

COVID-19 Info for Research Students: Update # 2 (23 March 2020)

Our team at the Graduate Research School are aware that this is a very challenging time for our research students, their whanau and wider support networks. This update follows our previous [communication on March 19](#), where we outlined information about options for research students affected by COVID-19. The situation continues to change, and this message contains further important updates for AUT research students. We hope this can help answer some of the concerns and questions you may have. We will provide further updates soon.

[New Zealand's COVID-19 alert level has been raised to 3, with a further rise to level 4 planned for Wednesday](#). This means that we are now preparing to move into self-isolation as a nation. Under alert level 4, non-essential businesses must close, and educational facilities will cease face-to-face operations. Alert level 4 will remain in place for four weeks, after which time it will be reviewed and could be extended. This means that **AUT campuses and facilities will be closed** for as long as alert level 4 remains in place.

Everyone in New Zealand is **instructed to stay at home**. Supermarkets and pharmacies will remain open, but we are instructed to stay 2 metres apart from other people while using these essential services. We urge you to prioritise the health of yourself and others by following the instructions of the New Zealand government.

You can find the latest information on COVID-19 from New Zealand's [Ministry of Health website](#). AUT will maintain up-to-date information on our [COVID-19 update page](#), and doctoral candidates can also access the [AUTi COVID-19](#) intranet page. We here at the Graduate Research School will continue to update you with information specific to research students. Our latest updates are given below.

Health is priority #1

Research students are encouraged to prioritise their own health and safety and the health and safety of their whanau, supervisors, fellow candidates and research participants. While many of you will be able to continue to work on your research from home while in self-isolation, there may be some of you where aspects of your studies will need to be put on hold.

A pause on all face-to-face data gathering involving human participants

We have ethical obligations as researchers to not place ourselves or our research participants and colleagues at risk. Because this is a difficult time for everybody the AUT Human Ethics Committee have made the decision to require **all researchers (including postgraduate research candidates) to halt all data gathering which involves being near to people**. This means any research techniques planned such as interviews, focus-groups, observations, and surveys which involve being in close proximity with people must be halted and deferred until further notice. Gathering and analysing data remotely or using secondary data (such as from data-bases) which is already approved under a formal AUTECH approval may continue. However, it is important that you consider the appropriateness of such data collection given the anxiety many people are feeling at present.

Managing your candidature

Inevitably many research students' progress will be affected by COVID-19, and some may be severely disrupted. There will be **no penalties imposed for lack of progression**. All candidates are encouraged to re-visit their plans and timelines in partnership with their supervisors and to revise these plans and timelines as needed. These may need to be further revised as the situation continues to evolve. The **GRS will process any extensions needed** and you may wish to discuss this option with your supervisors now. The GRS understands the need to be supportive and flexible, and will be so with regard to all applications for extensions.

Doctoral milestones: PGR9 presentations and oral exams

Doctoral students approaching the PGR9 should be aware that the **PGR9 oral presentation can either be deferred or held online** (e.g. via Zoom). These presentations and PGR9 reviews are organised by faculties, so contact your faculty postgraduate office for information on your presentation. Deferrals will be approved when needed, with no penalties in regard to your candidature timelines.

For those doctoral candidates approaching the oral examination, we are now moving toward **online examinations via Zoom**. Examinations for doctoral research which includes a practice-based component will be considered on case-by-case basis – but supervisors and candidates are asked to consider how the examination might be conducted remotely.

Visas and international travel

All universities in NZ have been advised by **Immigration New Zealand that they will be flexible with regard to student visa expirations**. However, they are requesting that applications for extensions to student visas be made as early as possible due to the volume of processing they are anticipating. The **GRS can provide a letter verifying current enrolment** and progress in your PGR degree as needed. Please send requests to grs@aut.ac.nz.

Any postgraduate research students “stuck” overseas and unable to return to New Zealand should please notify their primary supervisor and the GRS. Immigration New Zealand will consider a special re-admission back into New Zealand for non-NZ citizens and residents for “humanitarian reasons”. For our research students, this may include separation from family who are in NZ, having your home in NZ and being stuck somewhere internationally without support, or other reasons. The **GRS can provide a letter of support** for your application for a special re-admission back into New Zealand. Please send requests to grs@aut.ac.nz

Staying informed

It is important that you **stay updated** with regard to this rapidly changing situation. AUT has a [COVID-19 update page](#) on its website. Please visit this regularly.

The GRS will be providing more learning resources and other information specifically for research students via the [ThesisLink page](#) and via the [AUT Student Digital Workspace](#). You may like to bookmark these pages and visit them regularly.

Enquiries, questions and concerns

If you have any specific concerns, questions or issues you would like help with, please email the GRS grs@aut.ac.nz and we will do all we can to help you.

Being kind in troubled times

It is understandable that this situation has resulted in much uncertainty and many people are feeling vulnerable and anxious. Please be assured that the GRS and the wider AUT community will be flexible, supportive and do all we can to assist you in revising your plans for your PGR project. Please **be patient and kind**. Criticism of others in this situation is not helpful. We are all working hard and doing our best to respond and help.

Noho ora mai ra

Graduate Research School Team