

RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Note on the continuation of OBU's Covid-19-related extension policy.

At the RDC meeting on Tuesday, 14th June, 2022, under item 9, the Committee agreed that the policy detailed below will continue for a further year, at which point it will be reviewed again. The rationale was simply that the disruptive impact of Covid-19 on PGR projects was still being felt across the university. The key elements of the policy were originally agreed at a meeting held on Tuesday 19 May 2020. These elements have been subject to only one procedural amendment in relation to the availability of extensions and the number of times they may be requested.

Tracy Barber, Head of RDT, and Dr Tom Crook, Chair of RDC, June 2022.

The following points, procedures and guidance for implementation should be followed in the case of students seeking extensions to their programme of study owing to the disruptive impact of Covid-19

- **Evidence needed from Supervisors and student:** The Covid-19 Log issued to all students should be used as the basis for requesting extensions, together with the spreadsheet of information collected by Faculty PGRTs from Supervisory Teams. The student and supervisors should be invited to provide information on delays likely to cause the need for extensions, and this should be included as part of the Annual Progress Monitoring (APRs), together with a copy of the student's Log containing details of the reasons for the delays. Students are expected to keep the original copy. It should be noted that wherever possible, it is important that early actions are taken to make the necessary adjustments to a project etc. in order to remove the need for extensions to be applied.
- **Faculty process for review and agreeing:** Responsibility for monitoring and deciding on extensions lies with the Faculty Postgraduate Research Tutors. Where there were any funding implications requiring use of Faculty funds, the decision must be taken by the Postgraduate Research Tutor and the Associate Dean together. This would be recorded on the student records in Banner and copies of evidence kept by Faculty Research Administrators. All extensions should be noted on the RDC Sub-Committee agendas.
- **University appeal process:** As the Research Degree Sub-Committees already formally agree changes to programmes, it was thought appropriate for PGRTs to discuss difficult decisions and those challenged by the student to the Sub-Committees for resolution. Where a student is not satisfied with the outcome agreed by the Faculty, they may appeal to the appropriate RDC HESS or S&T Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee's decision will be final.
- **Timing of extensions (length and when requests should be made):** Students should apply between 6 months, and no later than 3 months before the extension is required. The reasons for the extension will have been previously raised, where appropriate, through Annual Progress Monitoring.
- The following will apply to applications for extensions:
 - Normally only one extension will be permitted per student based on evidence in the Covid-19 Log. Students that feel they require more than one extension should, in the first instance, speak to their PGRT, who will advise on what further action may be taken.
 - Extensions will normally be for one period, and this should equate to one fee paying instalment . Please ensure when applying for an extension that all students quote the fee paying period (i.e. 1st September- 31st December, 1st January - 31st May, 1st June- 31st August)

- o Or in the case of an additional bursary payment, one instalment (Please note that the bursary is normally paid in four quarters at the end of September (for Oct, Nov, Dec), end of December (for January, February and March), end of March (for April, May and June) and end of June (for July, August and September, unless a specific case is made (e.g. for loss of an entire field season, etc.).

Please ensure that all students quote the bursary payment to be covered.

- **Funding and different types of extensions:** Evidence-based extensions may be agreed by PGRTs for:
 1. Registration, Transfer and Annual Progress Reports, where appropriate informing the relevant Sub-Committee for approval.
 2. One period of continuation fee payment funded by the Faculty, or where appropriate, a fee waiver is required (with ADRKEs approval).
 3. One instalment of bursary payment at the UKRI/ University Studentship Scheme rate as set out in the student's offer letter (with ADRKEs approval).

Actions 2 & 3 above may also apply to externally funded students where the funder does not provide funded extensions. The period may be extended by the PGRT with the ADRKEs agreement if circumstances demand.

Students may also:

- o Suspend their Studentship and enrolment on the programme for a period of time using the normal process.
- o Students who remain enrolled may apply for funding from Financial Aid to cover living expenses, but not for fees.

Where a student is externally funded, supervisors and students should work with the Research Degrees Team and Research and Business Development Office, to ensure appropriate communication with funders is undertaken, and to establish whether fully funded extensions are appropriate. In these cases, at least 4 to 6 months' notice will be required in order to set up the necessary agreements.

- **Actions to remove the need for extensions may include, modifications to projects and approval mechanisms, including special cases such as, fieldwork and performance.**

As a basic principle, measures should be put in place to minimise delay and to ensure timely completion. This includes, but is not restricted to:

- o Online vivas, progress monitoring, Registration and Transfer interviews, etc;
- o Redesign of projects and rescheduling timelines;
- o Replacing experimental work with data analysis or informatics;
- o Consideration of alternatives to fieldwork, or relocating it to accessible locations;
- o Carry out performances and exhibitions online rather than in person, or presenting them to a restricted audience with social distancing.

When considering adjustments to a project at any stage of the programme due to potential delays, or the cancellation of fieldwork, or other physical elements of a project, PGRTs and supervisors must consider the rate at which Covid is developing in other countries and how that will impact the study during the course of the next couple of years. Supervisors and students must be realistic about what is achievable in order to complete the project and thesis.

Time must be factored into applying for light touch UREC reviews if a project is changed, and this must also be reflected in applications for Transfer. Where transfer is not an option, and a project has changed significantly from that approved at registration, a brief account of the changes and potential for completing the project must be reviewed by the appropriate RDC Sub-Committee.

Where delays in submitting applications for Registration and Transfer are a direct result from Covid-19 issues, the Research Degree Regulations should be applied and a covering note attached to the RDC application form, informing the Sub-Committee of the reasons for the delay, and detailing how the issues have been resolved so that they will not impact on future progress.