**YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY**

**Suspensions/Extensions of Study and Authorised Absences**

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# Frequently Asked Questions for Postgraduate Researchers

Some postgraduate researchers (PGRs) face difficulties during their period of study (eg ill-health, personal difficulties). In most cases PGRs will recover the time lost over the duration of their studies. For some PGRs, however, problems can be so serious that their progress is significantly affected. These guidance notes provide information for PGRs faced with difficulties who are considering the possibility of requesting permission for a short period of absence from their studies or, in more serious situations, to suspend or extend their studies.

## Q1. What do I need to do if I am unable to study at the moment (e.g. because of illness, personal difficulties, etc.)?

First of all, contact your supervisor.  If your supervisor isn’t available, contact your Postgraduate Research Tutor (PGRT) or School Postgraduate Research Lead.

It is a requirement of your candidature that you keep the University informed of the progress of your research and any circumstances which interrupt your work in a significant way, including your ability to meet deadlines. Falling out of contact may lead to lost time for your studies and seriously compromise your ability to complete your research degree successfully.

If you are on a Student Visa, any absence from study may impact your visa status so it is important that you get in touch as soon as possible so you can be offered appropriate advice in a timely manner.

## Q2 What is an authorised absence?

If you need a short period of absence from your studies, your supervisor(s) may be able to authorise this.  You and your supervisor must agree that the absence will not have any effect on your ability to meet deadlines for your research studies, including the transfer deadline and the maximum time limit for the submission of your thesis.

Typical reasons for authorised absence include short periods of illness and personal difficulties.

## Q3 How long can an authorised absence be?

An authorised absence is normally up to four weeks’ duration in addition to any period of annual leave (five weeks) in any one calendar year.

If you require a longer period of absence, a suspension of study should be considered.

## Q4 What happens at the end of my authorised absence?

You will be expected to return to your studies promptly.  This will include being able to carry out research effectively, attend the University and present work regularly against a timetable agreed with your supervisor.

## Q5 What if I am not ready to return after my authorised absence?

See Q1.  Keeping in contact is very important.  Longer periods of absence may be dealt with as a suspension of study.  If you do not keep in contact for a prolonged period, the University will assume you have withdrawn from your studies and your candidature will be terminated. It is therefore crucial that you discuss your return following absence with your supervisor.

## Q6 What is a suspension of study?

A suspension of study is a period of interrupted study (of one month or more) when the PGR temporarily leaves the programme and loses their registration status.  However, a PGR is not usually able to claim any welfare benefits during a suspension of study. During this time a PGR is not expected to progress their research, is not expected to pay academic fees, is not entitled to supervision and does not have access to the library or other University facilities (eg laboratories).  However, access to IT facilities (eg email) will remain available.

A period of suspended study will not count towards the deadlines for your research degree including your transfer deadline (if this has not taken place) and the maximum time limit for submission of your thesis. These deadlines will be adjusted accordingly to take the suspended period into account.

Typical reasons for suspension of study are serious illness, maternity/paternity or significant personal difficulties.

When a PGR resumes study following a period of suspension due to ill-health it will be on the basis that they are medically fit to do so and satisfactory medical evidence should be provided by the PGR.

## Q7 What is an extension of study?

A lengthening of the candidature to take account of a period of unexpected/ unavoidable disruption to studies which has slowed down academic progress significantly.  The PGR will not leave the programme and will continue to progress their research.

Typical reasons for an extension of study include recovery from accident or illness, significant personal difficulties, equipment breakdown.

If the request is for an extension of study, made during the overtime period, you will need to explain how much of your thesis is complete/incomplete and submit a plan for completion of your thesis (which includes milestones) agreed by your supervisor.

## Q8 What should I do if I think it might be necessary to request a period of suspension/ extension of study?

Discuss the situation with your supervisor(s), Postgraduate Research Tutor or School Postgraduate Research Lead as soon as possible.

It is important not to let time pass without informing your School – as suspensions will not normally be backdated by more than one month.  A suspension of study must be requested at the time the difficulty arises.

If you do not keep in contact with your School and advise them of the problems you are encountering, you will lose the time available to complete your research.

If you wish to proceed with a request for a suspension/extension complete the form and send it to your supervisor who will pass it on to your School Postgraduate Research Lead for approval.

## Q9 How are requests considered?

Most standard requests for suspensions/extensions of study can be considered by your School Postgraduate Research Lead.  Non-standard requests for suspensions/extensions of study will be considered by a sub-group of the Research Degrees Committee.

## Q10 How long can a period of suspension or extension be?

The length of suspension/extension requested should be reasonable in the sense that it bears close relation to the problem/difficulties you have experienced.

The minimum period for a suspension is 1 month and the maximum at any one time is 12 months.  There are also limits to the overall period of suspension and extension that can be granted over the course of the candidature, as set out in the Code of Practice for Research Degrees.

## Q11 How will I be informed of the outcome of a suspension/ extension request?

If you are granted a suspension or extension of study an email will be sent by Registry confirming the details including the revised maximum time limit for your transfer to doctoral study or submission of your thesis.  Your supervisor(s) will also receive a copy.

If your request is unsuccessful you will be contacted by either the School Postgraduate Research Lead or Registry to advise you of the outcome.

In some cases you may be asked to provide more information before a decision is taken.

## Q12 What should I do about my Sponsor?

PGRs are responsible for checking any implications of a suspension/extension of study on their funding with the scholarship/awarding body or provider.

## Q13 What documentary evidence is required?

PGRs should submit satisfactory documentary evidence in support of a suspension/extension of study request where this is practical.  Satisfactory medical evidence (eg doctor’s letter) must be submitted in all cases where the request is made on grounds of ill-health.

## Q14 What about registration following a suspension?

Upon return to study your registration will continue, but you will need to re-register if the University has entered a new academic year when you return to study. You will be able to obtain an updated student ID card with a new completion date, free of charge.

## Q15 What about registration for a period of extension?

If you are granted an extension of study you will need to remain registered, so if the extension period extends into a new academic year you will need to re-enrol for that year.  There is no fee for the extension and a new student ID card can be provided free of charge.

## Q16 Where can I go for further advice?

For advice about your research degree you can contact the PGR School (pgr.school@yorksj.ac.uk).

For advice about your visa or immigration situation, contact visa@yorksj.ac.uk ([www.yorksj.ac.uk/international/visa-and-immigration/](http://www.yorksj.ac.uk/international/visa-and-immigration/))

# Implications for International PGRs (who are in the UK on a Student Visa)

## Q17 Will an authorised absence have an effect on my visa?

No. The University is not required to report short periods of authorised absence to the Home Office, provided they do not impact on the overall time limit for completion of the programme of study. Authorised absences will normally only be granted if it is likely that the missed study time will be absorbed into the remaining ‘wrap up’ period granted on your visa.

## Q18 Will a suspension of study have an effect on my visa?

Yes. The University is required to report suspensions of study of any duration to the Home Office within ten working days.  The Student Visa Sponsor Guidance states that if a PGR defers (suspends) their studies after they have arrived in the UK and is no longer actively studying, then their permission to stay is no longer valid and they must leave the UK.

Please be aware that if you are granted a suspension of study:

1. Your visa will be curtailed by the Home Office; and
2. You are required to leave the UK during this period: and
3. You will need to request a new CAS and apply for entry clearance before returning to the UK; and
4. You should seek immigration advice from the Visa and Compliance Team (visa@yorksj.ac.uk)

## Q19 How soon do I need to leave the UK?

You will have 60 days from the date of curtailment in which to make plans to leave the UK. As we cannot guarantee how long it will take for the Home Office to make a curtailment decision, we recommend that you leave the UK within 60 days of the start of your period of suspension.

## Q20 What if I am seriously ill and have written medical evidence that I must not travel?

In extreme circumstances we advise that you seek expert immigration advice (outside the University).

## Q21 Will an extension of study have an effect on my visa?

You should seek immigration advice from the Visa and Compliance Team (visa@yorksj.ac.uk)