

Change of Circumstances for Postgraduate Research Students Policy

May 2021

**Research Degrees and Researcher Development
Directorate of Research and Business Engagement**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This policy applies to all doctoral and master's level postgraduate research degrees at the University of Manchester. The policy does not apply to Master of Research (MRes) or any other postgraduate taught degree programmes.

1.2 The policy forms part of the University's [Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).

1.3 This policy is supported by a number of procedural documents which provide further details and guidance related to changes in circumstances for postgraduate research students:

- a. [Official Leave of Absence Procedure](#)
This Procedure defines the different options available to a postgraduate research student (PGR) for an official leave of absence (fieldwork, placement, exchange, overseas institutional visit (OIV), and holiday) and their implications on a student's individual study.
- b. [Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#)
This procedure includes details on managing periods of interruption, the application process and supporting students on their return from interruption.
- c. [Submission Pending Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#)
This procedure includes guidance on the submission pending period, expectations on the student and how a student can apply for this additional period to finish writing up their thesis.
- d. [Sickness Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#)
This procedure provides guidance to postgraduate research students on reporting sickness absence and the necessary steps to be taken on return.
- e. [Extensions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#)
This procedure provides guidance on how a postgraduate research student can apply for an extension to their degree programme, extension to submission pending and extension to the resubmission period.
- f. [Extensions due to COVID-19 Procedure for Postgraduate Researchers](#)
This procedure provides guidance on how a postgraduate research student in receipt of a stipend processed by the University of Manchester can apply for an extension to their degree programme for reasons related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- g. [Withdrawals and Terminations Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#)
This procedure provides guidance on the student withdrawal and termination of registration processes.
- h. [Procedure on Support to Study](#)
This Procedure is to be used to refer students with health or wellbeing issues to support services, including the Occupational Health Service, the Counselling Service or Disability Advisory and Support Service.

i. **Procedure on Fitness to Study**

This Procedure enables the University to focus expertise, advice and support which could include a temporary cessation of studies on issues of health, behaviours and conduct which require additional support and monitoring.

j. **Procedure on Supporting Return to Study**

This Procedure ensures students returning to study following suspension of study receive the support they need to meet the required learning outcomes and complete their programme of study whilst taking account of their health and wellbeing going forward.

1.4 It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they are aware of the policy and procedures for requesting a change to their postgraduate research degree.

1.5 International students should refer to the Student Immigration Team for advice regarding the immigration implications of a particular change to their programme (for contact details see: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/international/why-manchester/immigration-support/>). Students should be aware that any delays to the completion of a degree as a result of a change to their programme may impact on funding or visa arrangements.

1.6 The University will monitor the progress and attendance of all postgraduate research students, and will report any interruption, extension, unauthorised absence, termination or withdrawal from studies to external sponsors and/or the appropriate UK Government agency where required to do so.

1.7 The University will have due regard towards maintaining confidentiality and privacy in relation to any request for change in circumstances but, in order for it to be considered fully, the content will need to be disclosed to members of staff who are involved in putting the Procedure into effect e.g. a Faculty/school graduate office, as well as staff whose input may be required to respond to the issues that a student has raised e.g. the Disability Advisory and Support Service etc. By submitting a request for a change in circumstance the student consents to the disclosure, storage and sharing of information relevant to the change within the University at all stages of the Procedure. If this presents a problem for the student, they may wish to seek advice from the Faculty/School graduate office; not providing consent may however affect the University's ability to consider the request fully. A copy of the request and associated documents will also be retained in accordance with the University's Records Retention Schedule.

2. DURATION OF STUDY

The University of Manchester [ordinances and regulations](#) for postgraduate research degrees detail the standard periods of study for part-time and full-time students, which vary in duration according to the type of degree.

For the duration of the degree, students pay the appropriate tuition fees and are fully registered as postgraduate research degree students at the University of Manchester. Students are entitled to full use of University facilities to enable research, including regular supervision, see the [Policy on Supervision for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#) for full details.

All students, regardless of the duration of their programme, are expected to complete all postgraduate research degree work, including research and the writing up of the thesis, within the standard period of the programme. Where students who are on 3 year or 3.5 year programmes are unable to submit their thesis within the registered period of their programme they must apply for a submission pending period which must only be for the purpose of completing the preparation of the thesis. For this purpose, students are required to apply, register and pay a fee for the submission *pending period*. *Further details can be found in the [Submission Pending Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#).*

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Student responsibilities

The student is responsible for:

- a. Alerting their supervisor to any unforeseen, unavoidable or personal circumstances that they feel may affect the progression of their research;
- b. Contacting the appropriate Faculty/School Graduate Office at the earliest opportunity to inform them of any circumstances which may impact on their progression;
- c. Making themselves aware of the [policies and procedures](#) relevant to change of circumstance;
- d. Making sure that a formal application for a change to study is made at the earliest opportunity before the change is to take place, and that details of any relevant mitigating circumstances are provided at the appropriate time. For details on how to formally apply please see the relevant [procedure document](#);
- e. Providing appropriate evidence to support any application for a change to their programme;
- f. Funded students are responsible for consulting their sponsor and/or the terms and conditions of their funder if the need for a change to their programme becomes apparent.

3.2 Supervisor responsibilities

The supervisor and supervisory team are responsible for:

- a. Determining whether they feel a statement of support is appropriate for a student's application for a change to their circumstances or programme, and providing this statement as appropriate;
- b. Discussing options with their student when progression issues arise and informing a student of the changes that are appropriate and available to them in certain circumstances;
- c. Determining whether referral to appropriate support services is required. See the [Referral of Students to University Support Services for Medical or Mental Health Reasons](#);

- d. Considering and communicating any appropriate support options available to the student throughout the process and when they confirm that they are returning from interruption;
- e. Reporting frequent short absences for medical or other reasons to the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office where they are likely to affect a student's ability to complete their research or submit their thesis on time.

The University [Policy on the Progress and Review of Postgraduate Research Students](#) provides information on policy and procedural issues in relation to the progress and review of postgraduate research students throughout their degree.

4. MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

- a. Any student experiencing mitigating circumstances may be permitted to extend or interrupt their degree or extend their submission pending period / resubmission period by prior approval of the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel or equivalent.
- b. 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 student'.
- c. Schools must ensure that students are made aware of the definition of mitigating circumstances and the procedure for applying for an interruption or extension. Details should normally be included in the programme handbook.
- d. Students are responsible for submitting their own requests for consideration of mitigating circumstances. In some cases, where the student is unable to formally submit the request for mitigation due to their current circumstances, the Faculty/School may accept an application from a representative who has written permission to act on the student's behalf.
- e. A student cannot submit the same individual request for mitigation more than once unless the circumstance has exacerbated in some way or the effect on the student has lasted longer than expected. In which case, additional evidence must be supplied with a supplementary application.
- f. Procedures for handling mitigating circumstances need to be clear and easily understood by both staff and students. Requests for mitigation must be processed formally and judged impartially. The procedures need to be applied consistently and in line with this Policy and [associated Procedures](#).

4.1 Examples of mitigating circumstances

The following circumstances are typical of what **may** be considered grounds for applying for an interruption or extension. The circumstances will either prevent the student from working altogether or severely affect his/her ability to work effectively.

- a. Significant illness or injury; or worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions;

- b. Death or critical/significant illness of a close family member/dependant;
- c. Significant family or personal crises or major financial problems leading to acute stress;
- d. Unexpected changes to the student's source of funding leading to stress (NB: students must ensure that have the necessary funds before embarking on their degree);
- e. Breakdown of *essential* equipment where a student is unable to continue research and the use of alternative equipment is not possible;
- f. Delays in obtaining ethical approval where approval has been sought in good time;
- g. Absence from the University for public service, for example, jury service;
- h. Maternity, adoption or unpaid parental leave (applies to period of interruption only);
- i. 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 student's control. NB: the problem **must** be reported to the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office at the time it occurs;
- j. Study leave necessary for the degree programme other than official leave of absence for study at an approved institution or fieldwork (applies to period of interruption only).

4.1.1 Examples of mitigating circumstances due to Covid-19

- a. Redeployment to work on COVID-19 related research or other COVID-19 related activity.
- b. Critical research activities have had to be postponed or have suffered a major delay, alternative activities have not been available and the impact cannot be mitigated.
- c. Additional COVID-19 related caring responsibilities.
- d. Illness related to COVID-19 (including mental health issues).
- e. Extended lack of supervision/guidance due to COVID-19 related activity.
- f. Specific impact resulting from remote working as a result of a disability or any other protected characteristics.
- g. Any other considerations that can be specifically attributed to COVID-19 and evidenced in the case

4.2 Examples of circumstances not normally considered to be mitigating

The following circumstances **will not** normally be regarded as grounds for applying for an interruption or an extension. This list is not exhaustive; it is intended to give an idea of what is not considered as a mitigating circumstance:

- a. The student or supervisor was unaware of policy and application procedures for interruptions and/or extensions for postgraduate degrees;

- b. Further primary research and/or laboratory work;
- c. Voluntary service overseas;
- d. Expeditions/sport;
- e. Long-term holidays/vacations;
- f. Inadequate planning and time management;
- g. Normal pregnancy (excluding standard maternity leave entitlement and events which may arise during pregnancy that may constitute a mitigating circumstance);
- h. Difficulties with English language (including delays as a result of proofreading);
- i. 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 systems as confirmed by School or Manchester Computing staff;
- j. Change in employment conditions: applications from part-time students who are working while studying may exceptionally be considered where a change in employment conditions was unforeseen;
- k. Lack of sufficient funds;
- l. Holidays, moving house and events that were planned or could reasonably have been expected;
- m. The act of religious observance;
- n. Consequences of paid employment.

4.3 Evidence to support an application due to mitigating circumstances

- a. In most cases evidence demonstrating the impact of circumstances on the student will be required. Applications for a change in circumstance should therefore normally be accompanied by an appropriate third party independent supporting or collaborative document. In the cases of illness of a close family member of the student, or injury or distress caused to the student by an accident or criminal act against the student, a doctor's note or other document which details the circumstance of the incident (such as a police incident report) will usually be considered acceptable evidence.
- b. The supervisor may provide a letter as evidence in situations where students have experienced delays in obtaining ethical approval or have had serious problems with equipment essential to their research.
- c. The University will consider what kind of evidence might be provided for other circumstances on an individual case by case basis.

5. INTERRUPTIONS TO A DEGREE

5.1 Interruption of studies

- a. The University of Manchester expects students to pursue their research on a continuous basis for the stipulated duration of the degree. However, students may encounter mitigating circumstances which seriously disrupt or delay their research studies.
- b. Students can apply to take a period of interruption which will allow them to take time away from their studies for an agreed period of time.
- c. A supervisor or a PGR Director may also recommend that a student interrupts if s/he feels that this is the most appropriate course of action.
- d. Students must formally request an interruption which will only be approved if their circumstances are considered mitigating by the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel or equivalent. Each request for an interruption will be considered on an individual, case by case basis and any decision made will be at the discretion of the University.
- e. Where periods of absence are of less than four weeks duration, the student will not be required to formally interrupt their studies. It is expected that the student will make up this time during their programme or at the end of their programme.
- f. Further information can be found in the [Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#) document.

5.2 Interrupting due to sickness

For periods of sickness of more than four weeks duration, the student may request to formally interrupt their studies or consider a change from full time to part time status (if appropriate to the programme). Further information can be found in the [Sickness Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#) document.

6. UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE AND SHORT-TERM ABSENCE

Students are not permitted to be absent without prior consent. Students must always report any absence to their supervisor, other member of their supervisory team or appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office. The supervisor and other members of the supervisory team must report student absence to the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office.

7. OFFICIAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Students may be permitted a leave of absence to undertake activities defined in the Official Leave of Absence Procedure. Students are not permitted to spend more than 50% of the degree away from the University of Manchester.

The definitions and process for applying for an official leave of absence can be found in the [Official Leave of Absence Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#) document

The relevant individual [degree ordinances and regulations](#) give circumstances in which study away from the University may be permitted.

8. HOLIDAY ALLOWANCE

Students may, with the prior agreement of their supervisor, take holiday allowance. Further information can be found in the [Official Leave of Absence Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#) document.

9. COUNCIL TAX EXEMPTION

- a. Students must be registered full-time in order to be entitled to Council Tax exemption. Students registered part-time are not eligible. Students taking an interruption or students who are in the resubmission period are also not eligible for Council Tax exemption (unless the interruption is for a period of maternity or adoption leave).
- b. Full time students who are extending the standard period of their degree or entering or extending the submission pending period will normally be eligible for Council Tax exemption.
- c. Students taking a period of interruption for the purpose of maternity or adoption are still eligible for continued Council Tax exemption.

A student is only entitled to council tax exemption during submission pending if they were previously full time on their original programme of study.

10. MATERNITY, ADOPTION and PATERNITY ENTITLEMENTS

Postgraduate research students who are members of staff, except those on a casual employment contract (e.g. Teaching Assistants) at The University of Manchester, should follow the appropriate maternity, adoption or *paternity leave policy of the Directorate of Human Resources, available via the University policy [website](#)*.

10.1 Interruption for the purpose of maternity / adoption / unpaid parental leave

- a. For details on how to apply for a period of interruption for the purpose of maternity adoption or unpaid parental leave please see the [Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#).

10.2 Paternity leave allowance

- a. A total of 14 days (including weekends and public holidays) paternity leave may be taken. The programme end date may be extended by this period of time dependent on the terms and conditions of your funder.
- b. In the case of adoption leave, a total of 14 days (including weekends and public holidays) leave may be taken to support the primary carer.

- c. Paternity leave cannot start before and must be completed within 56 days (including weekends and public holidays) of the child's birth / placement.
- d. The 14 days of paternity leave must be taken in one block.
- e. Where policies exist, sponsored students must follow the paternity leave policy of their sponsor. The University's Directorate of Human Resources policy on paternity leave should be followed by students who are members of staff of the University of Manchester.
- f. A formal extension request for paternity leave is not required, but students must inform their supervisor/s or member of their supervisory team and the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office before taking paternity leave.

10.3 Student eligibility criteria for receiving stipend payments during an interruption for maternity or adoption

- a. Full-time and part-time postgraduate research students who receive an annual maintenance stipend funded by the University of Manchester (i.e. from a School, Faculty or central department) and/or from Research Council funding may be entitled to maintenance payments. For further information, please see the [Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#).

11. SICKNESS

11.1 Leave allowance for sickness

- a. In cases of illness of a longer duration than 4 weeks, the student will normally be expected to formally interrupt their studies. Funded students should consult the terms and conditions of their funder for details on their individual sick leave allowances.
- b. Further information and guidance on interruptions for the purpose of sickness can be found in the [Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research students](#).

12. EXTENSIONS

Students who have experienced mitigating circumstances (non COVID-19 related) may apply for an extension to the prescribed programme, extension to the Submission Pending Period or extension to the resubmission period as appropriate. Students wishing to apply should refer to the [Extensions Procedure for Postgraduate Researchers](#).

PGRs in receipt of a stipend processed by the University of Manchester can apply for an extension to their degree programme with mitigating circumstances related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and they should refer to the [Extensions due to COVID-19 Procedure for PGRs \(UoM processed stipend\)](#).

PGRs not in receipt of a stipend processed by the University of Manchester who are seeking a COVID-19 related extension should refer to the relevant guidance detailed on the [COVID-19 PGR FAQ](#) page.

13. SUBMISSION PENDING

All students, regardless of the duration of their programme, are expected to complete all postgraduate research degree work, including research and the writing up of the thesis, within the standard period of the programme. Where students are unable to submit their thesis within the registered period of their programme they must apply for a submission pending period which must only be for the purpose of completing the preparation of the thesis. For this purpose, students are required to apply, register and pay a fee.¹

Students wishing to apply for a submission pending period should refer to the [Submission Pending Procedure for Postgraduate Researchers](#) and contact the appropriate Faculty/School Graduate Office.

14. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND IMMIGRATION

New international postgraduate research degree students arriving on a student visa will obtain immigration permission for the standard duration of the degree plus one year for preparation of the thesis (if the degree allows a submission pending period), plus 3 months for the viva (if the degree has a viva), plus an additional four months (automatically added by the UK Government agency responsible for immigration control to all degrees over one year's duration). Therefore, the normal duration of a student's immigration permission for a postgraduate research degree will vary depending on the degree, as follows:

- a. one year plus four months for MEnt and MSc by Research;
- b. one and a half years plus four months MPhil;
- c. three years plus 3 months for viva, plus four months for ChM and MD;
- d. four years plus 3 months for viva, plus four months for PhD, Professional, Engineering and Enterprise Doctorates;

In order to extend their immigration permission for a further period as a result of an interruption or extension, students should approach the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office to arrange a CAS from the University, which is needed for an application for a visa extension.

International students are advised to contact the Student Immigration Team in the Student Services Centre for further advice on visa applications. Contact details and further information can be found in the Immigration section of the University's Student Support [website](#).

15. STUDENTS SPONSORED BY EXTERNAL FUNDING ORGANISATIONS

- a. If students are absent for more than two weeks without authorisation, the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office will inform the relevant Research Council or sponsoring body.

¹ Students wishing to apply for a submission pending period should contact the appropriate Faculty/School Graduate Office.

- b. Students who are funded directly from a Research Council (i.e. a non-Doctoral Training Grant award) or other external funding organisation (i.e., overseas sponsor, private company, etc.) should carefully consult the regulations of their sponsor if they feel that an interruption or an extension to their studies may be necessary. Students are bound by the regulations of the sponsor and must therefore check that they are complying with both the regulations stipulated by the sponsor and the University of Manchester.

16. WITHDRAWALS AND TERMINATIONS

16.1 Withdrawal from Study

- a. Students are permitted to withdraw from their degree at any time and for any reason, but are reminded that any outstanding tuition fees or outstanding charges must be paid. Students are advised to carefully consider any decision to withdraw and should first discuss the matter with their supervisor, advisor or other appropriate member of their supervisory team.
- b. Further information on how to inform the University of withdrawal can be found in the [Withdrawals and Terminations Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#).

16.2 Termination of Registration

- a. On termination of registration, a student is no longer a student of the University.
- b. The appropriate Faculty or School Graduate Office is responsible for ensuring that the student is informed that their registration has been terminated.
- c. International students on a student visa should note that they are in breach of student visa regulations if they stay in the UK and are not registered as a student. In addition, the University is legally required to report to the government that their registration has been terminated.
- d. Further information on the process of termination can be found in the [Withdrawals and Terminations Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students](#) .

**Change of Circumstances for Postgraduate Research Students Policy
May 2021**

Version amendment history		
Version	Date	Reason for change
4	3 June 2020	Addition of COVID-19 Mit Circs

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Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations:	Regulations for Postgraduate Research Students
Related policies/procedures/guidance etc.	<p>If your policy links to other documents at the University, list them here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students • Extensions due to COVID-19 Procedure for Postgraduate Researchers • Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students • Official Leave of Absence for Postgraduate Research Students • Sickness Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students • Submission Pending Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students • Withdrawals and Terminations Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students • Supervision Policy for Postgraduate Research Degrees • Policy on the Progress and Review of Postgraduate Research Students
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