The University of Manchester

Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Interruption to Programme Procedure

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1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1 This procedure provides guidance for Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) with mitigating circumstances on how to apply for an Interruption to Programme.

1.2 This procedure ensures PGRs and the University are aware of their obligations when a period of interruption is approved. It also ensures there are appropriate processes in place to support a PGR returning from an approved interruption.

2. Scope and definitions

2.1 This procedure is applicable to full and part-time PGRs and relevant University of Manchester staff.

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

2.3 Where periods of absence or disruption are 4 weeks or less, PGRs are not permitted to formally interrupt their programme (except in the case of unpaid parental leave). It is expected that the PGR will make up this time during their programme.

2.4 PGRs who agreed to interrupt under the Support to Study Procedure should refer to the Procedure on Supporting Return to Study for details on the return from their interruption.

3. Interruption to Programme – General principles

3.1 The University expects PGRs to pursue their research on a continuous basis for the stipulated duration of the degree. However, PGRs may encounter mitigating circumstances that seriously disrupt or delay their ability to continue their research.

3.2 With mitigating circumstances, PGRs can apply to take a period of interruption allowing them time away from their research for an agreed period.

3.3 The total period(s) of interruption must not exceed one calendar year during the entire programme, excluding interruptions for Family Leave or leave related to baby loss.[1]

3.4 An interruption to a programme beyond one calendar year will only be permitted under exceptional circumstances. PGRs who request to interrupt for longer than one calendar year may be asked to withdraw and re-apply at a future date.

3.5 During a period of interruption, a PGR's registration status is put on hold and no tuition fees are payable. The degree is suspended, and both the standard period of research and the thesis submission deadline are adjusted by a corresponding period. The PGR must suspend all research.

3.6 Funded PGRs who receive an annual maintenance stipend may be entitled to payments during a period of interruption on medical or family grounds. PGRs should refer to the PGR Medical Leave Procedure and/or the PGR Family Leave Procedure and also refer to their specific funder terms and conditions for guidance on stipend payments during an Interruption to Programme.

3.7 A Change to Mode of Attendance e.g. from full-time to part-time may be an appropriate alternative to an interruption for some PGRs. Funded PGRs should check that the terms and conditions of their award allow a change to part-time status. PGRs on a student route visa are not normally permitted to study part-time.

3.8 Applications for an Interruption to Programme should be made at the time the mitigating circumstances first arise. Retrospective applications for interruptions will only be considered if the period of time to be interrupted is still current and the PGR must provide credible and compelling reasons why the interruption was not requested at the time the circumstances first occurred.

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'. They are circumstances that prevent a PGR from working altogether or severely affect their ability to work effectively.

4.2 Examples of mitigating circumstances that can be considered for an Interruption 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.

[1] In cases of illness of a long duration, the School or Faculty, in liaison with Occupational Health and the Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS) and in consultation with the PGR, will consider whether the PGR's withdrawal from the programme and possible reapplication at a future date would be a more appropriate measure. Where needed the School or Faculty will follow the University Support to Study procedures.

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. Absence from the University for public service, for example, jury service.
vii. Maternity, adoption and unpaid parental leave (refer to the PGR Family Leave Procedure).
viii. 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.
ix. Internships as defined in the PGR Research and Work Away from the University Procedure.

4.3 Examples of circumstances not normally regarded as grounds for an Interruption to Programme are:

i. Voluntary service overseas.
ii. Expeditions/sport.
iii. Inadequate planning and time management.
iv. Pregnancy (excluding events which may arise during pregnancy that may constitute a mitigating circumstance).
v. Difficulties with English language (including delays as a result of proofreading).
vi. 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.
vii. Change in employment conditions (except for part-time PGRs who are working while studying where a change in employment conditions was unforeseen).
viii. Lack of sufficient funds (PGRs must ensure that they have the necessary funds before embarking on their degree);
ix. Holidays, moving house and events that were planned or could reasonably have been expected.
x. The act of religious observance.

5. Evidence to Support an Application

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

5.2 Applications to interrupt for health reasons should normally be supported by medical evidence from an appropriate medical professional. This evidence should demonstrate that the PGR is not expected to be able to continue their research for an extended period of time.

5.3 If a PGR needs to interrupt due to exacerbation or change in impact of 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 - DASS), it will not always be necessary to provide new medical evidence. When a PGR wishes to interrupt for this reason, consideration should be given, and DASS consulted as necessary, as to whether other reasonable adjustments should be considered.

5.4 Evidence to support an Interruption 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 an Interruption to Programme due to taking up an agreed internship/another paid full-time job should be supported by proof of the internship/job 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 The PGR can request to withhold the submitted evidence from their supervisor(s) as part of the application process. The supervisor will still be able to view all other information on the application.

5.9 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.

6. Interruption to Programme Application Process

6.1 The PGR is responsible for formally submitting the relevant application form to the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy at the beginning of the proposed period of interruption. 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 In exceptional circumstances, and following consultation with the PGR and supervisor, a recommendation may be made by the Faculty Doctoral Academy for the PGR to interrupt their studies. An interruption is also a possible outcome of the Support to Study process.

6.4 Any application must give reasons for the interruption and the length of time required and include the relevant evidence as detailed in section 6.

6.5 The supervisor can submit a statement of support. 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 which case, additional evidence must be supplied with a further interruption application.

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

6.8 The decision of a postgraduate research degrees panel is final. Applicants may re-apply for an interruption 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 be permitted to re-apply.

6.9 The appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy will confirm in writing the terms of any interruption period, the dates agreed, any stipend payment allowance (if applicable) and the latest date on which the PGR should return. The confirmation of interruption letter will also include details of any evidence required to confirm that the PGR is fit to return to study following the period of interruption (e.g. a doctor's note).

6.10 PGRs who wish to extend their period of interruption from the original return date must apply for a further interruption and provide new evidence or additional mitigating circumstances or evidence of continuation/exacerbation of the original mitigating circumstances where appropriate.

6.11 If refused appeals are allowed under Regulation XIX.

7. PGR Access During an Interruption to Programme

7.1 During a period of interruption PGRs will not be a registered student at the University.

7.2 PGRs on interruption must not be physically present on campus for research purposes and should suspend all research activities.

7.3 PGRs will retain access to online resources including email and University libraries during a period of interruption.

7.4 PGRs on interruption can also continue to access the University's Counselling Service and / or the Disability Advisory and Support Service.

8. Returning from an Interruption to Programme

8.1 PGRs must keep their supervisor and Faculty Doctoral Academy informed of any changes in their circumstances whilst on interruption that may result in them returning to their studies earlier or later than originally stated.

8.2 PGRs who want to return later than originally stated might have to apply for another period of interruption using the appropriate application form.

8.3 The Faculty Doctoral Academy will contact the PGR to offer support, guidance, and instruction regarding the return to study process. They will also detail any evidence required from the PGR to satisfy the terms of their interruption period as set out in the confirmation of interruption letter.

8.4 The return to study process following a period of interruption can take some time (e.g., due to the need for additional information from the Occupational Health Service or other specialists). PGRs should respond as soon as possible to any communication from the University related to their return from interruption and comply with any deadlines given to them.

8.5 The Faculty Doctoral Academy will initiate a formal return to study process for those who agreed to interrupt under the Support to Study procedure or where it is determined that formal proceedings are in the best interest of PGR the possible outcomes of which include:

- Return from interruption with a change in mode of attendance (if allowed by the funder and / or any VISA restrictions). Where a return from interruption includes a request to change the mode of attendance, the PGR must apply using the normal Faculty/School application route (refer to the PGR Change to Mode of Attendance Procedure).
- A phased return from interruption. Where phased return is offered a record of the agreement must be kept detailing the amount of time that a PGR will study during a period of phased return. The arrangement should be reviewed periodically (normally, every four weeks). Phased Return may be accounted for from any available leave allocation, normally family or medical leave. Where no appropriate family or medical level is available, annual leave may be used. The PGR may receive an Extension to Programme to account for time away during a phased return if funder terms and conditions allow.
- Return from interruption with a support plan for a period of 3-6 months.

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[3] Where phased return is offered a record of the agreement must be kept detailing the amount of time that a PGR will study during a period of phased return. The arrangement should be reviewed periodically (normally, every four weeks). Phased Return may be accounted for from any available leave allocation, normally family or medical leave. Where no appropriate family or medical level is available, annual leave may be used. The PGR may receive an Extension to Programme to account for time away during a phased return if funder terms and conditions allow.