

Guidance for Staff on Interruptions to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes of Study

1. Background

- 1.1 This guidance accompanies the *Policy on Interruptions to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes of Study* and must be read in conjunction with it.

2. Procedure

- 2.1 All applications for interruptions must be made in writing on the appropriate School or Faculty form and accompanied by the relevant attachments. An example of an interruption approval form can be found in Appendix 1. Schools/Faculties must provide students with details of where to find their School or Faculty specific form.
- 2.2 An application to interrupt a programme should normally be made before the beginning of the proposed period of interruption. The Programme Director (or equivalent) will be responsible for discussing with students any circumstances that lie behind the student requesting an interruption to their studies.
- 2.3 Information about providing documentation to support an application for interruption can be found in Appendix 2. Examples of types of situation that may come forward as grounds for a student interrupting their studies can be found in Appendix 3.
- 2.4 Schools must ensure that students considering an interruption consider the following issues:
- The proposed dates of any interruption, including the practicalities of the preferred return date;
 - Whether an interruption is the most appropriate option;
 - The implications of interruption on a student's visa, if they are currently on a Tier 4 student visa (see paragraph 2.8);
 - Students must be made aware that the School may not be able to provide an identical teaching, supervision and assessment experience on their return from interruption as would otherwise have been the case;
 - Students must be made aware that they need to check their funding arrangements in the event of a period of interruption taking place.
- 2.5 Agreements made between the School and the student relating to the interruption must be recorded and signed by both parties. This would cover details such as the expected date of the end of the interruption; agreements about how PGT students plan to complete their dissertations upon their return (if applicable), and any other specific agreements made between the parties.
- 2.6 Students and Programme Directors must note that retrospective applications for interruption, for example, as a result of mitigating circumstances, will not be considered without a credible and compelling explanation as to why the circumstances were not known before the beginning of the proposed period of interruption or why the student was unable to complete or submit an application prior to that date. For information and considerations regarding dealing with retrospective interruptions, please see Appendix 4.

- 2.7 The decision to approve, either in full or in part, or to reject an application for an interruption must be taken by relevant staff members designated by the School: Schools must identify a panel nominated by the Director of Teaching and Learning and have arrangements in place in order to make an informed decision on interruptions. The designated panel members must be fully briefed on the student's situation by relevant colleagues, including the Academic Advisor.
- 2.8 Consideration must be given to the implications of interruptions for students on Tier 4 visas. It must be noted that international students (non-EU students in the UK on a Tier 4 student visa) are not permitted to study part-time (see paragraph 3.2 of the Policy on Interruptions to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes of Study). Further information from the Student Immigration Team can be found at:
- [Interrupting studies \(you will have to log in with your University of Manchester username and password to access\)](#)
- 2.9 The duration of the period of absence may have to be determined by the student's status in the programme. For example, if a student interrupts during the taught element of the programme, their return may be dictated by the availability of the course units that they have missed. ***A single period of interruption would not normally be for more than a complete year.***
- 2.10 A designated member of PS staff must be nominated in each School who will have overall responsibility for handling any administrative arrangements that result from an interruption being approved.
- the designated member of PS staff will be required to notify any relevant parties of the student's interruption and update any systems as required.
 - the designated member of PS staff will be required to record on Campus Solutions both the start date of the Interruption and the expected date of return. These pieces of information must be recorded together at the time the Interruption is approved. This is important for HESA purposes, so that the expected length of Interruption can be calculated and reported. The dates of the interruption must reflect as closely as possible the actual date when the student leaves the course and when they resume their studies. This is important because it affects two aspects of the HESA return: (i) the count of FTE for the individual student, and (ii) whether they are counted in the next year's target lists for HESA or the National Student Survey. Guidance on the process of recording an Interruption and the subsequent return to studies in Campus Solutions can be found in the 'Student Records Maintenance' Training Guide, available at:
 - [Student Records Maintenance Training Guide](#)
 - where a student is funded by a Research Council or other funding organisation, the designated member of PS staff will be required to receive the relevant paperwork from the student and submit it to the funding organisation seeking permission for the student to interrupt their studies.
- 2.11 The outcome of the application must be relayed to the student in writing as soon as possible after a decision is made.
- 2.12 Schools must report to their Faculty on a quarterly basis the outcomes of all applications received, both for information and to identify any underlying strategic issues. For details about reporting, please see the TLSD website:
- [Interruptions to Taught Programmes](#)

3. **During the interruption**

- 3.1 During the period of interruption, a student's registration status on Campus Solutions is 'leave of absence' (LOA) and no tuition fees are payable¹. Where tuition fees have already been paid, they will be held over by the University or refunded (if requested). If a student is refunded in one year and they return in another year, they will have to pay the higher rate of fee. If the University holds the money for them, they would not have to pay the higher fee.
- 3.2 During the interruption, students will not be entitled to supervision and will have limited access to University facilities. Please see the Student Systems Office (SSO) 'Guide to Student Access to Facilities' for details; page 3 contains a table of the specific University facilities which students have access to at various stages or situations, including during an interruption:
- [Guide to Student Access to Facilities.](#)
- 3.3 During the interruption, students will be encouraged to maintain contact with the appropriate person in their School or programme (e.g. Academic Advisor, Programme Director), to facilitate return to study at the end of the agreed period of interruption; however, it is the student's responsibility to maintain contact.

4. **Notice of Return**

- 4.1 All students who have been on an agreed period of interruption must indicate their intention to return to study by completing a 'Return to Study Form' (see Appendix 5) and returning it to the School at least one month prior to their agreed return date. If the period of interruption is less than one month, then the School will agree with the student the timescale for submission of the Form.
- 4.2 The School will attempt to contact the student and will offer support in relation to a potential return to study; there is a requirement for the student to meet with (or speak to) their School to discuss their return to study, prior to their return.
- 4.3 If the student does not submit a completed 'Return to Study Form', or does not provide relevant medical evidence, if required, (see section 5), students will be contacted one month prior to the agreed return date (or such other time as agreed if the period of interruption is less than one month).
- 4.4 If the School does not manage to contact the student, or the student fails to engage with the School with regards to their return from interruption, please see paragraph 6.4.

5. **Return to study approval process for medical-related interruptions**

- 5.1 Where the interruption was permitted as a result of medical reasons², the student must provide a letter from their healthcare professional which states that they are fit to return to their studies. The designated member of PS staff within the School must ensure, prior to re-registration, that the student provides this letter.

¹ The programme action reason for the LOA will be defined as 'interruption' or 'maternity leave' as appropriate.

² For the purposes of letters from healthcare professionals, normal pregnancy is not regarded as a medical reason, and consequently confirmation of fitness to return to study is not required following a period of maternity leave.

- 5.2 The student may be referred to a University Occupational Health physician to ensure that they are fit to return to study and meet the requirements of the specific programme. With the student's permission, the Occupational Health physician may need to contact the student's healthcare professional for updated information regarding their health issues/current condition.
- 5.3 Where conditions are placed upon the return of the student, the School will consider the Occupational Health report and any additional information, including any information provided directly by the student. In making the decision, the School will consider the student's individual support needs, including the requirement for any adjustments and may impose such conditions which they deem appropriate to the relevant case, such as a return to study plan or a requirement for regular progress checks.
- 5.4 Where there are concerns about the student's fitness to study after a period of medical-related interruption, it may be necessary to refer to the Policy on Supporting Health, Fitness and Return to Study (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=37798>).

6. Return from interruption

- 6.1 All students must attend a return to study meeting with relevant staff within the School/programme team, the purpose of which is to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to support the student's return to study. This meeting would normally be within two weeks of the return date and a record must be kept of the meeting.
- 6.2 Students will normally return from a period of interruption subject to the versions of University and/or programme regulations and requirements that are applicable to the cohort of students that they will then join. However, if there has been a significant change to the regulations or requirements during the interruption period which means that the latest versions are less favourable to the returning student, then programme teams should discuss this with the student at the return to study meeting and ensure that the student returns on the most advantageous set of regulations or requirements.
- 6.3 Students may be required to register on their return from interruption; this is dependent on their registration cycle and the date of their return to studies.
- 6.4 Students are responsible for notifying their funding organisation (if applicable), once they have returned from interruption and re-registered for their programme of study.
- 6.5 *Failure to return from a period of interruption*
If a student fails to return and re-register after 30 days of their expected date of return (as stated in the interruption letter) following an interruption, and there has been no response to the School's efforts to contact the student, they can be deregistered from the student system and formally withdrawn from the University.

7. Students' right to appeal

- 7.1 If a student's application for interruption is declined by their School, the student has a right to appeal against this decision. In this instance, students should be advised to refer to the University's Academic Appeals Procedure (General Regulation XIX):

- [Academic Appeals Procedures \(Regulation XIX\)](#)

Appendix 1 – Example Interruption Approval Form

University of Manchester
Faculty of *****

Postgraduate Taught Programmes or Undergraduate Programmes (*as relevant*)
Interruption Approval Form

This form must be completed where a request for an interruption to a taught programme of study is sought.

Before requesting an interruption to your programme of study, it is important that you consider the implications of interrupting. Help and advice can be obtained from your School or from the Student Guidance Service, the University Counselling Service or the Students' Union Advice Centre.

Section 1 – to be completed by the Student (Please PRINT)

Family Name:	Other Name(s):	Student Number:
Correspondence Address for contact during the period of interruption:		
Programme:	Year of Programme (if relevant):	
If you are a Postgraduate Taught student who has completed the taught component of your programme, have you provided a document detailing where you are up to in your dissertation and how you will complete the project within the time frame on your return from the interruption? YES / NO		

Reason for Interruption Request:

- Financial problems
- Health problems (*medical evidence must be supplied*)
- Other personal or family problems
- Employment

Are you in Receipt of a Scholarship? YES / NO (***if relevant***)

If in Receipt of a Scholarship please indicate: Research Council / School / Other (please specify):

Last Date of Attendance: *dd/mm/yy*

Requested Interruption Dates: From: *dd/mm/yy* To: *dd/mm/yy*

Supporting Documentation Attached:

YES / NO

If yes, please list the attachments.

Student Declaration

I confirm that the information I have given is correct to the best of my knowledge and that I fully understand the implications of interrupting my current programme of study. I confirm that during the period of interruption (if granted), I undertake to maintain appropriate contact with the School.

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 2 - Supporting documentation

Medical evidence – a doctor’s letter or a letter from another medical professional must be submitted in support of an interruption based on a prolonged or acute medical condition.

Other documentary evidence – appropriate third party independent supporting or collaborative documentation is required. Where there is considerable personal or family difficulties that have led a student to seek an interruption, these circumstances must be fully explained. The School will determine, on an individual case-by-case basis, if the documentary evidence supplied is satisfactory.

The School reserves the right to contact any person named in a submission to seek further clarification or further information. Please note: this will not be done to remedy omissions in the completion of the documentation by the student / Programme Director, or to seek supporting evidence when not supplied.

In the case of PGT students, where a student requests an interruption after the taught component of their programme has been completed, they must produce a document detailing where they are up to in their dissertation and how they will complete the project within the time frame on their return from the interruption. This time plan must be approved by the Programme Director or dissertation supervisor.

A supporting letter from the student’s sponsor/funding body may be also required.

Appendix 3 - Examples of exceptional situations

a. *Examples of acceptable types of circumstances*

The following circumstances are typical of what **may** be considered grounds for applying for an interruption to a programme. This list is not definitive and even if a circumstance is listed, it does not mean that an application for interruption on the grounds of the particular circumstance will automatically be approved; applications are considered on a case-by-case basis:

- Serious physical or mental illness of the student;
- Death / serious illness of a partner, close family member or close friend;
- Unforeseeable or unpreventable events such as distress or injury caused by a serious accident; the effects of being the victim of a criminal act or the distress or serious disruption caused by fire, flood or other natural catastrophe;
- Extreme family or financial circumstances leading to stress;
- Breakdown of *essential* equipment where a student is unable to continue a project and the use of alternative equipment is not possible;
- Jury Service;
- Maternity or Adoption Leave (see below)
- Delays in progress due to unforeseen problems (e.g., moving of offices/buildings, supervisor changes etc.) which are outside of the student's control.

Maternity leave - Students may interrupt their studies for the purpose of maternity leave at any time from 28 weeks of the pregnancy for a maximum period of 12 months during their degree. The period of leave must be taken in one consecutive block. Maternity leave *should* be treated as a period of interruption.

Paternity/shared parent leave - an expectant or new mother can choose to share her parental leave with her partner, so the partner of a pregnant student can apply for an interruption to take time out of their studies in order to provide parental care. A maximum of 12 months interruption can be granted between the two partners.

Separate short-term parental leave.

Adoption leave - Students who are adopting a child may interrupt their studies for a maximum 12-month period during their degree. The period of leave must be taken in one consecutive block.

* PLEASE NOTE: Students on Tier 4 visas are able to be absent from studies for up to 60 days before the funding body/visa agency is informed. The Tier 4 sponsor guidance states:

- *A student defers their studies after they have arrived in the UK and is no longer actively studying.*

You may continue to sponsor a student who has deferred their studies for up to a maximum of 60 days providing you can continue to carry out your sponsorship duties and the student will be able to complete their course within their existing period of leave. If you think the student will not resume their studies after 60 days, you must withdraw sponsorship.

b. ***Examples of unacceptable types of circumstances***

The following circumstances ***will not normally*** be regarded as grounds for applying for an interruption or an extension:

- The student or Programme Director being unaware of policy and application procedures for interruptions and/or extensions for courses. It is ultimately the student's responsibility to ensure that they are aware of all policies and procedures relevant to their degree;
- **Work commitments that do not contribute significantly towards the student's programme of study or future employability;**
- Vacations such as expeditions, recreational sporting activities or long term holidays;
- Inadequate planning and time management;
- Normal pregnancy (excluding standard maternity leave entitlement);
- Difficulties with English language (including delays as a result of proofreading);
- Computer or other equipment failure where use of an alternative is possible or any loss of work was avoidable.

c. ***Examples of other circumstances which Schools may wish to consider favourably***

Exceptional circumstances or situations may arise which fall outside of these examples of what would normally be accepted or not accepted as grounds for interruption. In these cases, Schools have flexibility to make decisions regarding the acceptance of applications for interruption. It is at the discretion of Schools to determine whether the following circumstances should be considered as grounds for interruption. ***However, in these cases, there must be no detrimental effect on the student's academic progression:***

- High level sporting activities (e.g. a student representing their country at events);
- Circumstances that demonstrably enhance a student's employability, which may in some circumstances include:
 - Work commitments that contribute significantly towards the student's programme of study or future employability;
 - Further primary research and/or laboratory work;
 - Exchanges/placements that do not form part of the student's degree programme;
 - Voluntary service overseas.

Appendix 4 – Dealing with Retrospective Interruptions

Retrospective interruptions should only be approved in exceptional circumstances due to the complex implications of the arrangements for such retrospective cases of interruption.

If you are advising a student about possible withdrawal, interruption or discontinuation of their studies, or considering updating a student's program plan retrospectively, it is important to bear in mind the following factors:

1. What is the financial implication of the retrospective action on both the student and the University?

Take the example of a UK undergraduate student being marked as on interruption on 18 April 2018, backdated to 30 November 2017. This student will have been returned as in attendance to the Student Loans Company (SLC) on three separate occasions throughout the academic year, which will have triggered the following financial transactions:

- release of any maintenance loan and grant direct to the student
- release of the full year's tuition fee loan to the University
- assessment and payment of the cash element of the Manchester Bursary to the student.

Once the student's interruption is picked up and reported in May, with an effective date of November, the financial impact on the student and the University will be as follows:

- tuition fees for the year will be reduced, which will result in the SLC having to claw back funds from the University
- the student being asked to refund to the SLC, maintenance loans and grants they are now deemed ineligible to receive, or having their future funding entitlement reduced.
- interest will have accrued on the student's loans from the SLC during the period their interruption was not recorded
- no easy means of the University recovering the cash bursary of up to £2,500 paid in error to the student.

There will be similar implications for students in receipt of the postgraduate and doctoral loans.

Similarly, a postgraduate student in receipt of a maintenance stipend or Teacher Training Bursary will have received payment up to the date the retrospective action is recorded on Campus Solutions, which may require funds having to be recouped from the student. Alternatively, the student may be asked to return funds immediately to an external sponsor, such as the US Federal government.

2. What if the student is studying abroad on placement?

If a student is study abroad or undertaking a placement and takes a leave of absence the student will face similar financial implications as above with any fees being clawed back, the student being asked to refund any maintenance loans and grants they have received, accrued interest on their loans as well as see a suspension of University bursaries they are in receipt of.

3. The effective date of the retrospective action

When deciding on the effective date of the action it is important to bear in mind key dates, such as the Student Finance liability dates for undergraduate students, which fall in September, mid-January and mid-April. For example, in 2018/19, an undergraduate with a withdrawal date of 19 April 2019 (the 3rd liability date) would be liable for £9,250 fees, whereas a student withdrawn on 17 April 2019 would only be liable for £4,625.

For further information and guidance on the financial implications of retrospective actions, please contact:

Funding Team, Student Services Centre; Ext.69902; email: funding@manchester.ac.uk

4. Overseas students on a Tier 4 visa

Issues can arise where the effective date of any action does not match the dates of attendance recorded through attendance monitoring, such as the Tier 4 student census points. In addition, for Tier 4 students, retrospective actions can lead to visa issues or problems with the UKVI. You are advised to ensure that the student seeks appropriate guidance or that you seek guidance from:

Student Immigration Team, Student Services Centre
0161 275 5000 (select option 1)
visa@manchester.ac.uk

Appendix 5 – Example Return to Study Form following an Interruption

University of Manchester
Faculty of *****

Return to Study Form following an Interruption

Section 1 – To be completed by the student (Please PRINT)

Family Name:	Other Name(s):	Student Number:
Correspondence Address for contact during the period of interruption:		
Programme:	Year of Programme (if relevant):	
Last Date of Attendance: dd/mm/yy		
Agreed Interruption Dates: From: dd/mm/yy To: dd/mm/yy		
Are you planning to return to studies on the date already agreed: Yes/No (please delete as applicable) If no, please provide the reason why, and state when you envisage being able to return. (This will then be discussed with your Programme Team).		
If your interruption was based on medical reasons, you are required to provide a letter from your healthcare professional to state that you are fit to return to your studies. If this applies to you, please state whether you are attaching a relevant letter from your healthcare professional: Yes/No/Not applicable		

Are you satisfied that the circumstances have resolved to the extent that they should not affect your ability to return to, and study at, the University (notwithstanding any support needs detailed below): YES/NO (please delete as applicable).

On your return to study, do you have any specific requirements for consideration by the University that you believe will enable you to return? Please specify below:

Would you like the University to consider onwards referral to any of the following support services (please tick as required):

Disability Advisory and Support Service (insert link and for those below)

Occupational Health

Counselling Service

Are you in Receipt of a Scholarship/external funding? YES / NO (*if relevant*)

If in Receipt of a Scholarship please indicate: Research Council / School / Other (please specify):

Please ensure that you contact your Scholarship/funding body (if relevant) to inform them of your planned return to study date.

Do you have any concerns/queries that you would like to raise in advance of a return to study? If so, please specify below:

Student Declaration

I confirm that the information I have given is correct to the best of my knowledge and that ***I am planning to return to study on the date already agreed and provided above.***

Or:

I confirm that the information I have given is correct to the best of my knowledge and that ***I am requesting an alternative date for my return to study, or I need to discuss possible amendments to the agreed date of my return to study.***

Please note that there is a responsibility on you to ensure that you engage with the University and its processes, formally making known any support needs and ensuring you are clear as to the work expected from you on your return. If you have any concerns or queries then you should discuss these as part of your return to study meeting.

PLEASE TICK THE RELEVANT BOX

Signed:

Date:

Return to Study Form following an Interruption

Section 2 – Undergraduate/Postgraduate Officer / Programme Director Use Only (as relevant)

This section must be completed following a return to study discussion with a student.

Family Name:	Other Name(s):	Student Number:
<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>I confirm that the above named student will return* / has returned* to their studies on the originally agreed date of dd/mm/yy . (* delete as appropriate)</p> <p>OR</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>I confirm that the above named student will return* / has returned* to their studies on a new agreed date of dd/mm/yy . (* delete as appropriate)</p> <p>OR</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>I confirm that further discussion needs to take place regarding the date of the student's return to study.</p> <p><i>(PLEASE TICK ONE OF THE ABOVE BOXES).</i></p> <p>Additional comments/reasons for alternative return date (if relevant):</p>		
<p>If there has been a significant change to the University/programme regulations or requirements during the interruption period which means that the latest versions are less favourable to the returning student, discussions should take place with the student at the return to study meeting and it should be ensured that the student returns on the most advantageous set of regulations or requirements. (Normally, the default position would be that students would return subject to the latest set of regulations/requirements applicable to the cohort they are joining).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I confirm that this discussion has taken place, if University/programme regulations or requirements have changed substantially during the period of interruption.</p>		

Are there any measures which need to be put in place to support the student's return to study?

Yes / No (please delete as appropriate)

If Yes, please provide details.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Position:

Date:

Guidance for staff on Interruptions to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes of Study		
Version amendment history		
Version	Date	Reason for change
2.1	October 2015	Creation and approval by TLMG/TLG: Produced as separate Policy, Staff and Student Guidance to replace version 1.4 of 'Principles for Granting Interruptions to an Undergraduate or Postgraduate Taught Programme of Study'
2.2	May 2016	Web links updated in May 2016 and August 2018.
2.3	April 2019	Review by TLG Policy & Guidance Subgroup, 2018/19 to provide more information to support students' return to study after interruption.
2.4	July 2019	Updates made to the new Return from Interruption form.
2.5	March 2021	New paragraph 6.2 added regarding which versions of University/programme regulations or requirements students should return subject to. Also new field added to the return to study form sample text to reflect this (page 15 of this document). (April 2023: Policy owner and contact details updated in the Document control box) (September 2023: Link to the Guide to Student Access to Facilities updated)

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Related Procedures and Guidance:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance for Students on Interruptions to Undergraduate or Postgraduate Taught Programmes of Study • Procedure on Supporting Return to Study
Policy owner:	Head of Student and Academic Services (SAS)
Lead contact:	Teaching and Learning Manager (Policies and Degree Apprenticeships), Teaching and Learning Delivery, Division of SAS <i>For any queries or questions relating to this document, please direct your email to teaching-policy@manchester.ac.uk</i>