

Student Leave Entitlements for Postgraduate Research Students, Residents and Interns

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1.0	New document to collate all student leave entitlements.	Adam Hall, Assistant Registrar for Programme Management			

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1. Introduction and purpose

All Postgraduate Research (PGR) students, Residents and Interns may take leave to be absent from studying in a variety of circumstances. This policy outlines the entitlements to leave for each group of students, the ability of a student to take leave and the funding they may receive based on their student status, and the procedures students and staff should follow to report and monitor periods of leave.

2. Scope

This policy applies to students enrolled on PhD, MPhil, MRes, Prof Doc (PGR students), PG Dip VCP (Interns) and MVetMed (Residents) programmes of study.

3. Student entitlements to leave

PGR students, Residents and Interns are entitled to apply to take any relevant types of leave described in this policy, unless stated otherwise.

Students are discouraged from undertaking work related to their programme of study during any periods of leave.

If a student is funded and/or is studying on a student visa, they must make sure that they do not contravene any terms and conditions, Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) of their funder and/or collaborative partner contract, or other requirements, when taking leave. Any relevant funder or visa rules take precedence over student entitlements to leave.

Any extension of a studentship/scholarship that is required following a period of leave is at the discretion of the relevant Head of Department/Graduate School.

3.1. Annual leave – PGR Students

PGR students are entitled to apply to take up to 40 days annual leave per annum commencing from the date of registration (including all public holidays and RVC closure days). This should be prorated for part-time students.

Where applicable, PGR students must abide by an employer's terms and conditions relating to annual leave.

Remaining annual leave days cannot be carried forward to the next year, and no more than one month of annual leave may be taken at the end of study (unless the funding body supporting the studentship states otherwise, in which case the latter takes precedence).

Annual leave must be booked in consultation with, and with the approval of, the supervisory team and the absence formally recorded.

3.2. Annual leave – Residents and Interns

Residents and Interns are entitled to apply to take up to 25 days of annual leave inclusive of bank holidays. There is no entitlement to the RVC concessionary days unless they are taken from the 25-day allowance.

The leave year for Residents and Interns will run from the start date of the scholarship.

Residents and Interns who wish to take annual leave should agree this leave in advance with their supervisors and the absence formally recorded.

Residents and Interns based within CSS should send an email to IntResAnnualLeave@rvc.ac.uk where their leave will be recorded by the Departmental Administrator.

Annual leave cannot be carried forward from one leave year to the next except in exceptional circumstances and with approval of the relevant Head of Department. In the event of the scholarship ending early, leave entitlement will be on a pro-rata basis.

3.3. Short-term exceptional leave

A student is entitled to make a request to take short-term exceptional leave in an emergency or on compassionate grounds. Examples of where this type of leave could be required include:

- a bereavement;
- an emergency domestic situation, such as a fire or burglary; and
- an immediate caring response for a dependant who has an emergency caring need.

Supervisors may grant up to five days' leave at their discretion on compassionate grounds for reasons such as the death of an immediate family member, serious illness or injury involving a loved one or serious personal relationship problems.

Students must contact their supervisor in advance (or at the earliest possible opportunity if this is not possible) to make a request to take short-term exceptional leave.

Supervisors should make a formal record of all short-term exceptional leave taken.

Time in-lieu will not be added on at the end of the scholarship/studentship where short-term exceptional leave is taken.

A student should consider requesting an SPD referral in the following situations:

- The exceptional leave does not fully address their situation, and a longer period is required.
- There have been multiple periods of exceptional leave that have had an accumulative impact on the student's ability to study.

3.4. Maternity, adoption, paternity and shared parental leave

PGR students and Residents are entitled to take maternity, adoption, paternity and shared parental leave and should refer to [Maternity, Adoption, Paternity and Shared Parental Leave Policy](#) for further details.

Interns funded by the RVC are not entitled to paid maternity, adoption, paternity and shared parental leave because of the high clinical component and duration of the course. Therefore, Interns may request an interruption to study for absences that exceed 4 weeks. Please refer to Section 5, Interruptions for further details.

3.5. Sickness leave

Sickness leave is recognised as leave of absence granted because of illness or injury.

A student is entitled to apply to take time away from study if they are ill or suffer an injury which impacts on their ability to engage with their programme of study.

3.5.1. Summary of process

Students must inform their supervisor, from the outset of any period of sickness absence and maintain regular contact with them, especially if their health problem is likely to lead to long term absence from study.

Supervisors of PGR students will make a formal record at the start of the absence and upon return to study, where the information is recorded, and the Bradford factor is calculated.

Supervisors of Residents and Interns based within the CSS department will email IntResSickness@rvc.ac.uk at the start of the absence and upon return to work, where the information is recorded, and the Bradford factor is calculated.

Supervisors of Residents and Interns based within the PPS department will email their Residency/Internship Programme Director/Module Leader at the start of the absence and upon return to work, where the information is recorded, and the Bradford factor is calculated.

3.5.2. Supporting evidence for sickness leave

For absences of more than 7 consecutive working days, students are required to inform their supervisor and the Postgraduate Programme Management Team. Medical certification from their doctor on official headed paper must be forwarded to their supervisor and a copy sent to pgadmin@rvc.ac.uk so that a record can be kept on the student's file.

3.5.3. Monitoring sickness leave

The Bradford Factor system is used to score absences and is designed to trigger points for referral to Occupational Health, and/or the Postgraduate Programme Management Team, from a calculation over a 12-month period. The trigger point for referral is set at a Bradford Factor of 100. Students who accumulate frequent short-term periods of absence and trigger the Bradford Factor will be referred to Occupational Health and may be signposted to the Advice Centre.

3.5.4. Prolonged sickness leave

A student must consider requesting an interruption to their studies if the illness or injury is having a significant impact on their ability to engage with their programme of study.

For periods of sickness absence exceeding 4 weeks, the student must inform the Postgraduate Programme Management Team and request an interruption to study.

Interruption of study will normally be granted for a certified period of sickness absence that exceeds 4 weeks up to a maximum of 12 months.

A PGR student who has had a period or periods of absence through certified illness will be eligible to apply for an extension to their studentship of up to 8 weeks. They must apply for the extension 3-6 months before the end of the studentship and their application must be supported by their supervisor and the relevant medical certification must be on file. Please refer to your Code of Practice for further details.

4. Student eligibility criteria for receiving sickness absence pay

For students who receive an annual maintenance stipend from the Royal Veterinary College or an external organisation (e.g. Research Councils, Wellcome Trust, Charities and Government/Embassies), the following applies:

- During periods of sickness absence that are covered by medical certification, a student is eligible to continue to receive payment at their normal stipend value for 8 weeks (13 for UKRI funded studentships).
- As previously stated, for Interns, the high clinical component and duration of the course means that students enrolled on the internship are only eligible to receive payment at their normal stipend value for 4 weeks.
- Where an external organisation is the funder, the funder must be asked what funding they can provide under their terms and conditions in the first instance.
- If the external funder cannot provide additional funds to cover the entire period of certified sickness absence at the normal stipend value, the RVC will cover the gap in costings, up to a maximum of 8 weeks.
- The RVC will only agree to cover the gap in costings once the funder has confirmed what funding they will provide.
- If the period of sickness absence exceeds 8 weeks, no further payments will be made by the RVC.
- Students are only eligible to receive paid sick leave at their normal stipend value from the first day of certified illness within any rolling 12-month period.
- Absences that are not covered by a medical certificate are not eligible for paid sick leave.
- Students experiencing short-term, self-limiting illnesses which are not covered by medical certificates, should not apply for paid sick leave. Their usual stipend payments will continue as normal and no extension to their funding will be provided.

5. Interruption to study

An interruption is a recognised and approved break from a student's programme of study.

Any period of time approved as an interruption will be added onto the original end date.

During an interruption, stipend payments will cease unless the interruption is for certified illness, or the external funder/collaborative partner permits this. Please refer to Section 4 Student eligibility criteria for receiving sickness absence pay section for further details.

All periods of leave of 4 or more weeks, up to maximum of 12 months, will require an interruption to study and must be approved via the Student Performance Development System (SPDS).

Interruptions to the programme of study may be permitted for several reasons: illness, birth of a child or adoption, personal and family reasons, jury service. It should be noted that these reasons are not exhaustive, and interruptions may be granted for other reasons.

5.1. Summary of process

All requests to interrupt a programme of study must be discussed with the Supervisor, the Course Director (Residents and Interns), Programme Director (Residents), Module Leader (Interns) and the Head of Department sufficiently in advance of the likely period of interruption.

Applications to interrupt study for periods exceeding 4 weeks must be made in advance (except in cases of illness where this was not possible) and be approved by SPDS.

Medical and/or other supporting evidence must always be provided, together with a supporting statement from the student's supervisors. Consideration (by supervisors and SPDS) will be given as to whether referral to Occupational Health may be needed (<http://estates.rvc.ac.uk/Health-And-Safety/Occupational-Health>)

Following approval of an interruption, a Change of Registration Form should be submitted to the Postgraduate Programme Management Team (via pgadmin@rvc.ac.uk) within 5 working days of approval being granted at the SPD meeting.

Amendments to a student's record will not be made without a fully completed Change of Registration Form.

5.2. Retrospective interruptions

Retrospective applications for interruption will not normally be considered. An application may be considered only in very exceptional circumstances, and where it was not possible to make an application for interruption prior to the period for which the interruption is requested, e.g. a long-term hospital admission. A retrospective request for an interruption must include an explanation from the student as to why the request was not submitted within the appropriate timeframe.

5.3. Visa implications for international students

The right to remain in the UK for international students will be affected by an interruption. As a Home Office Tier 4 sponsor, the University is legally required to report any changes to a student's registration status to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). This includes any interruptions of study. Students that are in the UK on a Tier 4 visa sponsored by the RVC must seek advice from the Advice Centre and refer to the [UKVI and US Federal Loans Student Attendance Policy](#) prior to submitting a request.

5.4. Length of interruption

Interruptions for a period of less than 4 weeks may be considered in exceptional circumstances.

For interns, the high clinical component and duration of the course means that any absence or interruption for a period greater than 4 weeks is likely to have a significant impact on their ability to complete the requirements to pass the PG Dip VCP as set out in the [Assessment and Award Regulations](#). Students would have the right to appeal the decision if withdrawn from the course. Further information regarding withdrawals can be found in the relevant Code of Practice. Further information regarding the appeals procedure can be found on the [Student Resolution and Compliance internet pages](#)

Students will not normally be permitted to interrupt their studies for more than 12 continuous months. However, it is recognised that a longer interruption may be necessary in certain circumstances where there is a compelling reason. In such cases the relevant staff (Supervisor, Course Director (Residents) Programme Director (Residents), Head of Department/Graduate School) may need to assess that overall programme learning outcomes can still be met within the registration limits of the programme at the intended return date. This assessment must be completed prior to approval of the additional interruption.

Interruptions beyond 12 months require a suspension of regulations which can only be granted by the Principal.

5.5. During an interruption

During periods of approved interruption, students will not be required to maintain active study on their research programmes. Any access to facilities needs to be approved by the Head of Department. If approved, students in this situation will normally have access to RVC resources and facilities but will not be required to pay any fees.

Student stipends may not be paid for all of the period of interruption depending on the organisation funding the study and the circumstances, as outlined above in Section 4. Student Eligibility Criteria for Receiving Sickness Absence Pay.

Students must keep their supervisor, and the Postgraduate Programme Management team informed of any changes in their circumstances that may result in them returning to their studies earlier or later than originally stated. Each application for a further interruption must be accompanied by new medical certification/supporting evidence.

5.6. Returning from an interruption

SPD will arrange a return to study meeting prior to the student's return following an interruption, normally of more than 6 months, unless there is a necessary reason, e.g. the interruption is linked to a mental or physical health issue.

Occupational Health and the Student/Disability Advisor should be consulted if it is thought to be likely that additional support needs will be required for students returning from a long-term absence.

If the student does not agree with or agree to accept the reasonable adjustments, withdrawal of study can be initiated.

A student must attend any referral appointments (medical or otherwise) and regular follow up appointments that are scheduled for after their return to study.

Students must inform the Postgraduate Programme Management team if they intend to end their interruption early and submit a Change of Registration form to formally request this.

A student must re-enrol on return from an interruption within 4 weeks of their return date.

A student may be withdrawn if they do not confirm their return to study by the approved end date of the interruption, and they have not applied for an extension to the interruption.

5.7. Extending an interruption

If a student is unable to return to their studies at the end of the interruption, they will need to discuss this with their primary supervisor and attend an SPD meeting to make a new request to interrupt. Additional medical and/or other supporting evidence must always be provided, together with a supporting statement from the student's supervisors.