



V. 26-06-2020

COVID-19 Related Requests FAQ

1. Costed extensions

1.1 What is the difference between a research project being “severely compromised” and a research project facing an “unavoidable interruption”?

The Council understands that all research projects are being affected by the COVID-19 restrictions to some degree. As stated in the Guidance, 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.

The Council does not consider it helpful to be overly prescriptive at this stage in relation to terminology. Rather, we would emphasise the importance, for each individual award, of project review and monitoring against the award’s unique research objectives in light of the impact of COVID-19. Project rescheduling and cost-neutral remedies should be used where possible. Requests for Costed Extensions will be considered by the Council 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 and Research Finance Office of the institution and, where applicable, supervisors/mentors and enterprise/strategic funding partners.

1.2 Does “Cost Extensions” only provide bench fees or stipend for the student for the duration of the extension granted by the college or both?

Council postgraduate awards contain three elements: stipend, research expenses and tuition fees. The last category, i.e. tuition fees, will *not* be considered as part of any request for a Costed Extension. See section 2. Fees below and clause 2.5 of the Guidance.

2. Fees

2.1 Can awardees (completing projects in 2020) use any remaining balance for their research fees for the next academic year? (not just stipends as in 3.A.i)

Where an award ends in 2020, any remaining balance in the award budget may be reallocated to provide for a Cost-Neutral Extension but *cannot* be used towards tuition fees in 2020 or in the next academic year.

2.2 Clause 2.5 of the COVID-19 guidance documents issued by the Irish Research Council refers to fee waivers expected of HEIs. Are these expected fee waivers only applicable in respect of costed extensions and not for all NCEs?

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 tuition fees is *not* eligible for inclusion in any Budget Reallocations or requests for a Costed Extension, No-Cost Extension or Cost-Neutral Extension.

2.3 Can an awardee whose institution charges fees of less than €5750 per year reallocate the unused surplus into their stipend to facilitate a Cost Neutral Extension or into another category?

No, this is not possible. This funding is recoverable by the Council.

3. Stipends

3.1 If an awardee reallocates expenses to facilitate a cost-neutral extension is their monthly stipend payment capped at €1333.33?

Budget Reallocations can be used to facilitate a Cost-Neutral Extension for stipends up to the maximum value of funding provided by the Irish Research Council (€1333.33 per month).

4. Soft-bound thesis

4.1 In relation to 3.A.iv, could an awardee who has submitted their soft-bound thesis in April 2020 request an NCE to keep or use up any remaining monies beyond September 2020?

This is not possible as completion of the award within the normal term can be expected. 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.

5. Cost-Neutral Extensions

5.1 What exactly is a cost-neutral extension, or what would be an example of this?

Unlike a No-Cost Extension (in which the budget does not change), a Cost-Neutral Extension is tied to a Budget Reallocation. For example, a researcher who had planned to present at a conference or conduct research overseas and cannot do so due to COVID-19 may request to reallocate travel expenses towards salary/stipend or another budget category in order to facilitate extending their award on a cost-neutral basis.

5.2 How does a Cost-Neutral Extension differ from a No-Cost Extension?

If you wish to request an extension to the end-date of your project with the budget unchanged, use the No-Cost Extension option.

If you are proposing a reallocation of budget with no change to the end-date of your award, use the Budget Reallocation option.

If you are proposing a reallocation of budget in order to extend the end-date of your award, tick Cost-Neutral Extension and Budget Reallocation on the relevant form.

See Question 2.3 above in relation to fees and Cost-Neutral Extensions.

6. Communication between IRC and ROs

6.1 All of the extension/suspension requests are being considered on a case-by-case basis. Do you know if the IRC will have a procedure for notifying Research Offices of the outcome/if a particular application has been approved?

The Council will put a process in place to ensure that all relevant parties are advised as to the outcome of requests.

7. Eligibility

7.1 I was wondering if you could please advise whether requests for costed extensions, budget reallocations, and no cost extensions should be submitted for all current IRC awards, or just for those ending in 2020?

Consideration of early career researchers whose projects are due to end in 2020 is the Council's priority at present. Requests for Costed Extensions should be submitted by 12th June 2020.

Requests for No-Cost Extensions or Budget Reallocations must be received at least one month before the current end date of the award. Requests for Suspensions or Deferrals of awards should be submitted as soon as possible.

8. Budget Reallocations

8.1 In order that we can assist scholars, can students indicate an overview of their account indicating amount for budget allocation? It would be difficult to provide students with a detailed breakdown at this time.

The early career No-Cost Extension/Cost-Neutral and Budget Reallocation Request Form does not require a detailed breakdown of the project budget. Early career researchers must state the amount they wish to reallocate and provide a rationale on the basis of research needs. See Section 2 of the form.

9. Salary queries

9.1 A GOIPD Fellow is applying to the IRC for an extension of their grant due to Covid 19. The fellow is a member of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme. Since 1 October 2019 no employer contributions have been deducted in accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform policy. Therefore there is a surplus in the pay budget. Can we submit a no cost extension utilising these funds to extend the fellowship?

The Council are currently liaising with the Department of Education and Skills on the implications of the DPER policy on employer pension contributions effective 1 October 2019. The Council will provide further clarification as soon as possible. Pending this, this funding should not be reallocated for any other purpose.