

# Lockdown toll on research and well-being revealed

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Research Fortnight



## Major survey shows Covid-19 measures' negative impacts on researchers' work, finance and well-being

A vast majority of PhD students and research staff are worried about their finances and future careers as a result of Covid-19 lockdown, according to a major survey intended to inform institutions' and funders' actions to support researchers.

The Student Mental Health Research Network (SMaRteN) and Vitae have surveyed doctoral researchers and early-career research staff in UK universities about the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions since 16 March 2020.

Almost 5,000 researchers have so far responded to the survey launched on 16 April.

"The findings of this survey provide insight into how challenging this time is for our research community, and especially our doctoral students," said Jennifer Rubin, executive champion for equality, diversity and inclusion at UK Research and Innovation, which funds SMaRteN.

Key findings include:

- 70 per cent of respondents are worried about their finances

- Two thirds are very worried about their future plans
- Half report being very stressed about their work
- 40 per cent of the staff say their research contract ends during 2020
- Only 12 per cent of final year PhDs were provided with an option to extend their studies

The lockdown also seems to be hampering the ability to conduct research.

More than three-quarters of respondents report a negative impact on data collection, discussions with colleagues and dissemination, and more than half report a negative effect on data analysis, writing and grant/fellowship applications.

Almost a third said they have reduced or no access to the software they require for research.

However, on the whole respondents were happy with the support offered by their institutions, supervisors and managers.

And respondents who felt their university had provided clear guidelines about work changes experienced higher feelings of well-being.

Nevertheless, around four in five respondents are reporting some mental distress, and stress is higher among doctoral researchers, women, those in the arts and humanities sector, and non-UK citizens.

Three-quarters of respondents are also showing low levels of mental well-being.

Speaking about PhD students and research staff, Nicola Byrom, principle investigator for SMaRteN, said: "They have been asked to transition to working from home and most are reporting a substantive negative impact on their ability to work and are experiencing high levels of stress in relation to their work."

Janet Metcalfe, head of Vitae said: "These researchers are at critical stages in their careers and the restrictions due to Covid-19 are not only having a significant impact on their current research activities, but are likely to have long-term implications for their future careers."

It is hoped the results will help funders and institutions be supportive of students and researchers.

UKRI's Rubin said: "The mental health and well-being of our community is paramount, and UKRI is working to identify, understand and address the impacts of Covid-19 on the researchers we fund and the research that is underway, helping to provide support to researchers to navigate these unprecedented times."