

*Message to PGR students and supervisors – 20/3/20*

Subject: Coronavirus (COVID-19) update from the MPLS Division

**MPLS PGR Covid-19 Update 20/3/20**

To: MPLS PGR Students, MPLS PGR Supervisors

Earlier this afternoon students should have received a message from the University containing some specific advice for the postgraduate research community. That message can also be found online here: <http://newsletter.admin.ox.ac.uk/q/119z7BJ2RbVb/vw>.

I am writing to reassure you that the MPLS Division is doing and will continue to do all we can to help postgraduate research (PGR) students in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency. The MPLS Graduate School Committee is holding emergency meetings on a weekly basis and between times myself and key academic leaders, supported by staff from the Divisional Office, are in constant contact working on any issues of specific concern to PGR students. We know that PGR students have distinct needs and we are liaising with your student representatives to understand these and how best to respond to your needs.

It will take us time to provide specifics, but we are able to reassure you of the following points.

**Your health, both physical and mental, should be your number one priority.** Students and supervisors should make whatever adjustments are necessary to their PGR research to ensure they can remain safe during the public health emergency. Please make sure you are looking out for friends and colleagues and do not do anything that will put your peers or yourself at risk.

As mentioned in the University message, **students should keep in regular contact with supervisors.** and supervisors are encouraged to work with students to ensure, that where possible, there are ways to keep PGR research moving forward. We appreciate that in many cases this will be difficult.

The University has also committed to deadlines being extended wherever necessary and recommended that students **keep a log** of anything coronavirus-related that has an impact on your research. This may include, but is not limited to: falling ill, the need to self-isolate, needing to care for others, difficulties in (safely) accessing facilities and mental health. We have prepared a template (attached) for you to use for these purposes. Please start completing this now and keep it up to date as the situation develops.

If you have a scholarship funded through UKRI (e.g. BBSRC, EPSRC, MRC, NERC, STFC) or through a central Oxford scheme (Clarendon, Scatcherd, etc.) please be assured that your stipend will continue to be paid for the time being, irrespective of illness, self-isolation or disruption of your research.

We understand that the disruption may have some specific implications for those of you on structured (CDT/DTP/WT) programmes, where there are taught components and rotations in the first year. We will be discussing the implications for students on these courses with course directors over the coming week and will try to provide guidance according to the specifics of the programme.

We appreciate that many of you will find the current situation stressful. You are not alone. Keep in regular touch with your friends and family by online platforms (Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom, etc.) if you aren't able to spend time with them in person. **Don't underestimate the importance of frequent communication, even where you think you have nothing much to say.** We have heard some stories

of people using platforms in very creative ways to help them cope with being and feeling isolated. If you have innovative ideas that may be useful to other students, please contact your student reps ([link](#)) to let them know. They are working on some ideas to share with you to try to make this all more bearable.

Sorry it has taken some time for us to issue this message. We will be contacting you regularly from now on to provide updates on what is happening within the MPLS Division. **Even where there isn't much to report, we will send you a brief message to let you know we're still working on things.**

For other information, the University's [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): advice and updates](#) page is an important source of information and is updated frequently.

I hope that this message helps to alleviate some of your concerns. We'll be in touch again soon.

Best wishes,  
Mike

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