

University Policy and Guidance on Suspensions/Extensions of Study for Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs)

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Policy

1. Where circumstances or events of sufficient gravity occur and adversely impact on a postgraduate researcher's progress consideration will be given definitions given below) to mitigate against the difficulties encountered and to ensure the PGR is not disadvantaged.

Note: Approval of Extension/Suspension requests should not be assumed, until formal notification of approval is received the request remains un-authorised.

Guidance

2. The University recognises that, during their research degree studies, some postgraduate researchers (PGRs) may be affected by illness and/or other circumstances that are outside of their control, which may significantly affect their studies. In many cases PGRs will recover any time that is lost during their candidature but where difficulties are sufficiently disruptive this may not be possible. The University mitigates against the difficulties encountered, to ensure the PGR is not disadvantaged, by considering a period of suspension or extension of study which will lengthen the overall candidature and delay the deadline for submission of the thesis for examination. In the case of suspensions of study the date for transfer to a specific research degree category may also be delayed.
3. The time limits for each research degree programme including the timescales for transfer are outlined in the [University regulations and individual programme of study specification](#) .

(a) Award of a research degree

4. In all cases the PGR must meet the criteria for award of the research degree. For research degrees there can be no "mitigating circumstances" with criteria for the award. All PGRs must complete an oral examination and the thesis submitted for examination has to reach the required standard for the award of the degree and the specified learning outcomes must be met. Any mitigating circumstances which may have affected the candidate during their period of study should not be taken into account as part of the assessment of the thesis and should never lead the examiners to award a research degree where the work is not felt to be of the appropriate standard. A framework for the consideration of reasonable adjustment for PGR assessment points can be found on the [UoL website](#)

(b) Transfer to doctoral study

5. In order to recommend a PGR for transfer the panel must be satisfied that the PGR and their research project have the potential for success at doctoral level and also whether completion of a thesis within the standard period of study for the programme concerned is a reasonable expectation.
6. The same academic standards for transfer to a specific research degree must be upheld and mitigating circumstances which may have affected the PGR during their period of study should never lead the panel to recommend transfer where the potential for success has not been demonstrated.
7. Such factors might, however, be taken into account when determining what support the PGR may need going forward, including whether any suspension or extension of studies should be considered.
8. When considering requests for suspensions and extensions of study the University will take due regard of the University's regulations and external factors including the Equality Act 2010, Home Office and Research Council requirements. These arrangements are covered by the [University Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#)

A. Procedure

Postgraduate Researchers

9. If a PGR is unable to study or their progress is significantly disrupted, they should let their Supervisor(s) know as soon as possible. They can do this by contacting their supervisor or Director of Postgraduate Research. Failure to take prompt action may lead to the PGR losing the time available to complete their studies. There is a great deal of support available across the University and Supervisors, DoPGR or the Research and Knowledge Exchange Office (RKEO) are best placed to provide advice on who to contact and how.
10. PGR's can request a suspension/extension of study by completing a [PGR Suspension/extension request form](#) and returning it to the research office via research@leedstrinity.ac.uk
11. When a PGR contacts their Supervisor(s) via other means (eg email) and provides confirmation of their intention to request a suspension/extension the supervisor(s) should consider whether the information provided is sufficient for formal consideration of the request without the need for the PGR to make a formal application for the suspension/extension.

Supervisors

12. Supervisors are responsible for alerting the Director of PGR Studies, to:

- any situation where it may become necessary to request a suspension or extension of study for a PGR, in a timely manner;
- reporting that there has been no contact or missed supervision meetings with individual PGR for a month (unless absence has been authorised for illness or other suspension etc) or where there is a pattern of absences which is affecting the PGR's progress or causing concern for the PGR's well-being in accordance with the [University's Attendance Monitoring Policy](#) (see under "Progress and Monitoring") .

Director of Postgraduate Research

- 13 Requests for suspensions and extensions of study for individual PGRs should be considered by the Director of PGR Studies or nominee. If the Director of PGR Studies or nominee is supportive of the request a recommendation will be submitted to the Research Office who will inform the PGR and the UoL of the outcome.

Where a request exceeds 12 months the Director of Postgraduate Research will submitted a recommendation to the Research office who will submit the request to the University of Leeds for approval.

Where there is a disagreement on the outcome of a request for a suspension or extension of study the Director of Postgraduate Research will liaise with the University of Leeds.

Confirmation of a suspension/extension of study

14. When a request is approved by the Director of Postgraduate Research on behalf of the UoL Programmes and Assessment Group the research office will inform the, UoL, PGR, supervisors and student administration of the outcome.

B. Suspension of Study

15. A "suspension of study" is a period of more than one month when a PGR temporarily leaves the programme and loses their registration status. During this time they are not expected to progress their research or pay academic fees. Access to supervision, the library or other University facilities (such as laboratories) is not available, but access to IT facilities, such as email will continue. Periods of suspension do not count towards the time available for completion of the degree and the "clock" towards the deadline for submission of the thesis/deadline for transfer will stop ticking when the suspension is in place. The University will report suspensions of study for sponsored visa holders to UKVI.

The University is required to withdraw immigration sponsorship for sponsored PGR visa holders during the period of suspension (see section J below).

Examples include: serious illness (supporting medical evidence (eg doctor's note) is required, significant personal difficulties, bereavement, financial reasons, accident, maternity.

16. The PGR is expected to return to study immediately after the period of suspension has ended unless an additional period of suspension has been requested. In all cases the Director of PGR Studies should be satisfied that the PGR is able to resume study and the difficulties have been overcome. Where appropriate documentary evidence should be sought. For example when a PGR resumes study following a period of suspension due to ill-health it will be on the basis that they are medically fit to do so and satisfactory medical evidence should be provided by the PGR (eg through the provision of a fit to return to study note). In more routine cases expiration of the sick note will be sufficient.
17. Suspensions will not normally be backdated for more than one month. A request for a retrospective suspension of study of more than one month will only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances and where the PGR can provide a good reason for not disclosing the circumstances sooner. It is, therefore, essential that prompt action is taken by the PGR, supervisor and Director of PGR Studies to formalise requests for suspensions of study.

Failure to return from a period of suspension

18. PGRs are expected to return to their studies at the end of the period of suspension and to re-register within 4 weeks of their return. If they are unable to restart their studies and require a further suspension they should let their Supervisor(s) know immediately.

Failure to keep in contact with their Supervisor(s), when the period of suspension has ended, may lead to their losing the time available to complete their thesis/submit for transfer or be presumed to have withdrawn from the University.

C. Extension of study

19. An "Extension of study" is a lengthening of the candidature to take account of a period of unexpected/unpreventable disruption to studies which has slowed down academic progress significantly. The PGR will not leave the programme of study and will continue to progress their research/thesis writing but with some disruption of study over a limited period slowing progress rather than interrupting progress completely.
20. Examples include: equipment breakdown, serious illness or recovery from accident/surgery, significant personal difficulties or family illness which have substantially affected progress.
21. During periods of extension PGRs will have access to Library and IT facilities and will be entitled to supervision. They will not normally be entitled to laboratory or

- other resources provided by the School. All research work, including experiments, should have been completed within the standard period of study and any period of extension granted should be for writing up the thesis.
22. Extension requests will normally only be considered after the completion of the standard period of study and at a point when it is clear how much of the time lost has been compensated for during the standard period of study.
 23. Cases will be expected to show that some unexpected/unavoidable circumstances have arisen which have significantly and adversely affected the progress of the research and against which precautions could not reasonably have been taken.
 24. Research projects require careful time management. Delays to the delivery of equipment and/or equipment breakdown are not uncommon. During periods of such inconvenience consideration should be given to the other aspects of the research the PGR can progress to avoid impact on the length of the overall candidature. In such cases waiting until the end of the standard period of study to assess the impact of delays is appropriate.
 25. Where an unexpected event/disruption to study occurs during the overtime period the extension request should be made at the point the event occurs. The PGR and the supervisor(s) should agree a timetable/work plan for completing the thesis which includes milestones. In some case the Director of Postgraduate Research and the Chair of PSAG may require sight of the timetable for completion before considering an extension request.
 26. Masterships by Research
In the case of Masterships by Research the maximum period of extension permitted on academic grounds for Full time MbR is 3 months and 5 months pro rata for Part-time MbR.

D. Extensions and long-term medical conditions and disability

27. The University acknowledges the practical difficulties related to individual circumstances resulting from long-term medical conditions and disability. Disclosure at an early stage is encouraged as this will enable the University to identify needs and put in place appropriate support. Where a needs assessment recommends that a reasonable adjustment is to provide an extension to the candidature, consideration can then be given to the length of time required. Supervisors should liaise with the PGR and the [Disability Service](#) before submitting requests for extensions in these circumstances.

E. Postgraduate Student Exchange (Study Abroad)

28. Any time spent by a PGR at a host institution will be included within the standard period of study. No period of suspension or extension of study will be considered as the expectation is that supervision and the research project will continue during this period.

F. Limits to the Length of Suspension/Extensions of Study

29. (Research Council award holders and those sponsored by external funding should also refer to the section M below)
30. Bearing in mind that Faculty/School structures change with time, supervisors leave for various reasons, and a topic, once original may not remain so indefinitely requests for suspensions of study will not be granted indefinitely. The norm at present is for a period of up to 12 months suspension to be considered by the University at any one time, with a review at the end of that period if necessary. The minimum period of suspension is one calendar month.
31. No PGR, commencing study from session 01 August 2012, will normally be granted periods of extension and suspension totalling more than **two calendar years for a full-time student or three calendar years for a part-time student by the University**. In the event of a PGR wishing to exceed this period, unless exceptional permission from PSAG is granted (see below), they will be required to withdraw from the research degree candidature, but may be permitted to apply to commence a new candidature.

Exceptional Permission for suspensions/extensions in excess of the total length normally permitted

32. Requests for exceptional permission for suspensions and extensions of study in excess of the total length permitted under the University's regulations will be considered by at least two members acting on behalf of PSAG (normally the Chair and one other member, neither of which will be from the same Faculty as the PGR).
33. When considering such exceptional requests the Group will take the following into account:
- the individual mitigating circumstances
 - the academic progress made to date and whether the PGR is in good academic standing
 - the currency of the research

- the availability of continued supervisory support and any resources required to complete the work within the School
 - a comprehensive timeline to completion which includes milestones/formal structure for monitoring progress agreed between the PGR and supervisor
 - whether the context of the research remain academically current
34. In all cases the Group must be satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect of submission of a thesis of the appropriate standard for examination if the additional period of suspension/extension requested is to be granted.

G. Guidance on Evidence

35. The Director of Postgraduate Research and the UoL Programmes of Study and Audit Group wishes to ensure that decisions made about suspensions/extensions of study are well founded and therefore PGRs are normally required to provide independent documentary evidence to support requests. Documentary evidence would normally be an original document on headed paper and signed by an appropriate third party, giving details of the circumstances, its dates and or duration and, where possible, its impact. Original documentation can be returned to the PGR where requested. An appropriate third party would be one who knows the PGR in a professional capacity, or one who can verify the circumstances and who is in a position to provide objective and impartial advice. Electronic evidence will only be accepted from verifiable addresses. All evidence must be provided in English. It is the PGR's responsibility to provide translations of any non- English documentation, and any documents not in English or without translation will not be accepted as evidence. The translation must be certified as accurate by a Public Notary or translated by an accredited translator. This evidence should be retained by the Research Office and not forwarded to UoL PGRO.
36. Where illness is proposed as the grounds for suspension or extension of study the PGR must provide the school with satisfactory medical evidence (eg full medical certificate) as evidence in support of the request. The medical certificate might take the form of a fit to study note, letter or report from a medical practioner (eg GP or doctor).
37. The Supervisor(s) should advise the PGR to produce the original document for them (within a set time frame) prior to them making a decision.
38. If the PGR fails to produce the original document or the Supervisor remains unclear as to the authenticity of the document on receipt of the original document, the Supervisor should
- (a) advise the PGR that they do not accept the evidence and ask the PGR to provide additional or further evidence in support of the application for a suspension or extension of study. They should remind the PGR that unauthorised absence may lead to formal warnings and can even result in the PGR being excluded from the

- University; and (b) formally refer the matter to the Director of Postgraduate Research who will liaise with the University of Leeds Doctoral College.
39. It is the PGR's responsibility to provide up-to-date objective evidence to support requests for suspensions/extensions of study.
40. Supervisor(s) should advise PGRs to obtain information which includes:
- (i) The dates and duration of any period when the PGR's health has completely prevented or will completely prevent them from studying/when they are not fit to study;
 - (ii) The dates and duration of any period when the PGR "may be fit for study" if their doctor thinks that returning to study will help them recover. The doctor should be asked to advise on how the PGR student's health may affect their ability to study (for example unable to use a keyboard for long periods or decreased mobility so difficult to get onto campus);
 - (iii) For international Sponsored PGRs studying in the UK on a student visa only confirmation of whether the student is fit to fly.
41. The presentation of a prescription or the box cover of medication or the submission of a series of medical appointments is not acceptable evidence as this gives no professional opinion of the PGRs capacity to study.
42. Care should be taken by the Supervisor(s) to ensure that any suspension or extension request on the basis of illness reflects the severity and duration of the illness as described in the medical evidence.
43. In all cases it is the responsibility of the PGR to ensure that the evidence provided addresses these requirements.
44. PGRs who have taken suspensions of study on medical grounds will be required to provide their supervisor(s) with evidence that they are medically fit to resume study at the end of the period of suspension (eg doctor's note). This evidence should be sent by the Supervisor to the Research Office.

I. Grounds for Suspensions/Extensions of Study

45. Approval of requests for suspensions/extensions of study is not guaranteed. Poor academic progress or failure to achieve ethical approval is not reasonable grounds for a suspension/extension.
46. Cases where the Director of Postgraduate Research is likely to be sympathetic to an application for suspension/ extension include (provided that the length of time requested is reasonable in the sense that it bears close relation to the events experienced by the PGR) :
- Accidents
 - Death or illness of someone the PGR is close to eg parent, grandparent, guardian, partner, sibling, child

- Serious personal illness or injury (of the PGR) (accompanied by medical evidence (eg doctor's note)).•
 - Unexpected events e.g. theft, (accompanied by a police report/crime number), equipment not being delivered or equipment breakdown.
 - Maternity (the PGR must make a request before the maternity leave is due to begin)
 - Significant personal difficulties
 - Systemic catastrophe in home country (eg war, natural disaster, pandemic)
 - Unexpected and serious financial hardship
 - Placements (where the request falls within the standard period of study, is no longer than 3 months in duration and is supported by the supervisor)
47. Cases where Director of Postgraduate Research is unlikely to be sympathetic to a request for suspension/extension include:
- When the PGR has completed the standard period of study on a full-time basis and is now in the overtime period and is now in employment and is making a request on the basis of "pressures of work"
 - Where the request is based on the grounds that the PGR has got married/honeymoon period. The Group is of the view that this should normally be taken from the PGR's annual leave entitlement
 - Where there is no clear relationship between the amount of extra time being requested and the problem being encountered by the PGR
 - Where permission has been granted for the PGR to register concurrently for another programme of study and a request is based citing academic or other commitments linked to the other registration.
 - Where an extension of study is requested on the basis of poor English language skills.
 - Where the delay to submission is caused by the engagement of a proof-reader.
48. In all cases the length of time requested needs to be specified and reasonable, in the sense that it bears close relation to the events experienced by the PGR. For example, it is unlikely that a 6 months suspension of study will be granted for a minor illness. Requests for suspensions of study will be considered in whole months only. For administrative purposes suspensions will begin on the 1st day of the month and end on the last day of the month.

J. International Sponsored Students

49. There are additional requirements placed upon the University by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) in relation to international sponsored students under the Points-Based System. Any adjustments made to a research degree candidature must continue to satisfy the conditions set by UKVI if the University is to continue to sponsor the PGR.

These include:

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- the PGR remains registered as a full-time candidate and makes progress with their research, attending the university campus, attending all supervision meetings, seminars, research training and other research events;
- if the PGR stops studying the University is required to make a report to the Home Office and their leave may be curtailed. In this event the PGR is required to leave the UK. PGRs whose study is suspended should be referred to Student Administration for advice;
- any short periods of authorised absence must not have an effect on the PGR's ability to meet deadlines for their research studies, including the transfer deadline and the maximum time limit for submission of the thesis.

The University is required to report suspensions of study to UKVI within 10 working days of the start of the suspension. Some changes reported by the University to UKVI will result in visas being curtailed (shortened). If this happens the PGR will be notified by email and will be given 60 days' notice from the date of the curtailment notice. Depending on their circumstances, they should either leave the UK, make an application to the UKVI to remain in the UK in a different immigration category or resume their studies promptly so that the University can update the report it has sent to them. If they leave the UK they will need to apply for a CAS to enable them to apply for a new visa (entry clearance) from their home country before returning to the UK.

50. It is, therefore, **essential** that international PGRs holding a sponsored student visa are aware of the following in the event of a suspension to their studies:
 - Leeds Trinity University will report their suspension of study to the UKVI
 - The UKVI may in turn curtail their visa
 - They may be required to leave the UK
 - If they leave the UK, they will need to request a new CAS and apply for entry clearance before returning to the UK to resume their studies
51. The PGR should seek immigration advice from the LTU Student Administration Team records@leedstrinity.ac.uk.
52. In exceptional cases the University may report absence to the UKVI but not recommend that a PGR leave the UK. Examples of this are where there is civil unrest in the PGR's home country or extreme medical incapacity. The PGR may then be advised to make an immigration application outside the rules. This would usually involve a referral for specialist immigration advice outside the University.
53. The Director of Postgraduate Research and Supervisors must not wait for the PGR to submit medical evidence before contacting the LTU Student Administration Office.
54. Where appropriate, LTU Student Administration will report the absence to UKVI and inform both the PGR, DoPGR and the Research Office that a report to the UKVI has been made. Failure to comply with this requirement could jeopardise the University's UKVI sponsor licence as well as causing the PGR to fall outside the immigration regulations.

55. During an extension of study attendance should be monitored in accordance with established University policy. If the PGR fails to attend action should be taken in line with the [Attendance Monitoring Policy](#).

K. Authorised Absence

56. In some cases a period of suspension of study may not be necessary and a period of authorised absence is more appropriate subject to the following requirements:
- if the period of absence will be for a short period (up to four weeks) in addition to any period of annual leave (five weeks) in any one calendar year and
 - the time away from studies will have no impact on the PGR's ability to meet deadlines (eg transfer, maximum time limit for submission of the thesis).
57. In such cases the supervisor and the PGR must agree that the short period of absence can be absorbed into the candidature with no allowance made for the PGR to meet academic deadlines for submission of work. A record of the agreement should be kept in writing (eg email).
58. The University is not required to report short periods of authorised absence for international sponsored PGRs holding a student visa to the Home Office provided they do not impact on the overall time limit for completion of the programme of study.

L. Sponsor/Awarding Body

59. Please note that it is the responsibility of the PGR to check the implications of a suspension or extension of study with their scholarship awarding body or provider.
60. PGRs in receipt of Research Council funding are normally only permitted, by the relevant [Research Council](#), to a total of 12 months suspension in the lifetime of the award. Other limits may be placed on the length of suspension/extension by external funders and PGRs are responsible for checking the implications of suspensions/extension on their funding.

M. Research Councils

61. Set out below is further advice on arrangements for candidates holding research council funding.
- a) [Research Councils –Doctoral Training and Doctoral Training Centre Grants \(AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC and STFC\)](#)

All suspensions and extensions are managed internally by the University

- Research Council funded PGRs are not entitled to receive maintenance payments while

- suspended
- Total periods of suspension must not normally exceed one calendar year (12 months) during the lifetime of the award
- Supervisors may wish to take advice from the Director of Postgraduate Research about the implications for suspensions/extensions of study for individual candidates holding Research Council awards and the payments they are entitled to receive

b) [AHRC - Block Grant Partnership Studentship Regulations](#)

Suspensions

- All requests to be sent to the Director of Postgraduate Research or nominee. Requests should be made at the time the problem arises and certainly no later than the end of July in the year the PGR is due to submit.
- Approval is not required by AHRC, however, AHRC require suspensions to be recorded on Je-S within one month of their commencement.

Extensions

- All requests to be sent by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Office (RKEO) to PGRO (with a copy to the Postgraduate Scholarships Office) no later than the end of July in the year the PGR is due to submit.
- AHRC will not grant retrospective extensions and they can only be approved by AHRC once a PGR has entered their overtime period.
- Maximum period of extension 12 months.

(c) [ESRC](#)

Suspensions

Suspension requests do not require prior approval by ESRC and are handled according to standard University procedures. The period of suspension must not exceed one calendar year in any one instance. Total periods of suspension must not exceed one calendar year during the lifetime of the award (standard period of study). Please note, however, that if a PGR is in the overtime period, ESRC will expect a PGR to request an extension 2-3 months before the submission date deadline following normal University procedures – prior approval from ESRC is no longer required.

Extensions

- Overseas University Visits, Internship Schemes, Difficult Language Training are treated by ESRC as extensions but do not require prior approval by ESRC. If successful, the Director of PGR Studies should submit a request for the appropriate extension to the RKEO who will forward to the UoL PGRO. The request should be made as soon as the Overseas University Visit/Internship scheme has been formally approved.

- Where a PGR experiences problems relating to an accident, illness or exceptional personal circumstances during the course of study, the ESRC will consider a case for extending the submission deadline. Extensions to the submission date cannot be considered in retrospect. Any request for an extension to the submission date due to illness cannot be considered unless evidence of illness has been provided at the time of illness. To apply for a submission date extension, normal University procedures should be followed, 2-3 months before the submission date deadline.

N. Suspensions and extensions during the thesis examination process

62. The Graduate Board's Examinations Group is responsible for considering, and reaching decisions requests for (i) suspensions/extensions to the resubmission deadline for candidates whose thesis has been referred for resubmission and (ii) extensions to the deadline for corrections of editorial and presentational corrections or minor deficiencies for candidates recommended for award.
63. Requests for PGRs during the thesis examination process are considered by the Examinations Group in accordance with the arrangements outlined in the main body of this document for suspensions/extensions during the period of study prior to submission of the thesis. Supervisors should therefore ensure they have consulted the relevant section of this document before submitting a request.

Suspensions/Extensions during the referral period

64. Cases where the sympathetic consideration is likely to be given to an application for a suspension or extension are outlined in the relevant sections of the main body of this document. In addition to these, the Examinations Group may give exceptional consideration to requests made where the PGR is now in full-time employment and is making a request on the basis of "pressures of work". Full details must be included in the case. Requests should be made using the pro forma provided.

Extensions to the period for editorial and presentational corrections/minor deficiencies

65. For PGRs who have been recommended for award, where the learning outcomes have been met and the thesis satisfies the requirements for award but is found to contain either editorial and presentational corrections or minor deficiencies, it is important that clear deadlines are in place for the corrections to the thesis in order to act as a motivator for completion. Therefore the PGR normally has 4 weeks (for editorial and presentational corrections) or 12 weeks (for minor deficiencies) from the date of the oral examination to complete and return the corrections to the internal examiner for checking.

66. Cases where sympathetic consideration is likely to be given to an application for an extension are outlined in the relevant section above.
67. The University does not prescribe whether a PGR is expected to work full-time on their corrections or the number of hours per day. It is acknowledged that at this point in the candidature many PGRs will already have taken up other responsibilities and commitments. In keeping with this the Examinations Group may consider an extension to the normal correction period if PGR's experience difficulties during the correction period and need extra time because of, for example, work/family reasons.
68. A case for an extension to the correction period must be made by the Director of PGR Studies by email to rp_examinations@adm.leeds.ac.uk (there is no need to complete the full suspension/extension form for these requests).
69. For PGRs recommended for the award of the degree and completing either editorial and presentational corrections or minor deficiencies, please bear in mind that, given the correction periods themselves are only 4 and 12 weeks respectively, requests for long extensions are **unlikely** to be given sympathetic consideration, unless the circumstances are exceptional.

O. Suspensions during the appeal process

When a PGR submits an appeal against the decision to refer their thesis for resubmission at the final examination stage or to transfer their registration to MPhil status at the transfer stage their studies will normally be suspended pending the outcome of the appeal. This will ensure they do not lose any study time whilst their appeal is under consideration.

A referred PGR who wishes to make the corrections required by the examiners to their thesis or a PGR who wishes to continue with MPhil studies pending the outcome of their appeal should discuss this with the Director of Postgraduate Research or Supervisor in the first instance.