

Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students

May 2021

**Research Degrees and Researcher Development
Directorate of Research and Business Engagement**

Contents

1. Purpose and scope
2. Key roles and responsibilities
3. Interruption of studies
4. The application process for a period of interruption
5. Interruption for the purpose of maternity
6. Interruption for the purpose of adoption
7. Student eligibility criteria for receiving stipend payments during an interruption for maternity or adoption
8. Interruption for the purpose of unpaid parental leave
9. Interruption for the purpose of sickness
10. Interruption for the purpose of internship
11. Interrupting whilst living in University of Manchester accommodation
12. Returning from interruption

**Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students
May 2021**

1. Purpose and Scope

- a. This Procedure should be considered in relation to the [**Change of Circumstances for Postgraduate Research Student policy**](#)
- b. The purpose of this Procedure is to provide guidance on how a postgraduate research student can apply for a period of interruption from their programme, to ensure that the student and University are aware of their obligations when a period of interruption is approved and that there are appropriate processes in place to support a student returning from an approved period of interruption.
- c. Students can only interrupt whilst they are on their programme of study. Students cannot interrupt the submission pending period or any resubmission period following viva, but may apply to extend these periods as described in the [**Extensions procedure for PGR students**](#).
- d. This Procedure allows subsequent action to be taken should the student not be considered fit to return following interruption.
- e. Research Councils and other funding organisations may use the terms 'suspension' or 'abeyance' when referring to an interruption.

2. Key Roles and Responsibilities

- a. The student is responsible for ensuring that their supervisor and relevant Faculty or School Graduate Office is informed of any changes to their circumstances before, during or on return from their period of interruption.
- b. The student is responsible for submitting an application for a period of interruption and for supplying any relevant evidence required in support of the application (see section 4).
- c. The Supervisor is responsible for considering their student's request for an interruption and where supportive, providing a case for support
- d. The PGR panel is responsible for considering applications for interruptions and making an approval decision for each request
- e. The student is responsible for providing the requested evidence to confirm their return from interruption, as set out in the confirmation of interruption letter.
- f. The student is responsible for informing the supervisory team and the appropriate Faculty or School Graduate office of their intention to return from an interruption, either by the agreed end date, earlier than expected or that they intend to submit a further request for interruption.
- g. The Faculty or School PGR Panel will oversee the return of students who have taken a period of interruption from their study in line with requirements of the [**Policy on Supporting Health Fitness and Return to Study**](#).

**Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students
May 2021**

- h. The Faculty or School in discussion with the student should determine if the support of the Occupational Health Service would be of assistance in maintaining student attendance on return from interruption. Upon referral the Occupational Health Service will assess the student's ability to manage the demands of studying at University. Where necessary, additional specialist advice and/or an opinion from the student's own GP or specialist may be sought.
- i. The Faculty or School should discuss referral to the Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS) where the student may have a disability. DASS can, if necessary, assess support during a student's interruption in preparation for their return.

3. Interruption of Studies

- a. The total period/s of interruption **must not normally exceed 12 months** during the full period of the programme (excluding interruptions for the purpose of maternity, adoption or unpaid parental leave).
- b. During a period of interruption the student's registration status is put on hold and no tuition fees are payable. The degree is suspended and both the standard period of research and the thesis submission deadline are adjusted by a corresponding period.
- c. If the student undergoes a period of illness, which exceeds four weeks, the student will normally be required to formally interrupt their studies. A funded student should refer to section 10 of this guidance and to their funder terms and conditions for funder-specific guidance on stipend payments and interruption allowances.
- d. In cases of illness of a long duration, the School or Faculty, in liaison with Occupational Health and the Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS) and in consultation with the student, will consider whether the student's withdrawal from the programme and possible reapplication at a future date would be a more appropriate measure. Where needed the School or Faculty will follow the University [Support to Study](#) procedures if there are concerns about this.
- e. Students must keep their supervisor and appropriate School or Faculty informed of any changes in their circumstances that may result in them returning to their studies earlier or later than originally stated.
- f. Students who wish to extend their period of interruption from the original return date must apply for a further interruption and provide new evidence or additional mitigating circumstances or evidence of continuation/exacerbation of the original illness where appropriate.
- g. Students who receive an annual maintenance stipend from the University or UK Research Councils may be entitled to payments during a period of interruption.

Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students May 2021

Students should refer to section 9.1 of this document and their specific funder terms and conditions for stipend and leave allowances.

- h. A change in mode of attendance to part-time may be an appropriate alternative to an interruption for full-time students. Funded full-time students, however, should check that the terms and conditions of their award allow a change to part-time status before considering this option. International students in the UK on a student visa are not normally permitted to study part-time.

4. The Application Process for a Period of Interruption

- a. Any application for interruption of studies should be made at the beginning of the proposed period of interruption, with the support of the supervisory team.
- b. Students must apply for an interruption at the earliest possible time before the period of interruption is due to commence or if this is not possible, immediately after a situation arises.
- c. The student is responsible for submitting the appropriate Change of Circumstances application form to apply for a period of interruption. Please contact the relevant Faculty or School Graduate office for the form.
- d. The application form must be submitted to the relevant Faculty or School Graduate Office with any relevant accompanying evidence to support the request. The application must give reasons for the interruption and the length of time required and be supported by relevant medical certificates, documentary evidence and a statement of support from the student's supervisor(s).
- e. Students applying for a period of interruption should consult the permitted mitigating circumstances criteria as set out in the [**Change of Circumstances for Postgraduate Research Students Policy**](#). Requests for an interruption will only be approved if the student's circumstances are considered mitigating by the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel or equivalent.
- f. Applications will be considered by either a School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel or equivalent.
- g. The decision of a postgraduate research degrees panel is final. Applicants may reapply for an interruption after a refusal has been made only if they have new or additional information and/or evidence to add to their application which was not originally considered. If the request is refused again, the applicant will not normally be permitted to reapply. Appeals are permitted under [**Academic Appeals \(Regulation XIX\)**](#).
- h. The appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office will confirm in writing the terms of any interruption period, the dates agreed, any stipend payment allowance (if applicable) and the latest date on which the student should return

Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students May 2021

to study. The confirmation of interruption letter will also include details on any evidence required to confirm that the student is fit to return to study following the period of interruption (e.g. doctors note). The School or Faculty Graduate Office may seek advice from DASS or Occupational Health to determine the nature of evidence required.

- i. Any application for interruptions beyond 12 months will only be permitted under the most exceptional circumstances. Students who request to interrupt for longer than 12 months may be asked to withdraw and reapply at a future date.
- j. Retrospective applications for interruptions will only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances and the student must provide credible and compelling reasons why the interruption was not applied for at the time the circumstances occurred.
- k. In exceptional circumstances, and following consultation between the student, the supervisor and the School, a recommendation may be made by the School for the student to interrupt their studies. In the case of a student going through the Support to Study process, the University may also determine that a student suspends their study. See procedure on [Support to Study](#).

5. Interruption for the Purpose of Maternity

5.1 Qualifying criteria for Maternity

- a. The University permits postgraduate research students to interrupt their degree for the purpose of maternity or adoption leave at any time from the 11th week before the expected week of childbirth until the date of childbirth for a maximum period of 12 months in total for any period of leave where the individual is the primary carer. The period of leave must be taken in one consecutive block.
- b. A student may interrupt their degree for the purpose of maternity leave for a maximum period of 12 months per period of leave subject to approval from the relevant School or Faculty.
- c. Students must discuss their forthcoming maternity leave with their supervisor(s), supervisory team and the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office as early as possible, and should confirm the start date of the maternity leave not later than the 15th week before the date on which the baby is due.
- d. Maternity leave can be postponed or brought forward to a chosen start date by informing the supervisor(s) and the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office at least 28 days (or as soon as possible thereafter) before the leave is due to start.
- e. A student may choose when to start her maternity leave, subject to the following constraints:

**Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students
May 2021**

- i. The interruption period for maternity leave cannot start before the 11th week before the expected week of childbirth.
- ii. The interruption period for maternity leave will be automatically triggered if a student is absent from their programme wholly or partly because of pregnancy after the beginning of the 4th week before the expected week of childbirth.
- iii. The latest date a period of interruption for maternity leave can start is the date of childbirth.

5.2. Applying for an Interruption for Maternity

- a. Once the interruption period dates have been agreed, students must submit the relevant interruption application form to the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office no later than the end of the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth. The student must also forward a copy of her MAT B1 form as soon it is provided by her GP.
- b. The student is responsible for submitting the appropriate Change of Circumstances application form to apply for a period of interruption. The form is available from the appropriate School or Faculty office.
- c. The appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office will then confirm in writing the terms of the maternity leave, maternity stipend payments (if applicable) and the latest date on which the student should return to study.
- d. Where a student fails to inform or apply to the appropriate Faculty or School for Maternity leave provision before the stipulated dates in this policy, the leave must be considered for approval by the Associate.
- e. There is no limit to the number of times a postgraduate research student can interrupt for the purpose of maternity or adoption leave throughout the duration of the degree.
- f. Supervisors and students should consider the fitness to study and health and safety of the student during their period of pregnancy and after their return to study.

5.3. Returning from maternity leave

- a. Students are not permitted to return to study during the first two weeks from the date of childbirth. This is classed as a period of compulsory maternity leave.
- b. Students who wish to return to study earlier than had been agreed as part of the application for an interruption, must advise their supervisor(s) and appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office in writing, giving 8 weeks' notice

Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students May 2021

of the intended date of return. The Graduate Office will amend the duration of the interruption period and thesis submission deadline.

- c. Students who wish to return to study later than had previously been agreed, must discuss this with their supervisor(s) and submit a further request for a period of interruption to studies (the maximum leave entitlement of 12 months).
- d. A student who has been studying full-time but who indicates they wish to return to study on a part-time basis following maternity leave, and have no visa restrictions, will receive sympathetic consideration of her request, and will be accommodated wherever possible. For students receiving funding managed by the University of Manchester, change to part time following maternity leave will lead to pro rata funding at part time level. The student is responsible for submitting the relevant Change of Circumstances application form to the appropriate Faculty or School Graduate Office. All application forms for change of circumstances are available via the appropriate Faculty or School Graduate Office.
- e. Faculty/Schools should consider what support needs a student returning from interruption after maternity leave may require in order to continue progression on their programme and signpost the student to appropriate University of Manchester student support.

6. Interruption for the Purpose of Adoption

A student may interrupt their degree for the purposes of adoption leave for a maximum period of 12 months subject to approval from the relevant School or Faculty.

6.1 Qualifying Criteria for Adoption Leave

Adoption leave is available to:

- Individuals who adopt.
- One member of a couple where a couple adopt jointly (the couple may choose which partner takes adoption leave regardless of gender).

The supporting partner (male or female) of an individual or a couple who adopt, may be entitled to paternity leave.

In order to qualify for adoption leave, a student must:

- Be newly matched with a child for adoption by an approved adoption agency.
- Have been registered as a student of the University continuously for 26 weeks leading into the week in which they are notified of being matched with a child for adoption.

6.2. Applying for an Interruption for Adoption

**Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students
May 2021**

- a. Adoption leave can be taken either from the date of child placement OR no more than 14 days (including weekends and public holidays) prior to the date of child placement.
- b. Students should discuss their forthcoming adoption leave with their supervisor(s) and the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office as early as possible.
- c. The student is responsible for submitting the relevant application form to the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office. The form is available from the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office
- d. The student must include the matching certificate (provided by the adoption agency). The form must be submitted to the graduate office within seven days of the student being notified by the adoption agency that they have been matched with a child for adoption.
- e. The appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office will then confirm in writing the terms of the interruption period for adoption leave, the agreed dates, any stipend pay allowance adoption pay (if applicable) and the latest date on which the student should to return to study.

6.3. Returning from adoption leave

- a. Students who wish to return to study earlier than had been agreed as part of the application for an interruption must advise their supervisor(s) and appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office in writing, giving 8 weeks' notice of the intended date of return. The Graduate Office will amend the duration of the interruption period and thesis submission deadline.
- b. Students who wish to return to study later than had previously been agreed, must discuss this with their supervisor(s) and submit a further request for a period of interruption to studies (the maximum leave entitlement is 12 months).
- c. A student who has been studying full-time but who indicates they wish to return to study on a part-time basis following adoption leave, and have no visa restrictions, will receive sympathetic consideration of their request, and will be accommodated wherever possible. The student is responsible for submitting the relevant Change of Circumstances application form to the appropriate Faculty or School Graduate Office. The form is available from the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office

7. Student eligibility criteria for receiving stipend payments during an interruption for maternity or adoption

- a. Full-time and part-time postgraduate research students who receive an annual maintenance stipend funded by the University of Manchester (i.e. from a School, Faculty or central department) and/or from Research Council funding are entitled to up to 26 weeks of paid maternity/adoption leave

Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students May 2021

without the *normal*¹ value of their maintenance stipend being reduced, followed by 13 weeks at a level commensurate with statutory maternity pay, with the remaining 13 weeks unpaid.

- b. Any paid and unpaid periods of maternity/adoption leave must be taken consecutively. The studentship will subsequently be extended by a commensurate period.
- c. Postgraduate research students who receive an externally funded stipend directly from an external organisation or an external award administered through the University of Manchester must follow the regulations of the funder. If the funder does not provide additional funds to cover maternity or adoption costs, the University is not liable to provide any payment during the student's maternity or adoption leave.
- d. Postgraduate research students who receive an annual maintenance stipend via a project funded by a research grant should enquire with the project leader if any funding for maternity or adoption leave can be provided. If the project does not provide additional funds to cover maternity or adoption costs, the University is not liable to provide any payment during the student's maternity or adoption leave.
- e. The University will not make any payment to self-funded postgraduate research students during maternity or adoption leave.
- f. Postgraduate Research students who are on a Teaching Assistant contract at the University of Manchester will be considered for maternity leave entitlement as part of this procedure.

Postgraduate Research students can apply for Maternity Allowance (MA) if they are on a Teaching Assistant contract during their qualifying week of entitlement (the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth). Students should contact HR Services to enquire about eligibility for Maternity Allowance (MA). Funding during periods of Maternity or adoption leave will not be provided to students during the submission pending period or resubmission period.

- g. Only postgraduate research students in receipt of an annual maintenance stipend are entitled to maternity or adoption stipend payments. Students in receipt of bursaries or awards covering tuition fees only are not eligible to receive any payment during periods of maternity or adoption leave. Awards covering tuition fees only will be suspended during periods of maternity or adoption leave.

7.1. Qualifying period for maternity/adoption stipend payments

¹ The normal stipend value is stipulated on the student's offer or award letter. Students who receive a contribution to their stipend from an external sponsor (for example: as part of a CASE award funded by a private company), will not normally continue to receive the external sponsor contribution during maternity pay periods. The appropriate School or Faculty graduate office should consult the external sponsor to check if they are able to continue to provide funding during these periods, but the external sponsor is not required to continue their financial support during maternity/adoption leave. Students should consult the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office to check the arrangements for their individual award.

**Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students
May 2021**

- a. There is no qualifying period for students applying for maternity or adoption leave stipend payments where the student is in receipt of an annual maintenance stipend funded by the University of Manchester (i.e. from a School, Faculty or central department) and/or from Research Council funding.

7.2. Stipend payments for students returning from an interruption for maternity/adoption

- a. A student will be required to return to study for at least 12 weeks following a period of interruption for maternity or adoption. If the student wishes to curtail their study before they return, or within the first 12 weeks of study, they should be aware of their funder terms and conditions and contact the appropriate Faculty or School Graduate Office at the earliest convenient time.
- b. If a student does not return to their programme after maternity or adoption leave they will be required to reimburse the University for any maternity or adoption leave pay made to date.
- c. If a student withdraws from the University within 12 weeks of their return to study after maternity or adoption leave the University has the right to recover any maternity or adoption payment made. A student who leaves the University while on an interruption for maternity/adoption will not continue to receive stipend payments.

8. Interruption for the purpose of unpaid parental leave

- a. The student parent partner who is not in receipt of parental leave is entitled to apply for an interruption for up to 50 weeks for the period of time following the birth/adoption of their child as unpaid parental leave. This leave must be completed within 12 months of the birth/adoption of the child. The student must formally apply for the interruption. For further details on how to apply, please see section 4 of this procedure.
- b. Students must discuss their application to interrupt for unpaid parental leave and agree interruption period dates with their supervisor(s), supervisory team and the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office as early as possible.
- c. Once the interruption period dates have been agreed, students must submit the relevant interruption application form to the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office no later than the end of the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth or within 7 days of the student being notified by the adoption agency that they have been matched with a child. The form is available from the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office.
- d. The student must also provide a copy of the mother's MATB1 (if the student does not have a MATB1 form, a letter from the GP can be provided confirming the date of childbirth). Or provide an adoption certificate (provided by the adoption agency)

**Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students
May 2021**

- e. The appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office will then confirm in writing the terms of the unpaid parental leave and the latest date on which the student should return to study.

9. Interruption for the purpose of sickness

- a. For details on how to apply for a period of interruption, please see section 4 of this procedure.
- b. Any application for an interruption of studies due to sickness is granted at the discretion of the appropriate School or Faculty and must be accompanied by a medical certificate.
- c. The School or Faculty, in liaison with Occupational Health Service and the Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS), may consider whether the student's withdrawal from the programme and possible reapplication at a future date would be a more appropriate measure than a period of interruption.
- d. Students should consult the terms and conditions of their funder for details on their sick leave allowance.

9.1 Student eligibility criteria for receiving stipend payments during absence for sickness

- a. Full-time and part-time postgraduate research students who receive an *annual maintenance stipend funded by the University of Manchester* (i.e. from a School, Faculty or central department) and/or from a Research Council funding are entitled to up to 13 weeks of paid sick leave at their *normal* stipend value from the first day of certified illness within any 12 month academic year period, subject to the approval of the relevant School or Faculty.²
- b. Postgraduate research students who receive an externally funded stipend *directly* from an external organisation *or* an external award administered through the University of Manchester must follow the regulations of the funder. If the funder does not provide additional money to fund periods of sick leave, the University is not liable to provide any payment.
- c. Postgraduate research students who receive an annual maintenance stipend via a project funded by a research grant should enquire with the project leader if stipend payments are provided. If the project does not provide additional money to fund periods of sick leave, the University is not liable to provide any payment.

²The normal stipend value is stipulated on the student's offer or award letter. Students who receive a contribution to their stipend from an external sponsor (for example: as part of a CASE award funded by a private company), will not normally continue to receive the external sponsor contribution for sick pay periods. The appropriate School or Faculty graduate office should consult the external sponsor to check if they are able to provide funding for these periods, but the external sponsor is not required to give financial support for sickness absence. Students should consult the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office to check the arrangements for their individual award.

Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students May 2021

- d. The University will not make any payment to self-funded postgraduate research students during periods of sick leave.
- e. Funding during periods of sickness will not be provided to students during the submission pending period or a resubmission period.
- f. All cases of student sick leave will be considered individually on a case by case basis and any payment is provided subject to the approval of the relevant School or Faculty.
- g. Stipend payments are instigated at the point when the student first falls ill, not when the request for an interruption is made. Stipend payments are unlikely to be considered if absence due to illness is not reported at the time. Retrospective requests for stipend payments will not be considered.

Note that *only* postgraduate research students in receipt of an annual maintenance stipend are entitled to stipend payments. Students in receipt of bursaries³ or awards covering tuition fees only are not eligible to receive any payment during periods of sickness.

10. Interruption for the purpose of internship

- a. An internship is an opportunity to undertake a period of work/research which is not regarded as part of the 'normal' programme of study, which may or may not be funded, and which may enhance future career prospects. An internship may or may not be related to the programme of study but will require a break from study via an interruption. (Note this is different from a placement which is an integral and pre-defined part of a programme of study which is an official leave of absence). See the [Official Leave of Absence Procedure](#).
- b. Students' should apply for a period of interruption for the purposes of internship via the normal interruption application form available from the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office. The form should be submitted in advance of the period of time to be taken away from their studies, supply evidence of the internship opportunity and provide a statement identifying how the students research or professional development will be benefitted. The decision is at the discretion of relevant School or Faculty PGR office. The student should check funding implications with their sponsor and any immigration implications impacting their visa with the visa@manchester.ac.uk.

11. Interrupting whilst living in University of Manchester accommodation

- a. Students living in University accommodation should note that short term absence will not normally affect their accommodation as long as they are still registered on a full or part-time postgraduate research degree at the

³ A bursary is a single payment, normally made at the beginning of the degree, to help towards payment of tuition fees and/or living expenses

Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students May 2021

University. If students formally interrupt and their registration status becomes 'interrupting' their university accommodation contract may be terminated with no less than 4 weeks written notice. See the [Terms and Conditions of Residence](#).

- b. If students require accommodation upon recommencement of their studies, they must reapply in the usual way. International students paying the overseas rate of tuition fees will still be guaranteed University accommodation on their return.
- c. For further information about accommodation see the [University of Manchester Accommodation Office website](#).

12. Returning from interruption

12.1 Notice of Return from interruption

- a. All students who have taken a period of interruption should indicate their intention to return to study and provide any requested evidence to satisfy the terms of their interruption period as set out in the confirmation of interruption letter.
- b. The School will attempt to contact the student and will offer support in relation to a potential return to study following interruption.
- c. The return to study process following a period of interruption can take some time (e.g., due to the need for additional information from the Occupational Health Service or other specialists). Students should, therefore, begin the return to study process as early as possible and comply with any deadlines given to them.

12.2 Return from interruption approval process

- a. The relevant postgraduate panel will oversee the return from interruption process.
- b. In most cases, the return from interruption can be approved by chair's action (Chair of the Postgraduate research degrees Panel) based on the evidence supplied by the student.
- c. If the student's return from interruption requires further consideration, the evidence provided by the student will be considered at the next appropriate postgraduate research degrees panel. The supervisor can supply a supporting statement to present to the panel as evidence.
- d. The student will be informed by the Faculty/School Graduate Office of the nature of the panel meeting, date/time and potential outcomes of the panel decision.

**Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students
May 2021**

- e. The student can supply further evidence to the relevant postgraduate research degrees panel in support of their return from interruption where appropriate.
- f. Additional support staff from student support such as DASS and Occupational Health may be invited to attend the relevant postgraduate research degrees panel to offer their recommendations.
- g. The postgraduate research degrees panel, on consideration of the evidence supplied by the student, may recommend one of the following outcomes:
 - i. Return from interruption approved
 - ii. A change in mode of attendance to support the return from interruption
 - iii. The student and supervisor prepare a support plan for a period of 3-6 months with regular progress checks
 - iv. The student is referred to the [Policy on Supporting Health, Fitness and Return to Study](#) and supporting Procedures.
- h. The student will receive a notification of the outcome from the postgraduate research degrees panel from the appropriate Faculty/School Graduate Office

12.3 Support to Study after Returning from interruption

- a. Upon return from a period of interruption, students must inform their supervisor and the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office so that they may re-register and receive any additional support or guidance appropriate to their return from interruption.
- b. Students will be expected to return to the same mode of study as they were originally undertaking, i.e., full-time or part-time. Where a return from interruption includes a request to change the mode of attendance, the student must apply using the normal Faculty/School application route.
- c. Students returning from an interruption must have a return from interruption interview with their supervisor on their return to discuss their support needs and any academic progression requirements. The return from interruption interview should be discussed and arranged between the student and supervisor and a PGR Director/Tutor should also be present at the interview.
- d. Faculty/Schools should consider what support needs a student returning from interruption may have in order to continue progression on their programme and the student should be referred to the Occupational Health Service if feedback to the Faculty/School is required. For details on referrals see: <http://www.occhealth.manchester.ac.uk/staff/referrals/students/>.
- e. The student and supervisor should consider what support needs a student returning from interruption may have in order to continue progression on their programme and the student should be signposted to any relevant support.

**Interruptions Procedure for Postgraduate Research Students
May 2021**

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