



Leave of Absence Policy and Procedure

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Leave of Absence Policy

Purpose

- POL.1. The University of Stirling is committed to delivering an excellent student learning experience and supporting students to achieve success.
- POL.2. In undertaking a programme of study, some students may experience circumstances which mean they need or wish to take an extended period of time away from studies and then return to complete the programme. Similarly, there are some circumstances in which the University may require a student to interrupt their studies and take a period of time away.
- POL.3. This policy and its associated procedure set out the provisions for students taking an authorised, agreed period of absence from their programme of study, including both where a student requests this and where the University requires it.

Scope

- POL.4. The policy and corresponding procedure apply to all students undertaking undergraduate, postgraduate taught, or postgraduate research study.
- POL.5. The policy does not apply to temporary absence from studies, non-attendance at classes or other learning and teaching activities, non-engagement with the programme of study or its requirements, extenuating circumstances or extensions to study. These are governed by separate policies and procedures.
- POL.6. Leave of absence forms part of the University's overall academic regulation and policy framework and is linked with a range of specific regulations and policies. These include:
- a. [Extenuating Circumstances Procedure](#)
 - b. [Policy and Procedure on Student Attendance and Engagement](#)
 - c. [Undergraduate Regulations](#)
 - d. [Postgraduate Taught Regulations](#)
 - e. [Postgraduate Research Regulations](#)
 - f. [Mitigation Policy and Procedure](#)
 - g. [Code of Practice: Research Degrees](#)
- POL.7. A leave of absence may impact on a student's ability to meet progression requirements, achieve expected timelines and complete their programme of study. In such cases, further policy, regulation or procedure may also become relevant.
- POL.8. Registered students studying at partner institutions must also comply with relevant partner institution requirements as agreed through partnership arrangements.

Definitions

- POL.9. **Engagement:** Active participation in scheduled teaching, supervision, assessment, or other required academic activity.
- POL.10. **Extension:** An approved increase to the period of study in accordance with the relevant degree regulations. An extension is distinct from a leave of absence and does not constitute a break from studies.
- POL.11. **Interruption of Studies:** A formally approved interruption to a programme of study under specific regulatory provisions, such as maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave. An interruption of studies is distinct from a leave of absence and is subject to separate regulatory provisions and entitlements.
- POL.12. **Leave of Absence:** An authorised break from studies for an approved period. During a leave of absence, a student is not in attendance at the University. No studies are undertaken and no supervision is provided. The student remains registered with the University but is not regarded as current for enrolment purposes during the approved period of leave.
- POL.13. **Longer Term Absence from Studies:** A period of absence of more than five working days during which a student is unable to engage with their programme of study. Such absences must be supported by appropriate documentation and approved by the University. Where the absence is expected to continue and the student is unable to engage with their studies for an extended period, a leave of absence should be considered.
- POL.14. **Programme of Study:** The approved programme of study, leading to an award of the University, for which the student is enrolled.
- POL.15. **Re-matriculation (Re-enrolment):** The process by which a student formally returns to their programme of study following a leave of absence.
- POL.16. **Temporary Absence from Studies:** A period during which a student is prevented from engaging with their programme of study. Absences of up to five working days are self-certified.

Points of Policy

Engagement with Studies

- POL.17. All students are required to meet the expectations of their programme, and the University's policy on [Student Attendance and Engagement](#), and overall engage effectively with their studies.

Types of Leave of Absence

- POL.18. A leave of absence may be requested by a student or required by the University.
- POL.19. Student-requested leave of absence applies where a student requests a break from their studies due to personal, medical, financial, or other circumstances which prevent engagement with their programme of study. These periods will count towards the maximum cumulative duration.

- POL.20. University-required leave of absence applies where a student is unable to continue their studies due to academic progression decisions, reassessment requirements, or programme structure, and there is no appropriate academic activity available to them during the relevant period, or where a requirement arising from the application of a University policy, procedure, or formal process prevents them from continuing their studies.
- POL.21. Where a leave of absence is required by the University, the period and any conditions will be determined by the University. Such periods will not normally count towards the maximum cumulative duration.

Authorisation of Leave of Absence

- POL.22. A student may be authorised to take a leave of absence from their programme of study.
- POL.23. Applications for leave of absence for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students must be submitted online via the portal, with any relevant supporting evidence, and are administered by Student Administration on behalf of Academic Council/Education Committee. Exceptionally, requests for additional leave beyond the cumulative periods set out in paragraph 26 may be considered by Academic Panel.
- POL.24. In the case of postgraduate research students, applications for leave of absence must be submitted via Research Compass, with any relevant supporting evidence, and are administered by Student Administration on behalf of Academic Council/Education Committee. Exceptionally, requests for additional leave beyond the cumulative periods set out in paragraph 26 may be considered by Academic Panel.
- POL.25. Approval of a leave of absence may be subject to conditions.

Allowable Periods of Leave of Absence

- POL.26. A student may take leave of absence from their programme of study for a maximum cumulative period as follows:
- a. Undergraduate students: a maximum of 24 months cumulatively.
 - b. Taught postgraduate students:
 - full-time: a maximum of 12 months cumulatively;
 - part-time: a maximum of 24 months cumulatively.
 - c. Postgraduate research students: a maximum of 24 months cumulatively.
- POL.27. These represent the maximum cumulative period of leave of absence and will not normally be exceeded.
- POL.28. Where a student is required to take a leave of absence due to programme structure, reassessment requirements, or academic progression decisions, this period will not normally count towards the maximum cumulative period of leave of absence.

- POL.29. This includes cases where a student must return in a later semester to complete a mandatory module and is unable to undertake study in the interim period.
- POL.30. Exceptionally, requests for additional leave beyond the cumulative periods set out in paragraph 26 may be considered by Academic Panel.

Retrospective Leave of Absence

- POL.31. Leave of absence will not be granted retrospectively.

Programme Viability

- POL.32. Where a programme of study is to be discontinued or significantly amended, it may not be possible to authorise a leave of absence.
- POL.33. In such cases, the University will work with the student to identify an appropriate alternative pathway.

Re-matriculation and Engagement

- POL.34. A student who does not re-matriculate (re-enrol) on the agreed return date, or who has not communicated intentions towards their studies by the end of their period of leave of absence, may be deemed to have withdrawn from the programme of study.

Activity During Leave of Absence

- POL.35. A student may undertake reassessments (second attempt and assessment only) during a period of leave of absence.
- POL.36. A student may not:
- a. repeat a module in its entirety; nor
 - b. attempt a module for the first time during a period of leave of absence.

Modules and Assessment

- POL.37. Any module for which the first attempt assessment has not been completed at the point of leave of absence may not be resumed following return to studies; the module must be repeated in its entirety.
- POL.38. There is a financial implication for repeating a module.
- POL.39. There may be exceptions made for dissertation modules (or equivalent), which will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Impact of Leave of Absence

POL.40. A leave of absence will result in a temporary break in studies and an extension to the overall duration of the programme.

POL.41. A leave of absence may have implications for tuition fees, funding arrangements, eligibility for student support, university accommodation and council tax exemption and visa or immigration status and may require reporting or withdrawal in accordance with immigration requirements.

Return to Study

POL.42. A student must re-matriculate (re-enrol) on the agreed return date.

POL.43. The programme of study to be undertaken on return must be agreed with the relevant academic adviser, programme director, or supervisor and, for taught students, confirmed by the Progression Board.

POL.44. Where the original programme or modules are no longer available, an alternative programme of study will be agreed where possible.

Responsibilities

POL.45. Students are responsible for:

- submitting applications in a timely manner;
- providing appropriate supporting evidence;
- maintaining communication with the University;
- re-matriculating (re-enrolling) on the agreed return date.

POL.46. The University is responsible for:

- considering applications fairly and consistently;
- maintaining accurate student records;
- providing guidance on the implications of leave of absence;
- supporting students in their return to study.

Leave of Absence Procedure

Application for Leave of Absence

- PROC.1. A student must apply for leave of absence in accordance with the published process which can be found [here](#).
- PROC.2. Applications must be submitted in advance of, or at the point that, circumstances arise which prevent continued engagement with studies.
- PROC.3. Where circumstances have already impacted on a student's ability to undertake assessment or engage with their studies, these should be considered under the Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure.
- PROC.4. Applications must be submitted no later than the end of teaching for the relevant semester.

Supporting Evidence

- PROC.5. Where appropriate, applications must be supported by relevant independent evidence. Details of acceptable evidence can be found in the [Mitigation Policy](#) and Procedure (paragraphs 23 and 24).
- PROC.6. Evidence should confirm the nature and timing of the circumstances and demonstrate the impact on the student's ability to study.

Consideration of Applications

- PROC.7. All applications will be considered by Student Administration in accordance with this policy and procedure. Exceptionally, requests for additional leave beyond the maximum cumulative periods set out in paragraph 26 of the policy may be considered by Academic Panel.
- PROC.8. For postgraduate research students, applications must be supported by the principal supervisor and approved through the appropriate academic process.
- PROC.9. For undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, applications should be discussed with the Programme Director before submission.
- PROC.10. Postgraduate research students should note that where additional time to complete their programme is required, but there has not been a break in studies, this should be considered through an application for an extension to the period of study rather than a leave of absence.

Outcomes

PROC.11. The outcome of an application will be one of the following:

- approval of leave of absence;
- partial approval;
- rejection of the application.

PROC.12. The student will normally be notified of the outcome within ten working days from the submission of their application.

Review of Decisions

PROC.13. A student who is dissatisfied with the outcome of an application for leave of absence may request a review in accordance with the University's [Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure](#), or may choose to submit a complaint through the [Complaints Handling Procedure](#).