

Policy on extending employment periods as a result of the coronavirus pandemic for doctoral research fellows employed at Nord University

The aim of this policy document is to provide common approaches and procedures relating to the extension of employment periods for doctoral research fellows who are being delayed as a result of the pandemic. It is assumed that their entitlement to study will be similarly extended if necessary.

The principles contained in our common policy are as follows:

- genuine delays caused by profound obstacles resulting from the pandemic shall justify extension
- any extension requirements for other reasons shall be dealt with as previously

Doctoral research fellows employed at Nord University shall be followed up by Nord. PhD candidates employed elsewhere must discuss any issues with their own employers.

Who is comprised by this policy document?

This applies to everyone who is employed as a doctoral research fellow at Nord University. Doctoral research fellows employed at Nord University shall be followed up by Nord.

PhD candidates funded by external employers must discuss any issues with their own employers. The faculty responsible for whichever doctoral programme the candidate in question is on should engage in discussions with the external funding body in order to clarify the candidate's requirements and any offers to extend the funding period.

Permanent employees at Nord who are pursuing a doctoral programme and are not involved in a recruitment position, but who have received extended R&D time in order to undertake a doctorate, are not comprised by this policy document. However, the faculty responsible must assess whether or not to extend the study period beyond six years.

General

Extensions may be granted following individual and specific assessments. The Employment Committee for Scientific Positions (ANF) makes decisions about any extensions after a case has been presented by the Dean. This is conditional on the coronavirus pandemic having caused such profound obstacles for the fellow that extension is necessary.

The following are considered to constitute profound obstacles:

1. Service in the health sector
2. Being ordered to serve in the 15 defined socially critical areas
3. Internal redistribution of tuition duties, etc. which are not covered by one's share of required duties
4. Delayed data collection and experimental activities
5. Delays relating to working from home

Application deadline

All applications for an extension must be individual and sent to the faculty by the dean by the end of 2020. The Appointments Committee for Scientific Positions (ANF) decides on any extension and will process all applications received before the turn of the year during the first quarter of 2021.

Working from home

Whenever possible employers shall make arrangements so that employees can work from home. Even though conditions at home may not be optimal, this does not necessarily carry an extension entitlement. In many cases the nature of the work, cf. Item 3 above, will serve as the basis for any extensions, not the home office in its own right.

If a doctoral research fellow is involved in looking after children which would make it impossible to work from home due to kindergartens and schools being closed, extension shall be granted for all absence in excess of 10 days. The provision contained in the regulations about absence requiring a *consecutive* duration of two weeks in order to provide a basis for extension, will be waived for as long as the coronavirus situation continues.

Due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, the [rules on using care days](#) are temporarily amended until 31 December 2020, as follows:

- employees have received double the number of days of care benefits for the 2020 calendar year.
- carers can transfer days between each other. They can transfer up to all the days that they have available. These days can also be transferred back if required.

These amendments must be taken into consideration when considering extensions.

Individual and local assessments

Assessments about whether or not to grant an extension are based on the main principle that the coronavirus pandemic shall not result in significantly worse (or better) study opportunities for doctoral research fellows. Emphasis shall be placed on the following in the overall assessment:

- How comprehensive is the delay?
- What impact is the delay having on completion of the doctorate in question and how far away is the planned end date?
- The nature of the research education; is the education theoretically, empirically and/or experimentally oriented. What type of access is needed to laboratories, fields, archives, premises and equipment, etc?
- Other special conditions which are causing genuine delays and which are beyond the responsibility and control of the doctoral research fellow concerned

The Government has announced a partial re-opening of universities for PhD candidates who are due to complete their studies during the course of this spring and who are depending on the university's equipment and infrastructure. For this group any genuine delays could be relatively short. However, for others, who are also scheduled to complete their studies in the near future, the delays could be more comprehensive if they do not gain access to the necessary external arenas or sources for their work as a result of central and local restrictions.

Research education as a course of study

The Rector has asked deans and supervisors to cooperate with the PhD Committee to assess how PhD candidates can be assured of completing their studies within the normal time by adapting their education. Solutions based on making adjustments and adapting research assignments, collecting data, etc. which will ensure progress without compromising

academic quality shall therefore be carefully considered as alternatives to extension, or possibly combined with extension.

Many PhD candidates may experience delays because data collection is delayed/stopped and access to laboratories and workshops is limited. The course of study for this group must also be adapted by considering alternative ways of securing data.

Need for extensions due to reasons other than the coronavirus epidemic

Statutory and contractual rights to extend employment periods shall be exercised as usual. Any requirements for extensions of study entitlements shall be decided by the faculty concerned.

Circumstances addressed in the [Regulations](#) relating to terms and conditions of employment for posts such as postdoctoral fellows, doctoral research fellows, research assistants and residents

Basically the regulations contain four provisions which allow extensions for doctoral research fellows:

- Section 2-3 (1). Rights-based leave
- § 2-3 (2). Care of children/close family (Reduced working hours in accordance with Section 10-2 of the Norwegian Working Environment Act)
- Section 2-3 (3). Leave to embark on short-term research and teaching positions
- Section 2-3 (6). In special cases the employment body can grant extensions for circumstances which have prevented the progression of doctoral education

Assessments of extensions resulting from the coronavirus pandemic can incorporate a combination of the legal provisions for extension.

The final subsection of Section 5-4 of Nord's PhD regulations stipulates a maximum study period of six years. Required duties and statutory interruptions are not included in these six years and extensions relating to the coronavirus pandemic shall not be included in the net study period either. The faculty decides any study period extensions in excess of six years.

Extension decisions

Extensions subject to Section 2-3 (1-3) are clearly regulated, and doctoral research fellows will at all times during the course of their studies know that these provisions allow for extensions. Other extensions are normally decided towards the end of a study period and in close consultation with the supervisor concerned. As regards extensions which are explicitly related to the coronavirus pandemic, these should be granted as soon as they are clarified. The main criterion will be the time of the planned completion of the course of study in addition to individual assessment. Generally speaking, doctoral research fellows who are due to complete their studies during the course of 2020 should receive clarification before the summer holidays. Any completions further ahead in time will not normally require decisions about extensions now. Other extensions shall comply with established practice.

Uniform practice vs individual assessments and discretion

At the start of a PhD course, the principle which applies is that the time at one's disposal is the same for everyone – i.e. basically everyone has the same framework conditions. During the course of the study period it may be necessary to make adjustments, including extensions. This is assessed and decided by undertaking a full, but individual assessment relating to the individual doctoral research fellow's academic progression and progress, based on the provisions contained in the regulations. These are decisions which the Employment Committee (ANF) is familiar with and they will be maintained irrespective of the coronavirus pandemic.

Policy on extensions relating to various sections of the above mentioned regulations¹

1. Extensions subject to Section 2-3 (6) of the Regulations

a. *Doctoral research fellows who are ordered to serve in the health sector.* To be granted similar extensions – to be funded by the health enterprises (must be clarified). One practical way of doing this might involve granting leave for PhD posts and salary from the health sector during the period of compulsory service.

b. *Doctoral research fellows who are reassigned to teaching/digitalisation of teaching.* To be primarily addressed by shifting the required duties of those concerned or their employment in accordance with Section 2-3 (3) of the Regulations, something which will carry an entitlement to a similar extension.

c. *Doctoral research fellows who experience delays because their research work is delayed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, e.g. closed laboratories, difficulties with data collection and field work, artistic subjects, etc.* Any extensions can be determined on the basis of documented applications and the supervisor's assessment/recommendations, cf. the above.

d. *Doctoral research fellows who have poor working conditions in bedsits/flats.* Basically no extensions will be granted. Any extensions can be assessed towards the end of the study period in accordance with normal practice.

2. Extensions subject to Section 2-3 (1-3) of the Regulations

a. *Doctoral research fellows who are at home and are looking after children, either on their own or when their spouse/partner is working for the health service.* The general rules on care days apply and the doctoral research fellow will be granted an extension in accordance with the number of registered care days. If the fellow opts not to take any care days no extensions will be granted. If no care days are taken or if one's quota has already been used up, any extensions can be assessed individually towards the end of the study period.

b. *Doctoral research fellows who are at home and are looking after children, when both parents are at home.* If the fellow opts to take care days the rules relating to such shall apply. If no care days are taken or if one's quota has already been used up, any extensions can be assessed individually towards the end of the study period.

c. *Doctoral research fellows who are at home and are looking after children, and are alone or when their spouse/partner is doing socially critical work, cf. the Government's 15 defined critical areas.* They are entitled to similar extensions if both parents, or one of them who is a doctoral research fellow, are involved in such work, cf. Item 1a above. If one of the parents is involved and the childminder is a doctoral research fellow, the general rules on care days shall apply, cf. also Items 2a and b.

d. *Doctoral research fellows who are quarantined at home or who fall ill with coronavirus (or something else).* In cases of home quarantine, working from home will apply and no extensions will be granted. In the event of illness, extensions will be granted in accordance with the normal rules relating to the number of days of sick leave.

¹The Regulations concerning terms and conditions of employment for the posts of postdoctoral research fellow, doctoral research fellow, research assistant and resident.