

MEMO

Research and COVID19: Best practices and opportunities

The COVID19 crisis has brought several challenges to researchers (PhDs and supervisors) and their research projects. Since the beginning of the COVID19 crisis, researchers have revisited their research and dissemination activities such as travel visits, field work including interviews amongst others. In some cases, these activities have been postponed or cancelled which may result in delay in the researchers' intended output.

In this memorandum, we highlight some of the alternative ways for researchers to address these challenges. First, we present an overview (non-exhaustive) of the different measures (i.e., best practices) that researchers can take to adapt to the conditions, while trying to mitigate the negative impact in their research. Subsequently, we draw the attention to the possible changes in dynamic and new opportunities that COVID19 creates to stimulate knowledge and building of a research network for young researchers.

This memorandum aims to provide a positive stimulus to researchers – though obviously under full recognition of the many and diverse struggles and tensions that COVID19 brings for young researchers.

Best practices

In general, the research project has specific objectives and timelines that have been agreed with the funding Institution (ERC/NWO), or that it is part of a general established rule (either 4 or 6 years depending on the type of Phd). Due to COVID19, some researchers have revisited their research project regarding their research questions as well as the timeline of research.

Some alternatives that have been considered are for instance (a) the suspension of the project, (b) the extension of the timeline of the project (c) the revision of the research project e.g., less countries of study, less output (articles/books), or (d) reallocation of travel budget to personnel costs to fund additional extensions.

In case that the project receives external funding, these alternatives need to be agreed with the funding institution, and in some cases an amendment to the grant agreement/research proposal will need to take place. These alternatives could also be considered in the framework of projects that are not receiving external funding, but are instead funded by the department or under a Meijers fellowship. In these latter cases, the main issue may be that additional funding may be needed, whereas such funding is very scarce (see for instance the pending procedure for additional NWO funding). In such cases, the aforementioned options under c) and d) would deserve particular consideration.

Unique opportunities during COVID19

It is a common practice that PhD researchers participate in conferences/training (in the Netherlands and abroad) to get the required skills for their research as well as for being a researcher, and to start networking regarding their PhD research project. Due to COVID19 travel restrictions, these conferences/training are now taking place online.

As a result, PhDs can participate in more activities than before, since it is now possible to attend meetings all around the world and to engage in participation with policy makers, scholars, among others. Besides, there are probably less obstacles to participation in these conferences, such as such as financial obstacles (due to high travel costs or high fees) and/or practical obstacles (e.g. teaching obligations/situation at home). These limitations are reduced in an online setting. This provides an excellent opportunity for PhD researchers to acquire more knowledge and to actively participate (in presenting research findings or giving/receiving courses) and to enhance their research network worldwide. Both the PhD supervisor and the PhD researcher could play an active role in identifying these conferences/ networking activities, and to register/participate actively in such conferences.

Contact

While the foregoing focuses on opportunities the current situation may bring, the fact remains that the disturbing consequences of the COVID19 crisis predominate. Please do not hesitate to contact your PhD Deans in case there is anything you want to ask, discuss or share (promovendidecaan@law.leidenuniv.nl).

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