

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 assessments 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 *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 and 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 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. 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 The options presented below are intended to provide short-term 'emergency' support within an academic year, by granting an extension to a published deadline to help you progress through your programme of study. If you do not meet the extended deadline, then you will need to discuss the impact of this with your Director of Studies or PGR admin team.
- 11 This policy and procedure allows for **20-working day extensions** to help meet submission deadlines for the items listed below.

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.
 - Confirmation of Doctorate applications – to extend the published regulatory deadline for Confirmation applications.
 - Thesis submission/course end date – to extend the end date of your course to allow you to submit your thesis without needing to formally submit an application for Additional Time to Complete.
- 12 Extensions of more than 20 days to research degree thesis amendments or re-examination periods after an oral examination has taken place can be requested by following the steps under point 20 of this policy.
 - 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 to extend a submission deadline in a timely manner, at least 5 working days before the assessment submission deadline. You should submit your request by email as in point 18 below. However, if you think you will need an extension, it is strongly recommended that you email around one month prior to the assessment 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.
- Provided appropriate documentary evidence where it can reasonably be obtained (see point 17 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. Research degree candidates applying for Confirmation of Doctorate or submitting a thesis should be aware of the submission date for these. However, if an extension is required due to extenuating circumstances, you 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 Head of Research Degrees (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 20-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 PGR admin team for advice about available options or consider applying for a break in study.
- 20 Applications to request an extension to 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.
- 21 This policy is designed to support you during an academic year to meet assessment deadlines. 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 relevant support to help you to mitigate the impact. Please refer to the Break in Study Policy and Procedure for PGR students if your extenuating circumstances are ongoing. If these are also impacting your health and wellbeing, then please access support from the university via [Student Wellbeing](#).

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Updates:	July 2023 – point 6 – retrospective breaks in study are not allowed.
	November 2024 – point 11 – extensions have been increased from 10 to 20-working days. RRAAs have been removed for Professional Doctorate students.