

## POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH HANDBOOK

### Chapter 18 – Annex A Postgraduate Research Sickness Stipend Payments - Policy for University-funded postgraduate research students

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#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The following policy relates to the payment of studentship stipends during periods of sickness absence including interruption on medical grounds and applies to postgraduate research students<sup>1</sup>. All students are equally considered irrespective of fee status.
- 1.2. Updates to this policy in [sections 3.3](#) and [section 4](#) take effect from 01 August 2022. Applications relating to funding under these circumstances will only apply to periods of absence from 01 August 2022 onwards (retrospective applications will not be eligible).
- 1.3. The remainder of this policy applies from the beginning of the 2021/22 academic year, and applications for funding under this policy for all other sections will only apply to periods of interruption taken from the 2021/22 year onwards (retrospective applications will not be eligible).

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<sup>1</sup> For the full list of eligible programmes please refer to [Ordinance 7. Title of Degrees, sections 7.3 & 7.4.](#)

- 1.4. Where this policy differs from that of a student's funder the terms and conditions of that funder **should** take precedence, and students are advised to check their terms and conditions accordingly and contact the relevant [PGR Support Team](#) for further information as needed. See also [section 4](#), below.
  - 1.5. Note that all sick leave payments under this policy are considered stipend payments and are therefore subject to the same tax conditions as described in your financial offer letter.
  - 1.6. Students **should** also refer to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18: Postgraduate Student Absence Policy, and the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Statement of Procedures: Periods of Registration and Changes to Registration Status for Graduate Research Students (section 4).
  - 1.7. This policy **should** be read in the context of the responsibilities of supervisors, pastoral tutors and students set out in the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 4: Code of Good Practice: Supervision of postgraduate research students.
  - 1.8. Further information to support PGR Health and Wellbeing is available on the [Doctoral College webpages](#).
2. Student eligibility criteria for receiving studentship stipend payments during periods of sickness absence, including interruptions on medical grounds
- 2.1. The following groups of students are **not** eligible for receipt of studentship stipend payments under this policy:
    - 2.1.1. Self-funded students.
    - 2.1.2. Postgraduate research students who are sponsored directly by an external organisation **must** follow the regulations of the funder. If the funder does not provide additional funds, the University is not liable to provide any payments under this policy. As such students are advised to carefully check the terms and conditions attached to their funding prior to accepting that funding, and to refer back to those terms and conditions as necessary.

- 2.1.3. Students in receipt of bursaries<sup>2</sup> or awards covering tuition fees only.
- 2.1.4. Students who have been in receipt of funding (as specified below), but who are or will be outside of their funding period at the point at which their period of sickness absence commences.
- 2.1.5. Students who are employees of the University or who undertake work paid via the claims payroll will not be eligible for receipt of studentship stipend payments under this policy on those grounds. Employees **may** wish to refer to the University's staff [Sickness Absence webpages](#). Students who undertake work paid via the claims payroll **should** refer to the [Terms and conditions for individuals paid by claim](#).
- 2.1.6. Students who are paid a salary as part of their employment, e.g. students who are employed by an industrial partner, public service, or other employer rather than receiving a studentship stipend and **should** refer to their employer's staff policy for paid sickness absence.
- 2.2. Students who fall into the categories above, and who have financial concerns about taking a period of interruption are advised to contact the Students' Guild or the Students' Union for advice and support.
- 2.3. Students in receipt of studentship stipend funding from the following sources are eligible for receipt of studentship stipend payments under this policy:
- 2.3.1. Students who receive Research Council funding.
- 2.3.2. Students who receive University of Exeter funding.
- 2.3.3. Students who are funded via funds allocated and administered by the University of Exeter.

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<sup>2</sup> A bursary is a single payment, normally made at the beginning of the degree, to help towards payment of tuition fees and/or living expenses.

2.3.4. Students who are funded via a research grant paid to the University of Exeter (except where the funder has a specific sickness absence policy in relation to studentships, which will take precedence).

2.4. Students are eligible:

2.4.1. whether registered on a full-time or part-time basis.

2.4.2. from the point of initial registration on their programme.

2.4.3. where the first day of the period of interruption falls within the funded period.

2.4.4. to receive studentship stipend payments at their full stipend rate<sup>3</sup> whilst interrupted or absent on medical grounds for up to 13 weeks (inclusive of cumulative absences and phased return) within any 12-month period<sup>4</sup>, and **may** do so on more than one occasion. The total funding available to the student will be extended accordingly.

### 3. Types of sickness absence

3.1. Short-term sickness absence of up to one month in duration will not normally result in additional payments (see [section 4](#)). Short-term sickness absence **should** be reported in accordance with the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18: Postgraduate Student Absence Policy and **should** be recorded in the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#). Studentship stipend payments will continue to be paid as normal during short-term periods of sickness absence.

3.2. For sickness absence of one month or more in duration students **should** apply for an interruption of studies (see [section 6](#), below). Exceptionally, when it becomes clear within one month of reported commencement, that a period of sickness absence that initially

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<sup>3</sup> The full studentship stipend rate is stipulated on the student's offer or award letter, however, where a student has changed their registration status subsequent to this (e.g. changed from full-time to part-time registration) payments under this policy will reflect the amount of studentship stipend they were receiving in accordance with their registration status at the point at which an application for a period of interruption to cover a period of sickness absence is made, with the exception of students who have changed registration status (e.g. from part-time to full-time) within the 52 week period prior to the commencement of leave on these grounds for whom payment will be calculated on a pro-rata basis. Students should consult the relevant Faculty's [PGR support team](#) to check the arrangements for their individual award.

<sup>4</sup>The 12-month period is measured from the first day of interruption on medical grounds.

appeared to be short-term will extend for one month or longer, an interruption of studies **should** be applied for with the interruption being recorded and payments being made in accordance with the date of commencement of the period of sickness absence providing that the sickness absence in question was reported at the time in accordance with the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18: Postgraduate Student Absence Policy.

- 3.3. Where a sickness absence specifically relates to a disability or long-term health condition that is formally disclosed to the University, whereby Wellbeing Services are in receipt of a medical practitioner's letter and an [Individual Learning Plan](#) (ILP) has been created, additional medical certification is not required for each period of interruption. The ILP **should** be reviewed annually, unless there are changes to the disability or medical condition, in which case a new medical practitioner's letter **should** be provided to [Disability Advice and Support](#) and the ILP **should** be updated. Requests for paid sick leave that relate to a disclosed disability will be considered in conjunction with any reasonable adjustments already in place through a student's ILP. Absences that are unrelated to a disclosed disability will require medical certification as described. Absences related to an undisclosed disability will require medical certification as described.

#### 4. Stipend payments for cumulative short-term absence

- 4.1. Where a student has had multiple short-term absences (not recorded as interruption), which are supported by medical evidence, are recorded in the [Trent PGR Absence Record](#), and which in total are equivalent to one month or more (the minimum threshold for interruption), the cumulative absence time **should** be added up and the funding and period of study be extended by the equivalent duration.
- 4.2. Cumulative short-term absences of over one month will be recorded as an extension to the programme of study on the student record, which will be administered in liaison with the [PGR Support Team](#).
- 4.3. 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 ahead of a period of sickness

covered by a sick note), 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.

## 5. Identification of eligibility

5.1. For offer letters sent out from the 2022/23 academic year the terms and conditions specified in a student's offer or award letter **should** include reference to a student's eligibility to apply for University administered sickness absence studentship stipend payments. Where offer and award letters do not make specific reference to eligibility (which **may** be the case for students who entered prior to the 2022/23 academic year) the criteria specified in this policy **should** determine whether a student is eligible for receipt of studentship stipend payments under this policy.

5.2. Where there is a conflict between the eligibility criteria and terms and conditions specified in this procedure, and the terms and conditions set out in a student's offer or award letter, the terms and conditions set out in the offer or award letter take precedence.

5.3. In any instance where a student's eligibility is not clear the relevant Faculty's [PGR Support Team](#) **should** be consulted in the first instance.

## 6. Process for application for continued studentship stipend payments during a period of interruption or other absence on medical grounds

6.1. To be eligible:

6.1.1. Students **should** apply for, and have approved, an interruption in accordance with the requirements set out in the the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Statement of Procedures: Periods of Registration and Changes to Registration Status for Graduate Research Students (section 4);

6.1.2. The application **should not** be made retrospectively (with the exception of clause [3.2, above](#));

- 6.1.3. The application **must** be made on medical grounds, with medical certificates or an ILP to cover the period of time in question.
- 6.2. Subject to the time periods stated in the the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Statement of Procedures: Periods of Registration and Changes to Registration Status for Graduate Research Students (section 4), students **may** apply for a longer period of interruption than 13 weeks. However, beyond 13 weeks payments will be put in abeyance until the student has re-registered on their programme of study.
- 6.3. If a student meets the eligibility criteria (see [section 2](#), above) and has a medical condition that is significantly impacting their ability to study but is unclear how this process might apply to them, they **should** seek advice as early as possible from the relevant [PGR Support Team](#).

## 7. Returning from a period of funded leave

- 7.1. Some students **may** benefit from a phased return to their studies following a period of interruption on medical grounds. Stipend payments during a phased return are part of the 13-week sick pay allowance and will be paid at the pro-rata rate during the phased return. The end date of their funding period will not be extended. For example, a student receives 11 weeks of sick pay at their usual FTE rate and can apply for 4 weeks phased return. The remaining 2 weeks of sick pay will be pro-rata over the 4 weeks of phased return.
- 7.2. Students who consider they may benefit from this **should** get in touch with their [PGR Support Team](#) as early as possible prior to their expected date of return, and should note that:
- 7.2.1. A phased return will require approval from the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor or nominee;
- 7.2.2. A phased return will only be viable where clear medical evidence is available to confirm a student's fitness to return to study;

7.2.3. A phased return **must** only be used where it is part of a written plan to return to working full-time at the student's previous FTE within no more than four weeks from re-registration, developed in consultation with Wellbeing Services;

7.2.4. A phased return is distinct from a formal application to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Statement of Procedures: Periods of Registration and Changes to Registration Status for Graduate Research Students (section 7), but if that is considered to be a more appropriate solution students will be advised accordingly. Where reduction in hours of study for longer than a month might be applicable, a reduction in FTE **should** be considered.

## 8. Confidentiality

8.1. Students **should** note that every effort will be made to respect the confidential nature of any disclosure of information on these grounds. However, in order to manage financial arrangements with regard to payments during a period of leave the University **may** need to disclose to external funders that the student has notified the University of their intention of applying for a period of interruption, which would result in continued payments under this policy, where the external funder has responsibility for provision of funding.