

Guidelines for Interruptions of Studies for PhD, MPhil, MD[Res] and EngD students

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document provides guidelines about interruption of studies. Before taking any steps to amend a doctoral student's registration, the supervisor should establish whether the student holds a Tier 4 visa. If this is the case, advice from the International Student Support Team should be sought immediately: international@imperial.ac.uk
- 1.2. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss interruptions as early as possible with their supervisors because there could be financial and visa implications.

2. External Study Leave

- 2.1. External Study Leave is defined as being a period of time away from College (minimum of two weeks) to undertake research which counts towards the degree registration. Ordinarily, this is either fieldwork or a placement, but also covers split-PhDs. It will be recorded as an External Study Leave Milestone. Before taking a period of external study leave, supervisors and students are advised to check the terms and conditions of the student's funding body which may stipulate restrictions on taking this type of leave and may impact on the stipend.
- 2.2. For advice and guidance on external study leave, please contact records@imperial.ac.uk. Guidance on placements can be provided by the Assistant Registrar (Placements) (student.placement@imperial.ac.uk) and departments are advised to read the *Guidelines for PhD, MPhil, MD[Res] and EngD students wishing to take External Study Leave*.
- 2.3. A period of time away from College to undertake activities which do not directly contribute towards the degree registration should be recorded as an interruption of studies using the category Alternative Research/Internships.

3. Interruptions of Study – General Principles

- 3.1. Students should be informed of welfare arrangements in their written induction material and should be specifically advised at Induction meetings to inform their supervisor and/or PG Tutor of any problems affecting their academic performance. Information about the welfare arrangements should also be clearly accessible from relevant departmental websites. These guidelines, including details about the type of interruption and evidence required to support requests should be made available to students. All requests to interrupt should be made using the Application for PGR Interruption of Studies Form and accompanied by any independent

corroborative evidence. This evidence and details of the outcome should be kept on the individual's file.

- 3.2. An interruption of studies will effectively “stop the clock” on a PhD student's period of registration, extending the original date of submission by the period of time indicated in the interruption. It will not be recorded as a late submission. An interruption can be taken at any stage of the PhD, including the Completing Research Status (CRS). The only exception to this is when a student is writing up away from College because there is no active student status at this point. No tuition fees will be charged during an interruption and no stipend will be paid. Students can apply for an interruption using the *Application for PGR Interruption of Studies Form*. Students and supervisors are also advised to check the terms and conditions of their funding body prior to applying for an interruption.
- 3.3. **For Tier 4 students, an interruption will trigger a report from the College to UKVI which will result in a visa curtailment (with the exception of an interruption to become a Sabbatical Officer) and the student must leave the UK.** Students must then reapply for a visa to re-enter the UK once the interruption is finished. An exception to this is when a student has been declared unfit for travel. In this case an authorised absence may be granted (see section 5 of this document). Once again, Tier 4 students and their supervisors are reminded to contact the International Student Support Office immediately if they are considering an interruption.
- 3.4. Students studying as part of a 1+3 arrangement (MRes or MSc, plus PhD) are subject to the regulations for taught course interruptions whilst they are registered for the Master's award. As soon as they progress to the PhD, they will be subject to these guidelines (*Guidelines for Interruptions of Studies for PhD, MPhil, MD[Res] and EngD Students*).
- 3.5. **Students and supervisors are reminded that retrospective or backdated interruptions will not be considered unless there are exceptional circumstances and a compelling case. Any retrospective interruptions will need approval from the student's Director of Postgraduate Studies and the Academic Registrar.** Due to UKVI Tier 4 sponsorship rules retrospective interruptions of study are not permitted for Tier 4 students.

4. Grounds for Interrupting

- 4.1. Supervisors whose students wish to apply for an interruption must first establish whether the student has a Tier 4 Visa. If this is the case, the student should be referred to the International Studies Support Team immediately for advice and guidance on how this will impact on their visa status. Students can apply for an interruption using one of the following categories:
 - Health
 - Alternative Research or an Internship
 - Financial
 - Maternity

- Adoptive Leave
- Paternity
- Elite Sport
- Personal
- Military Service
- Work Commitments
- Disruption as a result of College Building Works or equipment/software failure
- General

4.2. Interruption of Studies based on Health Grounds

- 4.2.1. Students will need to provide evidence to support their application to interrupt on health grounds including disability. [Note: The College Health Centre can certify illness only for absence from College lasting more than one week. They cannot certify illness if the student has not been seen at the Health Centre during the illness. Likewise, the College Student Counselling Service can only provide a letter on request by a student who is already attending counselling.] Suitable evidence should be provided, together with a completed *Application for PGR Interruption of Studies Form*. Before returning to studies, students must provide medical evidence which confirms that they are fit to return to studies. Examples of suitable evidence include: a medical Certificate or doctor's letter (if from a UK based practitioner, they should be GMC registered), email/letter from Imperial College Health Centre, hospital admission note, letter/email from counsellor. If students are not able to provide evidence, they should be asked to explain why.

4.3. Interruption of Studies to undertake Alternative Research or an Internship

- 4.3.1. This is defined as being a period of time away from College to undertake activities which do not directly contribute towards the degree registration. The *Application for PGR Interruption of Studies Form* must be completed and should have the support of the supervisor and department and evidence to support the internship should accompany the application, for example, an email or letter from the host confirming the internship and dates.

4.4. Interruption of Studies for Financial Reasons

- 4.4.1. It may be necessary for students to take an interruption during times of financial hardship. If this is the case, students should be reminded that the College has a student support fund which is available to support students experiencing financial difficulties or a change in their circumstances. More information about this fund is available at <http://www.imperial.ac.uk/students/fees-and-funding/student-support-fund/>
- 4.4.2. This category should only be used where interruption is the result of inability to afford fees and/or maintenance and it is expected this can be resolved. Here evidence such as bank statements should be provided as evidence.

4.5. Interruption of Studies for Maternity Leave, Adoptive Leave or Paternity Leave

- 4.5.1. Funded students are advised to check the terms and conditions of their studentship with respect to maternity, adoptive and paternity leave. For Home/EU research students in receipt of a stipend, contracts should include provision for up to 16 weeks paid maternity or adoptive leave (unless the funder stipulates a longer period).
- 4.5.2. Should funders not make provision to support maternity/adoptive leave or if students are self-funded, students are advised to contact their department in the first instance. Should the provision of departmental financial support not be available, a central fund, managed by the Registry, can be utilised to support full-time Home/EU students. An application should be made for a period of interruption of studies to cover the period of maternity/adoptive leave, normally for 16 weeks, but may be less if the individual so wishes. The application may be extended beyond 16 weeks, for up to one year but anything beyond 16 weeks will not be funded by the Registry. An application for an interruption of studies for maternity or adoptive leave must be made to the Registry in advance of any application for funding. To apply for funding, students are asked to complete the [Maternity Fund application form](#) and provide a copy of the MATB1 form. Both should be returned to Student Financial Support at student.funding@imperial.ac.uk. [Note that Research Assistants (who may also be registered for a PhD, but as part-time students) are entitled to maternity or adoptive leave in accordance with the College conditions of service for staff].
- 4.5.3. The central fund to support maternity / adoptive leave is not currently available to part time students, international students (because an interruption will likely curtail their visa) or in support of paternity leave. Applications for Paternity leave can be made using the *Application for PGR Interruption of Studies Form* noting that the maximum period of paternity leave normally allowed is 4 weeks. Again, suitable evidence to support the application must be provided in the form of their partner's MATB1 form. Given the central fund to support maternity / adoptive leave is not currently available to support paternity leave, students are advised to check with their department to see if financial support is available.
- 4.5.4. If the student holds a tier 4 visa and is planning to take maternity, paternity or adoptive leave this may have an impact on their visa status. Depending on the circumstances, students may be required to leave the UK during this period of absence. Once again, students should be advised to contact the International Student Support Team as soon as possible to discuss options. International students holding a scholarship should also inform their funder of their pregnancy or planned interruption and comply with any requirements made by that body.
- 4.5.5. Further information and advice, including information for students with children can be found at this website:
<http://www.imperial.ac.uk/students/fees-and-funding/general-support/childcare/>

4.6. Interruptions to participate in Elite Sport

4.6.1. This category can be used when students represent countries in elite sporting events. The application must include suitable evidence which supports the student's application.

4.7. Interruptions for Personal Reasons

4.7.1. This category can be used in cases where there is bereavement, caring responsibilities, an accident or if the student is a victim of crime. This category can also be used for other personal reasons that do not clearly sit within the other categories. Once again, suitable evidence must be provided for example, a death certificate or police crime number or letter.

4.8. Interruptions for Military Service

4.8.1. This category can be used when a student is conscripted to the military or deployed as a member of the reserve forces. Evidence which supports a student's application must be provided such as the letter confirming conscription.

4.9. Interruptions due to Work Commitments

4.9.1. This category can be used to cover work commitments during busy times, for example, clinicians who may be undertaking clinical work during writing up. Suitable evidence should accompany the application and may include a letter from a line manager.

4.10. Interruptions due to disruption as a result of College Building Works or equipment/software failure

4.10.1. This category can be applied to cover any works carried out by College or where equipment or software fails. In this case, the department or College will need to provide a statement in support of this application as evidence.

4.11. Interruptions for other General Reasons

4.11.1. This category can be used to record interruptions which do not fit into any of the other categories or in cases where the Registry's Student Records are not provided with sufficient information about the nature of the request. In these instances the department will be asked to clarify the nature of the interruption.

5. **Authorised Absences – International students only**

5.1. In exceptional cases, for example if a student is declared unfit to travel, pregnant or suffering from mental health issues, an authorised absence may be granted by College. Cases will be assessed by the Visa Compliance Team on an individual basis. Student fees are still payable during this period of absence and students will receive their stipend. Authorised absences cannot extend a student's period of registration at the College or submission

date. In addition, the College must be able to continue to meet its engagement responsibilities with the student and keep records of how the authorised absence was authorised and monitored.

6. Other categories applied by College

6.1. Other categories of interruption may be applied by College. These are:

- Compulsory – Enforced, can only be lifted by registry e.g. suspension under the Code of Student Discipline
- Sabbatical

7. Students with disabilities or mental health issues

7.1. Should a student declare a disability to their supervisor as a consequence of applying for an interruption, please ensure that they are advised to seek support from the Disability Advisory Service (disabilities@imperial.ac.uk)

7.2. For some students, a health issue or personal issue may subsequently lead to a mental health issue and if this is the case, they should be referred to the Student Mental Health and Counselling Service for support and guidance (counselling@imperial.ac.uk).

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