

# **Guidance on managing Covid-19-related doctoral studentship extensions at the School of Economics and Management**

## **Background**

For some doctoral students, the Covid-19 pandemic could entail obstacles that make it difficult to complete their research studies within the stipulated time (four years of full-time studies).

The present document is intended to provide guidance on managing potential extensions of doctoral studentships and to support doctoral students, supervisors, directors of studies and heads of department. The aim of these guidelines is to streamline the management of extensions within the School of Economics and Management.

## **Regulations**

Pursuant to chapter 5, section 7 of the Higher Education Ordinance, the total period of employment for doctoral students may exceed the stipulated four years (full-time) if “special grounds” exist. Such grounds include authorised sick leave, parental leave, military service or elected office in employee or student organisations.

In its memo of 28 May 2020, Lund University’s Research Programmes Board agreed with the assessment of the Swedish Agency for Government Employers that the period of employment for a doctoral student could be extended under certain circumstances with reference to the Covid-19 pandemic as special grounds.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic affects the research studies of doctoral students to a varying extent and in different ways, the Research Education Council and LUSEM management do not consider it appropriate to grant a general extension of all doctoral studentships. Whether an extension due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions is justified must be assessed on a case by case basis for each doctoral student. The assessment must be at the same level as the Higher

Education Ordinance, i.e. the obstacles encountered by the doctoral student in their research studies due to the pandemic must be such that they essentially impeded or prevented the doctoral student from working according to their individual study plan. Likewise, it must have been impossible to compensate for these impediments and their effects through changes to planning or working methods, for example.

### **Doctoral students with funding other than a doctoral studentship**

Doctoral students employed by an organisation other than Lund University must contact their employer to find out what rules apply in their case. Often, they are already employed for an indefinite term; the question is then whether the employer can finance an extension of their research studies. The department concerned is to extend supervision and other resources to ensure the doctoral student's research studies if there are valid grounds for extension. The application for, and assessment of, extension are done in the same way as for holders of doctoral studentships.

Admitted doctoral students who are entirely or partially financed by scholarships can be offered employment after the expiry of the scholarship period, if their research studies have been unavoidably delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Applications for and assessment of extension are done in the same way as for holders of doctoral studentships.

### **Guidance**

Supervisors and Directors of research studies are encouraged to contribute actively to adapting the research studies of individual doctoral students as needed, and to do the work this entails according to the prevailing situation, e.g. by postponing or bringing forward various parts and components or by investigating the possibility of completing other types of studies that are not negatively impacted by the ongoing pandemic and its associated restrictions. This requires a generous measure of flexibility on the part of everyone involved in relation to the planning and implementation of research studies.

It is important to maintain the course activity, in particular with regard to compulsory courses, as a pass grade on these is a requirement for a doctoral degree. With the transition to digital formats and work from home, to some extent isolated from fellow doctoral students, it is important to ensure that the courses do not take up an unreasonable amount of time (more than 40 hours per week).

### **Documentation**

It is important to document all changes to research studies in the individual study plan. It is also important to document in the individual study plan whether, and if so how, the doctoral student's work has been negatively affected by the pandemic,

its associated restrictions, or by Covid-19 so that this documentation can form the basis for a potential assessment and decision on extension. However, an approved study plan documenting the grounds for extension does not per se constitute a decision on extension of the doctoral studentship.

The documentation in the individual study plan can be included for example under the headings: “2.4 Past and present leaves/appointments eligible for extensions” or “5.7 Deviations from previous study plan”. The following examples can be documented in the individual study plan:

- Reasons for delay in work in the research studies programme and how the reasons are related to the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions
- Measures that have been put in place to compensate for the delay due to the Covid-19 pandemic and how the doctoral student and supervisor have re-planned (or attempted to re-plan) the research studies
- Estimated delay in time (stated in whole weeks, months or, if the delay is estimated to be a few days, in number of working days).

For support in how the doctoral student and supervisor can document any delays due to the pandemic, please see the appendix to this document.

## **Processing and applications for extension**

Applications for extension, their processing and decisions on extension, generally or specifically due to the Covid-19 pandemic, are managed at the School of Economics and Management by the department which admitted the doctoral student for research studies.

## **For Heads of department and Directors of studies**

It is important that the Director of research studies and/or the Head of department reviews the individual study plan before approving it, and in particular the parts dealing with deviations from previous study plans and the reasons for these. Before an individual study plan is approved, any requests for extension of the doctoral studentship due to the Covid-19 pandemic are to be checked for compliance with the documentation requirements (see above).

Requests for extension are managed according to an individual assessment based on the doctoral student’s ability to complete their research studies while maintaining quality. The costs of any granted extension of a doctoral studentship are carried by the department.

If the Director of research studies/Head of department makes a different assessment of the request for extension from that of the doctoral student, this is to be clearly documented in the individual study plan. This is done by the Director of studies justifying the department’s assessment of the appropriate duration of an

extension, and documenting this in the individual study plan in the field “7.3 Director of studies’ comments”.

## **Basis for discussion**

There are a number of circumstances related to the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences that can complicate, impede and delay research studies, but not all of them entitle the doctoral student to an extension. Below are a few examples which can be used as a basis for discussion on delays to research studies.

Some of the situations raised here can generate extension of a doctoral studentship for reasons other than those relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. These could be parental leave, temporary care for a sick child (VAB), annual leave, sick leave or teaching (departmental duties).

Examples of circumstances that could generate an extension of a doctoral studentship:

- Time to replan a doctoral research project. For example, restructuring a project, new ethics applications, establishing contact with new research participants
- Cancelled and postponed fieldwork, nationally and internationally, due to obstacles such as travel restrictions, closed organisations or organisations not permitting fieldwork (e.g. schools, elderly care facilities, prisons, hospitals)
- Cancelled opportunities for participant observations and/or interviews due to cancellation of activities in the field (e.g. cancelled meetings, conventions, exhibitions, concerts, etc.)
- Cancelled/interrupted research trips and stays abroad
- Closed research infrastructures and archives for collecting material
- Closed research infrastructures for analysis of collected material
- Experiments that cannot be conducted or are delayed
- Being prevented from working due to quarantine
- Being prevented from working due to supervisor’s long absence

Examples of circumstances that do not usually generate extension:

- Cancelled conference or course
- Obstacles to scholarly networking
- Complications to family/home situation. For care of children or nursing of children, parental leave or VAB is to be invoked instead.
- Increased teaching workload or more time for transition to digital teaching. This is regulated within the framework of departmental duties instead.
- Difficulties contacting the administration
- General anxiety and/or stress. If the anxiety or stress is so serious that it affects a person’s ability to work and leads to sick leave, the doctoral studentship is extended on the basis of sick leave.

Appendix. Template for doctoral students and supervisors to use in documentation of delays in the individual study plan.

<b>Circumstances related to the Covid-19 pandemic</b>	<b>Period of time</b>	<b>Counter-measures implemented</b>	<b>Time lost after counter-measures (weeks, months)</b>
Time to re-plan a doctoral research project. For example, restructuring of a project, new ethics applications, establishing contact with new research participants			
Cancelled and postponed fieldwork, nationally and internationally, e.g. due to travel restrictions, closed organisations, or organisations not permitting fieldwork (e.g. schools, elderly care facilities, prisons, hospitals)			
Cancelled opportunities for participant observations and/or interviews due to activities in the field being cancelled (e.g. cancelled meetings, conventions, exhibitions, etc.)			
Closed research infrastructures and archives for collecting material			
Closed research infrastructures for analysis of collected material			

Experiments that cannot be conducted or are delayed			
Cancelled/interrupted research trips and stays abroad			
Being prevented from working due to quarantine			
Being prevented from working due to supervisor's long absence			
Other reasons			