

Sickness Absence 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 students¹. All students are equally considered irrespective of fee status. This policy applies from the beginning of the 2021/22 academic year, and applications for funding under this policy will only apply to periods of interruption taken from the 2021/22 year onwards (retrospective applications will not be eligible).
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 Students should also refer to the [Student absence procedure](#), and the interruptions procedure specified in the '[Statement of Procedures: Periods of Registration and Changes to Registration Status for Graduate Research Students](#).'
- 1.4 This policy should be read in the context of the responsibilities of supervisors, pastoral tutors and students set out in the '[Code of Good Practice: Supervision of postgraduate research students](#)'.
- 1.5 Wider 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:
- a) Self-funded students;
 - b) 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;

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

- c) Students in receipt of bursaries² or awards covering tuition fees only;
- d) 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.
- e) 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 may wish to consult the '[Terms and conditions for individuals paid by claim](#)'. 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:

- a) Students who receive Research Council funding;
- b) Students who receive University of Exeter funding;
- c) Students who are funded via funds allocated and administered by the University of Exeter;
- d) 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:

- a) whether registered on a full-time or part-time basis;
- b) from the point of initial registration on their programme;
- c) where the first day of the period of interruption falls within the funded period;
- d) to receive studentship stipend payments at their full stipend rate* whilst interrupted on medical grounds for up to 13 weeks within any 12-month period³, 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 result in additional payments. Short-term sickness absence should be reported in accordance with the [Student absence procedure](#). 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 it is advisable to apply for an interruption of studies (see section 5, 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 may be applied for. In such instances the interruption will be recorded and payments will

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.

³ The 12 month period is measured from the first day of interruption on medical grounds.

be 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 [Student absence procedure](#).

4. Identification of Eligibility

4.1 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.

4.2 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.

4.3 In any instance where a student's eligibility is not clear the relevant College's PGR Support Team **should** be consulted in the first instance.

5. Process for application for continued studentship stipend payments during a period of interruption on medical grounds:

5.1 To be eligible:

- a) Students should apply for, and have approved, an interruption in accordance with the requirements set out in the '[Statement of Procedures: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students, Interruption of Studies](#)';
- b) The application should not be made retrospectively (however, see 3.2, above);
- c) The application must be made on medical grounds, with medical certificates to cover the period of time in question.

5.2 Subject to the time periods stated in the '[Statement of Procedures: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for graduate research students, Interruption of Studies](#)', 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

5.3 If a student meets the eligibility criteria (2.3-2.4, 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 contact](#).

6. Returning from a period of funded leave

6.1 Some students may benefit from a phased return to their studies following a period of interruption on medical grounds. During this period students will be paid at their full stipend rate. The end date of their funding period will not be extended. Students who consider they may benefit from this should get in touch with their [PGR support contact](#) as early as possible prior to their expected date of return, and should note that:

- a) A phased return will require approval from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of College or nominee¹;

- b) A phased return will only be viable where clear medical evidence is available to confirm a student's fitness to return to study;
- c) 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;
- d) A phased return is distinct from a formal application to [change mode of study](#), 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.

7. Confidentiality

7.1 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.

* 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 College's Postgraduate Research Office to check the arrangements for their individual award.

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