

*This guidance applies to Doctoral and MPhil research degrees and the University will regularly review this guidance. (Last reviewed September 2023.)*

## **Introduction**

1. This guidance is limited to the examination of a thesis for Doctoral and MPhil research degrees and the inclusion of a Covid-19 Impact Statement in a thesis submitted for examination. Academic Units may also have subject specific guidance for students in place that aligns with, and complements, this guidance.

## **Research Project Adjustments due to Covid-19**

2. From the start of the disruption from the Covid-19 pandemic, the University's focus has been and will be on adaptation, allowing students to progress, complete their studies and gain their qualifications according to their original timetable wherever possible and to minimise the number of students whose completion of their project is delayed. This may require various forms of adjustment when it is in the interest of the student to support them to complete their studies.
3. A student will be expected to produce and submit a thesis for examination which will be of equivalent quality and rigour to one that would have been produced under normal circumstances. However, there is an acknowledgement that for some students the thesis will have changed from what was originally intended, in terms of its scope and type of work.
4. Research project adjustments are not uncommon in research degrees, but it is recognised that the ongoing nature of the restrictions and disruption caused by Covid-19 may lead to more significant adjustments to the original project strategy, plan or design. Decisions on these adjustments will be made collaboratively between the student and supervisory team.  
  
For new students, these changes should be discussed and agreed as part of the project approval process. New students should also discuss the likely risks for their project should Covid-19 impact continue and may need to formulate an alternative ('Plan B') approach to their proposed research.  
  
For continuing students, these changes should be documented as part of the Annual Progress Review. Some components of the study may need to be rescheduled in discussion with supervisors.

5. Project detail will be discussed with supervisors in light of any additional requirements relating to wellbeing or special needs that the Covid-19 situation may bring. It is recognised that underlying health conditions may restrict the ability of students to alter the project design as a consequence of Covid-19 restrictions. In such circumstances, alternative solutions, such as study interruption, should be discussed with supervisors and Graduate School staff.

### ***Covid-19 Impact Statement***

6. Where a research student has changed their thesis from what was originally intended due to Covid-19, a research student may include a Covid-19 Impact Statement. This statement is not compulsory and should only be included where a research student wishes to explain to their Examiners the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their research project.
7. It is the decision of a research student whether to include a Covid-19 Impact Statement with their thesis, but they are encouraged to discuss the inclusion of a Covid-19 Impact statement with their Supervisory Team.
11. Where a student chooses to provide a Covid-19 Impact statement this should be included in the thesis itself between the abstract and the author's declaration. The Covid-19 statement will only be required in the examination copy of the thesis and must not be included when the final e-copy of the thesis is provided to the Graduate School for deposit in the Library. The student will be asked to indicate on the Research Degree Examination Entry form whether they are including a Covid-19 Impact Statement in their thesis.
12. The statement, which must not exceed 500 words will provide Examiners with an overview of any research work disrupted as a result of Covid-19 restrictions and any adjustments to work that were made in response to these restrictions. A student may wish to include detail on the following:
  - Disruption caused by the Covid-19 restrictions, (such as, lack of access to facilities, libraries, archives, research participants, fieldwork, etc) where it has impacted on planned research activities and the content of the thesis;
  - Disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (such as caring responsibilities, home schooling, well-being impacts (physical and mental health) where it has impacted on planned research activities and the content of the thesis;
  - A description of how these disrupted research activities would have contributed to the thesis, if not for the disruption;
  - Details of any adjustments to work in light of the disruption and/or any issues that could not be mitigated against.

*(These suggestions are for guidance and is not an exhaustive list of impacts that a research student may experience.)*

13. The Covid-19 Impact Statement should not detail any issues unrelated to Covid-19 disruptions to research activities (such as illness, bereavement) where standard mechanisms, such as an interruption of study, are intended to account for such issues.

### ***Guidance for Examiners on Covid-19 Impact Statements***

14. Examiners will be expected to assess the candidate against the assessment criteria for the relevant research degree. However, examiners should take the circumstances as detailed in a Covid-19 Impact Statement into account when considering the recommendations open to them. Examiners will be asked to consider this statement in relation to the scope and volume of work achieved by a student, and take into account where disrupted/curtailed research activities have affected the scope and volume of work in thesis, while assessing the student against the assessment criteria for the relevant research degree.
15. The thesis should be a body of work which a capable, well qualified and diligent student, who is properly supported and supervised, can produce in the period of study as detailed in the relevant research degree regulations.
  - A Doctoral thesis should exhibit substantial evidence of original scholarship and contain material worthy of publication.
  - An MPhil thesis should demonstrate that a student has demonstrated the ability to deal with the chosen subject in a competent and scholarly manner displaying critical discrimination and a sense of proportion in evaluating the evidence and opinions of others.

*The following documents provide further information on the assessment criteria for Doctoral and MPhil programmes:*

- *Section 133 of the University's [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#)*
  - *Section 3 of the [Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees](#)*
  - *[QAA Doctoral Standard Guidance](#)*
16. Where the Covid-19 Impact Statement includes information not relating to Covid-19 disruptions/curtailments to research activities, this information should not be considered by the Examiners.
  17. All examination recommendations are a matter of academic judgement. It is the decision of the Examiners' as to what allowance to give to any limitations in the volume and scope of the thesis due to the impact of Covid-19 and associated disruptions to research activities and

determine whether the thesis meets the assessment criteria for the relevant research degree.

18. Where a Covid-19 Impact Statement has been submitted, the Joint Report should detail how this has been considered and their opinion on the impact on the thesis (in terms of scope and volume) within the context of maintaining the academic standards required for the award.
19. Where the Examiners require corrections, or a resubmission, they should consider any allowance they have made in the volume and scope of the thesis due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Examiners must determine and set out in detail what corrections are required so that the thesis fulfils the assessment criteria for the relevant research degree. However, the corrections should not be used to try and catch up with data collection that has not taken place due to Covid-19 restrictions and/or disruption.