

# UNIVERSITY OF EXETER DOCTORAL COLLEGE

## Applications for Deferral of Upgrade for Entrants registering from the 2019-20 academic year – Temporary Policy in Response to Impact of Coronavirus Outbreak

### Timing of Upgrade

#### Entrants registering from the 2019-20 academic year

Transfer of registration should normally take place not later than after 12 months of full-time registration, or the pro-rata equivalent for part-time registration, and as specified within College Handbooks. It is recognised that Coronavirus (COVID 19), may constitute *exceptional circumstances beyond the student's control* and as such applications for deferral to the deadline for transfer of registration may be made. These will be considered by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of College. Further details on the process to be followed where consideration of deferral of the deadline for the transfer of registration from MPhil to Doctoral Study, which may involve applying for deferral of the deadline for initial submission of documentation to the College Upgrade Committee, is appropriate is set out in Annex 1 'Applications for deferral' (temporary policy), below. Applications to transfer registration should take place early enough to allow a decision about changes to registration status to be made within this timeframe. This means that Colleges should specify internal deadlines for initial submission of documentation for consideration by the College Upgrade Committee.

#### **ANNEX 1: Applications for Deferral (temporary policy)**

##### [Graduate Students Mitigation for Deferral Form.](#)

For upgrade deferral applications for students registering from the 2019-20 academic year.

Please ensure you read this process before completing the form.

### 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This document is a temporary policy in response to the impact of the coronavirus outbreak and replaces the [annex](#) to the requirements for '[Upgrade of Students from MPhil to Doctoral Study](#)' specified in the '[Statement of Procedures: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students](#)' to provide further details on the process to be followed where consideration of deferral of the deadline for the transfer of registration from MPhil to Doctoral Study is appropriate for students entering from 2019-20. **For deferral in all other instances please refer to the Applications for [Deferral of Internal Programme Deadlines – Temporary Policy in Response to Impact of Coronavirus Outbreak.](#)**
- 1.1.2 An application for a deferral to the deadline for transfer 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 recognised 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.

- 1.1.3 Completion of the upgrade process by the deadline for transfer means that students necessarily have to apply for a deferral to the deadline for submission of documentation for upgrade. Whilst this takes place ahead of the final deadline for transfer, it is necessary in order to allow time for completion of the upgrade process, such as consideration by the College Upgrade Committee and completion of further work, where the outcome is not a pass at the first attempt.
- 1.1.4 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.
- 1.1.5 Students may choose to apply to defer their deadline for transfer 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 clarity with regard to the initial deadline for submission of documentation for upgrade for its students;
- 1.2.2 To ensure that College Upgrade Committees are scheduled to take place in a timely manner subsequent to the deadlines for submission;
- 1.2.3 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;
- 1.2.4 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 the scheduling of College Upgrade Committee meetings (e.g. to allow for deferred College Upgrade Committee meetings to take place at the same time as College Upgrade Committees are considering upgrade submissions referred for a second attempt). 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 deadline for transfer of registration 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 Deadlines for transfer of registration are calculated on a pro-rata basis for part-time students, and as such a change in registration status prior to the deadline for transfer leads to amendment of the deadline for transfer. Students who feel that their circumstances might mean that a change to their mode of attendance between full-time and part-time or a change to their part-time hours was appropriate 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 an application for a deferral to the deadline for transfer may be made. 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.
- 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.;

#### 1.4 Serious and unexpected circumstances

- 1.4.1 An application for deferral of the deadline for transfer 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.
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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 (normally during the period of Nov to Feb for full-time September starters) 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 formulating the proposal, i.e., research question, or any other documentation required by the upgrade process as established by their department.
f)	A breakdown in technical equipment that is key to formulating the proposal, i.e., research question, or any other documentation required by the upgrade process as established by your department.
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 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 expected submission deadline for upgrade. In exceptional cases, i.e. when serious and unexpected circumstances occur closer to the deadline, an application can be made later, provided that it is prior to the College Upgrade Committee's scheduled

meeting. If serious and unexpected circumstances arise after the student's first attempt at upgrade these may also be considered.

## 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 the deadline for transfer 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. It is expected that the time elapsed by the point at which thesis submission would take place would normally mean that a student would have had sufficient opportunity to get back on track with their studies. See also [Extensions to Study](#)<sup>1</sup>.
- b) No further deferral of the transfer 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 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'.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 to upgrade and other equivalent progression points.

- c) depending on the nature of a student's funding, it may be necessary to report any delay in successfully upgrading within the first year (pro-rata) of study to a student's sponsor.

## 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 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 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'.
- 1.8.2 If a student has not applied for deferral 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
  - 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'.

Professor Andrew McRae  
Dean of Postgraduate Research and of the Doctoral College

9<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Temporary Policy produced April 2020.