

MEMORANDUM

Date: 22 May 2020

From: Dr. Alice Aiken, Vice President Research and Innovation

To: Principal Investigators (PIs)

CC: Deans and Associate Deans Research (ADRs)

I am writing today with important updates for you, regarding Return to Research at Dalhousie.

As communicated in my previous memo on April 28th, my team has been working for some time with Deans, the Dalhousie Research Advisory Committee (DRAC), Environmental Health & Safety, Facilities Management, and other academic leaders to develop a robust and meaningful road map that will lead us to a thoughtful, structured and safe re-opening of research space. Thank you for your patience as we undertook this critical planning process. Our Deans and ADRs, in particular, have been heavily consulted throughout this process, and their input has been vital in shaping our final plans. These plans have been undertaken in step with other major university units in the interest of creating a coordinated, institution-wide suite of processes.

As communicated to senior administrators yesterday by the Assistant Vice-President, Human Resources, with the Province now beginning to ease restrictions, Dalhousie also can begin to contemplate a graduated return to campus. The University aims to start a return at the beginning of July, anticipating a return of about 25% of our workforce institution-wide, and will be looking to minimize the number of buildings that need to be opened at this time.

For our research spaces, recommencing activities safely and smoothly as of this date will require planning to begin immediately. A return to campus needs to be principles-based, grounded in the health and safety guidelines issued earlier this week by the Office of Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S), and coordinated centrally, as it will require a campus-wide allocation of finite shared resources (including custodial staff and limited supplies of PPE and protective barriers).

Please note that the information in this memorandum pertains only to research spaces and field sites on Dalhousie's campuses, and does not apply to research space at the NSHA, IWK or other external research sites. Please consult directly with such sites re: their own processes for reopening.

Today, I am pleased to share the following plans for Return to Research at Dalhousie.

1. Goal and Principles

The goal of our Return to Research plan is to keep everyone involved in research healthy and safe - while facilitating research activity in a phased approach as health and safety become easier to maintain - and to deliver research discovery and innovation that the world needs.

Our Return to Research is governed by the following principles:

- a. *Adhere to all relevant public health directives.*
 - Directives became more restrictive over time as they were implemented, and we can expect the loosening will look similar in reverse.
- b. *Protect the physical, mental and emotional health and safety of our research workforce and human-research participants.*
 - No researcher should feel compelled to work on campus or in the field during this period of phased return.
 - All return to campus will be guided by Dalhousie's broader strategy for commencing on-campus activity.
 - The relevant Dean(s) will approve the resumption of any research activity on campus, as part of a return plan that will be coordinated centrally.
 - Safety within laboratories must be rigorously maintained, with adequate access to and use of safety-related supplies. A Safety Plan must be completed before any lab or other research space is considered for reopening (*see item 3b below*).
 - PIs must identify who amongst their workforce are considered essential personnel. PIs also retain responsibility for their research workforce.
 - Researchers who feel uncomfortable about their work situation, for whatever reasons, need to know that they can confidentially report their concerns to their Department Heads, Deans, Safety Committees, ORS or EH&S.
- c. *Protect the careers of post-doctoral fellows and early career researchers.*
 - The current disruptions will present challenges to researchers at all seniority levels but will have the greatest impact on post-doctoral fellows and early-career researchers.
- d. *Maintain a priority focus on students conducting research – both graduate and undergraduate.*
 - No research-based student should feel compelled to work on campus or in the field during this period.
 - Limitations on research activity have enormous effects on graduate students which, to the greatest extent possible, need to be mitigated.
 - While it is important to remember that undergraduates are students first and researchers second, many begin to build their toolbox of research skills through undergraduate research experiences, so this should not be overlooked.
 - Students who feel uncomfortable about their research work situation, for whatever reasons, need to know that they can confidentially report their concerns to their Graduate Coordinators, Department Heads or Safety Committees.
- e. *Ensure the process for approving increased research activity is informed, fair and transparent and considers safety of research personnel.*
- f. *Continually strive to allow as much research activity as possible, while respecting the necessary limits required by the evolving situation, and while understanding the potential to return to stricter limits should the situation require.*

2. Priorities for Phased Return

All researchers are reminded that the University continues to require researchers to work remotely, wherever possible.

However, **any PI with strong reasons to re-start research activity at this time, while the Province still has strict public health guidelines in place, will now be able to apply for**

approval to resume activities. This process is described below (item 3). A full justification for this request must be provided; applications will be reviewed by Deans, who will make decisions on behalf of their Faculties and in consultation with Department Chairs/Heads. Following this, Deans will have to submit their plans to a central coordinating committee for approval for re-opening.

Please note that any **research project that has already received exceptional approval to proceed** subsequent to the general shutdown of research imposed on 25 March 2020 **may continue**. PIs of such projects who now wish to resume other research, however, must follow the process outlined in this document to obtain approval for other projects to resume.

As we move towards a graduated return to campus, **the following activities have been prioritized at this time** for the initial phase of re-opening (please see the [Decision Tree](#)):

- activities which include: i) **lab-based experimental research work, involving grad students or PDFs**; ii) **use of time-sensitive data and/or equipment**; and/or iii) **seasonal activity**;
- activities which can be undertaken with **minimal personnel**, and which respect rules re: **physical distancing**; an approved **Safety Plan** (see 3b below) demonstrating how this will be achieved must be prepared;
- activities governed by a **contingency plan** drawn up by PIs, to be used in the event that the research activity is required to cease.

PIs whose proposed research activities address **all** the above priorities will be invited to begin the established process (below) for requesting approval to resume those activities.

PIs whose research activities do not address all the above priorities are asked to wait until the next phase in the graduated return process. Timelines for this and all subsequent phases will be based on factors including further loosening of Public Health directives and increased availability of PPE and other safety supplies.

3. Process for PIs: Resuming Research on Campus

Any PI whose proposed research activities address all the above priorities, and who wishes to resume research activity at this time, is required to undertake a *three-step process* in order to obtain approval from their Dean to be included in the Faculty's return to research activity plan. This plan will still require approval from the central committee.

The steps in this process are as follows; each step must be completed satisfactorily before continuing to the next:

a. Step 1: Research Safety Assessment (RSA)

PIs will be required to undertake a full RSA of their labs or other research spaces they wish to reopen. Please use the [form](#) provided for this purpose.

b. Step 2: Safety Plan

Results of the RSA are to be recorded on the [Safety Plan form](#). PIs must attach a copy of their RSA and any supporting materials to the Safety Plan, then submit this to their departmental Safety Committee (if applicable) or Department Chair/Head, for review and approval.

c. Step 3: Application to Resume Research Activities

The Application to Resume Research Activities is to be completed and submitted via the ROMEO Researcher Portal; details of how to do so are available [here](#). PIs will be asked a series of questions about the nature of the activities they wish to restart and their urgency, and must upload a copy of their approved Safety Plan with the application. Once submitted, the applications will be transmitted electronically to Department Heads/Chairs and finally to Deans, for review and approval.

For any questions regarding the above processes, please consult with your ADR.

Once again, please accept my thanks for continuing to work to the best of your abilities during these very challenging times, and for your patience as we continue to navigate through these uncharted waters. We all look forward to Dalhousie's Return to Research in a safe and controlled manner.