

Kia ora Postgraduate Research Students,

Welcome to 2022 – another year with challenges, but also with opportunities. We look forward to doing all we can to continue to support you to make progress with your studies and develop as researchers.

This update provides some guidance for you with regard to:

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Preparing for Omicron

The Omicron variant of COVID-19 has changed plans for many. With case numbers rising globally and now in Aotearoa/New Zealand, it's important to understand what Omicron means for you, and to prepare accordingly.

AUT at 'Red' level

Campuses are open and operating. You are welcome to return to campus so long as you are fully vaccinated (or have a valid exemption), and have [registered your My Vaccine Pass with AUT](#). Public health measures are in place, including one metre distancing wherever possible, and face-mask wearing recommended while indoors and in any circumstance where you may be in proximity to other people – such as in outdoor areas where people gather. You will have also read that [appropriate quality face-masks](#) are now necessary. Please stay home if you are unwell, get tested and self-isolate until you have your test results back.

AUT spaces and services that are available with My Vaccine Pass include: libraries, shuttle buses, bookable study spaces and computers, some hospitality venues, and gyms. Online resources and services remain available to all students regardless of vaccination status. All students can also access the Student Medical Centres (by appointment). The Graduate Research School's physical office in WU building on the city campus is not currently open, however our usual services are available remotely. Contact grs@aut.ac.nz for any enquiries.

Vaccinations and let's get "boosted"

Vaccination is the most important way we can protect ourselves and others against Omicron and other variants of COVID-19. If you're aged 18 or over, and your second dose was more than three months ago, you can get your free booster dose at any walk-in vaccination centre (or [make a booking online](#)).

In February, the Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei #ShotDoy vaccination van is visiting AUT campuses. If you are eligible, you can 'get boosted' at North Campus in carpark 2 (Tuesday 8 February), City Campus outside WA building (Wednesday 9 February), or South Campus outside MB building (Thursday 10 February) from 10am to 2pm.

What to do if you experience symptoms

The first symptoms of the Omicron variant are often a scratchy or sore throat and a runny nose. If you experience these or other symptoms, get a test. Testing is free, and you don't need to be a citizen or resident of NZ. You can get a test at your doctor's office, or at any of the [425 COVID-19 testing stations](#) nationwide. Be prepared to self-isolate until you get a negative test result.

What to do if you test positive

If your test is positive, you will hear back within 48 hours. You (and everyone else you live with) will need to self-isolate for at least 10 days, or 14 days if you are not fully vaccinated, and be symptom-free for 72 hours before ending self-isolation. There is healthcare and financial support available for those who test positive – see the [Unite Against COVID-19](#) website for more details. You may like to notify AUT of your illness by completing our optional and confidential [COVID-19 notification form](#). This will allow us to identify how we can help you with learning assistance or basic supplies.

Planning ahead – contingencies

It's helpful to have a few supplies to hand going into the Omicron outbreak. The Ministry of Health suggests having pain relief such as Ibuprofen and Panadol, any prescription medicines, throat lozenges, cough medicine, hand sanitiser, masks, tissues and cleaning products.

If you are self-isolating and feel well enough to study, you may like to have some library books or other study materials at home. The GRS can help with laptop loans, and the Student Hub can help with data vouchers for those with no or poor internet access at home.

Stay in touch with your supervisors and keep them informed on your situation. You may need to adjust your plans for field-work, laboratory or clinic access, meetings and other planned activities if you (or the people you live with) test positive for COVID-19.

Support available for you

Orientation and new doctoral students induction moving online

Orientation events and activities for Semester 1 2022 will be held online. This includes postgraduate information sessions. The February 24 new doctoral students induction will also be held online. We look forward to resuming these types of activities in person again when it is safer to gather in large numbers.

Health and wellbeing

The AUT Student Medical Centres are open. You will need to phone in advance to make a booking. Phone [+64 9 921 9992](#) (City Campus) or [+64 9 921 9998](#) (North Campus).

You can make an appointment with an AUT counsellor to talk about your support needs. Phone [+64 9 921 9292](#) or email counselling@aut.ac.nz. Students have access to free alternative counselling services, which are private and accessible online or over the phone. Visit www.puawaitanga.nz/aut or phone [0800 782 999](#). You can also call or text [1737](#) for free any time of the day or night, to speak to a trained counsellor.

Financial support

AUT has hardship grants available for those in need of financial support. These can help with the cost of rent, food, transport, utilities, internet access, and more. Contact the [Student Hub](#) or make an appointment with an advisor via the AUT App to discuss your situation. Let the advisor know if your request is urgent.

Workshops, seminars and learning opportunities

The GRS Postgraduate Seminar Series will run online until further notice. Workshops and seminars are available on all sorts of topics: from data analysis to reading tips, software training to careers, plus support for writing each of the parts of a thesis. Browse the seminars and make your bookings via [elab](#).

Research peer support groups

Some research peer support groups are continuing to operate online or (with public health measures) in person. [Browse the groups here](#) and get in touch with their leaders if you'd like to connect.

What to do if...

You are stuck outside of NZ

Borders are currently closed. The NZ government has periodically released limited places for international students (including doctoral students) to enter for study purposes, and we have managed applications as those opportunities have arisen. However, there is no guarantee of similar opportunities in the near future. It is important to understand that AUT does not have the ability to grant entry or re-entry into New Zealand; this is controlled by Immigration New Zealand. AUT works with the other New Zealand universities to continue to press for entry/re-entry into New Zealand for international students.

We recommend that you speak with your supervisors and faculty / school advisors about how to start or continue with your research remotely, where possible. Our friendly [Liaison Librarians](#) can also advise on getting your reading started from wherever you are. If you are starting your doctoral studies from offshore, please contact pgresearcherdevelopment@aut.ac.nz for information about our online doctoral inductions.

If you are an international student wishing to return home

We do not recommend that AUT students travel internationally at present. However, we do recognise that some international students have not seen their families for many months and there may be pressing needs to return home. If you are considering this, it is important you communicate with your supervisors and consider your options which include:

- Completing a PGR30 form including a plan for you to continue to progress your studies while outside of New Zealand.
- Applying for a Leave of Absence (via a PGR6 form) to “stop the clock” on your timeline and to allow you to focus on your reasons for returning home/leaving New Zealand.

If you do choose to leave New Zealand at this time you need to be aware that there is no indication of when you may be able to re-enter the country. It is important to discuss the implications of this for your progress in your studies with your supervisors.

You are falling behind your timeline

There are a range of options available to those who have lost time or productivity due to COVID-19. These include deferment, leave of absence of enrolment, and requests for extension. Please talk with your supervisors and contact grs@aut.ac.nz for advice about which option might be best for you.

You have had to change your plans due to COVID-19

You may like to talk with your supervisors in advance about how you can best navigate an Omicron disruption in your research plans. It's important to note any disruptions (current or potential) in your PGR8 progress reports so that we are aware of how best to support you. You can contact grs@aut.ac.nz if you have specific questions or concerns about how Omicron is affecting your research plans. We can help you to work through your options.

You can do this!

One of the most valuable skills many graduates gain from their research programmes is the ability to persevere. Successfully completing a research degree – even under normal circumstances – requires great tenacity, planning, and resilience. Since 2020 and the beginnings of the global pandemic, this has been especially true.

But you can do it! Many research students have changed their plans, and many have been extremely flexible (and innovative) in their approach to research during the COVID era. This journey may be tough, but tough experiences build manawa (heart). We know the power of our PG research community, and we will support you in any way we can.

Wishing you a productive return to a year of intellectually stimulating and meaningful research.

Kia kaha, Kia māia, Kia manawanui (be strong, be confident, be determined and persistent)

Mark O

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