

**To: Postgraduate Researchers**

 **Academic Supervisors**

**From: Vice President Research**

**Research & Graduate School Team**

**Subject: Processes and procedures for Postgraduate Researchers in AY 2020/21**

**Date: Friday 24th July 2020**

So far Ireland has managed the suppression of Covid-19 reasonably successfully, despite significant infection levels and the sad deaths of more than 1700 people to date. At present, the infection ratio within the population in our country is low, but we are all aware of the potential for the virus to spread again quickly and extensively with relaxation of suppression measures - there are lots of examples of such reversals in Europe and globally. For this reason, each and every one of us must continue to do the right things, and adhere to public health advice in taking all practical steps to minimise the potential for virus transmission over the coming months.

If you currently have symptoms or you develop symptoms of Covid-19, or have/had contact with someone with Covid-19, or you are in a vulnerable group, please follow HSE advice. Where possible, the RGS will make special arrangements to allow you advance with your studies once you are well again. You should not come on campus under any circumstances while you are ill. Contact with you will be maintained by remote means with your approval.

**What is this message to PGRs and Supervisors about?**

In an intensive effort over the course recent weeks the MIC COVID-19 Academic Response Group (under the leadership of Professor Niamh Hourigan, VPAA) and the Facilities, HR & Health & Safety Group (under the leadership of Mr Michael Keane, VPAF), the College has made widespread adaptations to the physical campus and learning environment for the coming academic semester. Mary Immaculate College will provide the safest possible settings for all staff and students to continue their respective work, and at the same time ensure an excellent learning experience for students at all levels in the College. The principles for Academic Programme Delivery at MIC in AY2020-21 are available at this [link](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/institutionaldocs/Shared%20Documents/COVID-19%20Academic%20Response%20Plan%20and%20Principles%20for%20AY%202020%2021/MIC%20Academic%20Principles.pdf).

This message from the Vice President Research and the Research & Graduate School Team is directed primarily towards postgraduate research students (PGRs) and their academic supervisors. The PGR cohort of students works within pedagogical paradigms and frames of reference that are atypical within our institution, as is the case with PGRs in all HE institutions. Here, an effort is made to address issues of broad concern, as well as several matters that are specific to PGRs, in order to clarify the processes and procedures that will apply for them in the coming semester. It should be noted, however, that public health guidance will, if necessary, over-ride any or all of the arrangements described in this document. For this reason, PGRs should make a particular effort to keep in touch with the Research & Graduate School (RGS) at least weekly in order to stay abreast of any practical changes that may come about over the coming weeks and months.

Academic advice and guidance will be provided separately by supervisors and academic departments who will counsel PGRs in relation to communications with them.

Throughout the COVID crisis, the RGS has maintained a [FAQ](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/Shared%20Documents/9.%20FAQ%20for%20MIC%20Closure/FAQ_Research_Staff_and_PGRs.pdf) service for PGRs and MIC academic staff. Please continue to send questions to this service and we will issue regular updates with the most up-[to-date information](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/Shared%20Documents/9.%20FAQ%20for%20MIC%20Closure/Roadmap%20for%20Further%20and%20HE%20July%202020.pdf) we have on relevant subjects.

**When will the Autumn semester begin and how often will I be on campus?**

In common with most other HEIs, the Autumn semester will commence on 28 September 2020 after which MIC campus will open for students on a limited basis. As a PGR, you will have substantial discretion, in consultation with your academic supervisor(s), in relation to physically attending the College campus. In order to minimise the risk of virus transmission, PGRs will be given managed access to the JHN facilities, the Library and other services. This is described in more detail below.

The taught modules associated with structured / professional programmes will be delivered online. The RGS Transferable Skills programme will also be delivered online, along with other scheduled training. More information can be obtained from Dr Amy Healy in the RGS.

**How will academic supervision work for PGRs?**

The supervisory relationship between the academic supervisor(s) and the PGR is at the core of the Research Master’s and Ph.D. degree programmes. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that this relationship is maintained in the most effective ways possible for both the supervisor(s) and the supervisee. While standard practice in the past was generally corporeal supervision meetings, this was usually interspersed with other types of communications and interactions involving technologies of different kinds, including document exchanges and other dealings. The coming semester / academic year may well see more by way of remote supervision. Where this is the case, both supervisor(s) and supervisees are urged in the strongest terms to formalise the structures around such supervision. The tools for this include the [*Kearns Supervisory Tracking Form*](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Student%20Progression.aspx) (or equivalent) and the [*PGR Achievement Form*](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Student%20Progression.aspx), and additional / alternative tools can be sought from the RGS. All records should be written, and written records should be recursively shared among supervisors and students.

Alternatively, corporeal meeting can take place within the terms of public health advice, provided the parties to such a meeting are all in agreement. Agreement should be recorded in writing by the group (e.g. by a group email) in advance of the meeting taking place.

While the frequency of supervision varies across disciplines, modes of T&L, individual preferences and many other possible factors, between five and ten supervisory meetings should take place between the beginning of Semester 1 and the Research Review (Progression) Panel meeting for each PGR towards the end of each academic year.

**How will Online Learning work for PGRs?**

Your online experience will resemble regular learning as much as possible, but with all content delivered online. This will enable synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. Individual modules will vary to maximise opportunities for students to engage with material online.

Synchronous activities will be on a timetable and include scheduled broadcast lecture or tutorial sessions. Asynchronous activities include those that you can undertake at any time including pre-recorded lectures and activities/tasks online (e.g. forum discussions, quizzes, etc).

Like previous years, the timetable for all modules will be available at least a week before the semester commences on 28 September. This combined timetable will detail module activities for your academic planning purposes.

**What technology will I need to access and utilise Online Learning?**

1. Device Access: Regular access to a device (e.g. a laptop computer) will enable you to remotely access materials and curriculum content (e.g. access to Moodle, reading materials, lecture recordings, live classes and lectures). Any new laptop should suffice but higher cost laptops normally mean a better specification and/or warranty. The MIC ICT department will help individual PGRs if they want to check suitable specs etc.
2. Internet connection: Access to reliable WiFi / a home broadband connection is recommended. However, remote learning can also be facilitated via a reliable and consistent mobile broadband connection. For those who do not have access to broadband, a range of wired, wireless and mobile broadband solutions are on offer for the majority of locations in Ireland. MIC will offer more advice and guidance for students on this at a later stage.

**Are there guidelines for conducting field research (including research in schools)?**

Mostly, this is outside of the control of MIC as it will depend on government guidelines, such as the operation of schools, at any given time. PGRs may need to negotiate access within the prevailing circumstances and within the settings where they wish to conduct their research. Any and all arrangements must be (i) clearly and demonstrably within the public health guidelines; (ii) fully documented in writing in advance (places, names, times, record types etc.); and (iii) must be signed off by the PGR’s academic supervisor(s).

**Protocols for research with human participants, remote interviews etc.**

Like the previous item, this will depend on government guidelines and the public health situation. PGRs may need to negotiate in relation to accessing participants/interviewees within the prevailing circumstances and within the settings where they wish to conduct their research.

Furthermore, all work with human participants requires ethical clearance through [MIREC](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Mary%20Immaculate%20College%20Research%20Ethics%20Committee%20(MIREC).aspx). Where data collection or any aspect of research design involves direct interaction with participants (e.g. through interviews, focus groups etc.), appropriate arrangements (including confirmation of consent) must be made in the context of COVID-19. This will require MIREC approval and possible revisions / addenda to any pre-existing MIREC documentation. You can contact the MIREC Administrator Mary Collins in the RGS for advice.

**How will Annual Progression work for PGRs?**

For the majority of PGRs, annual progression takes place at or around the end of Semester 2. However, the advice presented here applies irrespective of when it takes place.

Online/remote arrangements can be operationalised for AY2020/21 having been tried/tested/proven in the 2019/20 progression cycle.

Preparations for the PGR Progression (Research Review) Panel Meeting in AY2020/21 should be ongoing between supervisors and supervisees throughout the academic year as usual. Students and supervisors are strongly urged to complete the [*Kearns Supervisory Tracking Form*](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Student%20Progression.aspx) (or equivalent) at each supervision session (in-person or remote) to ensure mutual agreements and understandings on milestones of progression during the year.

[The *PGR Achievement Form*](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Student%20Progression.aspx) illustrates the kinds of milestones / deliverables that PGRs are typically required to progress in a given year. The [*Skills Training Schedule*](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Student%20Progression.aspx)will be updated for AY2020/21, but gives an idea of supports for PGRs in this regard.

**What about Thesis Submission?**

Thesis submission and examination now involve PDF submission only (i.e. no hardbound soft copy is required), and it is likely that both MIC and UL will maintain this format for some time into the future. PGRs are strongly urged to familiarise themselves with safe storage and transmission of data and documents, and to seek guidance from the RGS if necessary on use of passwords, encryption, GDPR etc.

**How will *viva voce* examinations work?**

The document [*Guidelines on the use of Tele-Conferencing / Video-Conferencing for viva voce Examinations during COVID-19*](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Thesis%20Examination%20Forms.aspx)  provides specific guidance for all of those involved in remote *viva voce* examinations, and further written guidance on the roles of all actors can be requested from Dr Rebecca Breen in the RGS.

Where a PGR does not have access to a suitable location, device or broadband service for the purposes of a *viva voce*, they should contact the RGS at the earliest possible time and appropriate services in the JHN or elsewhere will be offered to the student. It will be a matter for the student to decide if they wish to proceed with the facilities on offer.

In the case of a postponed *viva*, or if a *viva voce* candidate/examiner prefers to meet face-to-face, it may be possible to facilitate this by special arrangement. This cannot be guaranteed in every case, however.

**Managed access to the JHN Campus**

It is understood that at least some PGRs will require access to their work stations in the JHN to access certain resources (e.g. their own learning resources, the study environment, high-quality broadband, certain services and datasets). It will be possible to manage some degree of study access to the JHN if the numbers requiring access are moderate/low in any given time period. PGRs requiring access must request it a week beforehand for a day or two (9am to 5pm), but must adhere to the restrictions put in place by MIC, including minimal interaction with others and use of individual (not shared) offices. If use of open plan offices is required then PGRs must offset their times of access and work so as not to overlap. Further information should be sought directly from Dr Amy Healy in the RGS in the first instance.

**Access to Library Services**

Library staff are working on a range of videos and guides for all students, including PGRs, at the moment with a view to having them ready for September. They have already developed [LibGuide](https://libguides.mic.ul.ie/c.php?g=681054) for searching resources, and this is likely to be useful for postgraduates or anyone searching for resources. A Covid-19 update on the home page of our website with more general information (<https://www.mic.ul.ie/library>) is also possible and will be useful to PGRs. Specific or particular queries may be sent to the RGS for advice and we will liaise with the Library staff if that is helpful.

**Access to campus facilities**

Priority will be given to students accessing educational facilities. Access to buildings and sport facilities for extra-curricular activities will be managed on a pre-booked basis and further information will be published closer to the start of the new semester.

**Access to student supports on campus**

Most MIC student support services will be online for all students to access. Some limited services may be provided on-campus if this is possible under physical distancing guidelines. Details on accessing services may be obtained from the RGS or the specific individual service websites at the commencement of the Autumn Semester.

**Erasmus+ programmes**

PGRs with an involvement in KA2 or KA3 actions relating to projects managed by MIC or with the involvement of MIC staff can contact Denia.Claudino@mic.ul.ie for more information on whether or how these projects will proceed.

All Erasmus+ student mobility programmes are cancelled for the coming semester (Autumn 2020). You may contact the International Office with further queries.

**Departmental Assistantships**

Signing of Departmental Assistantship (DA) contracts will be done online, as will all subsequent processing of these positions. DA induction sessions will be provided online by the RGS. Attendance is mandatory for ALL DAs as processes and protocols for remotely conducted duties must be clearly established. Failure to attend induction will mean that DA contracts will be cancelled.

DAs are required to make themselves available to work under the close and monitored supervision of their Head of Department, and are not expected to have full responsibility for management, administration and / or control of any assigned task. As the College moves forward to AY2020/21, it is anticipated that departments will be delivering much of their teaching online. DAs will be able to make a valuable contribution in this area by facilitating live online tutorials, and could also be asked to e-moderate discussion forums, wikis on Moodle or chats on MS Teams. More information will be provided to DAs in due course at induction.

Typical DA duties include:

* Tutoring / Preparation for tutoring/seminars/workshops
* Assistance with tutorial/lecture/seminar/workshop activities
* Recording of lecture/seminar/workshop attendance
* Supplementary lecture, seminar and workshop activities
* Field work supervision and assistance
* Attendance at training sessions organised by the Research and Graduate School (RGS)
* Attendance at training sessions organised by LEAD

**And finally, ……**

If the information provided here does not sufficiently address all of your questions or concerns, contact details for all members of the Research and Graduate School Staff can be found [here](https://micportal.mic.ul.ie/RGSIntranet/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Contact%20and%20Support.aspx), or mail RGSO@mic.ul.ie. Our offices in the JHN are currently closed, but all staff are available to respond to the service needs of PGRs, academic supervisors and the MIC community at large.

As many of you will know, Dr Julianne Stack will be replaced by Dr Amy Healy while Julianne is on statutory leave. We wish Julianne all the very best during her leave. At the same time, we welcome Amy to the team from August 1st 2020.

The Research Office and the Graduate School staff wish all PGRs and academic supervisors a happy and healthy summer break, and we look forward to welcoming all continuing and new postgraduate researchers back to MIC in the near future.

Professor Michael Healy, VPR & the Research & Graduate School Team

July 24th, 2020