

Survey: Impact of COVID-19 on researchers

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Findings from a survey carried out between February and March 2021 on the impacts of COVID-19 on the activities of researchers have now been published.

The [results \(Vitae\)](#) reveal that, at the time of the wave two survey, almost half of respondents had returned to pre COVID-19 working hours. However, the results also show that the pandemic was still having a major impact on researchers, affecting their research, mental health and future [career](#) prospects.

The survey was carried out by the Careers Research and Advisory Centre, who manage the Vitae program, and funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Impact on research

During February and March 2021, the impact on research activities was still high, the survey shows that:

- 61% of researchers reported lockdown or shielding had negatively impacted their time for research

- 58% reported that COVID-19 had made it impossible to do the research they planned
- more than half reported that COVID-19 restrictions impacted other [work activities](#), including teaching and administrative activities which reduced their time for research
- 88% of respondents with child caring responsibilities reported that associated responsibilities had a [negative impact](#) on time for research. This was gender balanced
- 56% reported that less commuting and 43% that less work-related travel had positive impacts on their [time](#) for research
- 27% agreed COVID-19 had provided unexpected opportunities for their research.

Impact on mental health

Researchers reported poor levels of wellbeing and [mental health](#). The survey shows that:

- 76% of researchers reported that they had probable or possible depression. The survey does not allow us to draw conclusions about the causes of the respondents' mental distress
- 11% of researchers had experienced bullying and harassment over the last year, with two thirds of these reporting this was higher than before COVID-19 restrictions.

Impact on future careers

The survey shows that:

- 24% predicted a very negative impact of COVID-19 on their career prospects, this rises to 34% of postgraduate researchers and 28% of research staff
- 60% predicted a negative impact or a very negative impact on their career prospects. This rises to 65% for those with child-caring responsibilities and 62% for female researchers.

Unprecedented challenges

Commenting on the survey's findings, UKRI chief executive, Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, said: "The pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for the research and innovation community with profound impacts on institutions and businesses, and on the people working in them. The community has responded superbly, but at great personal cost to many, who have been working under very difficult circumstances. We would like to thank those who have responded to this survey and talked to us about their experiences. This is invaluable as we continue to work to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and to address the inequalities in the system, which the pandemic has amplified. One of the key action points highlighted in this survey is for UKRI to drive ahead with our work to improve research culture. We will continue to work collaboratively to promote and support an inclusive, respectful and safe working culture, including through our ongoing implementation of the recently launched People and Culture Strategy."

Provided by Medical Research Council

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