

Frequently Asked Questions

What is happening?

A review of the Policy on Postgraduate Research Interruptions of study, on Extensions of study and on Personal Extenuating Circumstances in relation to the *viva voce* examination ([Appendix 6 of the PGR Code of Practice](#)) and associated Annexes was carried out. The purpose of the review was to ensure clarity, fairness, and consistency in the application of interruptions, extensions and personal extenuating circumstances and to ensure that the University remains aligned with the wider Higher Education sector.

There was no intention via this review to curtail access to interruptions of study, extensions of study or personal extenuating circumstances claims in relation to the *viva* for students who need them, but it is important to ensure that the Policy is applied consistently, equitably and fairly.

Why was the Policy reviewed?

- Requests to interrupt and/or extend studies are increasingly being treated as the norm which has resulted in a large (and rising) number of requests being received by the University. There is a maximum upper limit of 18 calendar months available for interruption, extension or a combination of both. Limits also exist for maximum periods of registration for research degrees. These limits cannot be exceeded; however, requests were routinely accompanied by the mistaken belief that PGR students had unlimited time available to interrupt and/or extend and ultimately complete their studies.
- In many cases, the durations requested in claims for interruption and extension were misaligned with the circumstances being experienced. For example, a minor issue that had minimal demonstrable impact on a student's ability to engage with their studies might be accompanied by a request for 12 months interruption.
- The University's definition of extenuating circumstances was set out in the Policy, however, claims based on circumstances that did not meet that definition were still routinely received.
- The final decision to approve or reject a claim for interruption or extension rests with the Faculty Director of PGR, however, securing support from their supervisors for an interruption or extension claim sometimes led students to believe that their request had already been approved before the process had concluded.
- Interruptions and extensions are not interchangeable; however, the nature of the submitted requests suggested that in many cases they were viewed and treated this way. Extensions of study exist to support students who experience circumstances near their thesis submission deadline that prevent them from submitting on time, yet it was common for extension requests to be received far outside of the window for submission- sometimes many months prior to a student's submission date. When this occurs, it is not possible to be definitive about potential impact current circumstances might have on a student's ability to submit far in the future. It was also acknowledged that the timeframe for submission of requests in the previous Policy required re-consideration, and this has been addressed in response to the review (further information is available below).

Why does the current approach need to change?

- Interruptions and extensions are among a limited set of measures the University has available to support students who experience circumstances that affect their ability to engage with their studies. Additionally, periods of interruption or extension also have the potential to exacerbate other issues and delay necessary conversations that would otherwise demand swift resolution (for example, in relation to progress issues). This can ultimately make it more difficult for a student who has interrupted or extended to get back on track with their studies and complete their programme.
- When students remain enrolled on their research degree for longer than originally intended due to lengthy periods of interruption or extension their research project risks becoming surpassed by developments in their discipline area, potentially resulting in an outdated project that can no longer make a novel contribution to knowledge. This could ultimately prevent a student from successfully achieving their intended award.
- Interruption and extension can delay career progression that a student might otherwise benefit from had they obtained their research degree within the original timescale.
- The above risks need to be balanced against a student's need for interruption or extension. **Application of the Policy must be based on what will give students the best possible chance of succeeding in their studies and completing either within, or as close to their normal period of registration as possible.**

What are the Policy changes?

A summary of the changes to the Policy on Postgraduate Research Interruptions of study, on Extensions of study and on Personal Extenuating Circumstances in relation to the *viva voce* examination ([Appendix 6 of the PGR Code of Practice](#)) is provided below. These are split into 5 categories: format, timescales, medical consultation/ evidence, applicable circumstances and process. Students who wish to see the full list of revisions may request it by contacting pglink@liverpool.ac.uk.

Format

- The Policy has been divided into 3 sections covering interruption, extension and extenuating circumstances in relation to the *viva* to make it easier to navigate. Previously it was split into requests submitted prior to thesis submission and after thesis submission.
- A new Glossary section has been added to the beginning of the Policy. This includes definitions of the following terms: interruption of study, extension of study, significant exceptional factors, maximum period of registration, academic leave.
- A new section covering Disability has been created to bring together information that previously appeared throughout the Policy.

Timescales

- Sections 1.4, 5.1 and 5.4 have been updated to reflect **a revised timescale for submission of extension requests, which has increased from 10 days to 3 calendar months prior to the thesis submission date** in recognition that circumstances which prevent students from submitting their thesis on time might occur during the months leading up to the thesis submission deadline. **Section 5.1 also clarifies that UoL cannot consider extension requests made earlier than the 3 calendar month submission window because it is not possible to**

accurately determine how much extra time students need when their thesis submission date is more than 3 calendar months away.

- Sections 3.2 d, 6.6 c and 6.6 d were updated to include new deadlines for reporting unexpected last minute events from 48 hours to 2 working days prior to the examination to cover *vivas* occurring on a Monday.
- Sections 4.2, 4.6, 4.6a, 5.2, 5.5, 5.9 now reflect that **the maximum period of interruption/ extension that can be requested on a single occasion is 6 calendar months, reduced from 12 months. This does not change or affect the overall maximum period available for interruption/ extension and does not prevent students from requesting an extension to an existing period of interruption or extension; however, this can only be done in maximum increments of 6 months.**
- Sections 4.8 and 5.5 now note that any approved interruption of study or extension of study will be for the shortest period necessary based on submitted evidence and the student's situation. As a result, a request for interruption or extension may be approved for a shorter period than was originally requested.
- Section 5.4 clarifies that **extension requests related to circumstances that occurred more than 3 calendar months prior to the thesis submission deadline will not be considered if they do not set out why the student did not apply for an interruption of study at the time nor identify how the previous circumstances are continuing to affect the student's ability to submit their thesis on time.**

Medical consultation/ evidence

- Section 2.4 has been updated to remove the expectation that consultations with GPs must be held face-to-face.
- Section 4.7 now specifies that medical evidence should include a duration for recovery time and a diagnosis. Where a diagnosis isn't available, details of symptoms are required instead in recognition that a diagnosis can take time to obtain or might not be available.

Applicable circumstances

- Section 3.1 now specifies which circumstances are considered grounds to request interruption of study and section 3.2 identifies which circumstances are considered grounds to request extenuating circumstances in relation to the *viva voce*.
- Section 3.1f has been updated to include career development, internship and placement opportunities as grounds for extenuating circumstances.
- Section 3.1 g: failure of specialist equipment without which the student is unable to make any progress with their project is included as grounds for extenuating circumstances.
- Sections 3.1 s, 3.1 t and 3.1 u have been **updated to include further guidance on what is not considered grounds for extenuating circumstances. This includes failure to raise concerns about circumstances affecting studies at the time they occurred (including issues linked to the Covid-19 pandemic) and delays arising due to the candidate's decision to use an alternative thesis presentation format.**
- The Policy has been revised throughout to note that extenuating circumstances apply to remedying adverse situations as well as enabling students to access opportunities that require them to take time away from their studies.
- [Annexe 1](#): Categories of personal extenuating circumstances has been **updated throughout to reflect which grounds for extenuating circumstances are applicable to interruption of study, extension of study and/ or the *viva*.**

Process

- Sections 4.12 and 5.8 now note that **having support from a sponsor/ funder/ supervisor does not automatically mean that UoL will ultimately approve a request for interruption or extension.** It is also not possible to guarantee in advance that a request will be successful (this is especially relevant for students who, instead of requesting an interruption at the time, plan to request an extension but must wait until they are within 3 calendar months of their thesis submission deadline before they are able to formally submit the request). **Where UoL approves an interruption/ extension request it is for the student to clarify with their funder/ sponsor whether their funding will be extended accordingly.**
- Section 5.3 now advises that **students must continue to work towards their normal thesis submission date until they receive formal confirmation that the Faculty Director of PGR has approved their request for extension.** Similarly, section 4.4 specifies that **students requiring an interruption must continue to engage with their studies (except where the circumstances themselves prevent the student from doing so) until they receive formal communication that the Faculty Director of PGR has approved their request.**
- Section 5.4 now advises that **where a request for an interruption of study is rejected, re-submission of the same information in support of a claim for extension of study instead will also result in rejection.**
- Section 5.13 now clarifies that Appendix 6 of the PGR Code of Practice applies to students who receive a re-submission outcome in their *viva* and go on to require an extension to their thesis re-submission date. Students working on minor or major thesis modifications following the *viva* who require a short extension to their modifications submission date are managed differently and should refer to the Policy on submission of a research degree thesis for examination ([Appendix 7 of the PGR Code of Practice](#)) for details on how to request this.

Who was consulted on the changes?

The Policy revisions were developed in consultation with the APVC for Research Environment and Postgraduate Research, Faculty Directors of PGR, the Research Degree Administration Team, Faculty PGR Professional Services colleagues, colleagues from the Postgraduate Research Experience Team and PGR Leadership Group. The Policy and Annexes have also been circulated (and revised in response to feedback received) to the following groups, teams and individuals:

- School/ Institute Directors of PGR
- The Guild of Students
- Disability Advice & Guidance
- Student Conduct, Complaints & Compliance Team
- Heads of Education & Student Experience
- Faculty, School and Institute colleagues with a remit for student wellbeing and PGR
- International Advice & Guidance
- PGR Operational Group

How does this affect me?

The new Policy and Annexes are available online [here](#) and will come into effect on 1 October 2025. The new Policy only applies to requests for interruptions, extensions and personal extenuating circumstances in relation to the *viva* that are submitted on or after 1 October 2025.

There will not be any retrospective changes for students whose claims have received full approval prior to 1 October 2025. For these students the existing policy will continue to apply, however, any new interruption, extension or personal extenuating circumstances requests that are submitted

(including requests to extend an existing interruption or extension) on or after 1 October 2025 will be managed under the new version of the Policy.

What if I still have questions?

If you have questions about the changes, or would like further information please email pglink@liverpool.ac.uk