

Policy on research students' suspensions and extensions

1. The University Board for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience has approved the following Policy, relating to suspensions and extensions for research students.

Policy on research students' suspensions

2. Illness, changes in family circumstances or other exceptional circumstances¹ sometimes make it difficult for a student to continue his or her research.² Given the requirements of sponsors and the University that students should complete their theses within a given time period, it is sometimes appropriate for the student and the University that a suspension of registration is agreed. Suspensions are approved by the Head of the Doctoral Research Office, on behalf of the University Committee on Researcher Development and Postgraduate Research Studies, subject to the following regulations and procedure:

Regulations

- a. The period of suspension should not exceed 12 months in any one instance, and should not normally exceed 12 months for the duration of the degree. However, in very exceptional circumstances, further periods of suspension may be granted, but the total period of suspension throughout the duration of the degree shall not normally exceed 24 months. After this time, the student will be required to withdraw from the programme.
- b. Periods of suspension are excluded from the minimum and maximum periods of registration.
- c. Students are not liable for fees, and will have limited access to university facilities during the period of suspension, in line with the University's guidance on the entitlements of suspended students to access services.³
- d. Suspensions will not normally be agreed retrospectively.
- e. Due regard should be given to Research Council (or other external sponsor)

¹ The University considers the following as examples that could justify a suspension:

- Health or Medical
- Maternity leave
- Jury service or compulsory military service
- Approved work opportunities or career development
- Compassionate (including serious domestic difficulties)
- Technical difficulties (limited to technical difficulties beyond the student's control)

² Rules regarding suspensions enforced by the University for disciplinary reasons or non-payment of fees are covered by other University regulations, namely 'Regulations for Conduct' and 'Student Fee Payment Policy'.

³ Where a student has submitted work prior to their period of suspension, there is an expectation, under normal circumstances, that supervisors would review and return to the student in the usual timescales.

regulations,⁴ and visa conditions for international students.⁵

Procedure

- f. The student and/or an appropriate member of staff should initially contact their School Director of Postgraduate Studies to discuss the matter informally. A formal submission should then be made through the School/Department to the Doctoral Research Office. The approval of the Head of the Doctoral Research Office is required to formalise the suspension; a request for suspension should include the following:
- i. The formal request, which should contain signed statements from the student and the primary supervisor, and be countersigned by the School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies;
 - ii. Documentary evidence supporting the case for a suspension. The evidence must be official, objective and confirm the circumstances cited by the student and their impact upon the student.

The University may in its absolute discretion, request specific documentary evidence from the student which may include, but not be limited to, evidence from a medical practitioner.

- g. Return to study
- i. The student should return to study on the date specified in the confirmation of suspension letter. Students returning from suspension are required to confirm that they have resumed their studies by informing the Doctoral Research Office. Should the student fail to return to study, the University will assume that the student has withdrawn from the programme and the Doctoral Research Office will amend the student's record accordingly.
 - ii. Should the student wish to return to study before the specified return date, they should inform their supervisor and the Doctoral Research Office in writing.
 - iii. In any case, the Head of the Doctoral Research Office should be satisfied that the student is able to resume study, through appropriate evidence if necessary, depending on the circumstances of the suspension.

General

- h. A new application must be made for each further period of suspension and documentary evidence to support any new applications may be further requested by the University.
- i. Where a student has failed to provide the documentary evidence requested by the University within a reasonable timeframe, the University may refuse the suspension request.
- j. Where the University has refused a suspension request or where a student's period of suspension has expired, the student must either return to their studies or withdraw from their programme.
- k. Where the student has been requested to withdraw from their programme

⁴ Students in receipt of external funding should ensure that their sponsors are kept informed of their suspension arrangements.

⁵ In certain circumstances, the University is required to inform the Home Office of changes in status of those international students on a Tier 4/Student visa.

further to (j) above but has failed to do so, the University may withdraw the student from the programme. Prior to such withdrawal, the student will be notified that the decision on their withdrawal will be made by the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies and Researcher Development with a recommendation by the Head of Doctoral Research Office for withdrawal and the student will be given the opportunity to submit any objections to such withdrawal in writing. The Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies and Researcher Development will make a decision on the student's withdrawal, taking into account any case put forward by the student.

3. Right of Appeal

- a. Where a student has been withdrawn further to 2.g.(i). or 2.k. above, they may submit an appeal against their withdrawal within 5 working days of being notified of their withdrawal to the University's Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation by email to studentappeals@reading.ac.uk setting out their grounds for appeal. The PVC (Research & Innovation) will not re-hear the case that has already been considered but will consider whether there has been any failure of procedure and whether the decision to withdraw the student was fair and reasonable in all of the circumstances.
- b. The appeal to the PVC (Research & Innovation) concludes the University's procedures and will normally result in the issue of a Completion of Procedures Letter. If the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the procedures, the student may submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) providing that the complaint is eligible under the OIA rules. Students who wish to do so must submit a complaint to the OIA within twelve months of the date of the University's Completion of Procedures letter.

Guidance on research students' extensions

4. Extensions beyond the University's stated maximum period of candidature (4 years for full-time, 6 years for part-time) are only permitted in exceptional circumstances. Extensions are approved by the Head of the Doctoral Research Office, on behalf of the University Committee on Researcher Development and Postgraduate Research Studies, subject to the regulations and procedure set out below.

There are circumstances in which it is not in the best interests of a student or the University for that student to be permitted an extension; this can be for a variety of reasons, including:

- the frequency of contact from the student (and/or their attendance at the University) has been unacceptably poor, despite the School making reasonable attempts to maintain such contact with the student;
- there is evidence of poor progress during the writing-up period;
- previous extensions have been granted but have not resulted in submission of a thesis;
- there is evidence to suggest that an extension would not result in a thesis submission; and
- there are no extenuating circumstances of which the University has been made aware.

Regulations

- a. The period of extension shall not normally exceed 12 months. After this time, the student will be required to withdraw from the programme.
- b. Requests for extensions will only be considered if they are submitted no earlier than three months prior to the maximum registration date and no later than 28 days prior to the maximum registration period. It is expected that circumstances impacting on performance earlier in the programme will have been addressed through a suspension of study at that time.
- c. Due regard should be given to Research Council (or other external sponsor) regulations,⁶ and visa conditions for international students.⁷
- d. Students granted an extension will pay a fee during this period, the amount dependent on the level of supervision and use of University facilities.⁸

Procedure

- e. The student and/or an appropriate member of staff should initially contact their School Director of Postgraduate Studies to discuss the matter informally. A formal submission should then be made through the School/Department to the Doctoral Research Office. In normal circumstances, this should be at least two months prior to the end of the maximum registration period. The approval of the Head of the Doctoral Research Office is required to formalise the extension; a request for extension should include the following:
 - i. The formal request, which should contain signed statements from the student and the primary supervisor, and be countersigned by the School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies;
 - ii. Relevant documentary evidence supporting the case for an extension. If included, the evidence must be official, objective and confirm the circumstances cited by the student and their impact upon the student;
 - iii. A copy of the student's and supervisor's annual progress reports may be included;
 - iv. An action plan for completion.

Outcome

- f. Where a student is granted an extension, the maximum registration date will be amended in line with the length of the agreed extension. Where a student is not granted an extension, he or she will be required to submit his or her thesis by the existing maximum registration date. Failure to do this will invoke the Procedure for Appeals against Termination of Registration following Non-submission of a Thesis by the Maximum Registration Date.

⁶ Students in receipt of external funding should ensure that their sponsors are kept informed of their extension arrangements.

⁷ International Students on a Tier 4/Student visa will be required to apply to the Home Office for an extension to their visa, should any extension of programme go beyond the length of their current leave to remain.

⁸ See 'Fee Levels for Research Students', *Calendar*, Section H.

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1	Doctoral Research Office	Annually	UBTL	2015	2015
2	Doctoral Research Office	Annually	UBTLSE	7.6.22	23/06/2022