



# **Policy on Leave of Absence (intermission) for Postgraduate Research Degree students**

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# **Policy on Leave of Absence (intermission) for Postgraduate Research Degree students**

## **1. Overview**

- 1.1. This document is intended to provide staff and students with information about the Postgraduate Research Education Team practice in relation to leave of absence (intermission), so that staff and students are aware of what are permissible grounds for periods of leave.
- 1.2. There are instances when it is necessary for students to take a period of leave from their studies. However, leave can be disruptive to a student's studies and affect their motivation to continue, either pushing up withdrawal rates or slowing down completion, even if the time out is discounted. Moreover, periods of leave are not discounted by the Office for Students in their calculations of qualification (completion) rates on the grounds that it occurs across the sector. If a student takes extensive leave they can end up being recorded as a non-qualifier.
- 1.3. Retrospective leave of absence will be granted in exceptional circumstances only and is not an option for those who are sponsored by the University for a student visa. Students should, in consultation with their supervisor and Student Support, request leave as early as possible ahead of the term affected by their extenuating circumstances.
- 1.4. It should be noted that periods of intermission are not impacted or determined by a student's mode of study; the maximum allowance (in terms) remains the same for full- and part-time students.
- 1.5. In recognition to the exceptional circumstances faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, periods of intermission which are requested due to the impact of the pandemic will be excluded from the maximum number of intermissions permitted, as stipulated within this document.
- 1.6. If a student requests a leave of absence during their first year of study which extends for longer than two terms, they will be required to restart the course.

## **2. Illness**

- 2.1. Approval of requests for a period of intermission due to ill health are judged on a case by case basis. If the case is sound and backed by medical evidence, leave of absence is generally agreed regardless of the stage of the degree – the length of leave depends on the illness and its

severity. We try to keep leave as short as possible but on occasions extensive leave may be necessary. However, there are some illnesses where assessing the severity and whether the length of time requested is overlong is more difficult. Depression and stress are two examples where careful judgements have to be made. A Maximum of 9 terms of medical intermission can be granted, after which students will be required to withdraw and subsequently request readmission at a later date. Exceptional Circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis by the Executive Dean or their deputy.

### **3. Maternity and paternity leave**

3.1. Requests for such leave are agreed at any stage of the degree, and will follow government guidelines for entitlement. Many students only ask for a term's leave, but normally up to a year is permissible. However, there can be special circumstances when a longer period of leave can be justified (e.g. the poor health of the mother/baby). It may not always be possible to connect maternity leave to term dates and therefore each request will be considered on a case by case basis. If the minimum period has not been completed, and the course permits, students may have the option to shift from full-time to part-time status, although visa requirements may not permit this in the case of overseas students.

### **4. Domestic/family problems relating to serious ill-health, death, and/or the need to provide care**

4.1. A term's leave because of the serious ill-health or death of a parent, spouse, partner or child, and/or where there may also be a need to provide care, is usually granted. Because of the disruptive consequences of leave any further leave has to be carefully judged. We usually grant leave initially for a term with a reassessment of the situation towards the end of that period. Requests for such leave are normally agreed at any stage of the degree. A Maximum of 3 terms of Non-medical intermission can be granted, after which students will be required to withdraw and subsequently request readmission at a later date. Exceptional Circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis by the Executive Dean or their deputy.

### **5. Financial problems**

5.1. Some students experience financial difficulties during the course of their studies and students sometimes request leave for financial reasons. Leave of absence on these grounds is normally agreed only during the minimum period and usually only for a term, unless there are exceptional circumstances. A maximum of three terms of Non-medical intermission can be granted, after which students will be required to withdraw and subsequently request readmission at a later date. Exceptional Circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis by the Executive Dean or their deputy. The current policy is not to give leave for financial reasons once students have completed their minimum period. Again, if the minimum period has not been completed,

students may have the option to shift from full-time to part-time status, although visa requirements may not permit this in the case of overseas students.

## **6. Paid work**

- 6.1. Research councils will usually permit a period of leave of absence for up to a year for work that is closely tied to, and supports, the student's research. The Postgraduate Research Education Team will normally approve such leave for no more than a year, whether or not the student is funded by a research council. However, approval of leave of absence to full-time students on the grounds of any other paid work commitments is given only in exceptional circumstances, regardless of the stage of the student's registration, because of its disruptive consequences for a student's study. However, if the minimum period has not been completed students may, if visa requirements permit, have the option to shift from full-time to part-time status.
- 6.2. We make no distinction between full- and part-time status during completion because so many students take paid employment at this stage. For this reason we are very reluctant to give leave on grounds of work commitments once a student has entered the completion stage of their PGR study.
- 6.3. Part-time students often have full-time jobs throughout their period of study, working in posts that they took up well before they began their studies. The demands of this work can slow progress down and it is sometimes necessary to give a period of leave, for instance if someone has to take up a more senior position. However, in certain cases, rather than a leave of absence, extending the minimum period may be a more appropriate solution.

## **7. Procedures**

- 7.1. Students should discuss their reasons for requesting a period of leave with their supervisor. They should then fill out a Request for Intermission Form online via their MyEssex portal.
- 7.2. Retrospective leave of absence will be granted in exceptional circumstances only and is not an option for those who are sponsored by the University for a student visa.

## **8. Sponsored Students (student visa)**

- 8.1. As a Student Sponsor, the University has many duties and must adhere to the Home Office rules and guidance in force. It is only possible to sponsor a student for a student visa whilst they are fully registered and actively engaged in study.

### **Intermission and absence:**

- 8.2. We are required to withdraw sponsorship from a student who intermits from their studies and the Home Office will curtail (cut short) their immigration permission. The student will have to

leave the UK whilst they are intermitting and if they have been working, they must stop doing so immediately because the condition that allows work alongside study would no longer apply. Prior to returning to their studies in the UK the student can request further immigration sponsorship and, if eligible, apply for a new Student visa to enter the UK. When a report is made to the Home Office the International Services Team let the student know via email and provide immigration advice.

- 8.3. It is not possible for a sponsored student to be granted retrospective intermission for a number of reasons including: Home Office timescales relating to reporting changes to student circumstances; the student cannot be, or have been, in the UK while they are not fully registered and actively engaged in study; and Home Office guidance regarding gaps in study and engagement monitoring.
- 8.4. If a short absence is agreed without the need for intermission or an extension to the student's course duration, it may be possible for the student to remain sponsored during that period

## Document Control Panel

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