

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH HANDBOOK

Chapter 18 – Annex A. Postgraduate Research Absence Stipend Payments Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The following policy relates to the payment of studentship stipends during periods of absence including interruption or short absences on medical, maternity or family, disability or other grounds specified within this policy and applies to postgraduate research students¹. All students are equally considered irrespective of fee status.
- 1.2. Where this policy differs from that of an eligible student's funder the terms and conditions of that funder **should** take precedence. Students are advised to check their terms and conditions accordingly and contact the relevant [PGR Support Team](#) for further information as needed.
- 1.3. 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 For the full list of eligible programmes please refer [to Ordinance 7. Title of Degrees, sections 7.3 & 7.4.](#)

- 1.4. 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 Postgraduate Research Students](#).
- 1.5. 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](#).
- 1.6. Further information to support PGR Health and Wellbeing is available on the [Doctoral College webpages](#).

2. Eligibility and scope

- 2.1. Students in receipt of studentship stipend funding from the following sources are eligible for receipt of studentship stipend payments under this policy:
 - 2.1.1. Students who receive Research Council funding.
 - 2.1.2. Students who receive University of Exeter funding.
 - 2.1.3. Students who are funded via funds allocated and administered by the University of Exeter.
 - 2.1.4. Students who are funded via a research grant paid to the University of Exeter (except where the funder has a specific absence policy in relation to studentships, which will take precedence).
- 2.2. Students are eligible:
 - 2.2.1. whether registered on a full-time or part-time basis.
 - 2.2.2. from the point of initial registration on their programme.
 - 2.2.3. where the first day of the period of interruption/absence falls within the funded period.
- 2.3. Stipend payment definition:
 - 2.3.1. Throughout this policy, reference is made to stipend payments being made at the full stipend rate. 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.

2.4. The following groups of students are **not** eligible for receipt of studentship stipend payments under this policy:

2.4.1. Self-funded students.

2.4.2. Postgraduate research students who are sponsored directly by an external organisation (where the funding is not administered by the University of Exeter) **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.

2.4.3. Students in receipt of bursaries² or awards covering tuition fees only.

2.4.4. 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 absence commences.

2.4.5. 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. Guidance for employees is available at the University's staff [Sickness Absence webpages](#). Students who undertake work

² 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.

paid via the claims payroll **should** refer to the [Terms and conditions for individuals paid by claim](#).

- 2.4.6. 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 absence.
- 2.5. 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.
- 2.6. Funding parameters for absences related to pregnancy, maternity or other family leave is detailed in the [TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Annex C: Student Pregnancy and Family Leave PGR Funding Policy](#).
- 2.7. 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.

3. Categories of absence eligible for funding

3.1. Medical Leave:

- 3.1.1. Medical leave may include (but is not limited to): sick leave (including both physical and mental illness), pregnancy related illness, antenatal appointments, fertility treatment, disability-related illness and appointments, leave related to chronic illness, gender reassignment.
- 3.1.2. To receive studentship stipend payments at their full stipend rate whilst interrupted or absent on medical grounds for up to 28 weeks in a rolling 12-month period. The total cumulative amount of medical leave must not exceed 52 weeks across the whole studentship. This type of funding **may** be used on more than one occasion.
- 3.1.3. To receive stipend payments during a period of medical absence, students **must** provide clear medical evidence which covers the dates of the absence; and, where this is not in English, an authorized translation is required. For absences of

less than 7 days, students must self-certify their absence through the [iTrent PGR Absence Record](#). Students with an ILP should refer to 3.1.4 (below).

- 3.1.4. Where a sickness absence specifically relates to a disability or long-term health condition that is formally disclosed to the University, whereby an [Individual Learning Plan](#) (ILP) has been created, additional medical certification is not required for each period of medical absence. The ILP **should** be reviewed annually, unless there are changes to the disability or medical condition, in which case the ILP **should** be updated as a resulting action. Absences that are unrelated to a disclosed disability will require medical certification. Absences related to an undisclosed disability will require medical certification.

- 3.1.5. Medical absences during an examination should always require medical evidence, even when students have an ILP. Students should refer to the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18, PGR Student Absence Policy](#).

3.2. **Pregnancy, Maternity, Adoption and Other Family Leave:**

- 3.2.1. Students requiring leave related to pregnancy, maternity, adoption or other family leave should refer to both the [TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Student Pregnancy and Family Leave Policy](#), and the [TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Annex C: Student Pregnancy and Family Leave PGR Funding Policy](#).
- 3.2.2. Students **must** provide medical evidence of the pregnancy/adoption, for example a Mat-B1 form (or international equivalent) or adoption papers.

3.3. **Compassionate Leave:**

- 3.3.1. This may include, but is not limited to absence on compassionate grounds in the event of the death of a parent, close relative or a child or in the event that a pregnancy is lost before 24 weeks whether the student (i) experiences this loss directly or (ii) is the partner of someone who experiences the loss; or (iii) loses a baby via surrogacy.
- 3.3.2. To receive studentship stipend payments at their full stipend rate. This will normally be capped at 5 days, but may be extended for up to 10 days in specific circumstances.
- 3.3.3. Students **should** provide evidence to support leave of this kind, for example, a doctor's certificate, death certificate or order of service, where available.

3.4. Emergency Leave:

- 3.4.1. This **may** include but is not limited to for emergency situations, for example serious illness or injury involving a student's dependant, a victim of crime or to deal with a domestic emergency (e.g., flood or fire in the home).
- 3.4.2. To receive studentship stipend payments at their full stipend rate whilst absent for up to 5 days.
- 3.4.3. Students **may** be asked to provide evidence to support this kind of leave, depending on the circumstances and where available.

3.5. Carer's Leave:

- 3.5.1. Carer's leave is for a student who needs to give or arrange care for a dependant with a long-term care need. This is defined as a dependant with a disability under the Equality Act 2010, care need related to old age, or an illness or injury likely to need care for more than 3 months.
- 3.5.2. To receive studentship stipend payments at their full stipend rate whilst absent up to 5 days per year.

3.6. Leave relating to Public Duties:

- 3.6.1. Studentship stipend payments at their full stipend rate **may** be provided whilst a student is interrupted or absent for jury duty. The extension will be specific to the individual circumstances, and evidence **must** be provided by the student.

3.7. Other leave:

- 3.7.1. This **may** include additional disability leave due to delays in reasonable adjustments being implemented or leave where health and safety concerns mean that the student is unable to continue with their research where attempts have been made to mitigate the impact.
- 3.7.2. Students facing delays for other reasons not described in this policy or described in the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18, PGR Student Absence Policy](#), the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Statement of Procedures: Periods of Registration and Changes to Registration Status for Postgraduate Research Students](#) or the [TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Student Pregnancy and Family Leave Policy](#),

may request leave under “other leave” and the individual circumstances will be assessed according to the individual circumstances.

3.7.3. Leave for these reasons will be considered on a case-by-case basis, when supported by evidence, and where it is evident that attempts have been made to mitigate the impacts of the delays but mitigation has not been successful.

3.7.4. This leave must be discussed with the [PGR Support Team](#) in the first instance.

4. Types of leave not eligible for stipend payments

4.1. **Parental leave (leave to care for a child for whom they are parent/carer).** Students may take leave to provide care to a child for to whom they are a parent/carer of up to 1 month each year. Funding extensions are not available for periods of parental leave under this definition.

4.2. Stipend Payments will be interrupted where students take a period of interruption (one month) will have stipend payments interrupted during an interruption for periods of parental leave.

4.3. Students who take short term absences for parental leave (i.e., absences of less than 1 month where the student is not interrupting) will continue to receive stipend payments, but their funding will not be extended in accordance with these periods of absence. Students may request an unfunded programme extension through the cumulative absence policy

5. Absence duration and stipend payments

5.1. Short-term absence of up to one month in duration will not normally result in additional payments but will be considered through cumulative absences where applicable (see [section 6](#)). Short-term absence **should** be reported in accordance with the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18: Postgraduate Student Absence Policy](#) and **should** be recorded in the [iTrent PGR Absence Record](#). Studentship stipend payments will continue to be paid as normal during short-term periods of absence.

5.2. For absence of one month or more in duration students **should** apply for an interruption of studies (see [section 7](#), below). Exceptionally, when it becomes clear within one month of reported commencement, that a period of sickness absence that initially 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 absence providing that the absence in question was reported at the time in accordance with the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18: Postgraduate Student Absence Policy](#).

6. Stipend payments for cumulative short-term absence

- 6.1. Where a student has had multiple short-term absences (not recorded as interruption), which are supported by relevant evidence, are recorded in the [iTrent 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.
- 6.2. 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](#). Students may request cumulative absence extensions in June each year or at the end of the period of study and where the total absence equals one month or more. Short-term absences that overlap with periods of interruption are not counted to the total.
- 6.3. Short-term absences will only be considered as cumulative for funding extension purposes if they have been recorded in the [iTrent PGR Absence Record](#) and are supported by documented evidence (see section 3 of this policy for what evidence is required for each absence reason) ,. Absences that are not recorded in the [iTrent PGR Absence Record](#) or where there is not valid evidence as detailed in Section 3, will not be considered for cumulative absence extensions to funding.
- 6.4. Students may take longer than the total allowance for the specified reason through short term absences, but their funding will only be extended to reflect the stipulated maximum in Section 3.
 - 6.4.1. For example, a student may take 30 days of carer's leave to support an elderly parent through multiple short-term absences, considered under cumulative absence. They will receive a programme extension of 30 days, but their funding will only extend by 5 days which is the maximum allowance for carer's leave.

7. Stipend payments for interruptions

7.1. To be eligible:

7.1.1. 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 Postgraduate Research Students](#);

7.1.2. The application **should not** be made retrospectively;

7.1.3. The application **must** be made on grounds described in Section 3 above, with relevant supporting evidence to cover the period of time in question.

7.2. 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 Postgraduate Research Students](#), students **may** apply for a longer period of interruption than the total time allowed for stipend payments under this policy. However, beyond the specified eligible absence period, payments will be put in abeyance until the student has re-registered on their programme of study. **For example**, a student may interrupt on medical grounds for 32 weeks, but they will only receive stipend payments for the maximum 28 weeks. Stipend payments will be suspended for the last 4 weeks of the interruption.

7.3. If a student meets the eligibility criteria (see [section 2](#), above) and needs to take leave 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](#).

8. Phased return from a period of medical leave

8.1. 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 28-week sick pay allowance within that year 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 26 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.

- 8.2. 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:

- 8.2.1. A phased return will require approval from the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor or nominee;
- 8.2.2. A phased return will only be viable where clear medical evidence is available to confirm a student's fitness to return to study;
- 8.2.3. 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;
- 8.2.4. 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 Postgraduate Research Students](#), 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.

9. Phased return from a period of maternity or adoption leave

- 9.1. Students returning from a period of maternity or adoption leave may request a phased return to study, where the stipend payments for the phased return will come from their maternity/adoption leave allowance.
- 9.2. Due to the way that maternity & adoption pay is calculated, the stipend payments during a phased return from maternity/adoption leave will depend on when during the maternity/adoption year the student returns. The examples below illustrate the potential differences in how a student may be paid during a phased return from maternity/adoption leave:
 - 9.2.1. **Example 1:** Full time Student takes 23 weeks maternity leave and wants a 3-week phased return at 0.5FTE. Half of the stipend payment will come from maternity

leave (paid at 100% for the first 26 weeks of maternity leave) & the other half from the full-rate studentship payments.

9.2.2. **Example 2:** Full time student takes 34 weeks adoption leave and wants a 4-week phased return at 0.5FTE. Half of the stipend payment will come from adoption leave (paid at the statutory payment rate for months 6-9 of maternity/adoption leave) and the other half from the full-rate studentship payments.

9.2.3. **Example 3:** Full time student takes 50 weeks maternity leave and wants a 4-week phased return at 0.5FTE. The stipend payment will be paid at half of the full-rate studentship rate. Maternity & Adoption leave receive no payments for months 9-12, and therefore there will be no stipend payment made from the maternity leave allowance for this part of the phased return.

9.3. Students needing a phased return to study for more than 4 weeks should consider a temporary transfer to 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 postgraduate research students](#)).

10. Phased return from an interruption on non-medical grounds

10.1. Students requesting a phased return from interruptions on non-medical grounds, including compassionate leave or due to other personal circumstances, for up to 4 weeks will need to inform their PGR Support Team of their plans. They will be required to record their non-study days during the phased return in the [iTrent PGR Absence Record](#). The time off will be considered as cumulative short-term absences, Where the funding maximum for the leave reason has not been reached, the student may receive funding during the phased return, but this will be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

10.2. Students needing a phased return to study for more than 4 weeks should consider a temporary transfer to 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 postgraduate research students](#)).

11. Confidentiality

- 11.1. 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.