

GUIDANCE FOR AWARDEES ON COVID-19 RELATED IMPACTS ON COUNCIL FUNDED AWARDS

23 APRIL 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide further guidance and information in relation to Council-funded awards in the context of the COVID-19 public health crisis. The document will be updated with Q&As that are not addressed in the below guidance. Request forms associated with the measures outlined below are being finalised and will be available shortly.

1 Introduction

In responding to the impact of COVID-19 on research, the Council took two early steps, namely:

- In conjunction with HRB and SFI, the issue of a [joint statement](#)
- Commitment to a rapid-response [COVID-19 funding call](#) in partnership with the HRB (with successful projects to be notified shortly)

As stated in the joint communiqué, the Council's priority at this time is the safety and wellbeing of people – researchers, research participants, and those who support them, including the Council Executive team. The Council wishes to emphasise the key role that external partners play in supporting Council awards and the importance of ensuring that the necessary liaison takes place between awardees and strategic/enterprise partners as appropriate in relation to the progress of research at this time.

Council programme teams continue to be available to receive queries on awards, and staff will endeavour to provide additional support and clarification as quickly as possible.

2 Ensuring continuity of research

- 2.1 Continuity of research under Council-funded awards during the current crisis is critical to the successful completion of those awards. For many Council awards, the research can proceed as planned, albeit under changed working arrangements.
- 2.2 The Council recognises that research awards with particular components are facing significant disruption and interruption as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. These

include awards for which fieldwork and access to facilities, patients, other research subjects, artefacts or manuscripts are a key part of the research. In all such cases, it is vital that awardees (with supervisors or mentors, where applicable) review projects and, where possible, reschedule work packages to enable progress to continue to be made on the award. Projects should be kept under regular review as national measures/restrictions change over the coming months. **Notwithstanding the disruption to research that may occur, awardees and institutions can be assured that the Council is continuing to provide funding to researchers who are funded by its awards.**

- 2.3 This will be a time of considerable anxiety for early-career researchers (ECRs), in particular postgraduates who are in the final phase of their research. Given the uncertainty that prevails on timescales for resumption of 'normal service', postgraduates who are facing interruption should be supported and facilitated to continue to make progress towards their qualification against the backdrop of this uncertainty.
- 2.4 For all awards, priority should be given to achieving continuity and completion of research on a cost-neutral basis. In addition to the cost-neutral measures to support awardees at this time, the Council will also consider, strictly on a case-by-case basis, requests for costed extensions on awards where the research is severely compromised due to the COVID-19 crisis. Section 3.D below refers. **The Council will take a 'triage' approach, and the priority focus is early-career researchers who are due to complete their projects in 2020.**
- 2.5 The Council expects host institutions of postgraduate awardees to implement fee waivers where projects are extended as a direct result of COVID-19, and therefore payment of fees is not eligible for inclusion in any budget re-allocations or requests for a costed extension.

3 Awards due to complete in 2020

A *Council-funded Government of Ireland postgraduate and postdoctoral awardees*

- (i) Re-allocation of existing budget
Requests can be submitted to the Council to re-allocate the budget for research expenses, including towards stipend/salary to support a short-term extension in 2020 where projects are disrupted due to COVID-19.
- (ii) Pausing of an award/No Cost Extensions
Notwithstanding the need to minimise pausing of research and to encourage all avenues to be explored to support completion of ECR's projects, requests can be submitted to the Council to pause individual Government of Ireland awards in 2020 where the project is facing an unavoidable interruption due to COVID-19. In such circumstances, the funding is paused, thus facilitating a no-cost extension. Likewise, according to the same criteria, awardees can seek a No Cost Extension

without a project pause.

(iii) Temporary return to other country for international awardees

The Council recognises that some international scholars and fellows have returned, or may need to return, to their home country for a period of time during the current crisis for specific COVID-19-related reasons. For the period 1 March – 30 June 2020, the Council will waive on an exceptional basis the requirement for scholars and fellows to be based in Ireland. The waiver will be kept under ongoing review as restrictions are eased. It is the responsibility of individual researchers who require a visa to study/work in Ireland to stay up to date on and to comply with temporary changes to the immigration service:

<http://www.inis.gov.ie/>.

(iv) Waiving of soft-bound thesis clause for postgraduate scholars

The Terms and Conditions of individual postgraduate award schemes require awardees to notify the Council in writing upon submission of the soft-bound copy of their thesis. At this point the Council ceases funding for the award. This stipulation will be waived for awardees completing in 2020, and funding will continue for the full duration of the award (excluding any time added for approved No Cost Extensions and subject to the usual Terms and Conditions for the award). The Council is also reviewing this clause as part of preparations of Terms and Conditions for future calls.

B Postgraduate and postdoctoral awardees funded by external strategic funding partners (SFPs) or co-funded by enterprise partners (EPS scheme)

The above options apply to these cohorts also, with the proviso that strategic funding or enterprise partners must be consulted by awardees well in advance of any request being made to the Council. Awardees in these categories will be asked to confirm this in request forms.

C Project awards due to complete in 2020

Although remote working and collaboration will enable many funded projects to continue broadly as planned, the Council recognises that some projects will face disruption. Measures that can be taken include:

- Requests for No Cost Extensions will be considered due to COVID-19 related disruption.
- Project leaders can propose budget re-allocation to support delivery of project objectives in line with broad timelines.
- In addition, budget re-allocation may be deployed to extend the project duration for early-career researchers contracted to the project.

- The Council recognises that pausing projects (and funding) may not be feasible due to contractual commitments; however, such requests will be considered on the grounds of an unavoidable interruption to the project.

Important: In the case of projects funded or co-funded by strategic funding partners (SFPs), project PIs must consult in advance with partners and agree the proposed approach. PIs will be asked to confirm that agreement has been reached with partners in processing any requests submitted to the Council.

D *Costed Extensions to research awards scheduled to complete in 2020*

A request for a costed extension (CE) will be considered by the Council strictly on a case-by-case basis. All such requests will need to provide clear evidence of need on research grounds and will require endorsement by the Research Office of the institution and, where applicable, supervisors/mentors.

Priority consideration will be given to early-career researchers on individual Council awards, with postgraduate researchers whose research is severely compromised due to COVID-19 and who are due to complete their qualification in 2020 being the first priority group.

Awardees seeking costed extensions with strategic funding or enterprise partner support should in the first instance discuss requirements with their partner funder and advise the relevant Council Programme Manager of the outcome of discussions. The Executive will provide further guidance to such awardees at this point.

The Council will make available a CE request form shortly, with further guidance.

4 *Awards due to complete in 2021 or beyond*

As has been recommended by other funders (e.g. HRB), awardees in this category should not seek accommodations from the Council for future years until the outlook beyond the current restrictions are clearer and there is greater clarity on the overall impact of COVID-19 restrictions on the award.

The Council will provide further guidance as necessary later in the year, as the crisis and associated restrictions evolve.

5 *Awards to get underway in 2020*

The Council requests that new awardees, their supervisors and mentors where applicable, and host institutions take all steps to ensure that any delays to commencement of research under 2020 awards is minimised – if necessary, through reviewing and rearranging work packages.

Requests for deferrals

The Council is cognisant that commencement of some new awards may be disrupted by the COVID-19 crisis, for reasons including but not limited to issues relating to access to facilities

and travel or visa-processing restrictions. Awardees may seek from the Council a deferral of start-date in 2020 where there is unavoidable disruption to the project start due to the COVID-19 crisis. Such deferrals may be requested for up to a maximum of three months, and requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. In the case of early-career awards, where a deferral period expires the Council may offer a start date for the award in the following academic year or seek to rescind the award. Council policy with respect to deferrals will be kept under active review, having regard to the progress nationally on the easing of restrictions.

Where a strategic or enterprise partner is funding or co-funding an award, the awardee (supervisor/mentor in the case of early-career awards) must consult with the external partner on the proposed deferral in advance of the formal request. Awardees will be asked to confirm in the request form the agreement of the strategic funding or enterprise partner.

Documentation for 2020 applicants for early-career awards

Conditional offers of awards by the Council require the submission of documentation verifying results for undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications and, where applicable, completion of the conditional awardee's viva.

The Council welcomes all efforts by higher education institutions to put in place revised arrangements to enable the completion of *viva voce* examinations in a timely manner, thus facilitating those who have made applications for postdoctoral awards. In addition, the Council welcomes the [statement](#) by sectoral stakeholders in Ireland to make the necessary changes to modes of assessment to ensure that as many higher education students as possible can complete their studies as planned in 2020.

Where there is a delay in certification as a result of the impact of COVID-19, the Council may facilitate an extension to the deadline for submission of documentation verifying results. Extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be granted for a maximum of three months, whereupon the Council will review the extension and the award offer may be rescinded.

6 Progress Reports for existing Council awards

Progress reporting deadlines will be maintained as normal. The Council will implement the following measures as part of a flexible approach:

- Electronic signatures will be accepted.
- In cases where a project has been disrupted and/or paused, flexibility will be granted, and partially complete reports will be accepted by the deadline.
- Where a full financial report is unavailable, a partial report will be accepted.
- Updates to partially completed progress reports and financial reports should be submitted to meet the next deadline.
- Delays and/or changes to planned activities and variances in expenditure must be included in the submitted progress reports.

Having regard to the flexibility outlined above, the Council will continue to make quarterly payments throughout the COVID-19 crisis on the basis of adherence to progress reporting deadlines.

7 Changes to the 2020 Call Schedule

The Council has reviewed and revised its 2020 Call Schedule, and all efforts are being made to minimise the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on implementation of existing and new calls. Further changes may be necessary, and the Executive will keep the schedule under ongoing review.

The revised call schedule is published on our website: <http://research.ie/irc-and-covid19>.