

Postgraduate Research Handbook**Chapter 18 - Postgraduate Student Absence Policy***Contents (ctrl+click to take you to the section you need)*

1. Introduction	1
2. Submission of absence record.....	2
3. Tier4/Student Visa Holders.....	2
4. Absence from programme of study	3
5. Return to the University following interruption on medical grounds.....	5
6. Phased Return to study due to ill health	6
7. Ability to study significantly affected by a severe, chronic, or fluctuating medical condition or disability	7
8. Sickness during pregnancy	8
9. Absence from clinical practice, industrial placement or other placement linked to their degree.....	9
10. Professional Doctorate Taught elements only: submission deadline or assessment affected by absence	10
11. Student absence before a viva voce examination.....	10
12. Student absence during a viva voce examination	11
13. Student absence before a deadline or milestone not including thesis submission (including upgrade submission or viva, USPE deadlines or deadlines agreed for supervisory meetings).....	11
14. Student absence after submission of the thesis/dissertation	12
15. Unauthorised absence	12

1. Introduction

- 1.1. It is recognised that students can suffer illness or other adverse personal circumstances which affect their ability to attend and engage with their programme of study and/or complete an examination/assignment.

- 1.2. All Postgraduate Research (PGR) students are expected to meet all formal requirements of their studies including assessment submissions, upgrade and examination vivas. If a student is ill or experiencing other adverse personal circumstances during their studies, they should consult their [PGR Support team](#) as soon as possible in order to consider the possible effects of such circumstances on students'

performance. Students experiencing continued absence due to a long-term health condition or disability should manage their absences with support through the [Health, Wellbeing and Support for Study \(HWSS\)](#) procedures. PGR students who are also members of staff should follow the appropriate [HR policy for staff](#).

- 1.3. PGR students **must** report all absences (aside from pre-arranged annual leave) using the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#) and **must** also alert their supervisors. Students are reminded that many medical practices are unable to provide a medical certificate unless they are consulted during the illness. Students are therefore advised to contact their medical practitioner as soon as possible when a medical certificate is required (see [Section 4 below](#)).
- 1.4. Students on Professional Doctorate programmes whose illness affects examinations/assignments or taught elements **must** also consult the University's Mitigation system and report their illness [via iExeter](#) or as directed by their [PGR Support Team](#).

2. Submission of absence record

- 2.1. All absences must be reported via the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#) at the earliest opportunity in order to be considered. For absences longer than 7 days, medical certificates or other corroborating evidence should be uploaded to the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#). Students with an Individual learning Plan (ILP) that stipulates short term absences should confirm that they have an ILP when they submit the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#). Medical certificates and corroborating evidence will be archived until the end of the year following the student's graduation or leaving the University.

3. Tier4/Student Visa Holders

- 3.1. Absences, interruptions of study and changes to mode of attendance can have implications for students' immigration status. Students considering taking an interruption of studies, short-term absence or changing their mode of attendance should seek advice early from the University's [International Student Support team](#). Students should refer to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Periods of

registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students – (Section 4, Interruption of study) for further information and the [PGR Student Handbook](#) for guidance about applying for interruption to study.

4. Absence from programme of study

4.1. Students in receipt of funding should discuss the impact of absence on study with their funder directly. Students funded through a Research Council or who receive funding administered by the University of Exeter should refer to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18, Annex A: Postgraduate Research Sickness Stipend Payments Policy and the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Annex C: Postgraduate Research Maternity and Parental Leave Funding Policy.

4.1.1. Students in receipt of funding may be eligible (subject to strict eligibility criteria detailed in the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18, Annex A: Postgraduate Research Sickness Stipend Payments Policy) to receive studentship stipend payments at their full stipend rate whilst interrupted or absent on medical grounds for up to 13 weeks (inclusive of cumulative absences and phased return) within any 12-month period and may do so on more than one occasion throughout their period of study. The total funding available to the student will be extended accordingly.

4.2. The following arrangements normally apply in instances of absence from programme of study due to ill health, with exceptions relating to assessments and examinations detailed below.

4.3. The reasons for student absences which are eligible for consideration are:

- a. Disability (in accordance with ILP and HWSS recommendations)
- b. Illness
- c. Illness of a dependent or other immediate relative for whom they have caring responsibilities
- d. Maternity, adoption or paternity/maternity support leave
- e. Medical Appointments
- f. Bereavement or other compassionate grounds
- g. Victim of crime
- h. Jury service
- i. Unforeseen emergencies

- j. Attendance at religious days or festivals, or a requirement for religious observance which corresponds to a day of examination (e.g., upgrade or examination)
- k. Participation in a national or international sporting event

4.4. Absence of seven consecutive days or fewer

4.4.1. For an absence of seven consecutive days or fewer, the student **must** complete a [Trent PGR Absence Record](#) and notify their supervisor of their short-term absence. This form should be submitted as soon as reasonably possible at the start of the absence. If students take frequent short absences for the same reason, or if short absences regularly coincide with deadlines or milestones, students may be referred to Welfare to consider appropriate support.

4.5. Absence of more than seven days

4.5.1. For any absence of more than seven consecutive days the student must provide supporting evidence where possible, for example, an order of service for a bereavement or confirmation of jury service. For absences relating to sickness, a medical certificate from a medical practitioner is required to accompany the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#) unless the sickness is related to a disability or long-term health condition which has been disclosed to the University, and where an ILP is in place. Students should alert their supervisor to this period of absence.

4.6. Absence for one month or more in duration

4.6.1. Where students understand that the severity of their circumstances (including reasons of illness) will prevent them from engaging with their studies for a month or more, an interruption of studies **should** be considered and discussed with their supervisory team. Professional Doctorate Students **must** consult their [PGR Support team](#) in the first instance and notify their employer. Students should refer to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students – (Section 4, Interruption of study) for further information and the [PGR Student Handbook](#) for guidance about applying for interruption to study. The requirements for Interruption of Studies apply.

4.6.2. Students requesting interruptions which total more than one year in a consecutive period will be encouraged to consider their circumstances and the likelihood of when they will return to study. For continued long-term interruption, students may be

encouraged to consider withdrawing and reinstating at a later date, when their circumstances allow for study (see TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students – (Section 13, Reinstatement of Registration)).

4.7. Cumulative short-term absences

4.7.1. Where a student has had multiple short-term absences (not recorded as interruption), which are supported by medical evidence, and which in total are equivalent to one month or more (the minimum threshold for interruption), the cumulative absence time may be added up and the period of study extended by the equivalent duration.

4.7.2. Short-term absences will only be considered as cumulative for funding extension purposes if they have been recorded in the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#) and are supported by self certification (within the first 7 consecutive days), supporting medical evidence or are recorded in an ILP. Absences that are not recorded in the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#) or where there is not valid self-certification, supporting medical documentation or an ILP supporting short-term absences will not be considered for cumulative absence extensions to funding.

4.7.3. Students in receipt of funding **should** discuss cumulative short-term absence on study with their funder directly. Students funded through a Research Council or who receive funding administered by the University of Exeter should refer to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18, Annex A: Postgraduate Research Sickness Stipend Payments Policy.

5. **Return to the University following interruption on medical grounds**

5.1. Prior to resumption of their studies, all students who interrupt due to medical circumstances are responsible for completing a medical self-assessment form and for providing a medical practitioner evidence form where required. Students who have an ILP which supports absence as a reasonable adjustment may not need to provide medical evidence upon their return from interruption.

- 5.2. Students will be notified before they return from interruption whether they need to provide a letter from their medical practitioner (considered “enhanced” interruptions). Students considered to be on an ‘enhanced’ medical interruption will be supported in their return to study by the [PGR Welfare Support Advisor](#). Students on a standard medical interruption will be supported in their return to study by their supervisors.
- 5.3. The medical self-assessment form will ask the student to provide details of their current state of health and for details regarding further support that they may require.
- 5.4. For more information about interruptions, please see the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students – (Section 4, Interruption of study). For phased return to study, see section 6 in this policy, below.

6. Phased Return to study due to ill health

- 6.1. Students returning from a medical interruption **may** require a phased return to their studies if they anticipate that they will return to their previous mode of attendance. A phased return to study **should not** last more than 4 weeks and a fit note **should** be provided by a medical practitioner, confirming the individual's fitness to work. Phased return to study requests **must** be approved by the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor or nominee. Phased returns to study **must** be part of a written plan to return to working to the FTE under which the student is returning to study. If this arrangement is used, then the student’s submission due date would only be extended for the period of sick leave taken during the phased return. This **should not** be used where there is a clear need for the student to move to part-time on a longer-term basis.
- 6.2. If a student would benefit from a phased return to study for a period of more than 4 weeks, they should apply for part time registration via the Changes to Modes of Attendance process (see TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students – (Section 7: Changes to Mode of Attendance)).

- 6.3. University of Exeter funded students who require a phased return to study should refer to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18, Annex A: Postgraduate Research Sickness Stipend Payments Policy for further guidance on how their funding will be affected.
- 6.4. Students funded by a Research Council, in receipt of a student loan or funding from another provider **should** discuss their requirement for a phased return to study with their funder.

7. Ability to study significantly affected by a severe, chronic, or fluctuating medical condition or disability

- 7.1. Where a student is persistently absent from their programme of study due to a disability, chronic illness or fluctuating health condition the student **should** book an appointment with the [Disability Advice and Support team](#) to discuss any necessary adjustments for support for study, which **should** be recorded in an ILP (individual learning plan). Medical evidence **should** be provided by the student at the time of the assessment and may cover the duration of a student's study, although if there are changes to the disability or health condition during the period of study a new medical practitioner's letter **must** be provided and the ILP updated. ILPs should be reviewed annually. See section 4 in this policy, above, regarding procedures to follow for different length of absences.
- 7.2. Students **should** contact the [PGR Support Team](#) and [PGR Welfare Support Adviser](#), who will invite the student to a Welfare meeting to discuss their situation and any appropriate on-going support such as [HWSS](#), an [ILP](#) (if not already in place), Disability Support Allowances (DSA) in [Devon](#) or [Cornwall](#) etc.
- 7.3. Absences of one month or longer **should** be managed through interruption and requested through MyPGR (see the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students – (Section 4, Interruption of study)). If formal submission deadlines are affected (e.g., upgrade, thesis submission, assessments for taught modules), students must request either a deferral, extension or mitigation as appropriate, and will be advised which action to take by their [PGR Support Team](#). Deadlines for work for supervision meetings should be discussed with the supervisory team.

- 7.4. Professional Doctorate students, students on placements and those who have industrial placements as part of their programme **should** liaise with their [PGR Support Team](#) and external partners to discuss individual support outside of the University. Any absence related to a disclosed disability or health condition should be managed in discussion with both the employer and the [PGR Support Team](#) and will be managed on a case-by-case basis. Students with disabilities or chronic health conditions **should** disclose their disability/health condition to their employer and discuss reasonable adjustments with them. Students are encouraged to share their ILP with their employer.
- 7.5. Students who need extended periods of absence due to a health condition may consider transferring to a part time mode of attendance. The University of Exeter offers a variety of part time modes of attendance: 0.5, 0.6, 0.7, 0.8 and 0.9 FTE, and may reflect weekly, monthly, or annual working patterns according to the student's circumstances and requirements of the research project. Working patterns are flexible and should be agreed between students and supervisory teams and documented in the [Supervisory Agreement](#) at the start of each academic year. For further details about changing mode of attendance, please refer to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students – (Section 7: Changes to Mode of Attendance).
- 7.6. Where an absence specifically relates to a disability that is formally disclosed to the University, additional medical certification will not be required. Requests for paid sick leave that relate to a disclosed disability will be considered in conjunction with any Reasonable Adjustments already in place through the ILP. Absences that are unrelated to a disclosed disability will require medical certification as described.

8. **Sickness during pregnancy**

- 8.1. If during pregnancy, a student is unable to attend studies due to illness, the normal procedures for sickness absence reporting should be followed.
- 8.2. However, any period of pregnancy related sick leave or interruption beyond the 36th week of pregnancy may trigger the start of maternity leave, in line with the University

of Exeter HR maternity policy¹. The [PGR Support Team](#) may require confirmation from the student's doctor that they are fit to return to study at the end of the interruption period for maternity leave.

- 8.3. The Faculty in which a pregnant student is based is responsible for risk assessments in relation to their research or study environment. Students and supervisors **should** complete the pregnancy and maternity support plan (see TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Annex A: Pregnancy and Maternity Support Plan). Any health and safety concerns should be raised immediately within the appropriate Faculty.
- 8.4. Funded students **should** refer to the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Annex C: Postgraduate Research Maternity and Parental Leave Funding Policy.
- 8.5. Students should refer to the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25: Student Pregnancy, Maternity and Adoption Policy for further information about what to do when they are pregnant or are expecting parents.

9. Absence from clinical practice, industrial placement or other placement linked to their degree

- 9.1. Students on clinical, industrial or research placements **must** inform their placement provider of **any** absence as soon as possible.
- 9.2. Any absence related to a disclosed disability or health condition **should** be managed in discussion with both the employer and the [PGR Support Team](#) and will be managed on a case-by-case basis. Students with disabilities or chronic health conditions are encouraged to disclose their disability/chronic health condition to their employer and discuss reasonable adjustments with them. Students are encouraged to share their ILP with their employer.

¹ Refer to the [Maternity Leave Pages](#) for the HR maternity Policy

10. Professional Doctorate Taught elements only: submission deadline or assessment affected by absence

- 10.1. The University has established a mitigation system for considering the possible effects of an illness or absence for good reason on a submission deadline or assessment relating to a taught module (for thesis or upgrade submission deadlines, please see sections 11 & 12 of this policy, below). Professional Doctorate students **must** inform their placements/employer of any absences or changes to their clinical placements.
- 10.2. If students fail to attend a module examination or other unauthorised absence related to their Professional Doctorate, action will be taken in accordance with the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 29: Taught Student Attendance and Engagement Policy and the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance Procedures.

11. Student absence before a viva voce examination

- 11.1. If a student is unwell or absent due to severe and unexpected circumstances within five working days ahead of the viva or upgrade viva and knows that they are unlikely to be able to attend the viva, they **must** notify the Chair of the examination (the internal examiner or NEIC where appointed) and the [PGR Administration Team](#) that they are unable to attend, and request that the examination is rescheduled. Students **must** complete the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#) and provide supporting evidence (such as a letter from a medical practitioner, police crime number, death certificate etc). This is required in all circumstances where an examination is postponed within 5 working days, even if the absence is related to a disclosed disability, chronic illness or fluctuating health condition where a student has an ILP.
- 11.2. The [PGR Administration Team](#) will notify the Board of Examiners and will liaise with the student and Board of Examiners to make arrangements for rescheduling the examination. The examination **should** be rescheduled for as soon as possible and no later than one month after the student's to return to study.

- 11.3. Students who have disclosed disabilities or fluctuating health conditions who are concerned about arrangements for a viva voce examination should contact [Disability Advice and Support](#) to discuss an ILP and reasonable adjustments for the examination.

12. Student absence during a viva voce examination

- 12.1. If a student is unwell during a viva, they must alert the Chair of the examination (the internal examiner or NEIC where appointed) that they are unwell and unable to continue with the examination. The Chair will postpone the examination, making note of the time that the viva is halted and at what stage the examination is at.
- 12.2. The student **must** provide a letter from a medical practitioner to confirm their inability to proceed with the examination. This is required for all circumstances where an examination has been halted due to student illness, even if the illness is related to a previously disclosed disability, chronic illness or fluctuating health condition where a student has an ILP. The Chair (internal examiner or NEIC where appointed) will liaise with the [PGR Administration Team](#) to reschedule the viva for as soon as possible and should be no later than one month after the student's return to study.
- 12.3. Students who have disclosed disabilities or fluctuating health conditions who are concerned about potential disruption to a viva voce examination **should** contact [Disability Advice and Support](#) to discuss an ILP and reasonable adjustments for the examination.

13. Student absence before a deadline or milestone not including thesis submission (including upgrade submission or viva, USPE deadlines or deadlines agreed for supervisory meetings)

- 13.1. If a student is unwell or absent due to severe and unexpected circumstances within five working days ahead of a milestone or deadline (e.g. upgrade submission, USPE deadline etc) and knows that they are unlikely to meet the deadline, they **must** contact the [PGR Support Team](#) and their supervisors to notify them of their absence and to request that the deadline is rescheduled. Students must complete the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#) and provide supporting evidence (such as a letter from a medical practitioner,

police crime number, death certificate etc). This is required all circumstances where a deadline is postponed within 5 working days, with the exception of when the absence is related to a disclosed disability, chronic illness or fluctuating health condition and where an ILP is in place. The supervisors will notify the upgrade panel or [PGR Support Team](#) as appropriate and will liaise to make alternative arrangements for the deadline. The deadline **should** be rescheduled for as soon as reasonable after the student's return to study.

14. Student absence after submission of the thesis/dissertation

14.1. Students who are absent following thesis/dissertation submission are required to complete the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#) and **must** notify the [PGR Administration Team](#) of their absence. The examiners will be notified, and deadlines will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Students are reminded that absences leading up to the viva or prior to submission of minor or major amendments may lead to delays in the viva taking place or in the award of their degree due to the possible impact on examiners' workload and time planning. See [Section 15 of this policy](#), below about students failing to engage with the University following submission.

14.2. Students may be referred or continue to receive support through HWSS after submission of their thesis.

15. Unauthorised absence

15.1. Students who are absent from their programme (including, but not limited to, viva examinations, USPEA deadlines, HWSS meetings, supervisory meetings etc) without notifying the University of their absence will be considered to be on an unauthorised absence from their programme.

15.2. Students within their period of study (prior to thesis/dissertation submission) who do not respond to communications from the University will be started on the Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance procedures (see TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement Procedures).

- 15.3. If a student has not engaged for 3 months or more following submission, resubmission, or the deadline for submitting amendments; and where there is no evidence of why they have failed to engage; and where the University has made reasonable attempts to contact and engage the student, action will be taken to de-register the student (See TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students (Section 11, Students deemed withdrawn)).
- 15.4. Professional Doctorate Students who fail to attend a module examination or other unauthorised absence related to their Professional Doctorate, will be subject to action in accordance with the Taught Student Attendance and Engagement Policy (see TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 29: Taught Student Attendance and Engagement Policy) and the Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance Procedures (see TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance Procedures)