

COVID-19 Info for Research Students: Update #3 (31 March 2020)

This Update #3 from our team here at the Graduate Research School provides further information about matters relevant to research students resulting from the COVID-19 New Zealand government Alert Level 4 (“lockdown”). We intend to continue to deliver further updates on a weekly basis (or more frequently when important information becomes available).

New Zealand COVID-19 Alert Levels

New Zealand’s COVID-19 Alert Level 4 remains in place until at least 23 April 2020. It is possible that this will be extended beyond this date, and we should all prepare for this potential extension in our planning. Under Alert Level 4 all **AUT campuses and facilities are closed** and no person is able to access university facilities without explicit and special permission. All of our electronic access cards have been disabled.

If and when Alert Level 4 is lifted, it is likely we will step back to Alert Level 3. This will continue to restrict movements and require an extension of social distancing protocols. This will continue to constrain some graduate research student’s abilities to progress.

You can find the latest information on COVID-19 from New Zealand’s [COVID-19 information website](#) and via the [Ministry of Health website](#). AUT maintains up-to-date information on our [COVID-19 update page](#), and doctoral candidates can also access the [AUTi COVID-19](#) intranet page.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Advice and Support

When people spend extended periods in isolation, and in combination with uncertainty, it provides challenges for people’s mental health and wellbeing. This can be exacerbated by other factors and some graduate students may find they are struggling. There are a range of support services and advice available including:

- **R U OK Online:** The R U OK Advisor team have an online presence via the [R U OK Facebook page](#). If you want to talk to someone and stay connected with other students, you can join the page and send a message to the team. They are also able to connect you with AUT Student Services and resources.
- **AUT Wellbeing:** You can make an appointment with an AUT Counsellor to talk about your support needs. Phone 09 921 9292 or email counselling@aut.ac.nz
- Students also 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.
- The New Zealand Ministry of Health has some [helpful tips for staying healthy and well](#) during this “lockdown” period.

Financial Hardship and Support Options

A number of graduate research students are facing financial challenges. AUT has some support available ([via application](#)). For more specific advice and information of potential sources of financial support please email: studenthub@aut.ac.nz

International Students and Visas

[Immigration New Zealand has advised](#) that all international students who have a student or interim visa with an expiry date of 2 April to 9 July 2020 inclusive, and who are in New Zealand on 2 April 2020, will have their

visas automatically extended to 25 September 2020. Confirmation of extensions will be emailed to all visa holders.

Current student visa holders who are not in New Zealand are not currently permitted to enter New Zealand.

For new students who have been issued a student visa and who are not in New Zealand, and have deferred their studies until later in the year or 2021, your current student visa will remain valid. If you are in this situation please notify us at: grs@aut.ac.nz.

AUT Doctoral Scholarship Recipients

Current holders of doctoral scholarships (AUT Doctoral Scholarship and Vice-Chancellor's Doctoral Scholarships) are still being paid their scholarship stipends over this Alert Level 4 period. If, due to COVID-19, a doctoral scholarship recipient has had their ability to progress their research compromised for a period of more than four weeks, they may apply for an extension to their scholarship at the end of their scholarship tenure. These extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Disruptions to a Student's Ability to Progress

Many research students have been able to work with their supervisors to adjust their plans and continue to progress. For those students who are disrupted and unable to progress, an application for an extension to current timelines and milestones may be needed. Because we are unsure about the duration of the disruption at this point, students are encouraged to **delay completing and submitting an application for an extension until the length and implications of the disruption are known.**

When research students are able to return to progressing with their work they should (with their supervisors' advice) consider the potential need for an extension and, if warranted, apply at this time.

Extensions can be granted retrospectively.

Research Student's Tuition Fees

Because the implications of the COVID-19 disruption are not yet able to be quantified and because they are likely to be different for each research student, no decisions have been made with regard to changes to tuition fees (such as fee waivers). Currently enrolled students are still liable for tuition fee payments as per the invoices received.

In-Person Data Gathering Involving Human Participants Temporarily Halted

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 databases), may continue; provided these activities are already approved under a formal AUTECH approval.

Doctoral PGR9 Presentations and Oral Exams

Doctoral students approaching the PGR9 should be aware that the **PGR9 oral presentation may be either 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 doctoral candidates with an oral examination scheduled during April, we will have been in communication with you, your examiners, convenor and supervisors. We have developed protocols for **online examinations via Zoom and your examination will proceed** (unless there is an approved request to defer) using these remote examination protocols.

Online resources and learning opportunities

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

We are also providing a number of online seminars and workshops, including those offered by Academic Consulting who have offered a number of helpful [webinars](#). In addition, they are offering online drop-in sessions – the times for these will be arranged on a week by week basis, and the timeslots will be published on their [Facebook page](#) each Friday afternoon. The drop-ins are for any researchers (including students) who have a quick question – NVivo, SPSS, data analysis, writing or productivity questions are all welcome.

Finding a way forward and staying positive

Thank you to all research students and supervisors who are being flexible, patient and supportive during these challenging times. We will need to continue to work together and to adapt and find ways to continue with our research and graduate research degree aspirations.

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.

Noho ora mai rā

Graduate Research School Team