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**EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES
POLICY AND PROCEDURE
(RESEARCH STUDENTS)**

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Alignment with the Expectations and Core practices of the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education

This policy and procedure aligns with the following relevant Expectations and Core practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education:

Expectations for standards	Expectations for quality
	From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.
Core practices for standards	Core practices for quality
	The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.
	The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

	The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.
	The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.
	Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.
	The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.
Common practices for standards	Common practices for quality
The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.	The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.
	The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure (Research Students)

The University's Student Life Services offers a comprehensive range of supportive services, including counselling, disability and dyslexia support, and financial advice. In addition, the Students' Union operate an independent Student Advice service to provide students with neutral support and guidance on a range of personal and academic-related matters. Both services are available to research students, and are free, impartial, confidential and non-judgmental.

If you have a disability, mental health or long-term health condition for which you need reasonable adjustments to support you in your studies and/or assessment, you should contact the Student Disability Service as soon as possible. If appropriate, they will liaise with your School and Professional Services to ensure that your support needs are met.

1. General Statements

- 1.1. This policy and procedure applies to research students for the duration of their candidature, including the 'thesis completion' stage, pre- and post-examination, and during any resubmission period.
- 1.2. It does not apply to undergraduate or postgraduate taught (including MRes) students, for which a separate extenuating circumstances policy and procedure exists.
- 1.3. Students undertaking Professional Doctorates should follow this procedure only in relation to the research stage of the programme. In the case of Professional Doctorate programmes that do not have distinct 'taught' and 'research' stages (e.g. Doctor of Clinical Psychology), the Programme Director shall determine whether this policy and procedure or the separate extenuating circumstances policy for taught students shall apply, as appropriate to the stage of the candidature.

2. Policy

- 2.1. As a research student, you are responsible for your academic progress. Continued registration on your programme of study is conditional on you maintaining adequate progress in accordance with the Policy and Procedure on the Monitoring of Research Students.
- 2.2. You are expected to be able to cope with many life events alongside your research studies, to manage your own personal circumstances alongside your workload, and to expect a level of pressure which may lead to feelings of stress and anxiety. Unless this causes you to be unwell, you are expected to continue with your studies.
- 2.3. Short absences or limited periods of reduced progress are expected to be managed by adjusting your Research or Completion Plan where necessary and should not affect your ability to submit your thesis within your submission deadline. Your supervisor(s) and Review Panel will discuss your

progress with you and any recommendations to adjust your Research/Completion Plan.

- 2.4. We recognise, however, that you may encounter particularly challenging personal circumstances that have a substantial adverse impact on your ability to study, and which may satisfy criteria for extenuating circumstances.
- 2.5. An extenuating circumstance is defined as:
- being severe and exceptional, and
 - being unforeseen or unavoidable, and
 - having a significant adverse impact on your academic progress.
- 2.6. The following are examples of extenuating circumstances:
- serious short-term illness or an injury/accident;
 - unanticipated change or worsening of a long-term health condition;
 - recently identified disability for which it has not yet been possible to agree reasonable adjustment;
 - death of a close relative or friend, partner or significant other person;
 - significant adverse personal or family circumstances, e.g. an unanticipated change in caring responsibilities;
 - being a victim of a serious crime;
 - severe and unanticipated financial issues;
 - unexpected and exceptional increase in work commitments (part-time students only, during fees-payable period);
 - unavoidable practical or logistical difficulty, e.g. time-limited inability to access facilities or resources, or exceptional technical issues experienced at critical time.
- 2.7. The following will not be accepted as extenuating circumstances:
- work commitments when registered as a full-time student or during the 'thesis completion' stage;
 - a change in the scope or direction of the research project;
 - minor illnesses, or injuries that would not cause you to take time away from study;
 - events/circumstances that are foreseeable and can be planned for, such as holidays, weddings or other family-related events, religious festivals/events;
 - poor time management;
 - minor IT problems, as it is your responsibility to ensure that your work is appropriately backed-up;
 - general pressure of your studies, since this is common to all students and you are expected to manage your workload accordingly.
- 2.8. Long-term health conditions or disabilities are not considered extenuating circumstances, but if you experience an unexpected change or worsening of your condition that severely disrupts your studies, or if you encounter unrelated mitigating circumstances, you may request that these be taken into account. Students with ongoing conditions and/or disabilities are encouraged to meet with the University's Student Disability Service so that appropriate

reasonable adjustments can be considered.

- 2.9. Issues surrounding supervision, training or other elements of your programme will not be accepted as extenuating circumstances. Any problems relating to academic matters should be reported to your Director of Postgraduate Research and, if unresolved, via the Student Complaints Procedure.

3. Procedure

Reporting Extenuating Circumstances

- 3.1. You should make your supervisor(s) aware of any unforeseen circumstances that may have an adverse impact on your studies as soon as possible; ideally at the time they occur. If you would prefer not to disclose the circumstances to your supervisor(s), you should notify another member of the School's academic or professional services staff, such as the Director of Postgraduate Research or a member of the School Office. You may also wish to seek support or guidance from the University's Student Life Services or Student Advice, who can advise if your circumstances satisfy the criteria for extenuating circumstances.
- 3.2. Where it is apparent that the circumstances will impede your academic progress irrevocably, you should report them formally to your School at the earliest opportunity. It is your responsibility to report your circumstances promptly and appropriately. Any request for a remedy (see below) will not be considered retrospectively unless there are compelling grounds.
- 3.3. You should complete an Extenuating Circumstances: Research Programme Adjustment Form and provide a detailed description of the circumstances, the period of time affected and the impact that they have had/are likely to have on your work.
- 3.4. Your account must be supported by current and relevant independent documentary evidence, which must be:
- submitted on documentation that is recognisably authentic and should be signed and dated by the relevant authority: if the evidence is not on headed paper or from a recognised authority, you should submit the evidence that is available to you and explain why this is the evidence submitted;
 - provided in English or Welsh (translated and authenticated, if necessary) and unaltered: you are responsible for covering the costs of providing the documents, including the translation, if relevant.
- 3.5. The following are examples of supporting evidence that are commonly accepted:
- GP letter/medical certificate that confirms the particular illness relating to the extenuating circumstances reported, and the period it affected you, including the effects of any medication or associated treatment;

- GP letter/medical certificate that confirms the illness of a family member and the period it affected them;
 - statement from a University support service if you are known to them and have engaged with support services before the event;
 - copy of a death certificate, obituary or funeral service;
 - letter from a relevant third party, e.g. police, social worker;
 - letter from your employer verifying the exceptional and unavoidable increase in your workload commitments.
- 3.6. You should submit your completed form and supporting documentation to your School Office. The information that you submit will be treated sensitively and shared only with staff who need to know in order to process your request. If you would prefer to provide the information directly to the Extenuating Circumstances Group (see below) and not to the School Office, the Office will be able to provide instruction on how to do this.
- 3.7. If you disclose a disability or support issue, you will be encouraged to meet with the relevant University support service so that they can help you and, where appropriate, discuss reasonable adjustments with you.

Applying for an adjustment to your programme

- 3.8. Where the circumstances you report have had or will have a significant adverse impact on your progress, you may also apply to adjust your programme. Possible adjustments (remedies) are listed below in section 4.
- 3.9. In some cases, a minor adjustment for a time-limited or isolated event will be sufficient; in other cases, a more substantial remedy will be appropriate. The remedies available will also vary depending on the stage of your studies.
- 3.10. It is important to note that reporting extenuating circumstances does not mean that they will be automatically accepted, or that a requested adjustment will be permitted.

Consideration of your application

- 3.11. Each School has an Extenuating Circumstances Group that meets regularly to consider requests for adjustments. Members are nominated by the Head of School and include academic and professional services staff and disability/wellbeing representatives. In some cases, the Chair considers requests on behalf of the group.
- 3.12. The group (or Chair) may review requests for all students in the School, or the Head of School may convene a separate Extenuating Circumstances Group to consider requests from research students.
- 3.13. If a separate Extenuating Circumstances Group is established to consider postgraduate research matters, it will be chaired by a member of the School's academic staff, who may consider requests on behalf of the group. All members of the group, which may include other academic or professional

services staff, will have received training appropriate to the role.

- 3.14. Your School's Director of Postgraduate Research or supervisory team members cannot be part of this group, as it is important that extenuating circumstances are considered by individuals who are independent of your supervisor(s) and from determining the appropriate remedy.
- 3.15. The role of the Extenuating Circumstances Group is to:
 - consider verifiable, evidence-based information only;
 - determine whether academic progress has likely been/is likely to be affected by the circumstances;
 - estimate the likely extent of the impact on academic progress, and
 - report to the Director of Postgraduate Research.
- 3.16. The Director of Postgraduate Research will receive the report of the Extenuating Circumstances Group and will consider any adjustment requested. Where appropriate, the Director of Postgraduate Research will consult with your Review Panel convened to assess your progress.
- 3.17. If the Director of Postgraduate Research is also your supervisor, they will not receive the report; instead, their role will be delegated to another member of School academic staff.
- 3.18. In some cases, the proposed adjustment will require consideration by a College Postgraduate Dean (e.g., an extension to your submission deadline or an interruption of study). In such cases, your School will review your application in the first instance and will make a recommendation to the Dean.
- 3.19. In reviewing an application, the Dean will take into account the report from the Extenuating Circumstances Group, the recommendation of the Director of Postgraduate Research and all supporting documentation.

4. Possible programme adjustments (remedies)

Interruption of study

Extension to thesis submission/resubmission deadline

- 4.1. All applications for interruptions of study and extensions to the time limit are considered by a College Postgraduate Dean in accordance with the Interruption and Extension to Time Limit Policy and Procedure (Research Students).

Brief postponement to progress monitoring or warning of exclusion/downgrade deadline

- 4.2. If you are unable to submit work for a progress monitoring event by your deadline or are unable to attend the meeting where the work will be discussed because of extenuating circumstances that occurred during the reporting period, you may request a postponement of **up to 28 days**.

- 4.3. If you have been placed on a Warning of Exclusion/Downgrade because of concerns raised about your progress or engagement and you are unable to submit work or otherwise demonstrate re-engagement by your deadline because of extenuating circumstances that occurred in the warning period, you may request a postponement of **up to 28 days**.
- 4.4. A brief postponement may be appropriate in the case of a single, short-term incident or event, such as a brief but acute period of ill health, hospitalisation or bereavement, where submission of work by the deadline is not possible.¹
- 4.5. The decision to grant or deny a brief postponement will be taken by your School's Director of Postgraduate Research/nominee considering the report from the School's Extenuating Circumstances Group. If postponement is permitted, your School will notify Education Governance (PGR Quality and Operations) for any necessary changes to be made to your student record.
- 4.6. If you encountered unforeseen circumstances for which you did not interrupt your study, but which have impeded your ability to make the expected progress against your research plan or warning objectives, you should report these to your School **at least 14 days** before your deadline.
- 4.7. Any circumstances reported **less than 14 days** before your deadline will not be taken into account, unless you provide clear justification for late reporting.
- 4.8. Where you report extenuating circumstances and these are considered by your Director of Postgraduate Research to warrant remedial action, they will be taken into account when determining progression recommendations.
- 4.9. *For progress monitoring*, it may be appropriate for your progress to be '*considered satisfactory in the circumstances*': unforeseen circumstances are recognised to have had a considerable detrimental impact on your progress but continued registration on your programme of study is confirmed as a suitable remedy to the extenuating circumstances. You may be required to adjust your Research/Completion Plan in either scope or timing to ensure that you remain on track to complete your thesis within your time limit. Where sufficient adjustment to your Plan is not possible, your School may support you in making an application to extend your thesis submission deadline as a remedy to the extenuating circumstances reported.
- 4.10. *If you are under a warning of exclusion/downgrade*, your supervisor(s) and an independent reviewer will consider the work you submitted against the agreed objectives. It may be appropriate that your Director of Postgraduate Research permits one further attempt at meeting the objectives, within a period not exceeding 12 weeks.

Oral examination (viva)

¹ If you are unable to study for more than 28 days, you should apply for an interruption of study. If approved, your progress monitoring deadline will be adjusted by a period commensurate with the length of your interruption. You will not be required to submit work for review while on a period of approved interruption.

- 4.11. If you report extenuating circumstances following the submission of your thesis, it may be appropriate for your viva to be rescheduled. It is important that you inform your School as soon as possible if you are unable to attend the planned date of your viva, or if you have a justifiable reason to delay the scheduling of the examination, to allow the necessary arrangements to be made. The viva must be held within 12 months of submission, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- 4.12. Any extenuating circumstances that have occurred in the course of your studies will remain separate from the final academic decision on your thesis, so it would not be usual for the circumstances to be reported to the Examining Board unless they will impact on your performance in the viva.
- 4.13. If you have a disability, specific learning difficulty or chronic health condition you should discuss your needs and any concerns with your supervisor and the Disability Support Service in good time before your viva to explore what reasonable adjustments are available. These should not be reported as extenuating circumstances.

12-week thesis corrections period

- 4.14. If you are unable to submit the final, corrected version of your thesis within the 12-week time limit as a result of extenuating circumstances that have occurred in the period following your viva, you should report the circumstances to your School and request that your deadline is extended.
- 4.15. Your request will be reviewed, as above, and where this is considered an appropriate remedy for your extenuating circumstances, an extension of **up to 4 weeks** may be granted at the discretion of your Head of School. Your School will notify Education Governance (PGR Quality and Operations) for your student record to be adjusted.
- 4.16. Where an extension of **more than 4 weeks** is requested and deemed appropriate, you may make an application for the consideration of a College Postgraduate Dean.
- 4.17. Unless the circumstances are exceptional, the deadline will not be extended by a period of more than **12 weeks** from the original deadline.

Programme Transfer

- 4.18. If your personal circumstances change during your studies and this impacts your ability to engage with your research as planned, you may apply to transfer to part-time study, or curtail your PhD project and submit instead for an MPhil award.
- 4.19. A transfer from full-time to part-time study (or vice versa) is only possible during the fees-payable stage of your programme. Where possible, changes of study mode or degree programme should take effect from the beginning of

a calendar month.

5. Unsuccessful Applications

- 5.1. If your application is unsuccessful and your request for a remedy is denied, the outcome will be as follows (as relevant to the stage of your candidature).
- 5.2. Interruption of study: an absence will not be approved; should you take an unauthorised absence; this will be dealt with under the Unsatisfactory Progress or Engagement Policy and Procedure (Research Students).
- 5.3. Extension to thesis submission/resubmission deadline/12-week correction period: your thesis deadline will remain unchanged; failure to submit a thesis for examination by the deadline may result in your registered status being withdrawn. A Late Submission may be considered (see Policy on Late Submission of Research Degree Theses).
- 5.4. Progress monitoring or warning of exclusion/downgrade: your deadline remains unchanged; failure to submit work by the deadline will be considered evidence of non-engagement, and/or your submitted work will be assessed in accordance with the Policy and Procedure on the Monitoring of Research Students / Unsatisfactory Progress or Engagement Policy and Procedure (Research Students).
- 5.5. Oral examination (viva): No action will be taken in response to the information provided.

6. Communicating the Outcome

- 6.1. You will be informed of the outcome in writing **within 14 days** of the application being considered by the decision maker (Director of Postgraduate Research/nominee or College Postgraduate Dean, as relevant).
- 6.2. The Director of Postgraduate Research/nominee will liaise with relevant academic and/or professional services staff to ensure that any adjustments are made accordingly.

7. Appealing the Decision

- 7.1. You may appeal a decision of this Policy and Procedure in accordance with the University Review Procedure.