

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER DOCTORAL COLLEGE

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

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, 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 Programme deadlines are important milestones in a PGR student's journey. As such deferral of these milestones should only take place with good reason to avoid unnecessary delays, which might impact on a student's overall progress on their programme.
- 1.1.3 Students on professional doctorate programmes, should consult their Programme Director/Administrator for any local requirements with regard to [mitigation](#) before proceeding.
- 1.1.4 Upgrade: 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.
- 1.1.5 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. In the case of upgrade this temporary policy 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](#)'. In all other instance it does not replace an existing policy, but rather, recognizes that the scale of disruption arising from the present circumstances necessitates a formalization of approach. It builds on existing principles, whilst exercising flexibility.
- 1.1.6 There are two overarching grounds for circumstances that might lead to a deferral, mitigating circumstances (personal circumstances) and unforeseen impediment (research-related circumstances). An application for a deferral to a deadline will normally only be applicable where appropriate evidence is available to demonstrate the existence of serious and unexpected circumstances that had a disruptive impact on a student's studies and research. 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, although deferrals on the basis of unforeseen impediments should be supported by a member of the supervisory team.

- 1.1.7 The University wishes to support the continued engagement of students, and as such students should 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.
- 1.1.8 Students should be aware that 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, or for other progress milestones as appropriate.
- 1.2.2 To ensure that schedule are set to allow for timely decisions. For example, ensuring 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 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 This is a temporary policy, which is only applicable to deferral applications for a limited time during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic period. Students should ensure that they have taken account of the guidance below prior to considering applying for a deferral. A period of deferral may not be granted if the guidance below has not been followed. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of College may, however, consider an application that is not fully compliant with this guidance where they consider that there is a reasonable case to do so.
- 1.3.2 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. However, students in the first instance should be proactive in working with their supervisory teams to adapt their studies as needed.
- 1.3.3 Some students' circumstances might mean that an interruption is 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. It is recognized that during the 2019/20 academic year students may not have applied to interrupt where this would ordinarily be advised, and this will be taken into account when considering deferral applications. However, it is expected that during the 2020/21 academic year the guidance with regard to interruption of studies shall apply. 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.

- 1.3.4 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.
- 1.3.5 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, and should be mindful of the need to review their ILP in a timely manner to reflect changed approaches to study and assessment to ensure that it is possible to put appropriate support in place. 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](#)).
- 1.3.6 Students who feel that they may benefit from 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](#).
- 1.3.7 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 wherever possible.
- 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 Study](#) and the separate guidance with regard to [funded extensions and fees scholarships](#).

1.4 Serious and unexpected circumstances

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

Personal circumstances (where interruption is not appropriate)		Students are not required to provide evidence of
a)	single occasions of illness	
b)	adverse personal circumstances	

c)	Relapses/ exacerbations of long term fluctuating conditions/ disabilities	personal circumstances at present ¹
d)	Coronavirus (COVID 19) impact (where not covered by categories (a)-)(c) above), such as impact of self-isolating, impact of caring responsibilities	
<p>Unforeseen Impediments</p> <p>Unforeseen impediments constitute circumstances that effect a student's ability to conduct or pursue their research in the last 4 months (and ongoing) that it was not reasonably possible for the student to mitigate or plan for, which are corroborated by a member of their supervisory team.</p>		
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 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;

¹ Evidence can, however, be helpful, see '[Annex 1- Applications for deferral](#)' 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](#)' for examples.

- b) Confirmation that the student has discussed their deferral with a member of their supervisory team , and, where appropriate, pastoral tutor. Unforeseen impediments only (d)-g)): the form should be signed by a member of the supervisory team;
 - 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](#) and the separate guidance with regard to [funded extensions and fees scholarships](#).
 - b) No further deferral of the deadline will be permitted without further agreement. One further application for deferral of the deadline may be made, which shall not exceed three months. Approval may only be granted on the basis of a reconsideration of a student's circumstances. 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 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 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 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 updated October 2020, for application until January 2021.

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