

INTERCALATION PROCEDURE FOR RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENTS

Introduction

1. This document defines the University of Suffolk's procedure for dealing with requests from research degree studies for intercalation due to extenuating circumstances.

Scope

2. This procedure applies to students on research degree programmes at the University of Suffolk leading to awards of the University of Essex.

3. Students on research degree programmes at the University of Suffolk that lead to awards of the University of Brighton and University of East Anglia should refer to the equivalent policy of their awarding body.

Definitions

4. During their research degree programme, a student may encounter significant personal difficulties that impact on their ability to undertake their studies. The University refers to these personal difficulties as extenuating circumstances.

5. Intercalation is defined as an authorised break in studies, normally lasting between four weeks and one academic year. Granting intercalation status assumes that the student has been judged to have the potential to continue with their studies after a break.

Principles, commitments and expectations

6. The University of Suffolk is an institution which aims to support students to succeed in their studies and will be mindful of that context in the implementation of this procedure. The consideration of all requests for intercalation due to extenuating circumstances will be undertaken in a fair, reasonable, sensible, student-focused and timely manner.

7. Personal and sensitive data will be treated confidentially and its consideration restricted to those who need to know in order for a decision to be made. It is recognised that there may be instances where the evidence is of such a nature that only the Head of Suffolk Doctoral College should have sight of it. Students should indicate where this is the case when submitting their request.

8. Students have a responsibility for managing their research activities throughout the academic year. It is expected that students will plan such activities carefully to ensure that they

meet appropriate progression milestones and submit draft work and their final thesis in accordance with agreed deadlines.

9. The University recognises that illness and difficult or distressing personal circumstances occur as a normal part of life and can usually be absorbed. The University also recognises that a period of leave can potentially be disruptive to a student's studies and affect their motivation to continue, either pushing up withdrawal rates or slowing down completion. However, if a set of circumstances are such as will prevent a student engaging effectively with their programme of study, suspending study and taking a period of time out (intercalation) should be considered.

Grounds for extenuating circumstances

10. Circumstances that may be considered as extenuating (i.e. as exceptional or 'unforeseen' and over and above the course of everyday experience) and are therefore grounds for a request for intercalation would normally fall under one of the following categories:

- significant illness, accident or injury (of a nature which, in an employment context, would have led to an extended absence on sick leave)
- deterioration of a long-term health condition
- the death or serious illness of a close family member or dependant (of a nature which, in an employment context, would have led to an absence in accordance with compassionate leave regulations)
- significant adverse personal or family circumstances directly affecting the student
- parental leave
- other significant factors for which there is evidence of a direct adverse impact on the student
- paid work that is closely tied to, and supports, the student's research (during the standard period only).

11. Examples of extenuating circumstances include:

- serious illness or injury
- symptoms of an infectious disease that could be harmful if passed on to others
- worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions
- death or significant illness of a close family member or friend
- unexpected caring responsibilities for a family member or dependant
- significant personal or family crises
- witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident
- a crime which has had a substantial impact on the student

- accommodation crisis such as eviction or the home becoming uninhabitable
- safeguarding concerns (relating to the student or their dependants)
- parental leave (including the minimum two-week maternity leave following the birth, and periods of parental leave from employment)
- jury service
- competing in national or international sporting events or other similarly high-profile activities.

12. Circumstances that will not normally be considered as extenuating include:

- alleged statement of a medical condition without reasonable evidence (medical or otherwise) to support it
- long-term health condition or specific learning need for which the student is already receiving reasonable or appropriate adjustments in accordance with the [Code of Practice on Reasonable Adjustments for Students](#))
- minor illnesses (such as coughs and colds or hay fever) which in a work situation would be unlikely to lead to absence from work, unless the symptoms are particularly severe
- personal or domestic events, such as holidays, house moves or other events that were planned or could reasonably have been expected
- minor life events, unless the circumstances have had a disproportionate impact
- financial issues, unless an unexpected financial crisis (beyond budgeting difficulties) prevents the student from engaging with or funding their studies
- routine consequences of paid employment.

13. Pregnancy is not normally considered an extenuating circumstance unless the student experiences ill-health or complications associated with the pregnancy. When a student finds they are pregnant they are encouraged to speak to the Student Life team. A risk assessment can then be carried out to assess whether any changes are needed to the student's studies for health and safety reasons. This will enable a support plan and appropriate arrangements to be put in place, which could include reasonable adjustments and the deferral of any progress review or submission deadlines that fall within the two weeks after the due date or birth (in line with the minimum period of maternity leave in the UK). Students who wish to take a period of maternity leave lasting longer than the minimum two-week period should apply to intercalate.

Requests for intercalation

14. Students may submit a request to intercalate their studies where they are not fit or able to study for an extended period (normally more than four weeks). Noting that breaks can be disruptive

to studies, students are encouraged to liaise with their supervisory team and give careful consideration to the period of intercalation required, with a view to planning to return to their studies at the earliest opportunity. Normally the maximum period of intercalation is one academic year for both full-time and part-time students, but a shorter period of intercalation may be appropriate depending on the nature and severity of the student's situation. Intercalation for more than a year will only be granted in exceptional evidenced circumstances, and for no more than a further academic year.

15. All requests for intercalation must be submitted to Suffolk Doctoral College by the student using the Change to Registration Request form, as soon as possible after the circumstances that have prompted the request have occurred. Requests may also be made up to eight weeks in advance where the student is aware that they will be unable to study from a set date (for example due to a planned operation or period of maternity leave). Retrospective requests for intercalation will be granted in exceptional circumstances only and are not an option for those who are sponsored by the University for a Student Visa.

16. In exceptional circumstances, a member of University staff may submit a request on behalf of a student where the student is physically unable to do so themselves, for example because they are in hospital or a similar situation, and the member of staff is privy to the circumstances and has been authorised to submit a request by the Head of Suffolk Doctoral College.

17. All sections of the form must be completed. Supporting evidence is not always required but should be provided when submitting the form if available. If not provided, the University reserves the right to request evidence where required, which should be provided by email to the Suffolk Doctoral College.

18. All requests for intercalation must be accompanied by a supporting statement from the Lead Supervisor (or other nominated member of the supervisory team) confirming that the request has been discussed.

19. Students on a Student Visa should be mindful of the implications of intercalation and seek early advice from their supervisory team and the Student Life team. The University will report any period of intercalation to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). If the intended period of intercalation is for 60 days or more, the University will withdraw sponsorship and the student will have to leave the UK. Prior to returning to their studies, the student can request further immigration sponsorship and, if eligible, apply for a new Student Visa to enter the UK.

20. It is the responsibility of the student to resolve any financial implications of intercalation. The University of Suffolk Tuition Fee Policy details the timeframe for payment of fees.

21. Students with approved intercalation status will have access to the University of Suffolk library, Learning Services, Student Life services and Brightspace, but may not attend any supervisory meetings or engage with any training or research activity during the period of intercalation.

Role of the supervisory team

22. It is expected that students will have discussed their situation with their supervisory team before submitting a request for intercalation. All requests must be accompanied by a supporting statement from their Lead Supervisor (or other nominated member of the supervisory team) before it can be approved.

23. Supervisory teams should ensure that students have a realistic understanding of the range of actions and remedies that are available to deal with their circumstances and be aware that some students may be reluctant to report extenuating circumstances and may consider this a sign of weakness or failure.

Approval of requests for intercalation

24. Requests for intercalation are subject to approval by the Head of Suffolk Doctoral College on the recommendation of the Lead Supervisor (or other nominated member of the supervisory team).

25. Where accepted, the date of intercalation will be taken as the date the request was submitted. For requests made in advance, the date of intercalation will be the date requested on the form.

26. Students will normally be advised of the outcome of requests for intercalation and the appropriate return date within ten working days of receipt of the form. Where a request is rejected, the outcome notification to the student will include the reason for the rejection.

27. The supervisory team and the University of Essex Postgraduate Research Education Team will also be advised of the outcome of requests for intercalation.

Return to studies

28. On their return to studies after a period of intercalation, the student should meet with their supervisory team to complete a Return to Studies form, to assess their current circumstances and ensure that sufficient support is in place to enable them to successfully re-engage with their research. This should be submitted to Suffolk Doctoral College for information.

Links to other policies

29. Where student claims of extenuating circumstances raise potential fitness to study concerns, the matter will be reported to the relevant Dean of School for consideration under the University's [Support to Study Procedure](#).

30. Where student claims of extenuating circumstances raise potential safeguarding issues, either for the student or others, the matter will be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Officer for consideration in accordance with the University's [Safeguarding Policy](#).