support any PGR who is unable to remain for whatever reason. Please contact your supervisor and your PGR Faculty / School office.

I am a Tier 4 student who is returning home. What do I need to do?
International PGRs on a Tier 4 visa should liaise with their local supervisor and PGR support team to complete a change of circumstances forms/interruption form in order that the sponsorship remains up to date. This is to ensure there are no issues from a visa perspective. Ultimately it is your decision whether you remain in the UK or decide to return home.

My programme requires the completion of taught units. How will I complete these?
PGRs should follow local guidelines around seminar programmes and all teaching and training events will be delivered according to instructions from the course organiser.
I am currently away from the University conducting fieldwork / on a placement. What should I do?

If you are a PGR on fieldwork or placement overseas, please refer to travel advice on www.gov.uk for foreign travel. PGRs should discuss this with your supervisor and PGR team and they can advise further.

I had fieldwork/a placement scheduled to start soon. Can I still go?

No, all future-dated fieldwork and placement activity should be postponed until further notice. If you have any questions please contact your supervisor or local support team but you must follow government advice regarding travel and social distancing.

I am registered to attend an event/conference. Should I go?

You must follow government advice regarding travel and social distancing, and refer to travel advice on www.gov.uk for foreign travel. PGRs should discuss any concerns with their supervisor.

How should I remain in contact with my supervisor/supervisory team whilst working remotely?

Provided that your supervisor is in good health and therefore working remotely, contact should be maintained during this period. If not, PGRs should liaise with other members of their supervisory team. All progression and supervisory meetings should be conducted remotely and eProg milestone deadlines should continue to be met.

I have an existing condition, I am registered with Disability and Advisory Support Service but symptoms have got worse and I am too ill to study remotely. What should I do?

Please contact your supervisor / supervisory team and Faculty / School PGR support team for advice. Further information can also be found on the DASS website. You should follow the most recent NHS advice at all times.

What should I do if my research/project involves face-to-face contact with people?

What research involving human participants should stop?

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the following types of research should stop as soon as is ethically possible: interviews, focus groups, observations in public spaces, psychological experiments, tissue sampling, and any other research procedure requiring face-to-face contact.

Can I continue to collect data involving human participants?

Data collection which does not require direct personal contact can continue during this period, such as via Skype, telephone or electronic surveys/questionnaires. Where possible, projects should be adjusted to be conducted remotely. Research will only be permitted to continue face-to-face if there is an exceptional reason such as clinical need or a significant ethical rationale for non-immediate cessation. Any continuation of face-to-face research will require University approval. Advice is provided via links below:

For information about how to adapt your project or continue a project on exceptional grounds that has NHS REC approval please go to the Faculty Research Governance website.

Information about how to adapt your project or continue a project on exceptional grounds that has UREC approval.
I want to do some research into COVID 19, how can I get ethical approvals?

If your research involves NHS patients, you can find the information [here](#).

If your research does not involve NHS patients, you can find the information [here](#).