



Postgraduate Research Code of Practice

APPENDIX 6

Policy on PGR Suspensions, on Extensions of Study, and on Extenuating Circumstances in relation to the *Viva Voce* Examination

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy forms part of the University's Postgraduate Research (PGR) Code of Practice (PGR CoP). In addition to the PGR CoP and its other Appendices, other University of Liverpool (UoL) policies, procedures and documents which may be relevant to this Policy are as follows (see web links in section 8):
 - Ordinances governing Postgraduate Research degrees listed in 1.2 below
 - PGR Handbook
 - Student Complaints Policy and Procedure
 - Fitness to Study Policy
- 1.2 This Policy covers the following research programmes:
 - Doctor in Philosophy (PhD)
 - Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
 - Doctor of Medicine (MD)
 - Campus-based and Online Professional Doctorates (in relation to the thesis stage only)
- 1.3 The value of a UoL research degree award is underpinned by the quality of the research experience provided to candidates studying on the respective degree programme. UoL is responsible for the academic quality and standards of the examinations of its research degree programmes, including those offered under a collaborative agreement with an institutional partner.
- 1.4 UoL accepts that circumstances may sometimes lead to a student requiring a suspension of their studies, or an extension because they are unable to submit their thesis within the normally permitted deadline. UoL will consider requests for suspension or extension where it can be demonstrated that it is in the candidate's best academic interests to do

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so. The maximum overall time permitted for suspension, extension or a combination of each is 18 months in total (see sections 4.2, 4.13, 5.2 and 5.8 below). Suspensions of study taken in line with the [UoL Student Maternity, Maternity Support and Adoption Policy](#) are recorded separately and do not contribute to the to the candidate's maximum period of registration or the maximum overall 18 month period permitted for suspension and/ or extension noted above.

- 1.5 UoL further accepts that a student may sometimes perform more poorly in the *viva voce* examination (hereafter called *viva*) than expected. Sometimes this poor performance can be attributed, or partially attributed, to particular circumstances beyond the control of the student. These circumstances are described as '*extenuating circumstances*' if they are accepted in mitigation of the poorer than expected performance; in the context of this Policy '*poorer than expected performance*' refers to the *viva*.
- 1.6 In operating its Policy on Suspensions, on Extensions of Study, and on Extenuating Circumstances in relation to the *Viva Voce* Examination, UoL will aim to ensure that students are treated fairly and that claims and evidence submitted by students are considered with appropriate proportionality and confidentiality, without prejudice or bias or direct or indirect discrimination.

2. Scope of this Policy and General Principles

Scope of this Policy

- 2.1 Students who declare a disability (including a long-term medical condition) to their School/Institute Director of PGR Studies (SDPR/IDPR) may be entitled to reasonable adjustments, which are not the subject of this Policy. Students should be advised to contact UoL's Disability Advice & Guidance Team (see section 8 for the web link) to discuss potential reasonable adjustments. Reasonable adjustments must be approved by the DST and the SDPR/IDPR or nominee at Level 1. If the student does not think that the proposed adjustments are reasonable they should use the reasonable adjustments complaints process set out in the [Policy Regarding Reasonable Adjustments and Support for Disabled Students](#).
- 2.2 Students with a declared disability, and for which they are already receiving reasonable adjustments, should not normally use this Policy to claim extenuating circumstances on the same grounds as their declared disability.
- 2.3 This Policy is divided into two main sections reflecting the stages of a student's studies. The first stage covers a student's studies up until the date when they have submitted their thesis and relates to requests for a suspension of study or an extension (see sections 4 to 5 below). The second stage is in relation to the period after a student has submitted their thesis and wishes to claim extenuating circumstances in relation to their *viva* examination (see section 6 below).

General Principles

- 2.4 A student may not, following submission of their thesis, ask for extenuating circumstances relating to their earlier studies to be taken account in relation to the examination of their thesis, unless they can provide evidence that exceptional circumstances prevented them from making such a claim at the time. A student experiencing circumstances which are affecting their ability to pursue their research programme or write their thesis may apply for a suspension or extension of study in order to remedy the situation, if appropriate. Opportunities are provided e.g. through the Annual Progress procedures, to raise concerns about any matters adversely affecting a student's studies.

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- 2.5 Claims regarding extenuating circumstances and any provided supporting documentation must be considered as highly confidential and access to them must be restricted solely to:
- a. SDPR/IDPR or nominee
 - b. Examiners
 - c. Professional Services staff who provide support to the SDPR/IDPR or Examiners (for students on online programmes, this shall include appropriate members of staff of Kaplan Open Learning e.g. Student Adviser Team).
- 2.6 If documentary evidence relating to illness is provided by someone other than a medical practitioner (as recognised by the GMC) the documentation must include details of that person's qualifications or standing; the evidence will still need to be accepted by the School/Institute and it will be for them to make a judgment as to the value or weight they attach to the evidence in deciding a case of extenuating circumstances. Students should be aware that some services (e.g. doctors) may make a charge for the provision of a letter, statement or other evidence and that this will not be reimbursed by UoL.
- 2.7 The student must provide independent documentary evidence which is contemporaneous with the events that they are claiming have affected their performance. The SDPR/IDPR may decline to accept statements from medical practitioners, counsellors or other similar people which show that the student has approached them only after the *viva* about something on which they could have consulted with them in advance of the *viva*, and may also decline to accept evidence obtained from consultations which have not been held face-to-face (e.g. online or telephone consultations). UoL's support services (e.g. Counselling Service) may decline to provide students with a statement if it considers that it cannot confirm that the circumstances, which the student is claiming have affected their performance, pre-date the *viva*.
- 2.8 Submitted evidence should be dated and its source or author clearly stated. If the original documentation is provided in a language other than English then the student must provide a certified translation.
- 2.9 Students should be advised that, by submitting personal and sensitive information (such as a medical note), in support of a claim for extenuating circumstances, they are giving their express written permission for this information to be passed to those individuals listed above in section 2.5 in order that decisions may be made in relation to their claim. In addition, unless the student expressly withdraws this permission, the information will be made available (where relevant) to those UoL staff who are involved in UoL's various appeals procedures, should the student enter any of those procedures (e.g. Progress Appeals, Research Degree Appeals).
- 2.10 In exceptional circumstances, where the student is considered to be a risk to themselves or to others or there is a statutory obligation on UoL to provide information to a third party, the extenuating circumstances claim may be provided, in confidence, to relevant persons without the student's further permission. In such circumstances, the student must be informed and reasons for the disclosure must be given to them.
- 2.11 Documentation provided by a student with an extenuating circumstances claim or created in consideration of a claim must be kept on file by the School/Institute in such a manner that no person without permission to access it may view it (e.g. hard copies in a sealed envelope marked 'confidential – extenuating circumstances', electronic copies in password-protected files).
- 2.12 Those involved in making decisions about an extenuating circumstances claim should always seek to act in the best interests of the student.

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- 2.13 Extenuating circumstances will not be accepted either as a good reason for committing academic malpractice as defined in Appendix 4 of the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice or for condoning breaches of the required conduct in examinations as defined in Appendix 8 of the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice.
- 2.14 An Extenuating circumstances claim cannot be delayed, nor can evidence relating to it be delayed, on the grounds of sensitive personal, family or cultural reasons.

3 Definitions

In the context of Research Degree programmes, ‘**Extenuating Circumstances**’ are defined as any unforeseeable circumstance not of the student’s own making, which could have affected their performance.

Examples of circumstances that UoL would regard as extenuating circumstances differ slightly, depending on the stage of the student’s studies i.e. whether the request for consideration is before or after submission of the thesis and these are set out in sections 3.1 and 3.2 below.

- 3.1 *Extenuating circumstances before submission of the thesis - i.e. cited as grounds for a request for a suspension or extension of study.*

These circumstances **might** include:

- a. Bereavement – death of a close relative/significant other/close friend (of a nature which, in an employment context, would have led to an absence in accordance with the compassionate leave regulations).
- b. Serious short-term illness or accident (of a nature which, in an employment context, would have led to an absence on sick leave).
- c. Evidence of deterioration in a chronic health condition.
- d. Significant adverse personal/family circumstances.
- e. Parenthood and associated circumstances as outlined the [UoL Student Maternity, Maternity Support and Adoption Policy](#) (also see section 1.4 above).
- f. Other significant exceptional factors for which there is evidence that performance has been impaired.

For more detailed guidance on what is permitted and the documentary evidence required see Annexe 1.

The following may **not** be regarded as constituting extenuating circumstances:

- g. Alleged statement of a medical condition without reasonable or contemporaneous evidence (medical or otherwise) to support it. For example a doctor’s note which states that the student was seen (after the illness occurred) and had declared they had been ill previously would not be considered to be acceptable evidence.
- h. Alleged medical circumstances, for which appropriate adjustments for extenuating circumstances have already been made in relation to the period in question.
- i. Long-term stable health condition for which the student is already receiving reasonable or appropriate adjustments, as referred to in section 2.1 above.
- j. Retrospective disclosure of circumstances or withholding of details on grounds of sensitive personal, family or cultural reasons.
- k. Minor illness or ailment, which is unlikely to have had a significant impact on the student’s performance.

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- l. Any event that could have been reasonably expected or anticipated, such as sporting events, pressures from employment, or other study commitments.
- m. Events such as holidays and weddings.
- n. Any UoL procedure relating to investigations into breaches of academic integrity or misconduct, except where the student has been exonerated, or any UoL appeal procedure, except where the appeal has been upheld.
- o. Failure to follow good practice with regard to use of IT (e.g. failure to back-up documents or protect against computer viruses).
- p. Pregnancy and its normal course in itself does not constitute extenuating circumstances. However, a student may submit an extenuating circumstances claim if there is some medical complication over and above the normal course (see Annexe 1 for further details).
- q. Inadequate planning and time management.
- r. For International students - circumstances relating to immigration and visa status.

3.2 *Extenuating circumstances after submission of the thesis - i.e. claimed in relation to a scheduled viva.*

The circumstances that **might** be included are as set out in sections 3.1a to 3.1f above. Additionally, in the case of advanced pregnancy a student should advise the School/Institute whether they wish their *viva* to be postponed or their circumstances taken into account during the scheduled *viva*.

The circumstances that would **not** be regarded as constituting extenuating circumstances in relation to the *viva* are as set out in sections 3.1g to 3.1r above but also include the following additional circumstances:

- a. Failure to attend the *viva* due to misreading of the examination arrangements or inadequate time management related to preparation for the *viva*.
- b. Financial issues or their effect where these are reasonably foreseeable (e.g. Financial Suspension for non-payment of tuition fees or eviction for non-payment of rent).

4 Requests for suspension of study prior to the submission of the thesis

- 4.1 UoL's Ordinances for research degrees prescribe the minimum and maximum periods of registration for each award, which include all periods of suspension. Accordingly any suspension which may be approved must not cause the maximum period of registration permitted by the relevant Ordinance to be exceeded. The Ordinances also prescribe the normally expected deadlines for thesis submission. Suspensions taken in line with the [UoL Student Maternity, Maternity Support and Adoption Policy](#) will not contribute to the student's maximum period of registration (also refer to section 1.4 above).
- 4.2 A student may, on the grounds of either extenuating circumstances or other appropriate grounds, be granted a suspension of studies for up to 12 (twelve) months only on the first occasion. See also section 4.13 regarding further requests for extension of the original period of suspension.
- 4.3 If potential extenuating circumstances are such that the student considers they might impact on the quality of their research and thesis then the student should request a suspension of studies in order to attempt to remedy the situation. Circumstances that occurred before submission of the thesis cannot be considered by the Examiners at the *viva*.

Submission of a request by a student

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- 4.4 There is a formal procedure for requesting and approving a suspension of studies, which is initiated by the student submitting an online request¹ (see the Suspensions and Extensions link in Liverpool Life), following initial discussions with their Supervisor(s).² Responsibility for approving requests for suspension of studies lies with the Faculty Director of Postgraduate Research (FDPR)³ following a recommendation from the student's Supervisor, supported by the SDPR/IDPR or DDP. When considering any claimed extenuating circumstances pertaining to a student's request for suspension of their studies prior to submission of their thesis, the School/Institute and Supervisors should consider the guidance and requirements provided below and in Annexe 1.
- 4.5 The deadline for submission of a suspension request is normally within 10 (ten) working days of the claimed circumstances. Retrospective requests for suspensions of study will not be considered except in exceptional circumstances and where there is evidenced good reason for the student not to have made a request in advance, for example the nature of the circumstances themselves prevented the student from making a request beforehand.
- 4.6 The request for suspension must specify the period requested expressed in terms of whole months, from a minimum of one month to a maximum of twelve, and supported by evidence as outlined in sections 4.7, 4.8 and Annexe 1 below. Students should be aware that:
- a. Requests for suspensions of longer than 12 (twelve) months will not normally be permitted.
 - b. Proposed absence for a period of less than 1 (one) month does not require a request to suspend studies. However, a student should consult their Supervisor for any absences of more than ten working days.⁴ For International students the School/Institute will be required to maintain a record of the approved short period of absence. Persistent short-term absences may be regarded as a matter for student progress.
- 4.7 Independent documentary evidence, e.g. medical certificates, must normally be provided in all cases to support the request for a suspension. However, evidence which is less independent may be acceptable in some cases where independent corroboration is difficult to obtain.
- 4.8 Submitted evidence should be dated and its source or author clearly stated. Where no evidence (independent or otherwise) can be provided, it is at the discretion of those involved in considering the claim to decide whether it is more likely than not the claimed circumstances have occurred.
- 4.9 An approved period of suspension must include an expected date for the resumption of studies. Following approval of a suspension, the expected thesis submission date will be amended to take into account the approved period.

¹ Students studying an online professional doctorate who wish to request a suspension of studies should seek advice from the relevant UoL administrator.

² The Guild of Students is available to provide advice and guidance to students. See section 8 for the web link.

³ For online students the role of FDPR will be taken by the Programme Director.

⁴ Individual Schools/Institutes might have protocols which require a student to notify the School/Institute immediately, for example regarding the implications for laboratory work.

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- 4.10 Students should be aware that if they are on an approved suspension of studies they are not legally covered by UoL's insurance to undertake any work in a laboratory or fieldwork.
- 4.11 Implications of suspensions of study for International students are contained in Annexe 3 of this Policy and should be considered by both student and the School/Institute before a suspension is approved.
- 4.12 Sponsored students may need to obtain approval from their sponsor in order to suspend studies and they should do so before submitting the request.
- 4.13 Consideration of a further request to extend the initial suspension (see section 4.2) on the same grounds as originally granted must include a review of the academic viability of a further suspension; in any case a student will not be permitted more than a maximum period of 18 (eighteen) months for a single period of suspension, which includes any additional extension.
- 4.14 Repeated separate periods of suspension on the same grounds will not normally be permitted. See UoL's Fitness to Study and Engage in Student Experience Policy for further information (see section 8 for the web link).
- 4.15 Students should be aware that they will not normally be allowed to exceed their maximum registration as permitted by the relevant Ordinances. If the period of suspension results in the student exceeding the normal maximum period of registration, their studies may be terminated except that, in exceptional circumstances, an exceptional approval case may be made to allow the student to continue with their studies.

Resumption of study following a period of suspension

- 4.16 Students should be encouraged to maintain contact during their period of suspension with their Supervisor and the PGR administration team in their School/Institute, in order to advise of their progress and facilitate a return to study.
- 4.17 In order to confirm that they will be resuming their studies on the scheduled return date students are required to contact the Research Degree Administration Team (SAS) to confirm their resumption of studies upon their return, and no later than 10 working days from recorded end of suspension. To agree a renewed plan for their project, students are required to contact their Supervisor and the PGR administration team in their School/Institute. International students must make contact in sufficient time to comply with visa requirements.
- 4.18 Students will be expected to return to the same mode of study that they were originally undertaking, i.e. full-time or part-time. Where a request to return to studies includes a request to change the mode of study or the intensity of study, this will be considered by the FDPR. The request must be academically viable and should enable the student to complete the programme within the normal maximum registration period.
- 4.19 Students who have suspended their studies on medical grounds will also be required to provide medical evidence that they are fit to return to their studies, in accordance with UoL's Fitness to Study and Engage in Student Experience Policy. This should be provided to the relevant PGR administration team in their School/Institute one month prior to the date the student intends to return to studies. See section 8 for the web link.
- 4.20 If, after the permitted period of suspension, the student is unable to resume their studies due to ill health they must notify their supervisor and the Research Degree Administration Team (SAS). UoL may require them to see an Occupational Health Physician in accordance with UoL's Fitness to Study and Engage in Student Experience Policy.

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- 4.21 In accordance with section 4.1(g) of the PGR Progress Policy (Appendix 3 of the PGR CoP) students must engage with the Annual Progress Monitoring (APM) process in every year of their studies. This includes undertaking the APM process on return after a suspension of studies, if the previous year's APM was missed as a result of the suspension, as well as completing the APM process for the year in which the return to studies takes place. This includes the completion of the Annual Progress Report.
- 4.22 Where the medical evidence clearly indicates an expectation of studies being resumed after no more than a further six months, a further suspension will normally be permitted for that period only i.e. up to the maximum eighteen months permitted in accordance with section 4.13 above. If the student does not resume their studies following the extended period of suspension, the student's lack of engagement will be managed in accordance with UoL's PGR Progress Policy and Procedures (Appendix 3 of the PGR CoP).
- 4.23 In accordance with UoL's Fitness to Study and Engage in Student Experience Policy, if a student, with no further period of suspension granted, is considered unfit to resume studies then their studies will be terminated. The student will have a right of appeal in accordance with UoL's Fitness to Study and Engage in Student Experience Policy.
- 4.24 Where a student has not resumed their studies nor made contact with UoL their unsatisfactory progress will result in Deemed Withdrawal for non-engagement in accordance with UoL's PGR Progress Policy and Procedures (Appendix 3, section 4.4(a)(i) of the PGR CoP).

5 Requests for extensions of study prior to submission of the thesis

- 5.1 A student may request an extension to the normally expected submission date for their thesis, as set out in the relevant Ordinance for their degree. If they are not sufficiently close to their thesis submission deadline (see section 5.4 below) they may be advised by their School/Institute to request a suspension of study instead; however, in such cases they should be aware of the legal implications for their continued research (e.g. for International students see section 4.11 above).
- 5.2 A student may, on the grounds of either extenuating circumstances or other appropriate grounds, be granted an extension of their expected submission date for up to 12 (twelve) months only.
- 5.3 There is a formal procedure for requesting and approving an extension of their studies⁵, which is initiated by the student submitting an online request (see the Suspensions and Extensions link in Liverpool Life), following initial discussions with their Supervisor(s). Requests for extensions may not necessarily be on the grounds of extenuating circumstances.
- 5.4 The deadline for submission of an extension request is within 10 (ten) working days prior to the expected date for thesis submission; extension requests submitted earlier than this will not normally be considered. Should circumstances arise earlier in their studies, which might lead to a request for an extension, the student should discuss the matter with their Supervisor at the time and record this during the Annual Progress Monitoring process. It is then the responsibility of the student to make the request for an extension at the appropriate time.

⁵ Students studying an online professional doctorate who wish to request an extension of studies should seek advice from the relevant UoL administrator.

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Retrospective requests for extensions are not permitted except in exceptional circumstances and where there is evidenced good reason for the student not to have made a request in advance, for example the nature of the circumstances themselves prevents the student from making a request beforehand.

- 5.5 The request for an extension must specify the period requested expressed in terms of whole months, from a minimum of 1 (one) month to a maximum of 12 (twelve). When requested on the grounds of extenuating circumstances it must be supported by evidence as outlined in sections 4.7 and 4.8 above and Annexe 1.
- 5.6 Extensions to maximum periods of registration are not permitted unless there are exceptional circumstances, which are beyond the control of the student. In such instances the School/Institute should make application in the normal way for approval by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Impact or nominee for an extension to the period of registration notwithstanding UoL's Ordinances and Regulations. Suspensions of study taken in line with the [UoL Student Maternity, Maternity Support and Adoption Policy](#) do not contribute to the to the candidate's maximum period of registration or the maximum overall 18 month period permitted for suspension and/ or extension (see section 1.4).
- 5.7 A request for an extension must be accompanied by a plan of work including completion dates. Following approval of an extension, the expected thesis submission date will be amended by the Research Degree Administration Team (SAS) to take into account the approved period.
- 5.8 Consideration of a further request to extend the initial extension on the same grounds as originally granted must include a review of the academic viability of a further extension; in any case a student will not be permitted more than a maximum period of 18 (eighteen) months, which includes any additional extension. If a student requests a period to exceed twelve months, this will be considered as a matter for review of the student's progress in accordance with the Policy and Procedures on the Academic Progress of PGR Students (Appendix 3 of the PGR CoP). Suspensions of study taken in line with the [UoL Student Maternity, Maternity Support and Adoption Policy](#) do not contribute to the to the candidate's maximum period of registration or the maximum overall 18 month period permitted for suspension and/ or extension (see section 1.4).
- 5.9 Repeated requests for additional periods of extension of the thesis submission deadline on the same grounds will not normally be permitted. See UoL's Fitness to Study and Engage in Student Experience Policy for further information. This will be considered a matter for review of the student's progress in accordance with the Policy and Procedures on the Academic Progress of PGR Students (Appendix 3 of the PGR CoP).
- 5.10 In cases where they have already submitted their Intention to Submit (ITS) form, to confirm that they will be submitting their thesis on the scheduled date, the student must contact their Supervisor and the PGR administration team in their School/Institute 1 (one) month before this date (or two weeks beforehand if their period of extension is for less than three months). Where they have not yet submitted their ITS form the normal submission rules apply.
- 5.11 Where a student has not submitted their thesis in accordance with the deadline or made contact with UoL their unsatisfactory progress will result in Deemed Withdrawal for non-engagement in accordance with UoL's PGR Progress Policy and Procedures (Appendix 3, section 4.4 (a) (v) of the PGR CoP).

6 Requests for consideration of extenuating circumstances in relation to the viva

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UoL accepts that a student may sometimes perform more poorly in the *viva* than expected and that this might be attributed, or partially attributed, to particular circumstances beyond the control of the student. When making an application for such circumstances to be considered in mitigation of their poorer than expected performance, a student must indicate the purpose of their claim i.e. whether they wish the *viva* to be postponed or to continue with their *viva* but have the Examiners take the circumstances into account (see subsection 6.7(d) below). For circumstances arising during the *viva* please see section 6.8 below.

Where extenuating circumstances are claimed following the first *viva* but during the modification or re-submission phase of studies, this will be handled as a request for extension in accordance with section 8 of Appendix 7 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy on Submission of a Research Degree Thesis for Examination. If an International student suspends their studies at this time the usual visa regulations will apply.

Where a PGR student has already been provided with reasonable adjustments for a declared disability during the course of their study, as referred to in section 2.1 of this Policy, then it is the responsibility of the student to remind the SDPR/IDPR prior to the *viva* to ensure that the Examiners have been informed and any appropriate reasonable adjustments put in place for the *viva*. Such adjustments are **not** the same as any appropriate arrangements made as a result of a valid extenuating circumstances claim submitted in accordance with section 6.1 below.

6.1 Instances where extenuating circumstances are claimed and will require review by the SDPR/IDPR or Examiners are as follows:

- a. Following submission of the thesis but prior to the scheduled *viva*.
- b. During the *viva*.

The following procedures should be adopted when handling claimed extenuating circumstances as defined in section 6.1 of this Policy:

Submission of the claim by the student in accordance with section 6.1a above

- 6.2 A student must complete either a signed hard-copy declaration or an equivalent online form where electronic submission is used, to claim formally extenuating circumstances⁶. A copy of the form to be used is provided as Annexe 2 of this Policy. Claims will only be considered if they are submitted on the correct form accompanied by supporting evidence.
- 6.3 The deadline for submission of a claim is normally within 10 (ten) working days of the claimed circumstances. Retrospective requests are not permitted except in exceptional circumstances and where there is evidenced good reason for the student not to have made a request in advance, for example the nature of the circumstances themselves prevents the student from making a request beforehand.
- 6.4 Independent documentary evidence, e.g. medical certificates, must normally be provided in all cases to verify extenuating circumstances. However, evidence which is less independent may be acceptable in some cases where independent corroboration is difficult to obtain.
- 6.5 Submitted evidence should be dated and its source or author clearly stated. Where no evidence (independent or otherwise) can be provided, it is at the discretion of the

⁶ Students studying an online professional doctorate who wish to submit a request for extenuating circumstances should seek advice from the relevant UoL administrator.

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SDPR/IDPR to decide whether it is more likely than not the claimed circumstances have occurred.

- 6.6 The student must submit the claim form and independent documentary evidence to their Supervisor who will ensure that the SDPR/IDPR or nominee is provided with the documentation.

Consideration of the claim, made in accordance with section 6.1a above, by the SDPR/IDPR or Examiners

6.7 Following submission of the thesis but prior to the scheduled *viva*:

- a. There are two categories of possible extenuating circumstances that might arise after submission of the thesis but prior to the *viva*. These are:
- i. Known events, which include anything in advance of the date of the *viva* which the student could reasonably expect might affect their performance. See section 1 of Annexe 1 for examples.
 - ii. Last minute events, including anything that occurs sufficiently close to the date of the *viva* which might affect performance and which would mean that the student's ability to notify anyone in advance of the *viva* would have been hampered. See section 2 of Annexe 1 for examples.
- b. Any claim and supporting evidence provided by the student will need to be considered by the SDPR/IDPR or nominee to assess whether it is likely that the circumstances claimed have the potential to affect the student's performance in or attendance at the *viva*. The SDPR/IDPR will notify the student of their decision; if the circumstances are deemed to have the potential to impact the student's performance in the *viva* this notification will include whether the scheduled *viva* is to be postponed or continued in accordance with subsections 6.7(d)(i) or (ii) or 6.7e (i) or (ii) below.
- c. It is the responsibility of the SDPR/IDPR to ensure that the Examiners are informed of these circumstances prior to the examination, provided that the candidate has given consent to share this information. Normally the SDPR/IDPR is expected to contact the Internal Examiner in such cases.
- d. A student must normally submit an Extenuating Circumstances Claim in good time in advance of the scheduled *viva*, giving at least 48 (forty-eight) hours' notice to the SDPR/IDPR and must provide supporting documentary evidence. The student must also state whether they are requesting a postponement of the *viva*. In such circumstances the SDPR/IDPR will decide either to:
- i. Postpone the *viva*, which will be the normal default decision in such circumstances. In such circumstances, normally the *viva* will be rescheduled for a date no later than three months from the date of the originally scheduled *viva*.
 - ii. Continue with the scheduled *viva* but request the Examiners to take the extenuating circumstances into account by making any adjustments they deem necessary, e.g. scheduling a short rest break during the *viva*.

Should a student request that the scheduled *viva* still goes ahead they should be aware that this decision is at their own risk.

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- e. In exceptional circumstances where a student is unable to provide the minimum 48 (forty-eight) hours' notice, the SDPR/IDPR will either:
 - i. Postpone the *viva*, which will be the normal default decision in such circumstances. Where the student is able to demonstrate that they will be unable to attend the *viva* then the decision will *always* be taken to postpone the *viva*.
 - ii. Notify the Examiners that the *viva* is to take place as scheduled.

Should a student request that the scheduled *viva* still goes ahead they should be aware that this decision is at their own risk.

If the *viva* is to take place as scheduled the SDPR/IDPR will request the Examiners to decide as follows:

- iii. Make appropriate arrangements during the *viva* to allow the examination to go ahead e.g. by providing a short rest break.
- iv. After commencing the *viva*, to suspend the examination if they deem it appropriate to do so (e.g. should the student become very ill during the *viva* – see section 6.8 below also) i.e. stop the *viva* and request that it be re-scheduled to start afresh.

Consideration of a claim made by the student in accordance with section 6.1b above, i.e. during the viva

6.8 During the *viva*

- a. Categories of extenuating challenging circumstances that could arise during the *viva* include something that occurs whilst the student is attending the exam, of which the student was aware at the time, and which might affect the student's performance. 'Challenging circumstances' are defined in this Policy as: sudden illness, disturbance (e.g. fire alarm), material administrative or procedural errors (e.g. error in paperwork regarding the timing of the exam or incorrect information provided to Examiners, lack of previously agreed reasonable adjustments) or environmental factors (e.g. adverse temperature or external noise).
- b. The student should raise issues of concern that occur during the *viva* to the Examiners at the time.
- c. Should challenging circumstances (as defined in section 6.8(a) above) arise during the *viva*, Examiners should exercise judgment and take executive action (in accordance with section 5.9 of the Policy on Research Degree Examinations and Examiners – Appendix 8 of the PGR Code Practice). The Examiners should ask the student whether or not they wish to continue with the *viva*.

Examiners' decisions might include the following possible outcomes:

- i. Continue with the *viva*, making any arrangements they deem necessary to allow the examination to go ahead e.g. by briefly suspending the exam to provide a short break.
- ii. Adjourn the *viva* and request UoL to re-schedule a new *viva* to start afresh.

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- d. Where the validity of the circumstances claimed are accepted, it will be for the Examiners to make a judgment as to whether there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the student's performance in the *viva* may actually be affected. The Examiners will not necessarily regard the student's performance *at its face value* in making decisions about the outcome of the *viva*. If the student considers that the Examiners have not taken due account of their concerns they will have a right to submit an appeal under the Research Degree Appeals Procedure (Appendix 10 of the PGR CoP).
- e. The Examiners should record on their normal Examiners' reports any challenging circumstances and also the outcome decision. The FDPR will maintain oversight of such cases to ensure a coherent cross-Faculty approach.
- f. If the student fails to attend the *viva* but is unable to provide any reason for their non-attendance to their Supervisors, the SDPR/IDPR or to the Examiners the *viva* will be abandoned and the circumstances investigated by the SDPR/IDPR. If the investigation establishes good reason for the student's non-attendance, the *viva* will be rescheduled, but if no good reason is identified, the student will be failed by the Examiners on that occasion. The student will have a right of appeal against the decision of the Examiners in accordance with the Research Degree Appeals Procedure: Appendix 10 of the PGR Code of Practice.

7 Appeals Procedure

In accordance with sections 6.8(d) and 6.8(f) above, a student has a right to submit an appeal under the Research Degree Appeals Procedure (Appendix 10 of the PGR CoP) if they consider:

- a. That the Examiners have not taken due account of their concerns regarding the challenging circumstances that have arisen during the conduct of the *viva*.
- b. That there was material irregularity in that the Examiners should not have failed them for their non-attendance at the scheduled *viva*.

8 Sources of further information

- [The PGR Code of Practice](#)
- [Research Degree Administration Team \(SAS\)](#)
- [Student Complaints Policy and Procedure](#)
- [Guild of Students Advice Service](#)
- [Fitness to Study and Engage in Student Experience Policy](#)
- [Disability Advice & Guidance](#)
- [Counselling Service](#)
- [International Advice and Guidance](#)
- [Governance \(for Ordinances\)](#)

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- [PGR Student Handbook](#)
- [Student Maternity, Maternity Support and Adoption Policy](#)