Higher Degree by Research Candidates COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Will my University scholarship payments be impacted by COVID-related disruptions?

Your scholarship payments will continue as usual as long as you:

- remain enrolled

- continue to make progress in your research program under the guidance of your supervisory team

- meet the Conditions of Award for your scholarship.

2. Can I still access my research allowance funds if I am working on my research project from home?

As an enrolled HDR candidate, you can access your research allowance as set out in the Minimum Standard for Resources, Facilities and Other Support statement while you are working on your project from home.

You can make a request to access your research allowance funding through your School's or Department's usual process.

3. Where can I find information on financial support that may be available to me?

If you are experiencing extreme financial difficulty, you may be eligible for financial assistance to help with living expenses and the costs of studying at university. See student financial support for more information.

4. What if my progress on my research project is impacted by COVID-19?

Depending on where you are in your candidature, impacts due to COVID-19 may have consequences that may not need to be considered for many months. As a result, all currently enrolled HDR candidates are required to maintain a record of any COVID-19 impacts you are facing, big or small, from this point forward and for the rest of your candidature.

GGRS has created a documenting impacts template which will help guide you to keep a detailed record of any specific impacts, or delays, to your candidature (COVID-19 related or otherwise). We strongly encourage all candidates to regularly update and forward this information to your supervisor.

This documentation will also need to be submitted for consideration as part of future extension requests.

The documenting impacts template has been designed to allow both minor and serious impacts to research progress to be recorded, and it ensures that all required information for assessing future applications for extensions or leave is included.

It also contains a series of prompts to help you and your supervisor explore possible variations to your project so that you can continue to progress your research while the impact continues. These prompts should be used to help guide a discussion with your supervisors—not all questions will be relevant to your research and there might be additional things you need to consider.

5. My ability to progress my research at the usual pace has been significantly impacted. What options do I have?

If you find that progress in your research program is being affected, contact your supervisor as soon as possible to advise them and talk through next steps. You may need to consider the options below:

Flexible research hours

Impacts caused by the COVID-19 situation may increase demands on your time and/or interruptions, please note that you are not restricted to working on your research project during normal office hours. Talk to your supervisor if you need to work variable hours on your research project, such as evenings or weekends.

Reduced work week

If your progress is significantly impacted, you can use your leave to reduce your working week, for example by taking one day of leave per week. You can view your leave entitlements here. You can use your recreation leave or, if this has been exhausted, you can take a leave of absence. If you are a scholarship holder, your scholarship will continue to be paid during a period of recreation leave and will be suspended during a period of leave of absence.

Carer's Leave

If you are unable to progress with your research for a period due to substantial caring responsibilities as a result of the COVID-19 situation, you may be able to access your sick leave provision. Sick leave for candidates with caring responsibilities can be accessed where candidature cannot be managed within the provisions of a reduced work week or transfer to part-time candidature. Candidates are entitled to up to 12 weeks sick leave, including provisions for paid sick leave for scholarship holders (refer to your conditions of award). For a period of sick leave that is less than 10 working days, no formal leave request is required, however, you need to advise your supervisor or your HDR Convenor. Requests in excess of 10 consecutive working days must be lodged online and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Change your enrolment status to part-time

Full-time HDR candidates whose progress is being significantly affected can request to change their enrolment status to part-time. Changing to part-time will 'slow the clock' on your HDR program to 50 per cent of a full-time study load and will push out the dates for your milestones and thesis submission.

Scholarship holders with significant caring commitments may receive approval to hold their scholarship part-time. If the request is approved, your scholarship stipend rate will be changed to reflect your part-time status. Please be aware, however, that part-time scholarships are taxable.

A request to change your enrolment (and scholarship) to part-time can be lodged online via myGriffith > My Research > My candidate centre. In this request, you will need to provide a start date for your change to part-time. You don't need to provide an end date, but you will need to lodge another change of enrolment status request when you want to go back to full-time enrolment.

Take leave

Leave of absence requests can be lodged online via myGriffith > My research > My candidate centre. If you require any assistance with lodging a change of enrolment status or leave request, please contact GGRS via hdr-enquiry@griffith.edu.au.

Leave of Absence

If you are unable to progress your research for a period, your supervisors may advise a leave of absence from your HDR program to cover the period where you cannot progress. Being on a leave of absence means your candidature is 'paused' so the time you are on leave does not count towards the duration of your candidature and scholarship, if you have one.

International candidates

The option to change your enrolment from full-time to part-time, for a maximum period of three to six months, or take recreation leave, sick leave, or a leave of absence is also open to international HDR candidates, however there may be additional requirements due to visa implications that you will need to consider. Also, if you are a sponsored student, your sponsorship body will need to agree to this course of action.

In the first instance, international HDR candidates should, in the following order:

- discuss these options with their supervisors

- seek information and assistance from an International Student Advisor regarding the requirements and implications of changing enrolment to part-time or taking leave from their program.

6. **I cannot undertake clinical research or data collection that is necessary for my project. What should I do?**

If fieldwork, data collection or clinical research planned for this stage of your project is currently not possible because of measures put in place in response to COVID-19, you should contact your supervisors as soon as possible. They are best placed to talk through the likely impact on your project and consider alternative approaches to, and timeframes for, collecting the data or reframing your methodology and/or intended research outcomes so you can continue with your project.

Measures will be taken where possible to accommodate the continuation of your research and minimise the disruption to your candidature. However, as a last resort, if circumstances mean you cannot move your project forward without progressing with your clinical research or data collection as originally planned, your supervisors may advise that you should take a leave of absence from your HDR program to cover the period where you cannot progress. Being on a leave of absence means your candidature is *paused* so the time that you are on leave does not count towards your duration of candidature and scholarship, if you have one. Your access to University resources, such as supervision, is suspended over this period. If you are on a University scholarship, payments of your stipend are also suspended during this period.

Leave of absence requests can be lodged online via myGriffith > My research > My candidate centre. If you require any assistance with lodging this request, please contact the Griffith Graduate Research School via hdr-enquiry@griffith.edu.au.

Please see FAQ *5. My ability to progress my research at the usual pace has been significantly impacted due to the COVID-19 situation. What options do I have*? for more information.

7. I am due to complete a candidature milestone. Can I complete the seminar online?

Milestone seminars are being supported in an online environment, which will still allow for milestone assessors and an audience to virtually engage with your seminar. Your HDR Convenor is best placed to talk to you and your supervisors about how the school is approaching these seminars once you have discussed the issue with your supervisor.

Please ensure that in preparing for your milestone, you incorporate any impacts, and any resultant amendments, to your research project as a result of the COVID-19 situation. Having these issues (big or small) documented in this way will be vital if you need to apply for extensions at a later date.

See FAQ *4. What if my progress on my research project is impacted by coronavirus COVID-19?* above for more information on documenting impacts.

8. Will there be any impact on the examination of my thesis?

GGRS is providing an ongoing service to candidates with a business-as-usual approach.

Examination processes will continue, however, we are mindful there may be instances where the availability of examiners is impacted by COVID-19 measures. Please be assured we will continue to monitor the progress of the examination of your thesis, ensuring as timely completion as possible.

Progress of the thesis examination can be tracked via myGriffith > My Research > My thesis.

9. What are my leave options if I fall ill with COVID-19 or any other illness?

If you become ill for any reason, sick leave is the appropriate form of leave. You should advise your supervisor or your HDR convenor if you are unwell and that you will be taking sick leave. If you have received a positive COVID-19 test, you will need to follow these published instructions and to report this via completion of this form.

For a period of sick leave that is less than 10 working days, no formal leave request is required. If your period of sick leave exceeds 10 working days you will need to lodge a sick leave request and provide a medical certificate or, for illness related to COVID-19, evidence of a positive PCR result or the positive RAT registration with Queensland Health. This leave request can be lodged online via myGriffith > My research > My candidate centre.

Current scholarship holders may continue to be paid for periods of approved sick leave up to 12 weeks. Candidates on scholarship are encouraged to review scholarship conditions of award which set out leave provisions available.

Sick leave may be granted for up to 12 weeks over your whole research program. If you require additional sick leave, you may wish to consider requesting a period of leave of absence. Please see FAQ 5. *My ability to progress my research at the usual pace has been significantly impacted due to the COVID-19 situation. What options do I have?* for more information.

If you require any assistance with lodging a leave request, please contact the Griffith Graduate Research School via hdrenquiry@griffith.edu.au

10. **Working on my research project in the current environment may be challenging and stressful. Is there someone I can talk to about this?**

For some people, the uncertainty of the current environment or remoteness of working from home could be difficult to navigate. Social isolation, domestic violence, stress and a range of psychological impacts may be exacerbated by limited social interaction.

We understand that HDR candidates may face a number of significant challenges with regard to your research and personal circumstances. With this in mind, Griffith has made available to HDR candidates its staff counselling program, run by Benestar. This is an independent, confidential counselling and coaching program that offers a range of services and resources paid for by the University. The program is designed to assist you to enhance your individual health and wellbeing.

Your supervisors, HDR convenors and Group HDR advocates are also important points of support for HDR candidates.

Additionally, student support services are also available to you:

• The Griffith Online Health and Wellness Centre can direct you to numerous support resources, including Coronavirus and self-care support.

• If you require support outside University hours, the Griffith Mental Wellbeing Support Line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide immediate assistance for emotional and mental distress. Phone 1300 785 442 or text 0488 884 146.

If you are impacted by domestic and family violence, you can access the following supports and resources:

• Griffith Domestic and Family Violence webpage

• Benestar domestic and family violence support line – 1300 574 516

• DVConnect

• Mensline

• 1800Respect.

11. **How will important information be communicated to me?**

The University will also periodically send important updates to you via email. Please be aware that if you have a staff appointment with the University, all University correspondence related to your program, including from GGRS, will be sent to your staff email account for the duration of your employment. As soon as you are no longer an employee, your student email account will again become the primary email account.

12. What must I consider if I need to work from home on my research project?

First, ensure that your supervisors are aware that you will be working from home on your research project. You should discuss, plan and agree with them on your work plan and achievable outputs within the anticipated working from home period. This will include working on aspects of your project that don't require physical access to on-campus or external research-related facilities such as working on your literature review, milestone documents, data analysis, manuscript and/or thesis writing. You are expected to check in regularly with your supervisor.

Academic areas have developed useful checklists to help guide your planning and consider your work from home needs. Your supervisor will be able to share and discuss this checklist with you.

You will need to consider your digital resource needs while working at home, such as computing facilities, internet and software access.

You will also be required to familiarise yourself with the Work location policy which detail responsibilities, considerations and requirements to ensure a suitable and safe work environment. Resources are available on the working remotely web page to guide setting up a workspace, software options, training with online tools, cyber security and more.

13. Can I attend and work from a Griffith University campus during a lockdown?

The University has COVID-19 Management Plan in place to guide our swift and structured response to COVID-19 public health directions from Queensland's Chief Health Officer. We also have a set of COVID-Safe Guidelines for Research, which help to inform the safe conduct of research-related activities for all researchers, research higher degree and Honours candidates, and support staff.

As risk levels rise, attendance at campus is strictly controlled and managed by exception. During periods of Tightened Restrictions or Campus Closure, permission will be required and **must be received before attending campus**.

Permission can be requested through your supervisor, who will apply to the Dean (Academic) on your behalf. This email request must include the following:

- Candidate name and s-number

- Supervisor's name and school

- The nature of the work you will be doing – how is it essential, why you must be on campus.

- What days you need to be on campus and times as well as start/end date

- The exact location (i.e. building and room number)

Attendance at campus during periods of Tightened Restrictions or Campus Closure can only occur after receiving approval from the Dean (Academic) and only for the activities, locations and times included in that approval letter.

Further information is also available for HDR candidates in the COVID-Safe Guidelines for Research.