

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER DOCTORAL COLLEGE

Research degree theses and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions - Temporary Policy in Response to Impact of Covid-19 pandemic

1. *Introduction*

- 1.1. Where possible, research students should adapt their research activities to address disruptions caused by Covid-19 restrictions.
- 1.2. Students may choose to include a statement at the front of their thesis on the impact of disruptions on their work. Examiners will consider this statement as contextual information to support their understanding of any changes to the scope and volume of the research student's work. As a thesis should usually include within its main body information on e.g. changes to research methodology this statement may form a concise summary of and signposting to information contained within the main body of the thesis.
- 1.3. The quality threshold for the award remains unchanged and there must be no compromise in the integrity of the examination or the award. This means that in order to recommend award the thesis must provide the examiners with evidence that the candidate has met the criteria for the award in question.
- 1.4. This policy covers all research degrees, with the exception of by publication programmes, and is in force for first submissions for students registered during the Covid-19 Pandemic. For the purposes of this policy, this includes **all students who started their programme before 01 September 2021**.
- 1.5. The option to include a Covid-19 statement acts as a temporary policy expansion to the specifications with regard to the sequence of materials in theses/dissertations for examination specified in the ['Presentation of theses/dissertations for degrees in the Faculty of Graduate Research: statement of procedures – 5 Presentation and Arrangement of Theses/Dissertations'](#).

2. *The decision to include a Covid-19 statement*

- 2.1. Any research student who submits a thesis in the timeframe permitted by this policy may include a Covid-19 statement in the format set out below. A statement is not compulsory and should only be included where a research student wishes to highlight the impact of the pandemic on their research and the steps taken to adjust their research activities.
- 2.2. Research students should discuss the inclusion of a Covid-19 statement in their thesis with their supervisors, but the decision to include the statement ultimately rests with the student.
- 2.3. Research students should also discuss with their supervisors the extent to which it is appropriate to reference any changes to their research project within the body of the thesis for guidance specific to the project and disciplinary area in question.
- 2.4. Inclusion of a Covid-19 statement will not preclude recommendations of further work where required in order to demonstrate that the standards for award have been met.

3. *Covid-19 statement format*

- 3.1. If including, the Covid-19 statement must be inserted in the thesis between the abstract and the list of contents: see the ['Presentation of theses/dissertations for degrees in the Faculty of Graduate Research: statement of procedures: Presentation and Arrangement of Theses/Dissertations' \(5.7\)](#). The statement is only required for the examination copy and should be removed when the final copy is deposited in ORE (Open Research Exeter). The statement, which must not exceed 800 words, will form a summary of any planned research activities

disrupted by Covid-19 restrictions and the extent to which it was possible to adapt the work in those changed circumstances. The following may be included:

- 3.2. Details of any planned research activities curtailed by the pandemic because of, for example, lack of access to facilities, libraries, archives, research participants, fieldwork, etc. Information on any curtailed training should be included only insofar as it relates to the impact on research activities and on the thesis. An acknowledgement of the anticipated contribution and value to the thesis if those research activities had not been curtailed and what was possible to include in the thesis in the circumstances, including where alternative choices were made to adapt the work.
- 3.3. Any other relevant factors on the impact of Covid-19 on research activities and on the contents of the thesis. The information included must only relate to disruptions to relevant research activities caused by the pandemic and to the content of the thesis. Students should not disclose information about their personal circumstances to the examiners in the statement.
- 3.4. This guidance is one measure amongst other measures that the University of Exeter has taken to support PGR students in the context of the pandemic. This includes both existing and introduced policies, e.g. with regard to deferrals, interruptions and extensions. Alongside a range of support to help students to adapt, e.g. through the Researcher Development Programme.

4. *Guidance for examiners on Covid-19 statements*

- 4.1. Examiners must maintain academic standards in relation to the criteria for awards as set out in the [Calendar](#). Where a Covid-19 statement is included in a thesis there can be some flexibility in the consideration of the scope and volume of the work produced, but only where this does not impact on its quality or on the thresholds for the award.
- 4.2. Examiners must decide whether in their academic judgement there is evidence that the thesis meets the criteria for the award of the research degree. The Covid-19 statement's purpose is to provide a contextual overview to support the Examiners' understanding of any changes that it has been necessary to make to the original research project plan to respond to unforeseen research impediments (see section 3 above, for examples).
- 4.3. The '[Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes: After the Examination](#)' must continue to be followed. This includes 'ensuring that any recommendations for further work are limited to those amendments necessary to satisfy the examiners that the thesis meets the assessment criteria detailed in the Regulations for the award in question' (8.9.5). This means that Examiners must consider what amendments are necessary to meet the criteria for the award and must not require additional work aimed only at addressing where research activities have been curtailed by Covid-19 restrictions.
- 4.4. Online training via [LearnUpon](#) is available to support Non-Examining Independent Chairs and Internal Examiners in their roles - "Navigating the PGR Examination Process".

Professor Andrew McRae
Dean of Postgraduate Research and of the Doctoral College

Updated November 2023