

## **C4. INTERRUPTION OF STUDY AND WITHDRAWAL**

For students on programmes and awards validated by the University of Plymouth this section of the CAPR has been agreed by the University (as the awarding institution) as meeting its policy and regulatory requirements on interruption of study and withdrawal. The shaded sections below form GSM London regulatory and policy framework as applied to Plymouth University and GSM awards

Related guidance and codes of practice can be found at the QAA Code of Practice, Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality Chapter B4 Enabling Student Development and Achievement.

### Purpose and scope

- 4.1 This section of the Consolidated Academic Policies and Regulations (CAPR) explains how a student may ask to take a break or withdraw from study with the College.
- 4.2 These regulations apply to all registered students of the College, and to any action taken on or after tbc regardless of the date of the event giving rise to the action or request.
- 4.3 These regulations do not apply in the following circumstances:
  - (a) A student is detained or imprisoned. If so, the College will decide – in the light of all the relevant evidence – whether to allow a period of interruption of study under the regulations on students who acquire a criminal conviction.
  - (b) A student is currently part of a regulatory investigation. If so, the College will normally investigate any concern or allegation, and formally consider the application for interruption of, or withdrawal from, study when the investigation is complete.
  - (c) A student has been recommended for an award and is due to graduate.

### Definitions

- 4.4 'Interruption of study' means an extended break from a programme at the student's request or if required by the College.
- 4.5 'Withdrawal' means leaving a programme and ending the student's registration with the College at the student's request or if required by the College.
- 4.6 'Programme stage' means the division of programme decided when the College approves a programme. In undergraduate programmes, this often aligns with the division of the programme by level. The programme stages are shown in the Programme Handbook.

### Introduction

#### *Overview*

- 4.7 It is important that the College ensures the safety and wellbeing of all its members, and may wish to ensure the safety and wellbeing of certain members specifically if it considers this necessary.
- 4.8 As part of this, the College recognises that exceptional circumstances may make it impossible for a student to properly engage with their studies. These regulations exist to enable a student to take a break or withdraw from their studies in such circumstances.
- 4.9 Interruption of study is a formal process designed to deal with an extended and unavoidable need to be absent. If a student's difficulties are complicated or long lasting, the College will make a more detailed investigation with the student.
- 4.10 In some cases it will be in the student's best interests to withdraw and reapply to join the programme at a later date. In such circumstances the student may be able to re-join at the start of the programme stage in which they withdrew.

*Principles of interruption of study*

- 4.11 A student can interrupt their studies if they satisfy all the following criteria:
- (a) There is an unforeseen and unpreventable change in their circumstances.
  - (b) Their required length of study absence is longer than the College could accommodate by other means.
  - (c) The student agrees to an intended and achievable date of return that is appropriate both to them and the programme.
- 4.12 The College will not grant an interruption of study to address academic failure unrelated to other circumstances.
- 4.13 The College considers each request on its own merits and will regard evidence from a student to support an application to interrupt their studies as confidential to the College.
- 4.14 The College is not obliged to permit the student to return to a programme or module that has been discontinued or significantly changed during a period of interruption lasting more than one (1) year. For the student's benefit, the College will try to find a suitable replacement. If the College cannot do so, it may require the student to withdraw.
- 4.15 A student must normally make their request before the end of week 2 of the semester in which the interruption will begin, though they can apply in a previous term.
- 4.16 If a student is unavoidably unable to continue their studies mid-semester, and only becomes aware of this situation after the week 2 deadline (as defined above), the College may grant an authorised absence from the point when the student is no longer able to attend, up until the start of the next semester. The student must submit an 'extenuating circumstances' request for any missed assessments during the period of authorised absence.

- 4.17 A student may normally interrupt their studies for a maximum of two (2) academic years in total during a single registration. The College may consider an interruption in exceptional circumstances on a case by case basis.
- 4.18 A student may continue their interruption beyond two (2) academic years ONLY by successfully applying to the Academic Board. The student must provide evidence that satisfies the Board of significant extenuating circumstances. This must be endorsed by the appropriate College body or committee.
- 4.19 An interrupting student must maintain contact with the College to ensure they know about changes in the curriculum, syllabus or reading matter, or in other relevant matters that will affect their registration, enrolment or programme on return.

*Principles of withdrawal*

- 4.20 A student may permanently withdraw from their programme. If they wish to re-enter the College, they may do so through the regulations on re-admission.
- 4.21 A student who withdraws from a programme at the College immediately ceases to be a registered or enrolled student at the College, and the date of withdrawal will be recorded as such.

*Interruption of studies, withdrawals and finance*

- 4.22 When considering an interruption of study or withdrawal, students must consult the Student Finance Office about their tuition fees. The College will not normally grant an interruption request unless the student shows evidence of seeking guidance from the Student Finance Office and of being aware of the financial implications.
- 4.23 A student is not normally liable for any tuition fees for a semester in which they have an approved interruption.
- 4.24 If the College grants a student an authorised absence after week 2 for a period of no longer than a semester, the student remains liable for all tuition fees payable until that point in line with the published policy.
- 4.25 The College will not waive debt if a student interrupts their study or withdraws, and will not accept liability for any re-assessment of a student maintenance or loan.
- 4.26 When resuming their studies, students will be liable to pay any difference in the level of tuition fee between interrupting and resuming their studies. They will also be liable for additional tuition fees if repeating some or all of the study they have already done.

*Interruption of studies, withdrawals and assessments*

- 4.27 Students who have submitted assessments during the academic year up to the effective date of the interruption or withdrawal will receive marks for them.
- 4.28 The College will cancel the enrolment of a student from any modules that begin after the point of interruption or withdrawal.

- 4.29 The College will mark as 'incomplete' any uncompleted assessments on modules already begun that are due for submission/attendance after the point of interruption or withdrawal. No credit will be awarded for them. The modules are not 'failed' and, in the case of an interruption, the student will keep the current number of attempts at the assessment component for that module.
- 4.30 A student who withdraws before completing their intended award may be conferred an intermediate award at the discretion of the Board of Examiners.
- 4.31 Students should submit an application for extenuating circumstances if they are unable to attend or submit assessments up to the point of interruption or if any assessments before interruption were affected by such circumstances.

*Examples of cases where interruption or withdrawal may be considered*

Significant extenuating circumstances, for example:

- serious long-term illness or accident that requires extended recovery or rehabilitation;
- a serious illness with a terminal prognosis; or
- a long-term health condition worsening to the extent that makes adjustment unreasonable or inequitable to other students.

Significant compassionate grounds, for example:

- death or serious illness of a close relative or 'significant other' such as a long-term partner, or child;
- short-term imprisonment, detention or remand where the long-term outcome is unknown; or
- significant worsening of any adverse personal or family circumstances.

Procedure

*Overview*

- 4.32 The process for applying for an interruption of study has four (4) stages:
- (a) Stage 1 – Submitting an application for interruption.
  - (b) Stage 2 – Considering the application for interruption.
  - (c) Stage 3 – Deciding on the application for interruption.
  - (d) Stage 4 – Resuming studies after a period of interruption.

- 4.33 A student may submit a notice of withdrawal at any point in writing. When a student informs the College of their withdrawal in person or via email, the College will confirm the details in writing to the student.
- 4.34 If a student does not wish to submit any formal notification in writing, the College will follow the appropriate regulations to discontinue their registration.
- 4.35 In all cases, the College will make appropriate enquiries to seek the reasons for the withdrawal.

*Stage 1 – Submitting an application for interruption*

- 4.36 A student may only submit an application:
- (b) in writing on the prescribed form with the student's full name, student number, and signature;
  - (a) before 4pm at the end of week 2 of the semester to which it relates, though they can apply in a previous term; and
  - (b) to the place and person in line with the written instructions.
- 4.37 The application must include:
- (a) a clear statement of the grounds for request (i.e. why the student thinks an interruption of study is necessary);
  - (c) a statement outlining the student's understanding of the practical and financial consequences (including evidence of discussions with the Student Finance Office, if appropriate);
  - (b) all relevant evidence or details of events in support of the request; and
  - (c) a list of any people who are known to have relevant information.
- 4.38 If a student gives medical grounds to support their application, these must be fully certified by a UK-qualified medical practitioner unrelated to the student and must provide sufficient reason for the interruption.
- 4.39 If a student gives compassionate reasons to support their application, they must provide evidence of the events or conditions that make an interruption necessary. The evidence must be documents – e.g., official certificates – that the student has not created.

*Stage 2 – Considering the application for interruption*

- 4.40 On receiving the application and supporting evidence, the College will arrange a meeting to consider the application to which the student will be invited. If the student cannot attend, the meeting will be conducted in their absence.
- 4.41 The College will:

- (a) consider the grounds for the request;
- (b) discuss the academic and practical consequences of the request, if possible with the student; and
- (c) ensure the best possible opportunity for the student to successfully continue and succeed in their studies.

*Stage 3 – Deciding on the application for interruption*

- 4.42 The College's consideration of the application must normally be completed and the student informed of the outcome within twenty (20) working days of the College receiving the application. If this is impossible, the student must be notified within this timescale of the delay and the reasons for it.
- 4.43 On completion of its consideration, the College must inform the student that:
- (a) the application does not meet the grounds for an interruption and the student will be expected to continue with their studies; or
  - (b) the application meets the grounds for an interruption and the student will be permitted to temporarily discontinue their studies until the agreed return date.
- 4.44 In giving its decision to reject an application, the College must inform the student that they may submit an appeal under the relevant regulations.
- 4.45 In approving an application, the College will normally set:
- (a) a date for the student to confirm in writing to the College that they will be resuming their studies; and
  - (b) a date for a returner's interview, which will normally be about one (1) month before the agreed return date.
- 4.46 It is the student's responsibility to note these dates and ensure they are met.
- 4.47 If the student fails to confirm that they will return in writing by this date, attend the interview, or return to their studies on the agreed date, then the College will begin the procedure to terminate the student's registration under the relevant regulations. The date of their termination will be given as the first day of the interruption.

*Stage 4 – Resuming studies after a period of interruption*

- 4.48 On the agreed returner's interview date the student must attend the interview in person or by telephone. The interview aims to assess the student's ability to re-engage with their studies. The student must normally give the panel supporting evidence that the circumstances leading to the interruption have now been resolved.
- 4.49 The outcome of the returner's interview will be one (1) of the following:

- (a) If there are doubts about a student's ability to immediately reengage with their studies, the panel may require a further interruption up to the maximum of two (2) academic years in total.
- (b) If there are serious doubts about a student's ability to continue with their studies in the foreseeable future, the panel may require them to permanently withdraw.
- (c) If the student shows they are ready to continue with their studies, the panel will reinstate them from the intended date of return.

4.50 Students will resume their studies at the most suitable point in the academic year as decided by the College. Early in their return, students must attend a tutorial meeting with academic staff to discuss their studies and return to the College.

4.51 Before resuming studies on a programme requiring a Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS) check, the student must submit a new, updated check.

#### *Advice and support*

4.52 If a student is thinking about an interruption of study or withdrawal, they may wish to discuss their situation with their personal tutor, programme leader or Learning Support and Wellbeing Team before starting the formal process.

4.53 Advice for students on the regulations for interruption of study and withdrawal, and the associated lower-level College rules, is available from the Student Hub or the GSM London Students' Union ([gsmadvicecentre@gsmlondon.ac.uk](mailto:gsmadvicecentre@gsmlondon.ac.uk)). More complex queries may be referred to appropriate individuals or the Office of Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulation ([oscar@gsmlondon.ac.uk](mailto:oscar@gsmlondon.ac.uk))

4.54 Advice for staff on interruption of study and withdrawal is available from their nominated Academic Policy Partner.

4.55 If any staff development needs are identified, these may be discussed with members of the Staff and Educational Development Team.

#### *Fees*

4.56 A student will be liable for all tuition fee charges according to the Fees, Refund and Debt policy for their programme up until the point where the College received and logged their notification of interruption of study or withdrawal.

4.57 The College is not liable for financial or other consequences arising from action under this policy.

#### *Legal and regulatory context*

4.58 These regulations are about the terms on which the initial relationship between the student and the College has been set up. Therefore, while there is limited legal context specifically on study interruption or withdrawal, these regulations have taken account of the principles

of contract law that apply to relationships between students and higher-education institutions.

- 4.59 The College may not be bound by the principles in 4.58 and these regulations alone may not provide the procedure to meet all of these principles, some of which may be met through other policies and procedures. The College uses the principles as guidance only, to help it deal soundly with these matters.

*Enforcement, monitoring and review*

- 4.60 If any person or body in the College refuses to comply with a request or decision made to enforce this policy, their refusal must be reported to the Academic Registrar, who will take such action to enforce this policy as they think necessary.
- 4.61 Each year, the College must receive a report that enables it to monitor, identify and act on any shortfalls in how these regulations are interpreted and applied.
- 4.62 The annual report must include statistical data on the number of interruptions or withdrawals by type; the outcomes, Departments and programmes from which they originate; the length of the process; and the equality characteristics (including sex, disability and ethnicity) of those who have interrupted or withdrawn from their studies.

4.63 Every three (3) years, the College must review these regulations to ensure that:

- (a) they remain up to date and continue to meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code, applicable legislation or guidance;
- (b) areas of improvement, or any concerns, raised by students, external examiners, or professional bodies have been addressed; and
- (c) opportunities to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy have been taken.

**Schedule (not part of the policies and regulations):**

**Responsible Officer: Head of Registry (Records and Data)**

**Approved by: Board of Directors and Academic Board**

**Version: 2.0**

**Date: June 2017**

**Monitoring and Review Body: Faculty Board**

**Effective From: July 2017**

**Next Scheduled Review: June 2019**