

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER DOCTORAL COLLEGE

Applications for Deferral of Internal Programme Deadlines – Temporary Policy in Response to Impact of Coronavirus Outbreak

ANNEX 1: Applications for Deferral

[Graduate Students Mitigation for Deferral Form](#). Please ensure you read this process before completing the form.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 A deferral is an agreed delay to an internal programme deadline, such as the deadline for transfer from MPhil to Doctoral Study (Entrants registering before the 2019-20 academic year), or other progression points, such as end of year reports for students in the College of Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences, or those which are specific to the student in question. Deferrals in this context are also applicable to deadlines for completion of amendments as part of the examination process.
- 1.1.2 Students on professional doctorate programmes, should consult their Programme Director/Administrator for any local requirements with regard to [mitigation](#) before proceeding.
- 1.1.3 Students who wish to apply for a deferral to the deadline for transfer from MPhil to Doctoral Study (Entrants registering from the 2019-20 academic year) should consult the revised deferral procedure '[Applications for Deferral of Upgrade Deadlines – Temporary Policy in Response to Impact of Coronavirus Outbreak](#)', and on which this temporary policy is based¹. [Statement of Procedures: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students](#), and on which this temporary policy is based².
- 1.1.4 This temporary policy is being implemented in recognition that there have been varied impacts arising from coronavirus (COVID-19), which may need to be taken into account in supporting student progression. It is intended to support students by providing additional clarity and consistency of process when making an application to delay a deadline. It does not replace an existing policy, but rather, recognises that the scale of disruption arising from the present circumstances necessitates a formalisation of approach. It builds on existing principles, whilst exercising a greater degree of flexibility (for

² Annex 1 – Applications for Deferral of the '[Statement of Procedures: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students](#)' was initially implemented with the specific aim of piloting the approach to deferrals stated, prior to rolling out the approach more broadly to other deadlines within PGR programmes. However, the current circumstances have necessitated moving forward with the broader application of deferral procedures in order to provide support and clarity to students and staff.

example in relaxing requirements with regards to evidence and in preferentially exercising other options) than would normally be applied in considering such requests.

- 1.1.5 An application for a deferral to a deadline will normally only be applicable where appropriate mitigating evidence is available to demonstrate the existence of serious and unexpected circumstances that had a disruptive impact on a student's studies and research and where the circumstances listed under 1.3, exclusions of [Annex 1](#) of the '[Statement of Procedures: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students](#)', are not applicable. However, it is recognized that there have been varied impacts arising from coronavirus (COVID-19), which may need to be taken into account, and as such the normal requirements with regard to the provision of evidence for deferrals have been temporarily suspended.
- 1.1.6 The University wishes to support the continued engagement of students where possible and desired, and as such students are encouraged to [discuss with their supervisors](#) in the first instance how best they might progress with their research and any impediments to so doing. If you have agreed a specific schedule of progress for your studies with your supervisory team, and are uncertain whether you need to apply for a deferral in order to make changes to that schedule, you should discuss your progress in the first instance with your supervisory team.
- 1.1.7 Students may choose to apply to defer a program deadline because of coronavirus (COVID-19), however the implications of deferral will vary depending upon each student's individual circumstances. As such, students should be advised to carefully consider their circumstances. This may include reviewing any terms and conditions attached to any studentship funding.

1.2 Responsibilities of Colleges

- 1.2.1 To provide consistent decision making with regard to requests for deferral, keeping records of the grounds and of the length of deferral granted to demonstrate this.
- 1.2.2 To provide procedures and clear guidance on how students can apply for deferral. This information should also include details of the implications and likely outcomes of any deferral application, including any local policies with regard to e.g. the scheduling of meetings to review student progress. The Doctoral College website will direct students to appropriate information about deferral applications during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

1.3 Managing your Studies

- 1.3.1 Where progress for any postgraduate research student is impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and associated restrictions this will be taken into account when considering requests for deferral.
- 1.3.2 Some students' circumstances might mean that an interruption might be a more appropriate option than a deferral. In cases of personal, financial or medical circumstances or other difficult circumstances it is expected that the student and College will follow the advice on [Interruption of Studies](#), along with the [additional information](#) provided in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which recognizes that in these exceptional

circumstances students may not have been able to make progress, but an interruption might not have been the most appropriate option. As an interruption suspends a student's registration this will lead to an automatic postponement of the relevant deadline for the duration of the period of interruption;

- 1.3.3 Periods of study for research degrees are calculated with an allowance for periods of [annual leave](#) during the registration period. Annual leave does not automatically shift deadlines but students may wish to discuss with their supervisory team how best to use their annual leave during this period to support their studies and manage their work/life balance;
- 1.3.4 Reasonable adjustments for disabled students are implemented through an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) in accordance with the [Inclusive Practice within Teaching and Learning Policy](#). Students who need other adjustments on the grounds of a disability should note that these should normally be supported by an ILP. A disability that has not been declared in a timely manner cannot be taken into account retrospectively, unless the student can provide a reasonable explanation and properly documented evidence for not having declared it (see also the University's procedures for [Student Academic Appeals](#)).
- 1.3.5 Students who feel that their circumstances might mean that a change to their mode of attendance between full-time and part-time hours should refer to the [Statement of Procedures: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students, section 7 Changes to Mode of Attendance: Full-time and Part-time Status](#).
- 1.3.6 This temporary policy is only applicable to deferral applications during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic period. Students should be aware that under normal circumstances, and with regard to consideration of issues that arose prior to the point at which coronavirus (COVID-19) might be considered to have impacted progress, a number of exclusions limit the grounds upon which a case could be made to defer a deadline. For more information refer to the [Statement of Procedures: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students, Annex 1- Applications for deferral](#), section 3, which, whilst framed in the context of applications to defer the deadline for transfer from MPhil to Doctoral Study encapsulates a number of principles that are relevant more generally.
- 1.3.7 It is advisable to keep a record of discussions between supervisory teams and students with regard to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on a student's research through the completion of a MyPGR contact event at the time the issue arose, however, it is recognized that this may not have been possible under current circumstances in all cases.
- 1.3.8 Students are reminded that funder requirements may be more stringent with regard to requirements for evidence, and that this relaxation of requirements with regard to evidence in the case of deferrals arising from the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) may not apply in other instances, such as when

making applications for extensions to the period of study. See also [Extensions to Study³](#).

1.4 Serious and unexpected circumstances

1.4.1 An application for deferral may be considered if the following circumstances apply:

For the duration of the pandemic students are no longer required to provide evidence to support their request for a deferral.	
Personal circumstances (where interruption is not appropriate)	
a)	single occasions of illness
b)	adverse personal circumstances
c)	Relapses/ exacerbations of long term fluctuating conditions/ disabilities
d)	Coronavirus (COVID 19) impact (where not covered by categories (a)-(c) above), such as impact of self-isolating, impact of caring responsibilities
Unforeseen Impediments	
Unforeseen impediments constitute circumstances that effect a student's ability to conduct or pursue their research in the last 4 months (and ongoing):	
d)	A radical shift in the political and/or social landscape of the project so that the initial aims of the project are brought into some doubt or are deemed no longer feasible
e)	Unexpected delays to getting data that is key to meeting the relevant deadline.
f)	A breakdown in technical equipment that is key to meeting the relevant deadline
g)	Any organisational issues beyond the student's control, e.g. a strike, closure of the University or campus, other Coronavirus (COVID 19) impact on ability to carry out research.

1.4.2 Where a student has experienced mitigating circumstances that do not fit neatly into one of the categories listed in 1.4.1 a) - g) they may, nevertheless make an application for a period of deferral.

1.5 Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures

1.5.1 When considering mitigation for personal circumstances (as listed in 1.4) it is important to consider whether or not referral to the [Health, Wellbeing and](#)

³ Separate guidance on consideration of extensions to programme end dates as a result of coronavirus (covid-19) is being developed and will be managed separately to deferrals and other equivalent progression points.

[Support for Study procedure](#) is applicable. It may also be appropriate to direct the student to other sources of support if circumstances are ongoing.

1.6 Time-frames for application

- 1.6.1 An application for deferral should normally be made as soon as possible and at the latest within one working day of the stated deadline. In exceptional cases, i.e. when serious and unexpected circumstances occur closer to the deadline, an application can be made later, and should be discussed with the PGR Support Team in the first instance.

1.7 Process

- 1.7.1 An application for deferral must be **supported by**:
- a) A brief statement of the reasons for your deferral;
 - b) confirmation that the student has discussed their deferral with a member of their supervisory team , and, where appropriate, pastoral tutor;
 - c) a work-plan with a proposed date by which the work will be submitted;
 - d) Your statement must give a clear indication of the length of deferral requested: this will inform the College's decision about what period of deferral might be considered reasonable, which shall not exceed a period of three months in the first instance.
- 1.7.2 Where an application for deferral is made on the basis of especially sensitive information this should be treated confidentially. If a student prefers the reasons for the application may be considered by their pastoral tutor, with whom the student may have discussed their circumstances, who will report to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of College, without sharing the detail of the evidence provided to them.
- 1.7.3 Applications for deferral will be granted by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of College, in collaboration with the relevant discipline DPGR and the PGR Support team.
- 1.7.4 Where a period of deferral to a deadline is approved:
- a) this will be added to the student's record, however, it will not lead to an extension to the thesis submission deadline. See also [Extensions to Study](#)⁴.
 - b) No further deferral of the deadline will be permitted without further agreement, however, Colleges will keep in touch with students and deadlines will be kept under review during the course of the coronavirus (COVID-19) period and this policy reviewed should the length of the coronavirus (COVID-19) period necessitate this. Without agreement any failure to transfer by the deadline given will normally result in action being initiated or progressed under the 'Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice' unless the College has concerns that

⁴ Separate guidance on consideration of extensions to programme end dates as a result of coronavirus (covid-19) is being developed and will be managed separately to deferrals and other equivalent progression points.

a student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour is significantly impacting their ability to meet the relevant deadline, where it should then be determined whether it is appropriate to take alternative action under the 'Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures'.

1.8 Failure to apply for or have a period of deferral approved

- 1.8.1 For exceptional application only: If an application for deferral is unsuccessful failure to meet the deadline given will normally result in action being initiated or progressed under the 'Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice' unless the College has concerns that a student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour is significantly impacting their ability to meet the relevant deadline, where it should then be determined whether it is appropriate to take alternative action under the 'Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures'.
- 1.8.2 If a student has not applied for deferral failure to meet the deadline given will normally result in action being initiated or progressed under the 'Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice' unless
- a) The student has informed the College (e.g. supervisor or PGR Support Team) of a temporary reason for their failure to engage with their studies, e.g. students who are medical practitioners who are currently working in a medical capacity;
 - b) the College has concerns that a student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour is significantly impacting their ability to successfully complete the upgrade process by the deadline, where it should then be determined whether it is appropriate to take alternative action under the 'Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures'.

Temporary Policy produced April 2020,

[Top](#)