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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 Support Centres offer 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. The Student Support Centres and Student Advice are available to research students and both services are free, impartial, confidential and non-judgmental.

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

Policy

1. General Statements

- 1.1 This policy and procedure applies to research students for the duration of their candidature, including the 'completing thesis' stage, pre- and post-examination, and during any resubmission period.¹ It may be followed in relation to progress monitoring (including any warning of exclusion/downgrade period), thesis submission and examination.
- 1.2 It does not apply to undergraduate or postgraduate taught (including MRes) students, for which a separate extenuating circumstances policy 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.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 We recognise, however, that during the course of your studies you may encounter challenging personal circumstances that are **unforeseen and unavoidable**, and which disrupt your ability to study for a short or long period of time. Where they are **serious** and have a **significant adverse**

¹ This excludes research students registered on occasional studies programmes as part of a formal collaborative arrangement. These students should refer to the policies and procedures of their home institution.

impact on your academic progress or performance, they may be considered 'extenuating circumstances'.

1.6 The following are examples of extenuating circumstances:

- serious time-limited illness or injury;
- unanticipated change or worsening of a long-term health condition;
- death of a close relative or friend, partner or significant other person;
- unanticipated change in caring responsibilities (e.g. ill health of a dependent);
- unexpected increase in work commitments (part-time students only);
- being a victim of a serious crime;
- disability, where it was not possible to put reasonable adjustments in place by the period in question, or where the adjustments were not effective;
- unavoidable practical or logistical difficulty (e.g. time-limited inability to access facilities or resources due to a School or University problem).

1.7 The following will not be accepted as extenuating circumstances:

- work commitments when registered as a full-time student or during the 'completing thesis' stage;
- a change in the scope or direction of the research project;
- minor ailments (cough or cold etc.);
- holidays, weddings or other family-related 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.

1.8 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 Disability and Dyslexia Service so that appropriate reasonable adjustments can be considered.

1.9 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.

1.10 Only the most serious extenuating circumstances are likely to have a substantial adverse impact on your overall progress. This is because it is expected that you will make up any short absences or limited periods of reduced progress within the reporting period or over the total duration of your candidature by adjusting your Research or Completion Plan where

necessary. Your supervisor(s) and Review Panel will discuss your progress and any necessary adjustments to your Research/Completion Plan with you at your regular monitoring events.

- 1.11 Where an adjustment to your Research/Completion Plan is not feasible, either due to the amount of time lost or the particular nature of the circumstances, you may make an application to extend your submission deadline in accordance with the Interruption and Extension to Time Limit Policy and Procedure (Research Students) (see section 5). This option will be considered only as a last resort and only in response to extenuating circumstances that have been reported and reviewed in line with this procedure.
- 1.12 In some cases, it may be appropriate for you to make an application to suspend your studies temporarily. Your application will be considered in accordance with the Interruption and Extension to Time Limit Policy and Procedure (Research Students). If you are unable to study for a period of more than **28 days**, you are required to apply for a formal interruption of study.
- 1.13 You may experience extenuating circumstances before or after submission of your thesis. It is important to note, however, that reporting extenuating circumstances does not mean that they will be automatically accepted. It will not always be appropriate for remedial action to be taken and the remedies available will vary depending on the stage of your candidature.

Procedure

2. Reporting Extenuating Circumstances

- 2.1 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 support services or Student Advice.
- 2.2 Where it is apparent that the circumstances will impede your academic progress or performance irrevocably, you should report them formally to your School at the earliest opportunity and request that a remedy be considered (see section 4). Discussing your circumstances with your supervisor(s) or other staff does not constitute formal reporting, and it is your responsibility to report your circumstances promptly and appropriately, as outlined below, as they will not be considered retrospectively.
- 2.3 You should complete an Adjustment to Study (Extenuating Circumstances) Form (Research Students) 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. Your account must be supported by current and relevant independent documentary evidence, including medical/health certification or letters of support/explanation from a support service at the University or from a third party, where appropriate.

- 2.4 The supporting evidence must be submitted on documentation that is recognisably authentic and should be signed and dated by the relevant authority. It must be 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.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 If you disclose a disability or support issue, you will be encouraged to meet with the Student Support and Wellbeing Team so that they can offer support and, where appropriate, discuss reasonable adjustments with you.

3. Extenuating Circumstances Group

- 3.1 Each School has an Extenuating Circumstances Group that meets regularly (in person or virtually) to consider requests. 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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 and disability/wellbeing representatives, will have received training appropriate to the role.
- 3.4 Your School's Director of Postgraduate Research or members of your supervisory team 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.
- 3.5 The role of the Extenuating Circumstances Group is to:
 - consider verifiable, evidence-based information only;

- determine whether academic progress/performance has likely been/is likely to be affected by the circumstances;
- estimate the likely extent of the impact on academic progress/performance; and
- report to the Director of Postgraduate Research.

3.6 The Director of Postgraduate Research will receive the report of the Extenuating Circumstances Group. Where a remedy is considered justified and appropriate, the Director of Postgraduate Research will discuss this with you and your supervisor(s) and appropriate action will be taken.

3.7 Where the circumstances have had a significant adverse effect on your progress and you have been unable to make up time lost by your 9-Month/Annual Review, the Director of Postgraduate Research will also consult with the Review Panel convened to assess your progress. The quantity and quality of work undertaken since your last formal review will be taken into account when possible remedies are considered.

3.8 In some cases, the remedy proposed may require consideration by a College Postgraduate Dean on behalf of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) (e.g. where an extension to your submission deadline or an interruption of study is appropriate, or where adjustments to the format of your viva are requested). In such cases, your School will review your application in the first instance and will make a recommendation to the College Postgraduate Dean.

4. **Options and Remedies**

4.1 Where the circumstances reported justify remedial action, an adjustment will be made to help support you in the successful completion of your studies. This will vary according to the nature and timing of the circumstances and the length of time you have been affected.

4.2 In some cases, a minor adjustment for a time-limited or isolated event will be sufficient; in other cases, more substantial action will be appropriate. The options and remedies are outlined below in relation to the key stages of your candidature.

Progress Monitoring

Submission of work for review

4.3 Your progress will be monitored formally through a series of regular events in accordance with the Policy and Procedure for the Monitoring of Research Students. This allows your School to assess the quality of your work and your rate of progress against the schedule in your Research/Completion Plan.

4.4 If you are unable to submit work for review by your progress monitoring deadline (either the Initial, Interim or 9-Month/Annual Review) as a result of

extenuating circumstances that have occurred in the reporting period, you may request that the event be postponed by **up to 28 days**. This 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.²

- 4.5 The decision to grant or deny a brief postponement to a progress monitoring event will be taken by your School's Director of Postgraduate Research in light of the report from the School's Extenuating Circumstances Group. If postponement is permitted, your School will notify Registry so that necessary changes can be made to your student record.

9-Month/Annual Review assessment

- 4.6 If you encounter unforeseen circumstances that have a significant adverse impact on your progress or academic performance, it is imperative that you report them to your School at the earliest opportunity. This must be **no later than 14 days** before your 9-Month/Annual Review deadline. Any circumstances reported **less than 14 days** before your monitoring deadline will not be taken into account by the Review Panel, unless you provide clear justification for the late reporting.
- 4.7 The Review Panel will assess your written work and the progress that you have made in the reporting period against your Research/Completion Plan. Where you have reported extenuating circumstances and these have been considered by your Director of Postgraduate Research to warrant remedial action, they will be taken into account by the Review Panel when determining their recommendation.
- 4.8 It may be appropriate for the Review Panel to report that your progress is '*considered satisfactory in the circumstances*'. This means that the Review Panel is aware that you have encountered unforeseen circumstances beyond your control that have had a considerable detrimental impact on your work. In recognition of the extenuating circumstances, continued registration on your programme of study will be confirmed as a remedy.
- 4.9 Depending on the precise impact of the circumstances on either the standard of your work or your progress during the reporting period, 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.
- 4.10 Where (further) adjustment to your Research/Completion Plan is not possible, your School may support you at the 9-Month/Annual Review stage in making an application to extend your submission deadline by a period of

² 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.

time commensurate with the extenuating circumstances evidenced (see section 5).

Warning of Exclusion/Downgrade

- 4.11 If you have been placed on a Warning of Exclusion/Downgrade as a result of concerns raised about your progress or engagement and you are unable to submit work or otherwise demonstrate re-engagement by your deadline as a result of extenuating circumstances that have occurred in the warning period, you may request that the deadline be postponed by **up to 28 days**.
- 4.12 The postponement of the deadline may be considered appropriate in cases of short-term or isolated disruption, such as a brief but acute period of ill health, where submission of work by the required date is not possible.
- 4.13 If you encounter unforeseen circumstances that are serious in nature and which impede your ability to meet the objectives that you have been set (in full or part) in the warning period, it is imperative that you report your circumstances formally to your School, as described above, **at least 14 days** before your deadline. Any circumstances reported **less than 14 days** before your deadline will not be taken into account, unless you provide clear justification for the late reporting.
- 4.14 Your supervisor(s) and an independent reviewer will consider the written work submitted against the agreed objectives. On the basis of their report, and in light of the report from the Extenuating Circumstances Group, the Director of Postgraduate Research may, in consultation with your supervisor(s), recommend to the Head of School that you be permitted one further attempt within a period not exceeding 12 weeks.

Oral examination (viva)

- 4.15 If you experience extenuating circumstances following the submission of your thesis, it may be appropriate for your viva to be postponed or 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.
- 4.16 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.
- 4.17 Where extenuating circumstances arise before your viva and they are likely to affect your performance, you should report them to your School at the earliest opportunity. If necessary, the Convenor of the Examining Board will take these into account when arranging the time and location of the examination. Depending on the nature of the circumstances, the Convenor

may also advise the Chair to make adjustments to the conduct of the viva (e.g. scheduling frequent short breaks).

- 4.18 In exceptional cases, it may be appropriate for the School to make an application to the University on your behalf to hold the viva at a location outside of the University or by electronic means as a remedy for the extenuating circumstances.³

12-week thesis corrections period

- 4.19 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.
- 4.20 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.⁴
- 4.21 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.
- 4.22 Unless the circumstances are exceptional, the deadline will not be extended by a period of more than **12 weeks** from the original deadline.

5. Extension to Thesis Submission/Resubmission Deadline

- 5.1 All applications for 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).
- 5.2 Where extenuating circumstances arise during the **'fees-payable' stage of your candidature**, adjustment to your Research Plan should be considered in the first instance in order to accommodate the time lost and ensure that you are able to submit a full draft of your thesis by the end of this period. An application for an extension will only be considered when you are in your registered period of study where there is pertinent evidence at the **9-Month/Annual Review stage** that (further) adjustment to the Research Plan is not feasible.

³ A viva will be held via electronic means in exceptional circumstances only. Applications will need to be made to the University in accordance with the Policy and Procedure for the Arrangement and Conduct of Research Degree Examinations (Viva) in Alternative Formats.

⁴ An extension to the thesis corrections deadline by up to 4 weeks from the date of the examination may be granted at the discretion of the Head of School where considered an appropriate adjustment to extenuating circumstances. In such cases, the School must inform the Registry that this action has been taken so that the student's record can be adjusted accordingly. Where an extension in excess of 4 weeks is required, applications must be considered by a College Postgraduate Dean in accordance with the Interruption and Extension to Time Limit Policy and Procedure (Research Students).

5.3 Where extenuating circumstances arise during your **‘completing thesis’ stage** or the formal **resubmission period**, you should make every effort to adjust your Completion Plan in consultation with your supervisor(s) to ensure that you are able to submit a viable thesis by your submission deadline. Where you are unable to meet your deadline as a result of extenuating circumstances, you may make an application to extend your time limit.

5.4 In reviewing the application, the College Postgraduate Dean will take into account the report from the Extenuating Circumstances Group, the statement from your supervisor(s), the Director of Postgraduate Research’s recommendation, and all supporting documentation.

6. **Interruption of Study**

6.1 You may make a request to suspend your studies temporarily at any stage in your candidature due to extenuating circumstances if they meet the criteria outlined in the Interruption and Extension to Time Limit Policy and Procedure (Research Students).

6.2 The evidence submitted as part of your application will be considered by your School’s Extenuating Circumstances Group in the first instance and on the basis of the group’s report, the Director of Postgraduate Research will make a recommendation to the relevant College Postgraduate Dean. The application will be reviewed by a Dean in accordance with the Interruption and Extension to Time Limit Policy and Procedure (Research Students).

6.3 An interruption of study may also be suggested to you in response to extenuating circumstances that you have reported, if the circumstances described meet the criteria for an interruption and it is considered appropriate that you take a clear break from your studies for a fixed period of time.

7. **Unsuccessful Applications**

7.1 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):

Progress Monitoring or Warning of Exclusion/Downgrade

7.2 Your deadline remains unchanged. Failure to submit work by the deadline will be considered evidence of non-engagement with the programme and appropriate steps will be taken

and/or

7.3 Extenuating circumstances will not be taken into account and 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).

Extension to time limit

- 7.4 Your thesis submission/re-submission 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).

Interruption of study

- 7.5 An authorised absence may be dealt with under the Unsatisfactory Progress or Engagement Policy and Procedure (Research Students).

Oral examination (viva)

- 7.6 No action will be taken in response to the information provided.

12-week thesis corrections period

- 7.7 Your deadline remains unchanged.

8. Communicating the Outcome

- 8.1 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 or College Postgraduate Dean, as relevant).
- 8.2 The Director of Postgraduate Research will liaise with relevant academic and/or professional services staff to ensure that any adjustments are made accordingly.

9. Appealing the Decision

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

Application Procedure

Student submits extenuating circumstances request with supporting evidence.



Extenuating Circumstances Group considers evidence and either:

- (a) Rejects any requests that do not meet the criteria for extenuating circumstances or that are submitted without appropriate/sufficient evidence; *or*
- (b) Determines whether academic progress/performance has likely been/is likely to be affected by the circumstances; *and*
- (c) Estimates the likely extent of the impact on the student's academic progress/performance.



Extenuating Circumstances Group provides a report to the **Director of Postgraduate Research** explaining the decision. The recommendation will be either:

- (a) That the extenuating circumstances are not accepted and that no further action should be taken; *or*
- (b) That the extenuating circumstances are accepted and that appropriate remedial action should be taken.



The **Director of Postgraduate Research** receives the report from the **Extenuating Circumstances Group** and either:

- (a) Consults with the student, supervisor(s) and, where necessary, Review Panel to implement an appropriate remedy; *or*
- (b) Notifies the student that their request has not been accepted and that a remedy will not be implemented by the School; *or*
- (c) Forwards the application to the Registry (PGR Quality and Operations) with the School's recommendation for consideration by a College Postgraduate Dean.



The **Director of Postgraduate Research / PGR Quality and Operations** notifies the student of the outcome within **14 days** of the application being considered by the decision maker.