Update to Senate on PGR petition
On 19/03/21 we launched our petition “for SUSU to hold a Student Union Senate meeting on whether SUSU should lobby for an overhaul of the current UoS phase 2 extension scheme and campaign for 6-month extensions for all PhD Students”. We surpassed the 250-signature requirement, achieving 265 signatures in total. Since this time there have been some national developments to the campaign for PGR funded extensions. However, the key parts of our petition are not altered:

* we are asking that SUSU resolves to support the position that all PGRs studying during the pandemic should be able to access a 6-month funded extension, with further extensions available based on need.
* That SUSU should campaign for UKRI and the government to make more money available to support researchers, including PGRs, affected by the pandemic.
* That SUSU should work collaboratively with the UCU to campaign for fair and equitable treatment of PGRs throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and support the UCU national campaign to have PGRSs recognised as workers.

These principles should apply to all PhD students regarding of funding source, including self-funded students (see our note on PhD funding for a brief overview of the different arrangements possible).

We also asked for SUSU to lobby the University of Southampton to overhaul the current Phase 2 extension application system as well as to push for transparency regarding the outcomes of this scheme (such as number of successful and rejected applications). There are some updates regarding these points of lobbying:

* The UKRI has made adjustments to the criteria for receiving a UKRI funded extension, with some small adjustments indicated to include allowing budgets reserved for training to be used to fund studentship extensions and allowing PGRs to reapply for an extension if their first application is rejected.
* To our knowledge, the University of Southampton is yet to apply these changes to its scheme and a lot of confusion remains. However, in principle it should allow students to re-apply for an extension if their first request is rejected. We want assurances from the University of Southampton that this is the case.

Members of senate may find the following documents useful to help understand the issue of funding PhDs and other campaigns mentioned within this document.

1. [Falling Short: response to UKRIs Phase 1 and Phase 2 support for PhD researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-6sBsboTyQ820axeJIFd8S4a2AOgSS5K/view) by the PGR campaign group Pandemic PGRs.
2. [UKRI response to the Pandemic PGR report](https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/UKRI-200421-LetterToPandemicPGRsProfessorDameOttolineLeyser.pdf), April 2021
3. [Pandemic PGRs initial reply to UKRI’s response letter](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bkVgNsS2Se_Ab_dwMMzNNidZ5Rt-LBVQ/view), April 2021
4. [University of Southampton students open letter to the](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1l4bGzqbP9TQdGZ5DxONb2jmg3tUENNV-qx7ehCpJ3ZE/edit) Vice Chancellor and University Board, March 21
5. [UCU launch of PGRs as Staff campaign](https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/11206/PGRs-as-staff-not-students?list=7268) (a new campaign that has yet to launch many resources).

## A note on PhD funding arrangements

The funding of PhDs is very complicated but some main principles apply. Like all students, PhD students are required to pay tuition fees to the University of Southampton but unlike undergraduate and master’s students there is not a student loan scheme available to cover these or the costs of living. Instead, PhD students can either self-fund their studies (through savings and work) or apply for funding. Funded PhDs are normally called “studentships” and most studentships cover tuition fees plus a stipend to go toward living expenses. Additionally, most studentships include access to a training allowance to cover professional development expenses. However, it is important to note that normally stipend money does not go direct from funder to the PhD students but instead to the University from where nominated budget holders are responsible for allocating funds. Additionally, even with receipt of stipend many PhDs rely on part time work including teaching work within the university as Stipends do not meet the true cost of living in most circumstances.

Currently, the UKRI funds around 25% of PhD students through its research councils. As the largest single funder sets the tone for funding arrangements within the sector, with its allocated student stipend largely considered the standard rate for all other funders to align with (though many do fall short of this). Meanwhile, some studentships are awarded directly from the University of Southampton and others via charities, business partnerships and other third-party arrangements.