

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

POLICY AND PROCEDURES ON STUDENT ABSENCE

This Policy and Procedures on PGR Student Absence was approved by Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) on 15th May 2024 and applies to all PGR students. For undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, please refer to [Policy and Procedures on Student Absence \(Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught\)](#).

The University places a high value on the health and wellbeing of its students. The University is keen to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to maximise the welfare of students but also to limit the consequences for students when genuine absences do occur.

1. POLICY ON PGR STUDENT ATTENDANCE

- 1.1 Formal supervisory meetings between the PGR student and the supervisor are expected to be conducted no less than monthly (pro-rata'd for part time PGR students and those in extension time), unless by mutual agreement.
- 1.2 PGR students are expected to undertake the required hours of study as stated in their admissions contract and, where applicable, their studentship agreement.
- 1.3 PGR students can request authorised holiday absence from their School. The maximum period permitted is 60 calendar days in any rolling 12-month period. PGR students funded by a UKRI Research Council can request a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 40 days (8 weeks) authorised holiday absence from their School, this includes public holidays.
- 1.4 PGR students are required to undertake all formal review and progression exercises (including Annual Progression Exercises) by the required deadlines.
- 1.5 PGR students are required to submit a final thesis and attend a Viva as per the required deadline.
- 1.6 The University Senate may terminate the studies of any PGR student who persistently fails to submit formal review and progression exercises, fails to progress as expected and/or fails to engage with their studies and supervisors, without medical or other good cause for doing so. The University's [Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students](#) and [student monitoring webpages](#) provide more information on how attendance / engagement and the submission of expected work is monitored. PGR students should note that failure to report an absence may initiate their School's monitoring procedures for PGR student attendance.
- 1.7 PGR students must report periods of absence (defined as an inability to attend or perform required work). This is of particular importance in the following instances:

- (i) They are absent for any period of more than **seven consecutive**¹ days
- (ii) They are absent for a period of less than seven consecutive days but during this time they:
 - a. Fail to undertake or submit assessment by the required deadline (e.g. annual progression exercise, thesis submission, viva attendance);
 - b. Are expected on campus
 - c. They are unable to attend a meeting with their supervisor(s)
 - d. Are unable to attend a conference or training session necessary for their research degree programme

1.8 Where PGR students will be absent for a consecutive period longer than one month a suspension application must be submitted together with relevant supporting evidence.

1.9 If a PGR student sits an assessment (e.g. annual progression exercise or viva) or submits expected work (e.g. annual progression exercise report or thesis), it will be assumed that the PGR student is fit to do so and there are no extenuating/mitigating circumstances (defined as exceptional, serious, acute and unforeseen problems, both medical and not). If a PGR student believes that they are not fit to sit an assessment or to submit an assignment due to an extenuating circumstance, or subsequently realises that they were not fit to do so, they should advise the School at the first possible opportunity, in line with Section 2.1, and in any case before any outcomes are published. Failure to follow this may undermine any future appeal.

1.10 Notifying an absence does not necessarily justify the absence and will not automatically authorise an extension to an assessment deadline nor period of study. Unless a suspension is applied for and approved (section 1.7), notifying an absence will not pause or extend the period of registered study.

1.11 PGR student visa holders should be aware that periods of extended absence may have an impact on the University's ability to continue sponsoring their Student visa. The University is only permitted to continue sponsoring a student's visa during a period of absence if the student is still able to achieve their overall degree intention upon their return to study. PGR students should refer to the [Immigration and Student Visas webpage](#), and / or contact the Student Immigration Compliance Team immigration@abdn.ac.uk for advice.

1.12 PGR students funded by a UKRI Research Council are eligible for sick leave for a period of up to 13 weeks (in a 12 month rolling period), additionally the studentship may be extended by a commensurate period. Any UKRI funded PGR student who requires formal sick leave must contact pgrs-studentships@abdn.ac.uk in the first instance. Retrospective claims can only be approved in exceptional circumstances (e.g., inability to submit a request due to incapacitation).

¹Seven consecutive days includes weekends (for example Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday).

- 1.13 PGR students funded by a UKRI Research Council may be eligible for paid or unpaid leave for unexpected life events, like bereavement. Requests for such leave will be considered on a case by case basis and should be requested by contacting pgrs-studentships@abdn.ac.uk.

2. PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING AN ABSENCE

2.1 When should an absence be reported?

- 2.1.1 Absence should be reported as far as possible in advance where the absence is planned (e.g., funeral or representing the University in an official event). Where advance notification is not possible (e.g., in event of illness), **it is expected that PGR students will inform their supervisor(s) on the first day of any period of absence.**
- 2.1.2 Where it is impossible for a PGR student to report on the first day of absence, PGR students should report at the first possible opportunity (normally no later than 3 days after the first day of any period of absence) and provide explanation of the reasons which prevented them notifying their absence earlier. Late notification of absence without good cause will only be permissible in exceptional circumstances. Suspensions will not normally be approved retrospectively.
- 2.1.3 In cases in which a PGR student becomes ill during an assessment (e.g. annual progression exercise panel, the viva) and is unable to continue, they must alert the examiner. They should then advise their supervisor(s) and School PGR admin officer at the first possible opportunity.

2.2 How should an absence be reported?

- 2.2.1 PGR students should report an absence to their supervisory team and/or School PGR Admin officer. PGR students funded by a UKRI Research Council should report an absence to their supervisory team and/or School PGR Admin officer and pgrs-studentships@abdn.ac.uk.
- 2.2.2 For absences of **one month or greater** a suspension of studies must be requested via normal processes (see section 2.7). It is expected that the supervisor(s) and school PGR administrators are also kept informed.

2.3 When is supporting evidence required?

- 2.3.1 The requirement for submitting supporting evidence when reporting an absence varies depending on the period of absence, the nature of the absence and the nature of the events missed. PGR students should, however, note that notification of an absence will not necessarily justify the absence and a clear explanation of the reasons for the absence should be given.

2.3.2 Funded PGR students should refer to their funders guidance on the requirements for supporting evidence for absences. PGR students funded by a UKRI Research Council should contact pgrs-studentships@abdn.ac.uk for guidance.

2.3.3 Supporting evidence is required in the following scenarios:

(i) Where a PGR student has been absent for more than seven consecutive days¹

(ii) They are absent for a period of less than seven consecutive days¹ but during this time they:

- a. Fail to undertake or submit assessment by the required deadline (e.g. six monthly review, annual progression exercise, thesis submission, viva attendance);
- b. Are expected on campus
- c. They are unable to attend a meeting with their supervisor(s)
- d. Are unable to attend a conference or training session necessary for their research degree programme

2.3.4 The Postgraduate Research Officers have discretion on whether or not evidence is required for specific cases. For example, in certain situations (such as, but not limited to, very sensitive or traumatic circumstances) it may be inappropriate or difficult to provide independent evidence or justification for an absence. Students are advised to seek the appropriate support when needed (see Section 2.9 for details). Upon the student's consent, in certain circumstances, Student Advice and Support may confirm their support of an absence request, without providing further details.

2.4 What is considered support evidence?

2.4.1 Funded PGR students should refer to their funders guidance on the requirements for supporting evidence for absences. PGR students funded by a UKRI Research Council should contact pgrs-studentships@abdn.ac.uk for guidance.

2.4.2 For medical absences, appropriate supporting evidence may include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- (a) Written evidence from a clinical practitioner² (which may include pro-forma or a letter) who has been providing health assessment/care for the PGR student which must be signed and clearly show the clinician's details, to enable verification. This can include written evidence from a secondary (e.g., hospital clinic, specialist doctor), tertiary (e.g., highly specialised national or regional centre) or community care service, or a private surgery/clinic, etc. In case of illness, PGR students should refer to the [Know Who To Turn To](#) and [Pharmacy First](#) guidance for advice on which service they should use. If it is

² Students should note that, in accordance with guidance from the Scottish Executive Health Department, clinical practitioners may charge a fee for the provision of medical certificates. Students should note that the University will not reimburse any costs incurred. Some clinical practitioners may not be able to supply medical certificates other than for employment reasons. In these cases, students may use an alternative form of evidence if needed.

impossible for the clinician to verify subsequently that the PGR student had been ill on the date of absence, a back-dated form of evidence will not normally be accepted.

- (b) A letter/email from a support service (including services within the University, e.g. Student Advice & Support Team or University Counselling Service, but also an external counsellor) if they have an ongoing relationship with the PGR student and are already aware of the PGR student's circumstances prior to the absence taking place or have had contact with the PGR student while they were experiencing the illness (i.e. retrospective evidence will not normally be accepted). In these cases, the support service practitioner should provide a letter or email outlining the nature of the medical issue, how it has impacted on the ability of the student to attend a compulsory teaching session or submit an assessment (if relevant) and the nature/extent of the support being given.
- (c) A detailed explanation, included in the suspension application form, from the PGR student describing the impact that the illness has had on their ability to engage or progress their research.

2.4.3 For non-medical absences³, appropriate supporting evidence may include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- (a) A letter/email from a support service (including services within the University, e.g. Student Advice & Support Team or University Counselling Service, but also an external counsellor or other services) detailing how the PGR student's circumstances affected their studies and the nature/extent of the support being given.
- (b) A full description of the cause including the impact it has had on their ability to engage or progress their research.
- (c) Other evidence acknowledged by the University to be of a significant nature, such as a police report, notification of a death, etc.

2.4.4 The Student Advice & Support Team can provide PGR students with support in reporting their absences and, with the PGR students' permission, can liaise with School(s) including the Postgraduate Research School, on their behalf⁴. Where a PGR student believes their medical condition or personal circumstance to be of a particularly sensitive nature, or where the Team is already aware of a PGR student's specific circumstances, PGR students are encouraged to contact the Student Advice & Support Team directly. The University recognises that, for very personal or private issues/events, PGR students may be reluctant to disclose the information to their School. In some cases, it may be possible for the Student Advice & Support Team to confirm to School(s) or the Postgraduate Research School that they have sight of the relevant personal information and that the evidence is satisfactory.

Where appropriate, documentation submitted as supporting evidence should normally be in English or translated into English and verified and where appropriate, should be recently issued.

2.4.5 Postgraduate research officers will decide on whether the evidence is satisfactory in cases of suspensions but may request additional information if required. In making this decision,

³ Students should not request a medical certificate from a clinical practitioner to cover absences of a non-medical nature.

⁴ In certain circumstances, it may also be appropriate for a personal tutor (or equivalent) to liaise with a School on a students' behalf. Such circumstances can include instances where a student has been in regular contact with a personal tutor (or equivalent) over a period of time such that the students' personal circumstances are well-known to the personal tutor.

Postgraduate research officers may refer to monitoring procedures for PGR student attendance. Specific requirements by funding bodies, or the UK Visas and Immigration department (UKVI) of the Home Office, will also need to be considered as part of the process. PGR students should note that, as per Section 1.9, reporting an absence or applying for a suspension does not necessarily authorise an absence.

2.5 What happens to reports of absence?

2.5.1 Reports of absence may be used:

(a) By supervisors and supporting teams to suggest pathways to return to study. It is the responsibility of the PGR student to contact the [Student Advice & Support Service](#).

(b) By School to rearrange an Annual Progression Exercise

(c) By Registry in support to rearrange a viva

2.6 Funded/ sponsored PGR students

2.6.1. Funded / sponsored PGR students may be entitled to sickness absence, it is the PGR student's responsibility to check their sponsors/ funding provider's absence policy/ guidelines. If a funded / sponsored PGR student is requesting a suspension (see section 2.7), it is the PGR student's responsibility to keep the funder/ sponsor informed. A UKRI funded student should contact pgrs-studentships@abdn.ac.uk for guidance.

2.6.2 In cases of serious issues (e.g. when there is concern for a PGR student's welfare) Schools may need to share reports of absence with the other University services, to ensure the PGR student receives appropriate support. In cases where PGR students are struggling with health issues, Schools and other staff should refer to the processes outlined in the [Support for Study Policy](#).

2.6.3 Reports of absence are not the same as extension requests and do not provide by themselves a justification for late submissions of agreed work (see 1.9).

2.7 Suspensions

2.7.1 Where PGR students will be absent for a period longer than one month [a suspension application](#) must be submitted together with relevant supporting evidence.

An application for suspension should be completed prior to the period for which suspension is to commence, or as soon as possible in unexpected circumstances. Suspensions will not normally be approved retrospectively.

It should be noted that PGR Students on suspension are not liable for tuition fees however should continue to complete online registration at the start of each academic year.

It is the responsibility of the postgraduate researcher to keep any sponsor informed of a suspension of studies and seek their approval. The PGRS will keep UKRI Research Councils informed of any suspension of studies.

Before requesting any periods of suspension, UKRI funded postgraduate researchers must seek advice from the PGR School Studentship Team: pgrs-studentships@abdn.ac.uk.

All International postgraduate researchers studying at the University on a visa should refer to the terms of their visa when requesting a suspension of studies and contact the Student Immigration Compliance Team at immigration@abdn.ac.uk for advice on any visa implications of a period of suspension of study prior to submitting the formal paperwork.

Postgraduate researchers should refer to the [Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Students](#) for detailed information on suspensions to research degrees.

2.8 Impact on Visa

2.8.1 PGR students should contact the Student Immigration Compliance Team at immigration@abdn.ac.uk to receive advice in the impact of absence on their visa status.

2.9 What support is available?

2.9.1 The University understands that PGR students may need support and guidance as they deal with issues leading to periods of absence. PGR students are always encouraged to contact their Supervisory Team for advice and signposting to available support. The University has a range of support services available to support PGR students as detailed below:

i) [The Multi-faith Chaplaincy](#) is a place of welcome for all and serves as a spiritual and social centre for all students and staff.

(ii) [The University Counselling Service](#) is open to all students of the University.

(iii) [Registry Officers](#) can provide a source of support to students who have concerns about their programme of study.

(iv) [The Student Advice & Support Team](#) offers impartial and confidential advice and support on a range of issues, including finance, disability information and more.

(v) [The Students' Association \(AUSA\)](#) represents and serves all student's interests and works to make their time in Aberdeen as happy and enjoyable as possible.

(vi) [The Postgraduate Research School Engagement team](#) offer support and advice on all aspects of the PhD journey

(vii) Your Schools [Postgraduate Research Coordinator](#) is an experienced member of staff with extensive knowledge of your School, who can offer advice.

(viii) [The International Advice and Compliance Team](#) provide visa advice to students. They offer support to students and staff to navigate and adhere to immigration rules and regulations