

Policy on Covid-19 related exceptional extensions for PhD Scholars

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK (CSC) has developed a policy for exceptional extensions to PhD study due to disruptions related to the Covid-19 outbreak. The policy is outlined below with details of how Scholars can apply for an exceptional extension if they are in the last six-months of their normal PhD tenure.

Where a Scholar has intermitted their studies and CSC scholarship, the period of intermission will be added to their scholarship and this policy need not be invoked. Where an extension to tenure is being requested due to ill health (including ill mental health) including that related to the Covid outbreak, the [CSC's Ill Health Policy](#) will apply.

Where disruption due to Covid-19 has occurred within the first or second year of a PhD award, the Commission hopes that wherever possible the Scholar, with support from their supervisor, have endeavoured to make at least some of the time lost up and have worked with their supervisor to adjust their research plan where possible in order to minimise the length of any extension needed.

Principles

This policy has been developed to ensure that all CSC doctoral Scholars are supported in the completion of their PhD from delays resulting from Covid. Whilst this policy has been designed to ensure that there is not an onerous burden of proof on Scholars, we have asked that Scholars update their CSC Programme Officers regularly by email with their progress. These updates will assist the CSC when making decisions about exceptional extensions.

Scholars and supervisors should be aware that the CSC does not have an additional budget to fund exceptional extensions, the funding for extensions is taken from the

budget for new scholarship awards. We ask that all applicants bear this in mind and only apply for an extension if necessary and not for longer than required.

The CSC expects its UK university partners to support all reasonable requests for extensions to submission dates and to refrain from charging tuition or other fees during a period of Covid-19 related extension. The CSC will enter into discussions with its university partners on contributions to funding exceptional extensions on a case by case basis, particularly in the case of Scholars from high-income countries who university partners fund in their final year.

Eligibility

The CSC will consider requests for exceptional extensions from Commonwealth Scholars where the following conditions are met:

- 1) That the Scholar was within the original tenure during the Covid pandemic and by 31st March 2021.
- 2) That the Scholar's research has been affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. This includes, but is not limited to, situations where progress has been affected by:
 - i. limited access to university facilities;
 - ii. loss of research materials due to e.g. lab closures;
 - iii. inability to complete planned fieldwork;
 - iv. change of research plans due to access to necessary research facilities or travel restrictions;
 - v. any other situation that has arisen as a direct result of Covid-19 (except ill health which will be considered separately under the CSC's Ill Health Policy).
- 3) That when requested, during and subsequent to Covid-related campus closures, the Scholar has kept the CSC, through their Programme Officer, up to date with their progress, ability and capacity to work.
- 4) That the UK supervisor has provided a statement in support of an extension, stating the reason for the extension, how much additional time will be required, and a breakdown of how additional time will be used.
- 5) That the Scholar has continued to work as much as reasonably possible, as determined by their supervisor, during the period of disruption.
- 6) That the Scholar's university has extended their thesis submission date to include any period of extension.

The CSC emphasises that meeting of points 1-6 above does not, of itself, guarantee that every request will be granted, and each request will be considered on a case by case basis.

How to apply

Scholars are able to apply for an exceptional extension only in the last six months of their PhD tenure (i.e. within six months of the end of their 36 months on full stipend).

Scholars should complete the Covid 19 Exceptional Extension form which includes a brief (no more than 500 words) description of the reasons for the extension request detailing how Covid-19 has affect their research, how much additional time is required and how they will use the additional time.

Supervisors should complete the specific section of the form to provide a separate brief (no more than 500 words) description of how the Scholar's research has been affected by Covid-19, how much additional time is required and a breakdown of how the Scholar will use that additional time.

For a request to be approved, the CSC must receive written confirmation from the university administration that the PhD submission date has been extended to account for any extension (if necessary).

The CSC will endeavour to reply to all extension requests within 20 working days.

Extensions longer than six-months will not normally be approved.

The CSC reserves the right to deny an extension if a Scholar has not been in contact with their Programme Officer.

This policy is correct at 7 June 2023.