

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

Introduction

- 1 In this document 'we', 'our' and 'us' refer to Sheffield Hallam University. 'You' and 'your' refer to all postgraduate research degree students (PGRs) of Sheffield Hallam University who are studying for a Sheffield Hallam academic award either at the University or a partner organisation.
- 2 It is important when you enrol on your course, and re-enrol each academic year on the anniversary of your start date, that you can engage fully with your research degree studies and assessments.
- 3 We recognise that you may be balancing your studies with the demands of difficult and complex life circumstances, such as disability, long-term illness, employment demands, personal relationships or caring responsibilities, which may result in extenuating circumstances, causing a short-term impact on meeting assessment deadlines. This Policy helps to mitigate the impact of these.
- 4 Students with disabilities or long-term medical conditions can be granted additional time to complete assessment via adjustments in a Learning Contract. If you have a Learning Contract which includes this adjustment, it is not necessary for you to follow the procedures in this document if your reasons for requesting additional time or another assessment attempt, *relate to a condition already covered by a Learning Contract*.
- 5 The Code of Practice for Research Degrees Students and Supervisors stipulates a requirement for you to engage in regular supervision meetings. Professional Doctorate candidates need to attend teaching sessions and submit formal assessments in years 1 and 2 of study. A high level of engagement and attendance contributes significantly to progression through your research degree, and your level of academic achievement and success.
- 6 If your extenuating circumstances are having a long-term impact of between 2 and 12 months in any one academic year, which are preventing sustained and meaningful engagement with your studies, then you should refer to the [Break in Study Policy and Procedure](#) for PGRs. This will allow you to take time out from your studies to manage the circumstances impacting on your progression. You must speak with your Director of Studies in the first instance, prior to making a formal application. Please note that the university will not allow retrospective breaks in study under any circumstances.

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- 7 Extenuating circumstances are life circumstances that are impacting on your ability to complete assessment, or your performance in the assessment, in a way you could not reasonably have anticipated at the beginning of an academic year because:
 - I. Something has occurred, or been diagnosed, suddenly and unexpectedly during the academic year, or

II. Pre-existing difficult and complex life circumstances have intensified during the academic year.

- 8 You must let us know as soon as possible if you think your research degree studies are being affected by extenuating circumstances. You can do this by contacting your Director of Studies and the PGR admin team in your Research Institute, in the first instance. The sooner you let us know, the more ways there will be to support you including the options in this document. These options will become limited, or may not be available at all, if you wait until after an assessment deadline, or until the end of an academic year before disclosing extenuating circumstances.
- 9 We understand it is not always easy to disclose personal, private and sensitive matters. If you have concerns about doing this, then please discuss them with a Postgraduate Research Tutor/ Professional Doctorate Programme Lead, or PGR admin team in your Research Institute. All of these staff have a pastoral role. Anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence. Information will be securely stored and only seen by those members of staff responsible for processing and considering your request.
- 10 This policy and procedure contains two options to help you manage the impact of extenuating circumstances. This is through additional time to complete an assessment, or for Professional Doctorate candidates, by requesting to repeat an assessment attempt if your circumstances have prevented you from starting, or fully engaging in, the work. These options do not remove the requirement to take assessment, or change the nature of that assessment, but facilitate you completing it when you are in a better position to do so. The options are:

An extension to a submission deadline for:

- Assessed work for Professional Doctorate programmes in years 1 and 2, when taking level 8 complementary studies modules, prior to progression to the thesis phase.
- Applications for Confirmation of Doctorate – to extend the published regulatory deadline for Confirmation applications.
- Applications to extend the research degree amendments or re-examination periods.

Requests to Repeat an Assessment Attempt:

- Assessed work in years 1 and 2 of Professional Doctorate programmes where extenuation has impacted on an attempt being made, or for underperformance.

The appropriateness and availability of each option will very much depend on the timing and severity of your circumstances and when you disclose them.

- 11 The options are intended to provide short-term 'emergency' support within an academic year so that you can then evaluate your ability to continue to study in the next academic year, considering your new or intensified life circumstances. The options are not designed to support you through the duration of your course, and it is unlikely that a particular set of life circumstances will fall within the definition of extenuating circumstances for more than one academic year.
- 12 The options will give you more time to complete assessment, but cannot replace missed teaching, supervision or other learning activities. The effectiveness of the options will be limited therefore if you have missed, or are likely to miss, a significant number of teaching and learning opportunities.
- 13 We will consider any request made within the Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure for PGRs both sensitively and fairly, based on the extent to which you have:

- Submitted the formal request by email to extend a submission deadline in a timely manner, at least 5 working days prior to the assessment submission deadline – however, please email any prior notice of needing an extension, around one month prior to the deadline, so that staff can give an early indication of whether your particular circumstances constitute valid extenuation. The only exception to the 5 working day deadline above, is where the reason for preventing timely submission falls within the extenuation criteria, and could not have been foreseen earlier.
- Clearly stated the nature of your circumstances and the impact they are having on your ability to study and take assessment.
- Provide appropriate documentary evidence where it can reasonably be obtained (see point 18 below).

14 There are some life circumstances which will *not normally* meet our definition of extenuating circumstances because we believe they can be avoided, or the impact can reasonably be managed. These include:

- Ongoing situations occurring in previous years
- The break-up of a short-term relationship
- Financial difficulties
- Attending or taking part in sporting and cultural events (unless these are national or international events)
- Holidays or travel
- Normal domestic issues, such as moving house
- Voluntary work
- Weddings
- Work commitments for full-time students

In addition, we do not accept study related issues as extenuating circumstances, for example:

- Not giving yourself sufficient time to complete assessment and missing the submission deadlines
- Losing your work
- Failure to abide by the published timescales for assessment
- Withdrawal of IT facilities as a result of being in debt to the University
- English being your second language
- IT difficulties.

However, the reason(s) presented by candidates will be fully considered on an individual basis.

Procedure - Extending a Submission Deadline

- 15 With regards to assignments for Professional Doctorate candidates in years 1 and 2 of study, which must be **submitted** by a specified deadline, it is your responsibility to be aware of your assessment schedule and to manage your time to ensure that coursework is submitted by the published deadline. Doctoral candidates applying for Confirmation of Doctorate, can apply for an extension to the published regulatory timescales through this Policy, as per section 18 below.
- 16 If you are a Professional Doctorate candidate, extending a submission deadline may help you mitigate the impact of extenuating circumstances, but this may mean you having to submit the work close to the deadline for another assessment, which may impact on your performance.
- 17 The nature of these circumstances means it might not be possible to obtain medical evidence to corroborate the circumstances you are reporting. You are therefore not required to automatically

provide such evidence with your request. However, the Research Institute does have the right to subsequently request evidence from you, and this should be provided on request.

- 18 If you feel it is in your best interests to request an extension to a submission deadline, then you must submit your request by email, headed 'Extension Request', to your PGR admin team in your Research Institute. The email inbox addresses of the four institutes are as follows:
- ! RIS Culture & Creativity PGR or culture-creativity-pgr@shu.ac.uk
 - ! RIS Health PGR or health.pgr@shu.ac.uk
 - ! RIS Industry & Innovation PGR or industry-innovation-pgr@shu.ac.uk
 - ! RIS Social & Economic Research PGR or social-economic-pgr@shu.ac.uk
- 19 The HoRD or EdD Professional Doctorate Programme Lead/DBA Course Leader/PgRT (or nominee from the PGR Admin Team) will consider the circumstances and evidence presented, and make a decision on requests for a 10-working day extension. It will be your responsibility to meet the new deadline. It is not possible to request a further extension. If you feel your extenuating circumstances are preventing you from meeting the new deadline, you should speak to your Research Institute administrator for advice about available options, or consider applying for a break in study. For Professional Doctorate candidates regarding extensions to work for the complementary studies modules, a RRAA will be advised if your extenuation is judged more impactful, in cases where a 10-working day extension is insufficient to cover the extenuation reported.
- 20 Extensions to request the 4-month FTE period to complete thesis amendments after formal assessment, or to extend the 12-month re-examination period, must be made in writing, supported by your Director of Studies, and emailed to the ! RDC admin inbox or rdcadmin@shu.ac.uk. The Research Institute HoRD and the Chair of RDC will consider the request, and notification of the decision will be emailed by the Doctoral School.

Procedure – Requesting to Repeat an Assessment Attempt for a Professional Doctorate module

- 21 Registration on a module entitles you to an initial attempt and a referral attempt. If your application for a repeat attempt is successful due to the extenuation presented, then your attempt is restored.
- 22 Repeating an assessment attempt may help you mitigate the impact of extenuating circumstances, however there are implications you will need to consider:
- Generally, the best time to attempt assessment is at the point it is initially set, within the delivery of the module, alongside the rest of your student cohort, and where the assessment forms part of a structured assessment schedule.
 - The repeat will normally take place in the reassessment period for your course.
 - If you repeat attempts in several assessment tasks, then it could lead to you having to manage a large workload within a short period of time.
 - Failure to successfully complete all assessment tasks by the end of an academic year could result in you having to take a break in study, and re-joining the course with the next available cohort. This would extend the time taken to complete your course.
- 23 If you feel it is your best interests to request to repeat the assessment attempt, you should contact your Research Institute PGR administrator for advice in the first instance. If you decide to apply for a RRAA, you must complete the 'ProfDoc RRAA' form and submit it to the SERI inbox at ! RIS Social & Economic Research PGR or social-economic-pgr@shu.ac.uk.

- 24 This procedure is designed to support you during an academic year. It is important when you re-enrol each academic year, that you can engage fully with your research degree studies and supervision. If the circumstances you report to us, continue to persist, we expect you to take reasonable steps to access support to help you to mitigate the impact. We will not necessarily accept further extension or RRAA requests submitted for the same circumstances.

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Updates:	July 2023 – point 6 – retrospective breaks in study are not allowed.