



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

<i>Policy No. ORGS/010-2021</i>	
<b>POLICY ON RESPONDING TO RESEARCH DISRUPTION</b>	
<i>Approval Date:</i>	February 11, 2021
<i>Contact Office:</i>	Office of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS)
<i>Approving Authority:</i>	University Research Council (URC)

*The Aga Khan University, in this document means all its schools, colleges, institutions, departments, research centres and hospitals across all campuses around the globe*

**1. SCOPE:**

- 1.1. For the purpose of this policy, a *Disruption to Research* occurs when university research activities are *substantially* interrupted or impeded as a result of any event or circumstances beyond the reasonable control of the University and includes but is not limited to; civil disorders, political unrests, protests, strikes, fire, natural disasters, epidemics and government enforced lockdowns.
- 1.2. The policy will be applicable to ALL research (ongoing and new) irrespective of the source of funding which have defined timelines and deliverables to report. Besides research, it covers grants which have a development and capacity building component or are classified as consultancies.
- 1.3. The foremost priority in responding to crisis situations is the safety of Aga Khan University's (AKU) faculty, students, employees and study subjects.
- 1.4. The policy will be applicable only in case of substantial and prolonged disruptions to research. For any temporary / brief disruptions, individual PIs and the AKU entities are in the best position to determine the response.

**2. DEFINITIONS**

- 2.1. *Substantial Disruption:* A substantial disruption is an unforeseen event which cannot be managed through business as usual structures. The event is declared as national and/or global emergency and is expected to halt university's research activities for 30 working days or more, seriously compromising the University's capability to carry out its research mission and timely accomplishment of research deliverables.

Such a disruption has the potential to significantly compromise safety and security of staff, students, and visitors, university's reputation and viability and strategic research objectives.

Examples could include but are not limited to;

- An unforeseen and indefinite halt to research because of damage to infrastructure viz campus building(s), laboratories, libraries and research field site(s) etc.
- Unauthorized occupation of the University premises and/or research field sites.
- A scenario that limits the ability of the University's administrative, academic and research units to meet operational or staffing needs.
- Restrictions to the accessibility of research subjects (human / animals) or site(s) of research (lab/fields) or human biomaterials at national or global level.
- A scenario where procurement / import of research supplies / equipment is halted and is not expected to resume for at least 30 working days or more.
- A catastrophic disruption or damage to the region's public transport system or infrastructure which impacts availability of research staff to conduct the normal research operations of the University.
- An unforeseen halt to research activities owing to a disruption with a significant potential to displace thousands of people.
- Contamination by a hazardous substance or agent / spread of an epidemic/pandemic in regions where university operates, posing serious health and safety risks to research faculty, staff, and study subjects.
- Any other event which could compromise or threaten the reputation of the University.

*If it is not clear whether the disruption is substantive and merits an institutional response, the Provost will make a judgement call*

### **3. POLICIES APPLICABLE DURING RESEARCH DISRUPTION**

Following policies approved by URC pertaining to research will remain applicable during the disruption

- i. [Policy on Research Ethics Review \(Policy No. ORGS/008-2021\)](#)
- ii. [Policy on Research Misconduct \(Policy No. ORGS/002-2020\)](#)
- iii. [Policy for Submitting Extramural Grant Applications \(Policy No. ORGS/007-2021\)](#)
- iv. [AKU-Wide Financial Policy and Procedure for Extramural grants.](#)
- v. [COVID-19: Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\) for Research](#)

### **4. RESPONSE TO RESEARCH DISRUPTION**

4.1. In case of substantive disruption, a **Research Disruption Response Team: RDRT<sup>1</sup>** will be constituted by the Provost which may have the following membership

- Provost and Vice President, Academic (Chair)
- Regional Vice Provosts
- Chair, University Research Council

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<sup>1</sup> Referenced from [AKU's Policy on Responding to Academic Disruption.](#)

- Associate Vice Provost, Research
  - Director Finance
  - Representative from HR & Legal Office
  - Dean/Associate Deans, Research/Academic Directors<sup>2</sup>
  - Chair ERB
- 4.2. The Provost, at his/her discretion or as necessary, may assign an alternate person to act as the chair of the RDRT.
- 4.3. The Chair at his/her discretion or as necessary, may appoint additional members in the Committee depending upon the nature of the disruption.

## **5. MANDATE OF RDRT**

- 5.1. To assess the intensity/scope of disruption based on geographic location of the disruption.
- 5.2. To determine how conduct/non-conduct of research during disruption will impact AKU's reputation and its contractual obligations under various research agreements.
- 5.3. To review and comply, wherever applicable with national and international guidelines/directives on the specific disruption under consideration.
- 5.4. To evaluate impact of disruption on smooth conduct of research activities.
- 5.5. To develop customized Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) depending upon the nature of disruption for complete/partial conduct of research or suggesting its complete halt as appropriate.
- 5.6. To ensure that University Research Council (URC) approved policies/procedures /SOPs pertaining to research disruption are disseminated across AKU through various communication channels. During the time when the customized SOPs are being developed and approved, the previous SOPs could apply as applicable. Compliance to the SOPs remains the responsibility of the various entity heads.
- 5.7. To ensure that all phases of grant life cycle administration from pre-award to close out continue to function as best as possible during the disruption and facilitate ORGS to develop alternate and nimble ways of working for central grant facilitation as circumstances permit.
- 5.8. To monitor that department/entity heads work with respective principal investigators to evaluate if any of their project timelines, staffing needs or technical deliverables require alteration/ modification (cost/no cost extensions) negotiations with granting agencies/sponsors.
- 5.9. To facilitate effective supply chain management during periods of disruption for research in wet labs.
- 5.10. Work with the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) to ensure safe and secure execution of research and handling of bio-hazardous materials to avoid any possible contamination (as appropriate).

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<sup>2</sup> Determined by the location of disruption.

5.11. Facilitate the Associate Dean Research / Entity Research Leads to work with ethics Review Board (ERB) and local ERCs to guarantee ethical compliance of the research to avoid any possible deviation of ethical standards during times of disruption. The ERB should develop relevant procedures to ensure compliance to best ethical practices during times of disruption.

5.12. The Research Disruption Response Team will meet periodically to evaluate the intensity of disruption and may propose a phased approach to restart or ramp-up research operations.

When a disruption ends, the Research Disruption Response Team will be dissolved after it submits its deliberations in writing.

## **APPENDIX - 1**

### **GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO SUBSTANTIAL DISRUPTION TO RESEARCH**

#### **Clause 1.4: Business as usual:**

- Disruptions to the research activities for less than 30 working days will be governed by normal research operations.
- In case of brief disruptions, individual PIs are in the best position to determine how to proceed forward. PIs will evaluate and inform department and entity heads about the extent to which their timelines, deliverables, experiments, labs-based research etc. has been affected by a disruption and what remedial action is required.
- Any remedial action taken should be in compliance with institutional policies and guidelines from national regulatory bodies.

#### **Clause 2.1: Decision regarding substantial disruption and critical research activities:**

- Provost may consult President and/or his Executive Committee before deciding if the disruption can be considered as substantial.
- If disruption continues for an extended period, the RDRT in consultation with senior leadership may decide to continue with critical-research activities.

Critical-research activities may include;

- Maintenance of essential equipment that cannot be attended to remotely or powered down without significant cost or consequence to the research effort.
- Preservation of unique or rare materials and/or reagents that require routine care.
- Completion of long-term research experiments and/or studies which, if ceased, would result in adverse consequences for the university and the study subjects.
- Clinical Trials or Research Studies that will help to generate scientific evidence for cure and treatment of diseases.
- Research that involves care for animals including drug treatment and special feeding that can be carried out with minimal social contact with others and appropriate precautions.

#### **Clause 3: Change in Current Policies**

For the duration of the disruption, the Chair RDRT, in consultation with University Research Council, relevant stakeholders and President's Executive Committee, may implement new and/or allow alterations and exceptions to current research policies.

Please note:

- All current research policies would prevail during the crisis unless otherwise specified.
- Any new policies or alterations/suspension of a current policy and exceptions to existing policies will only be valid for the duration of the crisis/disruption.
- Any new policies or alterations and exceptions to existing policies should be compliant with policies and procedures of relevant national regulatory bodies.

**Clause 5.8: Negotiations with Sponsor:**

- PIs will inform their department/entity heads about the alterations/modifications being discussed with granting agency/sponsor.
- Negotiations with granting agency/sponsor must be done after consultation with Legal, Finance and ORGS as appropriate.
- Any remedial action must comply to institutional policies and guidelines from national regulatory bodies.
- Any disagreements on timeline of agreed deliverables and/or budget negotiations will be dealt with on a case to case basis by the respective entity heads.

**Clause 5.9: Procurement delays in case of Substantial Disruption:**

- PI in consultation with respective Dean/Associate Dean will work with Purchasing and Supply Chain Management Division (PSCMD) to maintain effective supply chain management of essential items during the disruption.
- Effective supply chain management includes, taking stocks of required inventory and pre-order reagents and supplies that have long shelf lives.

**Reference:**

1. Wikipedia Force majeure definition: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force\\_majeure#:~:text=Force%20majeure%20is%20a%20common,one%20or%20both%20parties%20from](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force_majeure#:~:text=Force%20majeure%20is%20a%20common,one%20or%20both%20parties%20from)
2. Aga Khan University – Policy on responding to Disruption of Academic Programming: <https://www.aku.edu/admissions/Documents/policy-disruption-of-academic-programme-042.pdf#search=disruption>.
3. York University’s Academic Implications of Disruptions or Cessations of University Business Due to Labour Disputes or Other Causes, Senate Policy on the: <https://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/academic-implications-of-disruptions-or-cessations-of-university-business-due-to-labour-disputes-or-other-causes-senate-policy-on-the/>
4. University of Washington – Business, academic and research continuity: <https://www.washington.edu/uwem/resiliency/barc/>
5. The University of Texas System – UC Berkeley Research Continuity Plan: <https://www.utsystem.edu/documents/docs/publication/uc-berkeley-research-continuity-plan>
6. Brookings article – Hurricane Katrina provides lessons about closing campuses during coronavirus crisis: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/16/the-lessons-hurricane-katrina-taught-us-about-closing-campuses-in-a-crisis/>
7. Northumbria University Newcastle – Policy on Critical Incident Management Plan
8. Boise State University – Research Continuity Guidance During COVID-19 Pandemic: <https://www.boisestate.edu/research/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-frequently-asked-questions-relating-to-research/research-continuity/>