

Acknowledging the impact of COVID-19 on postgraduate research programmes: guidance for PGRs, Supervisors and Examiners on inclusion of a COVID-19 impact statement with theses submitted by PGRs at the University of Manchester.

The University of Manchester recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic, and consequent closure of our campus (18th March 2020) and national and international lockdowns, has directly or indirectly impacted the work of many of our postgraduate researchers (PGRs). Although the campus began re-opening from mid-June 2020, some researchers will be disrupted until all campus research facilities are open, and operational at adequate capacity, fieldwork can resume safely and/or personal circumstances become more manageable.

Many of our PGRs have been/will be able to accommodate the disruption to their research plans by changing the scope, phasing, design or direction of their project; others have/will have circumstances that necessitate an extension to programme or to the thesis submission date.

We have discussed the examination of PGRs impacted by COVID-19 with colleagues responsible for PGR policy at other universities to ensure that our processes and standards are in line with the rest of the sector whilst protecting the academic standard and value of your degree. Consequently, we encourage PGRs who wish to make their Examiners aware of the impact COVID-19 has had on their research plans and thesis to prepare an Impact Statement for consideration during the examination process.

The University recommends that Examiners take the Impact Statement into account when assessing the thesis, and PGR at viva, albeit without compromising standards as set out in the [University's ordinances](#) and the [QAA's expectations of doctoral outcomes](#), which emphasise that **doctoral degrees should be awarded based on the quality, rather than quantity, of research undertaken and the candidate's acquisition of intellectual and practical competencies.**

Accordingly, we support Examiners' consideration of whether a candidate's inclusion of less empirical research than usual has been compensated for by evidence of significant advanced scholarship, such as community engagement, knowledge transfer and professional practice, or other demonstrations of originality including, but not limited to, creation of new syntheses leading to new concepts/hypotheses, using new information to explore new implication of previous findings, examining a current issue or controversy through a different lens.

In any case, Examiners should use their academic judgment when deciding whether, as set out in the [Examinations of Doctoral Degrees Policy](#), the following criteria have been met:

- the candidate possesses an appropriate knowledge of the particular field of learning within which the subject of the thesis falls;

- the research which is reported in the thesis contributes a substantial addition to knowledge;
- the results of the research show evidence of originality and independent critical judgement;
- the thesis is presented in a lucid and scholarly manner;
- the thesis and the work reported in it are the candidate's own;

whilst bearing in mind that they should judge the '*substantial addition to knowledge*' in relation to what can be reasonably expected within a period of study (3, 3.5 or 4yrs FT) that has been conducted in the context of disruption caused by COVID-19.

In the final joint report of a thesis that includes a COVID-19 impact statement, Examiners should include a summary of their assessment of how a thesis with reduced scope and / or volume as a consequence of the disruption caused by the pandemic meets the academic standards required for the award.

Recommendations for corrections and / or further work should be limited to those needed in order for the candidate to meet the criteria for award of a doctoral degree rather than seeking to redress curtailed research plans/activities.

The Impact Statement should include the following information:

1. Details on how disruption caused by COVID-19 has impacted the research (for example, an inability to collect/analyse data as a result of travel restrictions/restricted access to labs/additional caring and health responsibilities - 500 words maximum);
2. A description of how the planned work would have fitted within the thesis' narrative (e.g. through method development, development of analytical skills or advancement of hypotheses - 500 words maximum);
3. A summary of any decisions / actions taken to mitigate for any work or data collection/analyses that were prevented by COVID-19 (500 words maximum).

PGRs are encouraged to discuss the statement with their supervisory team before submitting the statement within the thesis presented for examination and should refer to section 6.3 in the [Presentation of Theses Policy](#) for details.