

Personal circumstances guidance for PGRs

What are personal circumstances?

Personal circumstances are significant personal difficulties or circumstances which:

- Are significantly disruptive matters, outside of your control;
- Impact on your ability to complete and submit work for, or attend a specific progress event e.g. a progression examination, progress review or final assessment viva examination.

You are expected to plan your research study workload to avoid being impacted by a minor illness or other cause, which is not considered to be a personal circumstance in this context.

If you choose to submit work for a progress milestone or attend a viva examination or progress review, it will be assumed you have made a judgement that you are fit to do so and the implication will be that there were no personal circumstances present, which were adversely affecting you. If you apply for personal circumstances afterwards your application will normally be rejected.

What options are available for PGRs?

You can apply for one of the following:

- A five day extension to a milestone submission deadline with evidence or, if your circumstances are eligible, via self-certification;
- Postponement of a progression examination, progress review meeting or final assessment viva, evidence and urgent action required);
- Up to 28 day extension to a progress milestone submission deadline (evidence required);
- Suspension of your registration for more than one month and up to 12 months (evidence required);
- Extension of you registration if you have passed progress review stage 3 (PR3) and are in the completion stage (evidence and completion plan required).

Look at the [PGR personal circumstances flowchart](#) to help you decide what action to take.

If your circumstances relate to a taught module, **do not** use this process – go to the [University's Personal Circumstances page](#) and follow the guidance there.

You are strongly advised to obtain advice from your Director of Studies before you apply. If you are applying for a 28 day milestone extension, a suspension of your registration or to extend your registration in the completion period your DoS must confirm that they support your application. The Graduate School can also provide guidance about the process for submitting an application and more information and frequently asked questions are available in the [Graduate School Handbook](#).

Eligibility for applying for personal circumstances

The following are examples of valid reasons for applying for personal circumstances if you can show that they are affecting your ability to work on your research, completing a progress milestone, or attending a viva examination:

- illness or injury that is serious enough to stop you from working on your research altogether;
- illness or injury that is slowing down your work rate significantly but not stopping you from working on your research altogether;
- significant illness or injury on the day of, or during a viva examination;
- unexpected serious illness of a close family member which means you need to provide significant caring support that you were not able to plan for;
- death of someone close to you or the significant, ongoing effects of grief following the death of someone close to you;
- unexpected and significant increase in your employment workload that is beyond your control (only if you are a part-time PGR);
- being the victim of a crime;
- unexpected financial difficulties where these affect your ability to support yourself during your research study (self-funding PGRs only, consult the Graduate School for further advice about eligibility before applying);
- temporary¹ failure, withdrawal or non-availability of **previously agreed access** to laboratory or other equipment that is outside your control and is owned by the University or an external collaborative or industrial partner. Evidence must show that this equipment is essential to your research, and the situation must be confirmed by the University or external partner;
- participation in activities at a national / international level or requirements of military service or jury service from which you cannot defer - see <https://www.gov.uk/jury-service/delaying-or-being-excused-from-jury-service>.

What circumstances are not eligible?

You cannot apply for any of the following reasons:

- colds or known conditions such as hay fever;
- personal illness or disability where reasonable adjustments are already in place;

¹Permanent withdrawal of previously agreed access to, or non-availability of, essential equipment may require the research project or its direction to be reconsidered or re-scoped in conjunction with the supervisory team. Where this is not possible, project registration may have to be withdrawn.

- normal examination stress or anxiety experienced during preparation for a progression examination, progress milestone event or final viva examination;
- research study related circumstances: equipment failure e.g. computing/printer difficulties, failure to have taken back up copies of your work, data stolen, hacked or corrupted, missing books, poor time management, misreading progress review or viva examination information or guidance;
- requests based on casual preferences or for social or domestic reasons, for example, weddings;
- non serious domestic or personal disruptions: moving house, change of job, holidays, normal job pressure, normal childcare requirements, failed travel arrangements, oversleeping;
- cultural adjustment/assimilation, difficulty with the English language, different teaching methods in the United Kingdom to a home university, anxiety caused by visa issues;
- viva room conditions: disruption in the viva room, excessive external noise.

How to apply for personal circumstances

- Discuss your situation with your Director of Studies;
- Look at the list of eligible circumstances to determine whether your particular circumstance is likely to be accepted;
- Decide which solution or option would be most beneficial to you or help you most, i.e. what are you asking for: a five day extension, a 28 day milestone extension, a full suspension of your registration, or an extension to the completion phase of your registration? Do you need to postpone a viva? You can use the [PGR Personal Circumstances flowchart](#) to help you decide what you need
- If you need to postpone a viva examination, you must contact the [Graduate School](#) as soon as possible. If this is a final assessment viva happening within the next 4 days you must ring the [Graduate School PGR Assessment team](#) **immediately**;
- For a five day extension to a milestone deadline either email the graduate school attaching your evidence, or ring the graduate school to discuss self-certification;
- For everything else, download and complete the [PGR personal circumstances application form](#) ensuring that you fill in all relevant boxes and **state clearly** what solution option you are requesting;
- Send the completed form to the GraduateSchool@uwe.ac.uk **attaching your supporting evidence** (see below for acceptable supporting evidence)

Supporting evidence

All applications must be accompanied by original, independent documentary evidence, except for a five day self-certification where you must ring the [Graduate School](#) to discuss your circumstance confidentially with a designated member of Graduate School staff.

The evidence must show that the circumstances:

- were out of your control and could not be prevented;
- relate directly to the period affected and confirm the impact of the circumstances on you;
- relate directly to you, not a family member, friend etc., e.g. a doctor’s note for a seriously ill relative would not allow a claim to be approved unless you also provide evidence to show how this has impacted directly on you;

Evidence must:

- be genuine – your application will be rejected if the evidence cannot be authenticated. If there is concern you may have fraudulently presented documentation to the University the matter will be investigated and considered under the University’s procedures for investigating alleged assessment offences or under the procedures for the suspension and expulsion of students for academic reasons;
- be sufficiently informative - medical evidence should be from a qualified health professional who is independent of you, and confirm what the health problem is, not simply state that you have consulted a doctor and described particular symptoms;
- be in English with any translation of supporting documentation organised and financed by the PGR and undertaken by an authorised translator².
- be original³ and on headed paper and be signed and dated by the author. Evidence presented by email may be acceptable if the email has been sent by the author from the official address of the relevant organisation. Photocopies will be accepted as long as they are legible and can be authenticated if necessary; the University reserves the right to request to see original documentation if required;
- be dated, with the date of the circumstance relating to the dates of the period of research study or progress event, viva examination that you are applying about;
- state the whole period when you were unfit to study, or in the case of medical evidence about a circumstance that is ongoing, when you are likely to be fit to return to research study and if phased return arrangements are considered appropriate.

As a guide the following forms of evidence will be accepted

Example of circumstance	Appropriate evidence
Illness or injury that is serious enough to stop you from working on your research altogether.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical certification (which may include Doctor’s fit note or letter with expected

³for example, a local authority translation service

³ It is accepted that any evidence submitted electronically is a copy of the original documentation, however, the University reserves the right to request to see the original document if required.

	<p>return to work date, hospital letters, evidence of ongoing appointments, letter from qualified counselling practitioner).</p>
<p>Illness or injury that is slowing down your work rate significantly but not stopping you from working on your research altogether.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical certification (including Doctor's fit note or letter, hospital letter, evidence of ongoing appointments, letter from qualified counselling practitioner).
<p>Significant illness or injury on the day of or during a viva examination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-certification where eligible; • medical certification as above; evidence of injury or accident (e.g. attendance at A&E); • corroborating evidence from examiners/independent chair present in the viva room.
<p>Unexpected serious illness of a close family member, which means you need to provide significant caring support that you could not have anticipated and were not able to plan for.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical certification where available; <p>Self-certification where eligible, (you must ring the Graduate School and speak to a designated officer, and may be required to provide verification later e.g. evidence that you had a phone consultation with GP).</p>
<p>Death of someone close to you or the significant, ongoing effects of grief following the death of someone close to you.</p>	<p>Photocopy of death certificate when this becomes available if you are solely responsible for, or closely involved in funeral arrangements. (You are not expected to provide originals, but you may need to specify the nature of your relationship with the deceased). Evidence of date and location of funeral ceremony if attendance precludes attendance at a viva voce or progress review (e.g. photocopy of order of service front cover).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical evidence to explain the ongoing impact of the death on your ability to study, submit work on time, or attend a viva or progress review event.
<p>Unexpected and significant increase in your employment workload that is beyond your control (only if you are a part-time PGR).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written confirmation from your employer of a significant and unforeseeable change of employment circumstances; • Information about when this circumstance will come to an end; • NB. Where this relates to UWE staff who

	are PT PGRs, discussion may be required with HR and or your Head of Department and your permission will be sought prior to this taking place.
Being the victim of a crime.	Police crime number, police statement/correspondence, court attendance correspondence etc.
Unexpected financial difficulties where these affect your ability to support yourself during your research study (self-funding PGRs only, consult the Graduate School for further advice about eligibility before applying).	Evidence that your financial situation has significantly and detrimentally changed and that you could not have foreseen this when registering on the award.
Temporary ⁴ failure, withdrawal or non-availability of previously agreed access to laboratory or other equipment that is outside your control and is owned by the University or an external collaborative or industrial partner. Evidence must show that this equipment is essential to your research, and the situation must be confirmed by the University or external partner.	Written confirmation from a relevant member of academic staff (UWE or collaborative HEI), or industrial partner evidencing the length of time that critical equipment was not available to you. Confirmation from your Director of Studies of the impact that this has had on your research progress.
Participation in activities at a national / international level or requirements of military service or jury service from which you cannot defer - see https://www.gov.uk/jury-service/delaying-or-being-excused-from-jury-service .	Official correspondence from the relevant organisation confirming the requirement to be available on specified dates.

Important for Tier 4 Visa PGRs

Tier 4 Visa PGRs must ensure that the conditions of their visa will not be affected by their application for certain personal circumstances outcomes. Approval for authorised absences must be obtained from UWE's Visa Support Team and PGRs should discuss this in advance of taking any leave. The Handbook, Chapter 7 provides more information for Tier 4 Visa PGRs with personal circumstances.

⁴Permanent withdrawal of previously agreed access to, or non-availability of, essential equipment may require the research project or its direction to be reconsidered or re-scoped in conjunction with the supervisory team. Where this is not possible, project registration may have to be withdrawn.

Self-certification

You may self-certify for a period of up to five working days in circumstances only where you cannot reasonably be expected to obtain independent evidence. You may only self-certify once in each stage of your registration and you must ring the [Graduate School](#) during office hours and discuss your circumstance with a designated member of staff.

Eligible grounds for self-certification will normally be limited to the sudden, serious or highly contagious illness of you or a family member for whom you have significant caring responsibilities where medical advice is that you/they remain at home and do not visit the Doctor's surgery. Examples include serious diarrhoea and vomiting including Norovirus, measles or mumps or other highly contagious virus. Consult <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Measles/> or <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Mumps/> for information about seeing your doctor. In the case of measles, mumps or other identifiable viruses you may be required to provide medical evidence at a later date.

Non-eligible grounds. The following are not eligible for self-certification: colds, symptoms of hay fever or feeling generally unwell. Sprains of writing arm or hand in the case of a scheduled viva voce examination will not normally be eligible grounds as these are oral examinations.

Only in the most extreme cases will a final assessment viva voce examination be cancelled. If you are within the final assessment period and are scheduled to undergo your viva voce examination within the next 96 hours (4 days including weekends) and need to self-certify you must contact both your Director of Studies and the [Graduate School PGR Assessment Team](#) **immediately**. If you cannot contact the Graduate School because it is outside office hours, you must email immediately and then ring once the office re-opens.

Please note that if a final assessment viva examination is cancelled it may be some time before it can be rearranged due to examiner availability.

More guidance in the form of frequently asked questions is available in [Chapter 7 of the Graduate School Handbook](#).

How are personal circumstances applications considered?

Designated Graduate School staff will consider your application for personal circumstances on behalf of the Faculty Research Degrees Committee (FRDC) or the Research Degrees Award Board (whichever is appropriate to the stage of your PGR registration) to make an initial assessment of the eligibility of your application using the following criteria:

- did you have any control over the circumstances and could you reasonably have avoided them?
- how has your ability to carry out your research study been seriously affected?

or

- how has your ability to submit for or undertake the progress event or examination been seriously affected?
- have you provided relevant and eligible documentary evidence?
- does the evidence support your claim?
- does the evidence cover the date (or dates) of the progress event or period of study within the stage that you have applied for?

Eligible applications will be considered by the Chair of the Faculty Research Degrees Committee and confirmed by the FRDC for circumstances occurring prior to the submission of the thesis/critical commentary for final assessment.

Eligible applications relating to circumstances after the thesis/critical commentary has been submitted for final assessment will be considered by the Chair of the Research Degree Awards Board for approval by the Award Board.

The Graduate School

(This guidance clarifies and supports current practice and is effective from February 2018)