

## **Guidance for Departments: Managing Stipend and Registration Extensions for Research Degree Students still impacted by the Pandemic**

### **1. Introduction and background**

- 1.1 In response to the pandemic, and subsequent closure of the College's labs and research offices, the College agreed to provide all affected research students, except those who were in their Writing Up Phase of their PhD (Completing Research Status or Writing Up Away from College) or those who were interrupting at the time of the disruption, to an automatic registration extension of up to 6 months.
- 1.2 The length of automatic registration extension depended upon the level of disruption experienced between the period Monday 16 March 2020 until (and including) Wednesday 30 September 2020. This was decided locally by Departments and reported to the Registry who updated student records accordingly.
- 1.3 Where tuition fees associated with registration extensions were not covered by external funders, it was agreed that students would not be charged additional fees for this period of automatic extension.
- 1.4 At the same time, the College implemented a stipend extension policy and process to support students whose funders were not able to provide an extension to their stipend. The College processed student applications for stipend extension in "waves." All students who met the eligibility criteria for the College scheme and who had funding end dates prior to 01 April 2023 had an opportunity to apply for a stipend extension. The 6<sup>th</sup> and final College wave has now concluded.
- 1.5 It is recognised that some students are still being impacted by the pandemic and that their research has not been able to progress as planned through no fault of their own. To support students, Departments are expected to manage on-going applications for stipend extensions locally and the corresponding fee free registration extensions.
- 1.6 This document is designed to provide guidance to Departments on the eligibility criteria for stipend extension applications and the local management of the process for considering applications, including registration extensions.

### **2. Eligibility criteria for stipend extension requests**

- 2.1 Students whose funding end date was between 01 March 2020 and 31 March 2023 (inclusive) and who were not able to secure an extension to their stipend through their funder, were given an opportunity to apply for a stipend extension through the College's scheme.
- 2.2 The College's scheme was in place to support students with up to 12 weeks extended stipend. If funders provided less than 12 weeks support, students could also use the

College's Scheme to apply for the remaining support so that up to 12 weeks extension was considered in total.

- 2.3 The rate of pay used for the College's stipend extension scheme was equal to the College's minimum stipend for the academic year in which the stipend extension was awarded (which is also the equivalent UKRI stipend rate).
- 2.4 The College's stipend extension scheme was only available to students who were not in the Writing Up phase of their PhD (Completing Research Status or Writing up Away from College) or to those who were not interrupting their studies at the time of disruption which was defined as between 16 March 2020 and 30 September 2020.
- 2.5 The first 4 waves of the College's stipend extension scheme were not open to students who were in their first year of their PhD at the time of disruption. Following student feedback and acknowledgement by the College of the impact of the pandemic on first year students, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> waves were open to eligible students who were in their first year at the time of disruption.

#### Eligibility Criteria for Stipend Extensions

- 2.6 The eligibility criteria set out below are for the local management of stipend extensions and are based on those used for the College's stipend extension scheme. It is recommended that all Departments apply these same eligibility criteria to ensure consistency for all students across College.

Students are eligible to apply for a stipend extension if:

- I. Their funding end date was after 16 March 2020, including students who were in their first year when they experienced disruption.
- II. They were not in their Writing Up phase of their PhD (Completing Research Status or Writing up Away from College) or interrupting their studies at the time they experienced disruption.
- III. Their funder is unable to support their stipend extension request, either in full or in part.
- IV. If they have previously applied for a stipend extension (either through their funder or through the College scheme) but are experiencing disruption beyond the 12 weeks, for which support was already provided. This could be disruption experienced during the original period defined by College (16 March 2020 – 30 September 2020) or disruption experienced from 01 October 2020 onwards.
- V. They have exhausted all reasonable adjustments to their research plan (see 4.1 C) and can demonstrate that they were severely impacted by the pandemic for more than 12 weeks through one or more of the following:

- a. Significant delays in terms of access to necessary equipment (for example experimental laboratory equipment or computing equipment), facilities, patients or samples.
  - b. Significant delays caused by travel restrictions for off-campus field work in the UK or abroad.
  - c. Additional caring responsibilities that have significantly impacted progress.
  - d. Another challenge related to the pandemic which must be clearly articulated by the student.
- 2.7 The eligibility criteria do not set a maximum number of weeks that students can apply for support. This is to take account of the range of individual cases for support which might be submitted by students and to give Departments flexibility.

#### Self-funded students and those who do not meet the eligibility criteria

- 2.8 Self-funded students and those who do not meet the eligibility criteria should be advised to apply for support through the College's [financial hardship funds](#) for which guidelines were reviewed in light of the pandemic. If Departments have in place local arrangements to support students in hardship, these should be highlighted to students.

### **3. Fee Free Registration Extensions**

- 3.1 Departments have already provided details to the Registry of the period of disruption experienced by their students between Monday 16 March 2020 and Wednesday 30 September 2020 (inclusive) and the corresponding fee free registration extensions to be awarded (up to a maximum of 6 months). In the new local processes to be implemented, students may apply for a stipend extension for on-going and further disruption experienced during the original period of disruption (16 March 2020 – 30 September 2020) or they might apply for a stipend extension covering disruption experienced from 01 October 2020 onwards.
- 3.2 If the student applies for a stipend extension for disruption experienced during the period 16 March 2020 – 30 September 2020, the Department should consider whether the registration extension already reported to the Registry was sufficient, or if it needs to be extended.
- If the original period of extension needs to be extended, this should be reported to the Registry as if it were a new extension. Departments should submit the start and end date of the new extension period to the Registry by submitting a Departmental Covid-19 registration extension form (excel template). Departments are reminded that the maximum registration extension permitted for this period was 6 months.
  - If the original registration extension reported to the Registry is sufficient, then Departments do not need to report anything further to the Registry with respect to registration extension.

3.3 If a student applies for a stipend extension for disruption experienced from 01 October 2020 onwards, there is an expectation that the corresponding fee free registration extension, which would normally align with the number of weeks awarded for the stipend extension, will also be awarded. This will be considered a new registration extension which will need to be reported to the Registry by submitting a Departmental Covid-19 registration extension form (excel template). There is no maximum limit set for this period of disruption.

3.4 Some students may have been delayed by more than 6 months during the pandemic but have now finished their lab work. Whilst they may not be eligible for a stipend extension, they may need additional time to submit. In such cases, students can apply for a registration extension using the [Thesis Deadline Extension Procedure and form](#).

#### **4. Expectations for the Operational Management of Stipend Extension Applications and Registration Extensions**

4.1 Departments are expected to apply the following minimum expectations to their local management processes. Again, these expectations are in place to ensure consistency and parity for all students in College.

a. All funded students are required to check with their funder whether support is available before approaching their local Department for a stipend extension.

Note: UKRI-funded students who are still experiencing on-going disruption as a result of the pandemic should contact their Training Grant Holder for support before applying for a stipend extension through their local Department. If the TGH is not able to provide a stipend extension, then they should approach their Department.

b) Departments should develop guidance for students on how to complete an application, including how to confirm to their Department that their funder is not able to provide support.

c) Departments may wish to consider providing students with guidance on when to submit their application, for example applications would not usually be expected from students until after their Late Stage Review (LSR) has taken place. This is to allow time for revised research plans to take effect.

d) Departments should clearly define the timeline for their application process, including when students can expect to receive a decision (this would normally be within 4-6 weeks of the application submission deadline).

e) Departments should build into their process a step to review the registration extension for the student. If the stipend extension application relates to the original period of disruption (16 March 2020 – 30 September 2020) then Departments should check what was previously reported to the Registry and

whether this needs to be extended (note maximum permitted is 6 months extension)<sup>1</sup>. If the stipend extension application relates to disruption experienced from 01 October onwards, then this will be a new registration extension to be reported to the Registry (see 4.3) and does not have a limit.

- f) Applications should be reviewed by more than one academic member of staff.
  - g) Departments and/or Faculties should develop a process by which students can appeal against the outcome of a Department's consideration of their application for a stipend extension. The Appeals process should be clearly articulated to students and made available on Departmental websites.
  - h) Students who apply for a stipend extension should also be advised which staff will have access to the data they submit as part of their application.
  - i) Departmental application processes must be clearly communicated to students.
- 4.2 Once a stipend extension is approved, Departments should complete a bursary form and submit it via the Department's nominated representative. See: [Bursary administration | Administration and support services | Imperial College London](#). The rate of pay should be equal to the College's minimum stipend for the academic year in which the stipend extension is awarded.
- 4.3 At the same time, Departments should submit the departmental Covid-19 registration extension form (excel template) to the relevant Student Records Manager:
- Tanya Hunt [t.hunt@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:t.hunt@imperial.ac.uk) (Engineering and ICBS Departments)
  - Chloe Ward [chloe.ward@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:chloe.ward@imperial.ac.uk) (Medicine and Natural Science Departments)
- 4.4 Once processed by Student Records, student milestones, including the thesis submission deadline will be adjusted accordingly. Student Records will also inform Tuition Fees.

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<sup>1</sup> This information is available in the interruptions report within the ICA Banner Interim Report system, with a type of 'Lab Closure (COVID-19)'