

Absences, Interruptions and Extensions for Postgraduate Research Students, Residents and Interns

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Contents		Page
1	Introduction and purpose	2
2	Scope	2
3	Student entitlements to leave	2
3.1	Annual leave - PGR Students	2
3.2	Annual leave - Residents and Interns	3
3.3	Additional leave	3
3.4	Family leave	4
3.5	Medical leave	4
3.5.1	Summary of process	4
3.5.2	Supporting evidence for medical leave	5
3.5.3	Monitoring medical leave	4
3.5.4	Prolonged medical leave	5
4	Student eligibility criteria for receiving medical leave pay	6
5	Interruption to study	6
5.1	Summary of process	7
5.2	Retrospective interruptions	7
5.3	Visa implications for international students	7
5.4	Length of interruption	7
5.5	During an interruption	8
5.6	Returning from an interruption	8
5.7	Extending an interruption	9
6	Extensions	9
	MRes	9
6.1	Requesting an extension	9
6.2	Failure to submit within the approved extension period	9
6.3	Refused extension requests and late submission	9
	MPhil/PhD	10
6.4	Requesting an extension	10
6.5	Failure to submit within the approved extension period	10
	PG Dip VCP & MVetMed	10
6.6	Requesting an extension	10
6.7	Failure to submit within the approved extension period	11

1. Introduction and purpose

All Postgraduate Research (PGR) students, Residents and Interns may take leave to be absent from studying in a variety of circumstances. This policy outlines the entitlements to leave for each group of students, the ability of a student to take leave and the funding they may receive based on their student status, and the procedures students and staff should follow to report and monitor periods of leave.

2. Scope

This policy applies to students enrolled on PhD, MPhil, MRes, Prof Doc (PGR), PG Dip VCP (Interns) and MVetMed (Residents) programmes of study.

3. Student entitlements to leave

PGR students, Residents and Interns are entitled to apply to take any relevant types of leave described in this policy, unless stated otherwise.

Students are discouraged from undertaking work related to their programme of study during any periods of leave.

If a student is funded and/or is studying on a student visa, they must make sure that they do not contravene any terms and conditions, Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) of their funder and/or collaborative partner contract, or other requirements, when taking leave. Any relevant funder or visa rules take precedence over student entitlements to leave outlined within this policy.

Any extension of a studentship/scholarship that is required following a period of leave is at the discretion of the relevant Head of Department/Graduate School.

3.1. Annual leave – PGR Students

PGR students are entitled to apply to take up to 40 days annual leave per annum commencing from the date of registration (including all public holidays and RVC closure days). This should be prorated for part-time students.

Where applicable, PGR students must abide by an employer's terms and conditions relating to annual leave.

Remaining annual leave days cannot be carried forward to the next year, and no more than one month of annual leave may be taken at the end of study (unless the funding body supporting the studentship states otherwise, in which case the latter takes precedence).

Annual leave must be booked in consultation with, and with the approval of, the supervisory team and the absence formally recorded.

For UKRI funded students, supervisory teams must follow the reporting procedures outlined [here on Learn](#) to ensure accurate reporting to UKRI.

3.2. Annual leave – Residents and Interns

Residents and Interns are entitled to apply to take up to 25 days of annual leave inclusive of bank holidays. There is no entitlement to the RVC concessionary days unless they are taken from the 25-day allowance.

The leave year for Residents and Interns will run from the start date of the scholarship.

Residents and Interns who wish to take annual leave should agree this leave in advance with their supervisors and the absence formally recorded.

Residents and Interns based within CSS should send an email to IntResAnnualLeave@rvc.ac.uk where their leave will be recorded by the Departmental Administrator.

Annual leave cannot be carried forward from one leave year to the next except in exceptional circumstances and with approval of the relevant Head of Department. In the event of the scholarship ending early, leave entitlement will be on a pro-rata basis.

3.3. Additional leave

A student is entitled to make a request to take additional leave to cover specific instances where they may be required to be absent from study that is not covered by other types of leave. This leave will usually cover events which are unforeseen or uncontrollable and cause significant disruption that cannot be accommodated through flexible study. Examples of where this type of leave could be required, includes but is not limited to:

- a bereavement, pregnancy loss and baby loss
- an emergency domestic situation, such as a fire or burglary
- an immediate caring response for a dependant who has a long-term or an emergency caring need
- additional disability leave associated with delayed adjustments
- a health and safety concern that temporarily prevents a student from continuing their studies
- a public duty required by law

Supervisors may grant up to five days' leave at their discretion on compassionate grounds for reasons such as the death of an immediate family member, pregnancy and baby loss, serious illness or injury involving a loved one who requires care, or emergency domestic situation. During this time, students will continue to receive their full stipend, but normally the end date of the studentship/scholarship will remain unchanged.

Longer periods of additional leave taken may result in a student not receiving their stipend or needing to request an interruption or an extension.

UKRI funded students should check their T&Cs as their additional leave entitlements may be different to what is outlined above.

Students must contact their supervisor in advance (or at the earliest possible opportunity if this is not possible) to make a request to take additional leave.

Supervisors should make a formal record of all additional leave taken.

For UKRI funded students, supervisory teams must follow the reporting procedures outlined [here on Learn](#) to ensure accurate reporting to UKRI.

For periods of additional leave exceeding 5 days, students must inform the Postgraduate Programme Management Team who may require additional information or evidence to be provided.

A student should consider requesting an SPD referral in the following situations:

- The additional leave does not fully address their situation, and a longer period is required.
- There have been multiple periods of additional leave that have had an accumulative impact on the student's ability to study.

3.4. Family Leave

PGR students and Residents are entitled to take maternity, adoption, paternity and shared parental leave and should refer to [Maternity, Adoption, Paternity and Shared Parental Leave Policy](#) for further details.

Interns funded by the RVC are not entitled to paid maternity, adoption, paternity and shared parental leave because of the high clinical component and duration of the course. Therefore, Interns may request an interruption to study for absences that exceed 4 weeks. Please refer to Section 5, Interruptions for further details.

For UKRI funded students, supervisory teams must follow the reporting procedures outlined [here on Learn](#) to ensure accurate reporting to UKRI.

3.5. Medical leave

Medical leave is recognised as leave of absence granted because a student is deemed unfit to study due to illness or injury (medical and physical health), which impacts on their ability to engage with their programme of study. It may also be used to attend medical appointments where flexible study is not possible.

3.5.1. Summary of process

Students must inform their supervisor, from the outset of any period of medical leave absence and maintain regular contact with them, especially if their health problem is likely to lead to long term absence from study.

Supervisors of PGR students will make a formal record at the start of the absence and upon return to study, where the information is recorded, and the Bradford factor is calculated.

For UKRI funded students, supervisory teams must follow the reporting procedures outlined [here on Learn](#) to ensure accurate reporting to UKRI.

Supervisors of Residents and Interns based within the CSS department will email IntResSickness@rvc.ac.uk at the start of the absence and upon return to work, where the information is recorded, and the Bradford factor is calculated.

Supervisors of Residents and Interns based within the PPS department will email their Residency/Internship Programme Director/Module Leader at the start of the absence and upon return to work, where the information is recorded, and the Bradford factor is calculated.

3.5.2. Supporting evidence for medical leave

For absences of more than 7 consecutive working days, students are required to inform their supervisor and the Postgraduate Programme Management Team.

Medical certification from their doctor on official headed paper must be forwarded to their supervisor and a copy sent to pgadmin@rvc.ac.uk so that a record can be kept on the student's file. Alternate evidence may be accepted if it is not possible to provide professional medical documentation.

3.5.3. Monitoring medical leave

The Bradford Factor system is used to score absences and is designed to trigger points for referral to Occupational Health, and/or the Postgraduate Programme Management Team, from a calculation over a 12-month period. The trigger point for referral is set at a Bradford Factor of 100. Students who accumulate frequent short-term periods of absence and trigger the Bradford Factor will be referred to Occupational Health and may be signposted to the Advice Centre.

The total cumulative amount of medical leave for MPhil/PhD students must not exceed 52 weeks across the whole studentship.

3.5.4. Prolonged medical leave

A student must consider requesting an interruption to their studies if the illness or injury is having a significant impact on their ability to engage with their programme of study.

For periods of medical leave exceeding 4 weeks, the student must inform the Postgraduate Programme Management Team.

Interruption of study will normally be granted for a certified period of medical leave that exceeds 4 weeks up to a maximum of 12 months.

A PGR student who has had a period or periods of absence through certified illness will be eligible to apply for an extension to their studentship of up to 8 weeks. Students must apply for the extension 3-6 months before the end of the studentship and their application must be supported by their supervisor and the relevant medical certification must be on file. Please refer to Section 6. Extensions for further details.

UKRI funded students should check their T&Cs as they may be entitled to apply for a longer extension to what is outlined above.

4. Student eligibility criteria for receiving medical leave pay

For students who receive an annual maintenance stipend from the RVC or an external organisation (e.g. Research Councils, Wellcome Trust, Charities and Government/Embassies), the following applies:

- During periods of medical leave that are covered by medical certification, a student is eligible to continue to receive payment at their normal stipend value for 8 weeks (28 weeks for UKRI funded studentships).
- As previously stated, for Interns, the high clinical component and duration of the course means that students enrolled on the internship are only eligible to receive payment at their normal stipend value for 4 weeks.
- Where an external organisation is the funder, the supervisor must ask the funder what funding they can provide under their terms and conditions in the first instance.
- If the external funder cannot provide additional funds to cover the entire period of certified medical absence at the normal stipend value, the RVC will cover the gap in costings, up to a maximum of 8 weeks.
- The RVC will only agree to cover the gap in costings once the funder has confirmed what funding they will provide.
- If the period of medical absence exceeds 8 weeks, no further payments will be made by the RVC.
- Students are only eligible to receive paid medical leave at their normal stipend value from the first day of certified illness within any rolling 12-month period.
- Absences that are not covered by a medical certificate are not eligible for paid medical leave.
- Students experiencing short-term, self-limiting illnesses which are not covered by medical certificates, should not apply for paid medical leave. Their usual stipend payments will continue as normal and no extension to their funding will be provided.

5. Interruption to study

An interruption is a recognised and approved break from a student's programme of study.

Any period of time approved as an interruption will be added onto the original end date.

During an interruption, stipend payments will cease unless the interruption is for certified illness, or the external funder/collaborative partner permits this. Please refer to Section 4 Student eligibility criteria for receiving medical leave pay section for further details.

All periods of continuous leave of 4 weeks or more (not prorated), up to maximum of 12 months, will require an interruption to study and must be approved via the Student Performance Development System (SPDS).

Interruptions to the programme of study may be permitted for several reasons: illness, birth of a child or adoption, personal and family reasons, jury service. It should be noted that these reasons are not exhaustive, and interruptions may be granted for other reasons.

5.1. Summary of process

All requests to interrupt a programme of study must be discussed with the Primary Supervisor, the Course Director (Residents and Interns), Programme Director (Residents), Module Leader (Interns) and the Head of Department sufficiently in advance of the likely period of interruption.

Applications to interrupt study for periods exceeding 4 weeks must be made in advance (except in cases of illness where this was not possible) and be approved by SPDS.

Medical and/or other supporting evidence must always be provided, together with a supporting statement from the student's supervisors. Consideration (by supervisors and SPDS) will be given as to whether referral to Occupational Health may be needed (<http://estates.rvc.ac.uk/Health-And-Safety/Occupational-Health>)

Following approval of an interruption, a Change of Registration Form should be submitted to the Postgraduate Programme Management Team (via pgadmin@rvc.ac.uk) within 5 working days of approval being granted at the SPD meeting.

Amendments to a student's record will not be made without a fully completed Change of Registration Form.

5.2. Retrospective interruptions

Retrospective applications for interruption will not normally be considered. An application may be considered only in very exceptional circumstances, and where it was not possible to make an application for interruption prior to the period for which the interruption is requested, e.g. a long-term hospital admission. A retrospective request for an interruption must include an explanation from the student as to why the request was not submitted within the appropriate timeframe.

5.3. Visa implications for international students

The right to remain in the UK for international students will be affected by an interruption. As a Home Office Tier 4 sponsor, the University is legally required to report any changes to a student's registration status to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). This includes any interruptions of study. Students that are in the UK on a Tier 4 visa sponsored by the RVC must seek advice from the Advice Centre and refer to the [UKVI and US Federal Loans Student Attendance Policy](#) prior to submitting a request.

5.4. Length of interruption

Interruptions for a period of less than 4 weeks may be considered in exceptional circumstances.

For interns, the high clinical component and duration of the course means that any absence or interruption for a period greater than 4 weeks is likely to have a significant impact on their ability to complete the requirements to pass the PG Dip VCP as set out in the [Assessment and Award Regulations](#). Students would have the right to appeal the decision if withdrawn from the course. Further information regarding withdrawals can be found in the relevant Code of

Practice. Further information regarding the appeals procedure can be found on the [Student Resolution and Compliance internet pages](#)

Students will not normally be permitted to interrupt their studies for more than 12 continuous months. However, it is recognised that a longer interruption may be necessary in certain circumstances where there is a compelling reason. In such cases the relevant staff (Supervisor, Course Director (Residents) Programme Director (Residents), Head of Department/Graduate School) may need to assess that overall programme learning outcomes can still be met within the registration limits of the programme at the intended return date. This assessment must be completed prior to approval of the additional interruption.

Interruptions beyond 12 months require a suspension of regulations which can only be granted by the Principal.

5.5. During an interruption

During periods of approved interruption, students will not be required to maintain active study on their research programmes. Any access to facilities needs to be approved by the Head of Department. If approved, students in this situation will normally have access to RVC resources and facilities but will not be required to pay any fees.

Student stipends may not be paid for all of the period of interruption depending on the organisation funding the study and the circumstances, as outlined above in Section 4. Student eligibility criteria for receiving medical leave pay.

Students must keep their supervisor, and the Postgraduate Programme Management team informed of any changes in their circumstances that may result in them returning to their studies earlier or later than originally stated. Each application for a further interruption must be accompanied by new medical certification/supporting evidence.

5.6. Returning from an interruption

SPD will arrange a return to study meeting prior to the student's return following an interruption, normally of more than 6 months, unless there is a necessary reason, e.g. the interruption is linked to a mental or physical health issue.

Occupational Health and the Student/Disability Advisor should be consulted if it is thought to be likely that additional support needs will be required for students returning from a long-term absence.

If the student does not agree with or agree to accept the reasonable adjustments, withdrawal of study can be initiated.

Annual leave may be used to support a student's return to study, e.g. a number of days can be used to supplement a full-time student studying part-time temporarily as part of their phased return agreement. A phased return will not normally last longer than 4 weeks.

A student must attend any referral appointments (medical or otherwise) and regular follow up appointments that are scheduled for after their return to study.

Students must inform the Postgraduate Programme Management team if they intend to end their interruption early and submit a Change of Registration form to formally request this.

A student must re-enrol on return from an interruption within 4 weeks of their return date.

A student may be withdrawn if they do not confirm their return to study by the approved end date of the interruption, and they have not applied for an extension to the interruption.

5.7. Extending an interruption

If a student is unable to return to their studies at the end of the interruption, they will need to discuss this with their primary supervisor and attend an SPD meeting to make a new request to interrupt. Additional medical and/or other supporting evidence must always be provided, together with a supporting statement from the student's supervisors.

6. Extensions

MRes

6.1. Requesting an extension

- Requests for an extension to an in-course assessment deadline should be made by completing the Assessment Extension Request Form and submitting it to examspg@rvc.ac.uk in advance of the submission deadline.
- All extension requests must be approved by the MRes Course Director and may be refused at their discretion.
- Normally, only one extension per assessment will be permitted.

6.2. Failure to submit within the approved extension period

- Students who do not submit within the approved extension period will be subject to the Late Submission Policy set out in the RVCs General Assessment Regulations.
- Students will also be required to attend a meeting with an SPD Panel (Student Progress and Development), which will advise on continuation or withdrawal of study.

6.3. Refused extension requests and late submission

- If an assessment extension request is refused, and the student subsequently submits their thesis after the deadline, they will be liable to pay a proportion of the annual tuition fee. e.g. 1-month late submission (or part of) = 1/12 of the tuition fee, 2 month late submission (or part of) = 2/12 of the tuition fee etc. Information on tuition fees and related charges can be found on the RVC website.

MPhil/PhD

6.4. Requesting an extension

- For MPhil/PhD students, any request for an extension beyond the period specified in the Offer of Study, up to a maximum of four years (pro-rata for part-time students) should normally be made by the supervisor and endorsed by the grant holder, where applicable.
- Under no circumstances may an extension take a student beyond the maximum of four years of study (pro-rata for part-time students).
- Requests for an extension should be made approximately 3 months in advance of the current end date.
- Extension requests should be submitted using the [Change of Registration Form](#), which must be sent to pgadmin@rvc.ac.uk in a timely manner.
- Requests made within one month of the end of the studentship will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.
- The request must set out:
 - The reasons why the student has been unable to submit within the original period of study;
 - A full account of progress since initial registration;
 - A clear timeline estimating the time required for completion; and
 - The length of the extension requested.
- Extension requests for students enrolled on an MPhil/PhD programme must be approved by the Head of the Graduate School, in consultation with the Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation, where necessary.
- The RVC reserves the right to refuse an extension request.
- Normally, only one extension will be permitted.
- Approved extensions increase the expected thesis submission date, defined as the end date in the student record and may generate a proportion of the annual tuition fee. e.g. 1-month late submission (or part of) = 1/12 of the tuition fee, 2 month late submission (or part of) = 2/12 of the tuition fee etc. Information on tuition fees and related charges can be found on the RVC website.

6.5. Failure to submit within the extension period

- Students who do not submit within the approved extension period will be required to attend a meeting with an SPD panel (Student Progress and Development), which will advise on continuation or withdrawal of study.
- Requests for an extension to the four-year submission deadline will not normally be considered.
- Any MPhil/PhD student who does not submit their thesis by the four-year submission deadline will be liable to pay a late submission fee.

PG Dip VCP & MVetMed

6.6. Requesting an extension

- Requests for an extension to an in-course assessment deadline should be made by

completing the Assessment Extension Request Form and submitting it to examspg@rvc.ac.uk in advance of the submission deadline.

- All extension requests must be approved by the PG Dip/VCP/MVetMed Course Director and may be refused at their discretion.
- Normally, only one extension per assessment will be permitted.

6.7. Failure to submit within the approved extension period

- Students who do not submit within the approved extension period will be subject to the Late Submission Policy set out in the RVCs General Assessment Regulations.
- Students will also be required to attend a meeting with an SPD Panel (Student Progress and Development), which will advise on continuation or withdrawal of study.