

MPLS PGR Covid-19 Update 14/5/20

To: MPLS PGR Students, MPLS PGR Supervisors

Hello, I hope you are keeping safe and well. I am writing to provide an update on what is happening within MPLS and across the University to assist postgraduate research students.

Health and Well-being

The University's highest priority remains the safety and well-being of our staff and students. This means that while we are working hard to ensure that you are able to make progress wherever possible and also making plans to help you return to on-site working when it is safe to do so (see below), we still emphasise that you should consider your own health and well-being as of paramount importance. We do understand that the current uncertainty over a number of issues will be adding to the stress and anxiety that some of you are feeling. Updates on some key topics are provided below. While we are working to provide you with more certainty, if you are finding things difficult in the meantime, please make use of the resources detailed on the [University's coronavirus FAQ for students](#), including [Student Minds](#) and 24/7 support via [Big White Wall](#) (register via 'I am from a university or college' and using your Oxford email address).

Return to On-site Working

The Government has now signalled its encouragement for some work to resume where it cannot be carried out from home, including in labs and research facilities. Some of you will be keen to return to on-site work as soon as possible. It is, however, important that you realise that the return to on-site working will not happen overnight. As noted above, the safety of staff and students remains the University's number one priority.

MPLS is currently running a pilot exercise in a limited number of locations. This will enable the Division to learn more about how to implement safe working practices, identifying any complexities and difficulties that arise on a manageable scale. Departments will be working in tandem with the pilot to put in place plans for the return to on-site working, but we do need you to be patient so that we can learn lessons from the pilot and put in place safe plans before reopening labs on a larger scale.

Funding Extensions

As many of you will be aware, some funders (notably UKRI and the Wellcome Trust) have started the process of providing funding extensions to UKRI-funded students whose funding end dates lie between 1/3/20 and 31/3/21. If you fall within the eligibility criteria of the schemes announced to date you should have received an email via your department advising you of how the scheme will work and what you need to do to apply. If you believe that you are eligible for this funding but have not received an email, please contact graduate.studies@mpls.ox.ac.uk including the words 'UKRI 2020' in the subject of your email and a member of the Graduate Office team will assist you.

This raises the question of funding extensions for students in earlier years or whose funding comes from other sources. I can assure you that planning for this is well underway and we hope that we will be able to provide you with more specific information shortly. Discussions taking place about funding extensions include representatives from the Students' Union to ensure that students' concerns are included in any planning. The University and the Division continue to engage with UKRI with regards to funding for students whose funding will end later than 31/3/21.

Financial Hardship

We are aware that some students are experiencing financial hardship as a result of the lockdown. The University has set up an Emergency Assistance Fund (EAF) to help students who experience financial hardship. You can find more information on how to apply for this from your college hardship officer. However, we are also aware that the EAF offers limited support and may take up to four weeks to reach a decision. If you are experiencing particularly acute financial hardship which will have imminent consequences for your wellbeing such that there is not sufficient time to apply to the EAF, please contact your DGS with a request for emergency assistance.

Student Logs

Please continue to complete your log of any disruption you experience as a result of Covid-19. Past experience indicates that keeping a good account of problems at the time they occur is invaluable. MPLS communications sent to postgraduate research students regarding Covid-19, including the log template, can be found on the [COVID-19 MPLS PGR Communications page](#).

Official University of Oxford advice for students is published on the University's [Oxford and Coronavirus pages](#).

Best wishes,
Mike

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