The University of Manchester

# Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Extension to Programme Procedure

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## 1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1 This procedure provides guidance for PGRs with mitigating circumstances on how to apply for an extension to their degree programme

## 2. Scope and Definitions

2.1 This procedure applies to both full and part-time PGRs as well as relevant University of Manchester staff.

2.2 This procedure must be read alongside the Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Change of Circumstance Policy.

## 3. Extensions to PGR Programme - General Principles

3.1 Both full-time and part-time PGRs with mitigating circumstances can submit a request for an extension to their programme at any time during their studies. An extension to programme cannot be provided where the PGR has already submitted their Thesis or equivalent.

3.2 If approved, the time permitted in order to complete the degree will be extended by a corresponding period to the granted extension. Tuition fees may be charged on a pro rata basis for the period of extension.

3.3 The total period/s of extension to programme must not normally exceed one calendar year during the full period of the degree. Any further extensions beyond one calendar year will only be permitted under the most exceptional circumstances.

3.4 Stipend payments (if applicable) are not guaranteed during an Extension to Programme unless approved by the funder.

3.5 In most cases it will be more appropriate for PGRs experiencing mitigating circumstances to interrupt their programme or change their mode of attendance. PGRs should refer to the PGR Interruption to Programme Procedure and/or the PGR Change to Mode of Attendance Procedure and consult their supervisor(s) and Faculty Doctoral Academy to determine the best course of action as soon as the mitigating circumstances arise.

## 4. Mitigating Circumstances

4.1 The University defines mitigating circumstances as 'unforeseeable or unpreventable circumstances that could have, or did have, a significant adverse effect on the academic performance of a PGR. The circumstances will prevent the PGR from working altogether or severely affect their ability to work effectively.

4.2 Examples of mitigating circumstances that can be considered for an Extension to Programme:

i. Significant illness or injury; or worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions and acute stress;
ii. On-going medical treatment (including but not limited to fertility treatment or gender reassignment) where the PGR has been medically advised that they require leave;
iii. Personal /family circumstances such as taking on caring responsibilities or a sudden increase in existing caring responsibilities;
iv. Breakdown of essential equipment where a PGR is unable to continue research and the use of alternative equipment is not possible;
v. Delays in obtaining ethical approval where approval has been sought in good time;
vi. Delays in disability adjustments;
vii. Absence from the University for public service, for example, jury service;
viii. Partner's or Paternity leave (see also the PGR Family Leave Procedure);
ix. Neonatal care leave (see the PGR Family Leave Procedure);
x. Delays in progress due to unforeseen problems with the degree programme and/or working environment (e.g., moving of offices/buildings, supervisor changes etc.) which are outside of the PGR's control. NB: the problem must be reported to the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy at the time it occurs;
xi. Optional placements as defined in the Research and Work Away from the University Procedure].
xii. To account for time lost due to a recommended phased return from interruption.

4.2 Examples of circumstances not regarded as grounds for an extension to programme:

i. The PGR or supervisor was unaware of the policy and/or application procedure for an interruption;
ii. Voluntary service overseas;
iii. Expeditions/sport;
iv. Long-term holidays/vacations;
v. Inadequate planning and time management;

vi. Pregnancy (excluding events which may arise during pregnancy that may constitute a mitigating circumstance);
vii. Difficulties with English language (including delays as a result of proofreading);
viii. Computer or other equipment failure or theft where use of an alternative is possible or any loss of work was avoidable, except where the work is lost through the failure of University of Manchester (UoM) systems as confirmed by UoM;
ix. Change in employment conditions: applications from part-time PGRs who are working while studying may exceptionally be considered where a change in employment conditions was unforeseen;
x. Lack of sufficient funds (PGRs must ensure they have the necessary funds before embarking on their degree);
xi. Holidays, moving house and events that were planned or could reasonably have been expected;
xii. The act of religious observance;
xiii. Consequences of paid employment

## 5. Evidence to Support an Application

5.1 Evidence demonstrating the impact of circumstances on the PGR will be required. Applications for an Extension to Programme should therefore normally be accompanied by an appropriate independent supporting document.

5.2 Requests for an Extension to Programme for health reasons would normally be expected to be supported by medical evidence from an appropriate medical professional. This may be evidence dating from the time of disruption of study earlier in the programme.

5.3 If a PGR needs an extension of time due to a disability or long-term health condition, and evidence of the condition has already been provided to the University (e.g. to the Disability Advisory and Support Service), it will not always be necessary to provide new medical evidence.

5.4 Evidence to support an Extension to Programme for personal/family reasons will vary depending on the circumstances. It is appreciated that in some circumstances providing any evidence may be difficult, and that a PGR may only be able to provide a statement as part of their application. However, in some cases it may be possible for a PGR to provide relevant evidence, which could be a statement from someone within the University aware of the PGRs circumstances (e.g. a supervisor or pastoral advisor).

5.5 Requests for Extension to Programme due to an optional placement should be supported by proof of the placement and relevant dates.

5.6 The supervisor(s) may provide a letter as evidence in situations where PGRs have experienced delays in obtaining ethical approval or have had serious problems with equipment essential to their research.

5.7 The University will consider what kind of evidence might be provided for other circumstances on an individual case-by-case basis.

5.8 All evidence must be written in English, or translated to English by an official transcription service and must relate to the time the circumstances changed.

5.9 The PGR can request to withhold the submitted evidence from their supervisor as part of the application process. The supervisor will still be able to view all other information on the application.

## 6. Extension to Programme - Application Process

6.1 The PGR is responsible for formally submitting the relevant application form to the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy. Please contact the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy for access to the relevant form.

6.2 In some cases, where the PGR is unable to submit the form due to their current circumstances, the Faculty / School may accept an application from a representative who has written permission to act on the PGR's behalf.

6.3 The application should detail the current stage of the research/thesis, the reasons for the delay including mitigating circumstances, an assessment of the time required to complete the research and thesis, a full completion plan, and an assurance that the thesis will be submitted by the stipulated deadline.

6.4 The application should include the relevant evidence as detailed in section 5.

6.5 The supervisor can submit a statement of support, giving reasons for the extension, details of the length of time required and assurances that such an extension will be sufficient for the PGR to complete the degree and submit their thesis. This statement can be requested separately where the PGR prefers not to disclose full details of the application with the supervisor / supervisory team.

6.6 A PGR cannot submit the same individual request for mitigation more than once unless the circumstance has exacerbated in some way or the effect on the PGR has lasted longer than expected. In such cases, additional evidence must be supplied alongside a further extension application.

6.7 Applications will be considered by either a School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel or equivalent.

6.8 It is expected that approval will not be withheld unreasonably. However, the decision of a postgraduate research degrees panel is final. Applicants may re-apply for an extension after a refusal has been made only if they have new or additional information and/or evidence to add to their application which was not originally considered. If the request is refused again, the applicant will not normally be permitted to re-apply.

6.9 If refused appeals are allowed under Regulation XIX.

| Version amendment history | | |
|---|---|---|
| Version | Date | Reason for change |
| 2 | October | Scheduled review |
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| | | |

| Document control box | |
|---|---|
| Policy / Procedure title: | PGR Extension to Programme Procedure |
| Lead contact email | Alex.Hinchliffe@manchester.ac.uk |
| Date updated: | October 2025 |
| Approving body: | MDCSG |
| Version: | 2 |
| Supersedes: | March 2021 |
| Previous review dates: | N/A |
| Next review date: | October 2028 |
| Equality impact outcome: | |
| Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations: | |
| Related policies/procedures/guidance etc | PGR Change of Circumstance Policy: https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=8162<br>PGR Family Leave Procedure: https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=76396<br>PGR Medical Leave Procedure: https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=76397<br>PGR Research and Work Away Procedure: https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=76398<br>PGR Additional Leave Procedure: https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=76399<br>PGR Interruption to Programme Procedure: https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=39956<br>PGR Change to Mode of Attendance Procedure: https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=76400 |
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