

## **FACULTY OF HUMANITIES GUIDELINES FOR PGR SPECIAL PERMISSIONS 2019/20**

### **PURPOSE**

These guidelines are a revised version of the previous version in 2017/18 in light of the new Change of Circumstances for PGR Students Policy (September 2018), the University Policy on Supporting Health Fitness and Return to Study, Procedure on Support to Study, Procedure on Fitness to Study and Procedure on Supporting Return to Study. The purpose of this document is to ensure that, through the special permission process, we put in place support to help students who experience difficulties as well as ensure that the Faculty comply with current policies and practice. This document also emphasises the importance of Faculty-led support mechanisms and local School support schemes.

### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

*SCHOOL PGR TEAM* including PGR director are responsible for:

- Maintaining contact with supervisors and students to ensure that issues affecting study progress are identified as early as possible
- Providing advice to students who have mitigating circumstances or who are seeking to change their programme of studies
- Ensuring that applications under School's consideration are processed in accordance with relevant policies and procedures
- Raising concerns or escalating applications or issues to Faculty as necessary
- Referring students to relevant support services in the University as appropriate

*FACULTY PGR TEAM* including Deputy Associate Dean PGR are responsible for:

- Providing advice/recommendation to student, supervisor and school as required
- Ensuring that applications under Faculty's consideration are processed in accordance with relevant policies and procedures
- Where appropriate, liaising with student, supervisor or school to seek best solutions relating to special permission cases
- Referring students to relevant support services in the University as appropriate
- Providing reports in relation to special permission to relevant Faculty committees

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

*CONFIDENTIALITY* – Faculty uses relevant mechanisms to ensure confidentiality is protected in accordance with the data protection laws. Only related personnel have access to special permission applications. Where applications are referred to the University support services for advice or recommendation, all parties involved are required to duly maintain confidentiality. Identity of individuals is protected as necessary and documents are shared only when explicitly permitted.

**SUPPORT** – Faculty of Humanities are committed to supporting students who experience difficulties. Support services are already promoted through other avenues such as programme handbooks, workshop and School support offices but some students may still be unaware of them until problems arise and are flagged up in the special permission process. Efforts should be made to bring them to the supervisor's and student's attention where relevant and regardless of the stage of studies students are at. As with support provided by DASS, Occupational Health Service and Counselling Service, Students' Union, the aim is to offer support that will mitigate for the disadvantage caused by the difficulties and in some cases, help students develop a tool or mechanism to manage the difficulties to allow them to complete the degree.

**FAIRNESS AND EQUITY** – Faculty of Humanities consider applications on an individual basis and the consideration is taken within the bounds of the University policies and regulations to ensure that students receive adjustments proportionate to the circumstances and their level of severity. In so doing, we try to calibrate our decisions as far as possible to avoid creating unintended disparity.

### **STANDARD SPECIAL PERMISSION APPLICATION PROCESS**

The standard process involves school PGR team liaising with students, supervisors and, carrying out due diligence so that all relevant information is made available for consideration and communicating the decision to relevant parties. Colleagues should keep a complete record trail of the process which is crucial for a variety of purposes such as student funding audit and appeals and complaints using a practice compliant with the University Data Protection Policy. Schools would normally follow the process as follows:

1. Check that the application is fully completed and that supporting evidence or relevant documentation is provided
2. Where required, seek advice from DASS/Occupational Health Service/General Counsel/Faculty
3. Where externally funded, refer case to appropriate person or funding body regulations. It is crucial to ensure compliance with funding body's terms and conditions.
4. Consider application in accordance with the University PGR policies including [Change of Circumstances for Postgraduate Research Students Policy](#)
5. If application is beyond school's remit as per the criteria below, refer to Faculty for consideration
  - 5.1. First extension applications for under 6 weeks or first interruption applications for under 6 months
  - 5.2. Early submission of thesis
  - 5.3. Thesis word limit increase within 10% of maximum normal thesis length
6. If permission is granted, record the outcome in the student record system according to [Campus Solutions Student Records Maintenance](#) guide. It is crucial that each instance of the permission is recorded separately rather than by extending the existing permission.
7. Communicate decision to student, supervisor and funding body, where applicable
8. Where applicable, consider student support: refer to appropriate department and/or implement study support arrangement/return to study/completion support where appropriate

### **OTHER CHANGES TO STUDY/SPECIAL PERMISSION**

There are other types of application outside of the remit of these guidelines. Cases can be referred to the Faculty PGR office when required.

- Change of programme/school/faculty
- Change of mode of attendance
- Change of supervisory arrangement
- Change of research topic
- Residence outside the UK
- Official leave of absence not affecting programme end date/thesis deadline eg fieldwork
- Non-standard viva arrangements (eg using video link, outside standard hours)
- Delayed viva (beyond 12 weeks of submission)
- PhD by Published Work/Posthumous/Aegrotat/Higher Doctorate

### IMPORTANT POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

The following have been collated to provide guidance to help Schools and Faculty in supporting students and complying with the University regulations.

| Point for consideration                            | What to consider   | Resources   | Documentary evidence   |
|--|--|---|--|
| Whether a case is an interruption or extension     | <p><b>Definition</b></p> <p>An <b>interruption</b> is appropriate where a student is temporarily unfit, unable to attend or unable to remain registered due to mitigating circumstances.</p> <p>An <b>extension</b> is appropriate for students approaching the end of their programme or SPP but who are unable to complete their work within the timeframe due to mitigating circumstances.</p> <p><b>NB:</b> Students in SPP and beyond cannot apply for an interruption but may be considered for an extension to thesis submission deadline where there are mitigating circumstances.</p> |   | <p>For an interruption, the evidence should explain why the student is/will be unable to attend and specify the timeframe of the affected period.</p> <p>For an extension, the evidence should explain what the mitigating circumstances are and how they impact on the student's ability to make timely progress.</p> |
| Maternity/paternity/shared parental/adoption leave | Refer to the Change of Circumstances Policy for Postgraduate Research Students and Interruption Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students, for the most up-to-date information on the qualifying criteria, award eligibility for funded students and the management of return from leave.   | Code of Practice<br><a href="https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/rbe/rdrd/code/">https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/rbe/rdrd/code/</a> | MAT B1   |
| Sickness   | For periods of sickness lasting less than 4 weeks, students are not expected to formally interrupt their studies.  | Referral of Students to University Support  | For an interruption due to ill health, we expect a fit note confirming   |

| Point for consideration    | What to consider  | Resources   | Documentary evidence   |
|----------------------------|---|---|--|
|                            | <p>The student should refer to their GP for health problems if they have not already done so. If the student refuses to engage with the healthcare professionals or provide medical evidence, we expect there to be justification before we can consider the application and encourage engagement with the University Occupational Health Service via a formal referral.</p> <p>Where funded students apply for interruption due to sickness, the eligibility for funding is determined by the funding body's terms and conditions.</p> <p>If the sickness is serious, chronic and seems likely to last longer than one year, the Policy states that withdrawal may be considered if it is in the student's interest to do so. The School should follow the Referral procedures and seek DASS's advice.</p> | <p>Services for Medical or Mental Health Reasons<br/><a href="http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=647">http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=647</a></p> <p>Occupational Health Service<br/><a href="http://www.occupationalhealth.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/">http://www.occupationalhealth.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/</a></p>   | <p>the sickness period. A fit note can be obtained free of charge from GPs.</p>        |
| Mental health difficulties | <p>If there is concern about a student's mental wellbeing, the School should refer to the <i>University Guidance when dealing with students with any medical or mental health conditions</i> and the <i>Student Mental Health Policy and Guidance for Staff</i>.</p> <p>Certain mental health conditions that are substantial, long-term and affect day to day life may be classed as a disability. In such instances, staff must discuss referral to DASS with the student. However, the student has a right to decline the referral.</p>  | <p>Counselling Service<br/><a href="http://www.counselling.service.manchester.ac.uk/">http://www.counselling.service.manchester.ac.uk/</a></p> <p>Student Mental Health Policy<br/><a href="http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=1892">http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=1892</a></p> <p>Mental Health Policy: Guidance for Staff<br/><a href="https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/">https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/</a></p> <p>Policies on supporting students<br/><a href="https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/">https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/</a></p> | <p>Examples of documentary evidence include Counselling Service letter, GP letter.</p> |

| Point for consideration | What to consider   | Resources  | Documentary evidence                                 |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|
|                         |  | <a href="#">students/policies/</a>   |  |
| Fitness to practice     | In the Faculty of Humanities, this stipulation applies to professional doctorate degrees. The guideline can be found in the practice handbook available from Manchester Institute of Education.  | Programme handbooks  |  |
| Fitness to study        | A student's fitness to study may be brought into question through a special permission application process. The University Policy on Supporting Health, Fitness and Return to Study and the three associated Procedures provide an outline of how this is managed. The School Fitness to Study officer is expected to follow the Procedures in accordance with the School practice as appropriate.   | <p>Policy on Supporting Health, Fitness and Return to Study<br/> <a href="http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=37764">http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=37764</a></p> <p>Procedure on Fitness to Study<br/> <a href="http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=37762">http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=37762</a></p>   |  |
| Disability              | <p>If it is ascertained from the application form that the student might have just disclosed a condition which may be deemed eligible for disability support, the first consideration should be to check if the student is already DASS-registered or if a referral has been discussed.</p> <p>Please note that DASS referral also must be discussed if the disability is disclosed at any point, other than through the special permission application.</p> <p>If the application is made on the grounds of disability, the student is DASS-registered and DASS support arrangements have already been in place and there has been no change to circumstances nor new evidence, advice may be sought from DASS as to whether further reasonable adjustment (including interruption or extension) should be made.</p> <p>If the request would take the student beyond the 12 months interruption/extension Policy limit, whether or not the student is already DASS-registered, advice from DASS should be sought as to whether reasonable adjustment should be made by permitting an interruption or extension.</p> | <p>DASS<br/> <a href="http://www.dso.manchester.ac.uk/">http://www.dso.manchester.ac.uk/</a></p> <p>Equality Act 2010<br/> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010">https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010</a></p> <p>DASS Guidance for Dealing with Disability-Related Requests for Mitigation<br/> <a href="http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=33498">http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=33498</a></p> | DASS support plan or DASS advice or medical evidence |

| Point for consideration           | What to consider   | Resources  | Documentary evidence   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
|                                   | <p>For claims relating to delay in receiving disability support, the case should be referred to DASS.</p> <p>Student should be asked for consent for the documentation to be shared with DASS.</p>   |  |  |
| Permission during taught elements | PGR students seeking special permission during the taught elements should refer to Policy on Mitigating Circumstances.   | <p>Policy on Mitigating Circumstances</p> <p><a href="http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=4271">http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=4271</a></p> |  |
| Supporting evidence               | <p>Evidence varies depending on the circumstances but it should be substantiated, time-specific, from an independent and reliable third party or source such as a GP, solicitor or other authority.</p> <p>Evidence that should not be accepted includes undated doctor's note, evidence in foreign languages unaccompanied by English translation, letter from parties related to student in a non-professional capacity (eg friend, family), letter from supervisor except where it testifies circumstances relating to the University's action/inaction, medical prescription.</p> <p>If no evidence can be provided at all, we expect an explanation of why that is the case.</p> <p>If the evidence does not corroborate with the claim made and nothing else is provided, further advice can be sought from the Faculty.</p> | <p>Fit Note</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-note">https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-note</a></p>   | <p>The following are examples of supporting evidence. This is not an exhaustive list.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fit note</li> <li>• Letter from hospital or qualified medical professionals</li> <li>• Document from authority (eg court, police)</li> <li>• Death certificate</li> <li>• Letter from employer confirming change to work circumstances</li> </ul> |
| Previous interruption/extension   | <p>Key consideration points are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the student already been granted 12 months in total for each type of permission?</li> <li>• Is the application made on the same ground as their previous application?</li> <li>• If on the same ground, has the circumstance changed?</li> <li>• Is new evidence provided?</li> <li>• If the ground is long-standing (eg caring responsibility, long term health problem), have other changes been considered such as change to part-time or change to MPhil?</li> </ul>   |  |  |

| Point for consideration                                    | What to consider  | Resources   | Documentary evidence |
|--|---|---|----------------------|
| Immigration  | <p>Schools are responsible for ensuring that Tier 4 students are in attendance meeting their visa obligation. Records of interruption and extension should be kept accurate and never backdated.</p> <p>There may be immigration implications for students under UK immigration control who have an interruption, extension or change of mode of attendance. The Student Immigration Team should be consulted.</p> <p>If a Tier 4 student is granted permission to interrupt for longer than 60 days, he/she will be reported to UKVI, communication from the Immigration team will be triggered, student will be required to leave the UK and reapply for a new visa.</p> <p>For students at UoM, tier 4 visa is available for full-time study only so tier 4 students cannot change the mode of attendance to part-time.</p>  | <p>Student Admissions and Administration<br/><a href="http://www.saa.manchester.ac.uk/student-immigration/changes-and-interruptions/">http://www.saa.manchester.ac.uk/student-immigration/changes-and-interruptions/</a></p> <p>Student Immigration Team<br/><a href="mailto:visa@manchester.ac.uk">visa@manchester.ac.uk</a></p> |                      |
| Retrospective application                                  | <p>It may be possible to consider a retrospective n application where a compelling reason is given, for example, severe mental health problem preventing student from applying in good time. Otherwise, the application may be rejected or permission granted for the prospective period only. If the reason for the late application is disability-related, refer the case to DASS for advice.</p> <p>For UKVI compliance purpose, students under UK immigration control cannot be granted permission to interrupt the study retrospectively.</p> <p>For funding purposes, if a student received internally administered funding, the School would need to ensure that overpayments for any interruption period granted in retrospect are recovered except periods of illness covered by medical evidence, permissible by the funding body. Please refer to the funder's T&amp;Cs.</p> |   |                      |
| Conflict between study and other commitment including work | <p>A student may have other commitments or circumstances impacting their ability to make study progress, for example, family, caring responsibility, disability and health. The key consideration of what would be regarded as mitigating circumstances is whether the circumstances were unpreventable or unforeseeable and how much</p>   | <p>PhD Ordinances and Regulations<br/><a href="http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=20673">http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=20673</a><br/>(Except in so far as</p>  |                      |



| Point for consideration | What to consider   | Resources   | Documentary evidence |
|-------------------------|--|---|----------------------|
|                         | <p>control they have over such commitment. For example, moving house is not generally regarded as mitigating circumstances but being forced to move or having to move to care for a family member may be considered justified.</p> <p>There are students who register on part-time programmes who are also in casual, part-time or full-time work. It is expected that when joining the programme, the student or his/her employer has undertaken to permit appropriate amount of time for the study. Should circumstances arise which create conflict with the study, special permission can be considered if it is shown that the circumstances could not have been foreseen and are beyond the student's control.</p> | <p><i>relaxation is granted in accordance with the Regulations:</i></p> <p><i>a. for full-time study the degree shall be continuous, extending over such period as may be prescribed by the Regulations; and students will be required to devote their whole time to the degree and to attend in the University at all appropriate times)</i></p> |                      |

## EXAMPLES SCENARIOS

DASS, Occupational Health Service, the Office of General Counsel and the Faculty PGR Office can provide advice regarding the University policies upon request. Examples of scenarios in which Schools may seek advice include:

- Student has been absent for a period/consecutive periods totalling or exceeding 12 months
- Student has already been granted 12 months extension or more, either to programme period, thesis submission or resubmission deadline
- Supervisor raises serious concerns about academic viability or student's fitness
- Duration of mitigating circumstances cannot be easily quantified or duration of request does not appear justified
- There are underlying/complex progress problems which cannot be dealt with through the progress and review process (eg student failed to attend progress review due to ill health)
- Retrospective application without due justification for its lateness
- Schools are minded to reject (not on trivial grounds such as lack of evidence) but would benefit from a second opinion
- Any other permission requests that appear to fall outside of the University policies
- Rejected case brought back for reconsideration, upon availability of new evidence
- Student in employment whose work situation contravenes the programme stipulations or University policies
- Cases with complex mental illness/disability
- Student in receipt of funding where specific funder's rules apply



| Document control box                               |  |
|--|--|
| Policy/Procedure title:                            | Faculty of Humanities Guidelines for PGR Special Permissions   |
| Lead contact email:                                | <a href="mailto:Humanities-pgr@manchester.ac.uk">Humanities-pgr@manchester.ac.uk</a>   |
| Date updated:                                      | September 2019   |
| Approving body:                                    | Faculty of Humanities PGR Committee  |
| Version:   | 1.0  |
| Supersedes:  | n/a  |
| Previous review dates:                             | n/a  |
| Equality impact outcome:                           | n/a  |
| Next review date:                                  | September 2020   |
| Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations: |  |
| Related policies/procedures/guidance etc           | <a href="#">Change of Circumstances Policy for PGR Students</a><br><a href="#">Policy on Supporting Health Fitness and Return to Study</a><br><a href="#">Mental Health Policy</a><br><a href="#">Mental Health Policy: Guidance for Staff</a><br><a href="#">Referral of Students to University Support Services for Medical or Mental Health Reasons</a> |
| Policy owner:                                      | PGR Committee Faculty of Humanities  |
| Lead contact:                                      | PGR Services Manager, Faculty of Humanities  |