Guidance on extensions to registration periods for research degree students

As set out in the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research and Training, there are standard registration periods set out for research degrees (both MPhil and PhD). The ability to plan for and work towards submission within these periods is one of the key expectations of study at this level; it is often essential where a student is externally funded and is also good preparation for working to major deadlines (such as applying for research grants), where little or no latitude on deadlines will be available. Good progress monitoring throughout the course of a research degree is often an essential means by which timely submission can be achieved; monitoring can flag up the need for remedial action if progress is too slow to result in timely submission and can help identify any support that may be needed or where circumstances make an interruption to study necessary.

The vast majority of submissions for PhD require a degree of amendment following examination; some will be superficial and some more significant. However, particularly for those going on to a career in research, the PhD submission – though a huge personal achievement – is soon likely to be eclipsed by subsequent work, some of which will develop material originally touched upon in the PhD thesis. Therefore, while it is understandable that students will wish to submit the best possible representation of their doctoral research, this must be balanced with the need to submit in timely fashion.

There are, however, exceptional circumstances in which the timetable for submission can be disrupted and where an extension to the deadline beyond the normal maximum registration period may be appropriate. Feedback from students has been that the key information on extensions previously set out in the former PGR Student Handbook, and now available in the Code of Practice, would benefit from amplification. This document seeks to clarify the circumstances in which a student may make an extension request.

In what circumstances can an extension request be made?

The central criteria that any case for extension is expected to meet is that there must have been unavoidable delays outside the control of the student; there will be circumstances that have occurred during the final phase of the writing-up year (i.e. particularly the last 3 months) preceding the submission deadline.

The following is a list of areas in which such circumstances can arise:

- Medical emergencies or other serious causes that prevent work on the research degree from continuing for short periods. Medical evidence (which can include documentation from either medical practitioners or the University Wellbeing service) is required in support of medical cases for extension and it is advised that medical-related absences of longer than 1 month will be expected to have been addressed through the use of interruption of study
- The unexpected absence of a main supervisor for consultation during the final writing-up months
- Disruption to key resources necessary for submission (such as physical space) or a significant loss of data already compiled. In the case of the latter, this should normally be avoidable through good practice in data management (ensuring data and other written work is regularly backed up)

1 Available at https://www.gold.ac.uk/graduate-school/essential-information/
Extensions will not be approved solely on the basis of the following:

- Undertaking further research
- Employment commitments
- Availability of sponsorship beyond the maximum registration period
- Attendance of conferences and other events
- Preparing publications
- Having underestimated the amount of work still left to do; regular discussion with supervisors should help to avoid this

In considering cases for extension, it will be taken into account whether the frequency of contact from the student (and/or their attendance at the University) has been unacceptably poor, despite reasonable efforts from the Department to maintain such contact.

**How long a period of extension should I apply for?**

This should normally be discussed with your supervisor but students are advised to be realistic. Justification for the period requested (including a timeline to submission) will need to be submitted. Requests for periods of longer than 1 year will not be approved; in such cases, either an interruption or withdrawal from studies will often be the appropriate course of action. A request for a second extension, taking the total extension beyond 1 year’s duration, will not be approved. Students who have not upgraded by their submission deadline are not eligible for an extension, because upgrade is supposed to have occurred by the mid-point of the whole PhD period. In circumstances where a student’s work has not warranted upgrade by this late stage, asking for even a maximum extension of a further year would not leave sufficient time for a successful submission.

**When do I request an extension?**

Normally at least 2 months before your submission deadline. Cases submitted 6 months or more before the deadline will not be considered.

If you submit an application after your submission deadline and you (or your supervisor) have not notified the Graduate School in advance, this is unlikely to be approved.

**How do I submit a case for extension?**

The formal extension form can be obtained from the Research Degrees office within Registry (Student Centre) or by contacting the Graduate School.

This form should be completed in conjunction with your supervisor and submitted, along with any supporting evidence, to Research Degrees (details provided on the form).

If an extension is approved, termly updates on progress must be submitted 3 weeks before the end of each of the following two terms.
Other considerations

Sponsored students need to refer to any terms and conditions applicable to their funding before submitting any application for extension.

Likewise, candidates who are on a Tier IV visa need to be aware of any limitations that this can cause. These can and should be discussed with the University’s Immigration Advisory Service.

Further information

Where interruption is likely to be a more appropriate solution to difficulties experienced during studies, the form to approve this can be found under ‘Taking a break from study’ at https://www.gold.ac.uk/students/studying/research-students/

Graduate School

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