

Leave of Absence Guide for Postgraduate Researchers and their Supervisors.

This guide aims to provide some information to help postgraduate researchers, and their supervisors negotiate a supportive Leave of Absence (LOA), Maternity/ Parental Leave or leave for Jury Service period during a postgraduate research degree (MPhil, Professional Doctorate or PhD). Covered here is: i) applying for LOA, Maternity/ Parental/ Adoption Leave or leave for Jury Service, ii) responsibilities of Postgraduate Researchers and their supervisors during these forms of leave, and iii) returning from LOA. You may also wish to refer to the University of Wolverhampton Research Regulations (2023/24), Sections 3.25 – 3.45 'Leave of Absence'.

There are many reasons why Postgraduate Researchers may require a Leave of Absence from their research degree. These include:

- Pregnancy or Parental Leave¹
- Attending Jury Service²
- Or other circumstances that may make it difficult for Postgraduate Researchers to continue with their studies. Examples of this this could be illness, periods of stress or anxiety, bereavement, periods of financial hardship or issues relating to close family.³ However, leave of absence must not be used to cover holiday leave, research visits, fieldwork visits, etc.

If a Postgraduate Researcher requires leave for any of the above reasons, they should first discuss their circumstances with their supervisors and agree that this is the correct course of action. During this meeting, the PGR and their supervisors should explore the actions below and follow up the relevant actions before and during the LOA:

1. the process for applying for LOA. This may include:
 - *how to apply for leave?* – this is an e-vision task that must be completed by the PGR at the time of requiring LOA. LOA cannot be granted retrospectively. Please note that a supervisory team can not apply for LOA on behalf of a student.
 - *how long should the LOA be?* – LOA is granted in month long blocks and a student can take up to 12 months LOA at any one time. PGRs are entitled to a maximum of 24 months of LOA during their research degrees for all issues that make it difficult for PGR to continue with study (taking maternity and parental leave, and time to complete jury service are additional to these 24 months). However, once a 12-month period of LOA is completed a PGR must return to study for at least 3 months before being eligible to apply for further LOA. We advise that PGR and their supervisors think carefully about the time a PGR will require for LOA. Applications to return early from LOA can be made.
 - *what supporting evidence is required when applying for LOA?* – Although the University reserves the right to ask for evidence to support a request for Leave of Absence, it would not normally do so. However, when a request is made that would take the total period of Leave of Absence to over 2

¹ There are no limits placed on the number of times a PGR applies for Maternity or Parental Leave. The time taken for Maternity or Parental Leave is in addition to the 24-month maximum LOA entitlement. The time taken for this type of leave is added on to the maximum registration period for the degree.

² Jury Service is in addition to the 24-month maximum LOA entitlement. The time taken for this type of leave is added on to the maximum registration period for the degree.

³ Any LOA taken for these reasons during a research degree will be included within the 24-month maximum LOA entitlement. The time taken for this type of leave is added on to the maximum registration period for the degree.

years (because of the parental leave clause), then evidence will be sought confirming that the student is eligible for parental leave.

- *whether there are UKVI requirements that need to be considered?* – If a PGR is studying at the University via a Tier 4 Visa, they will need to leave the country during periods of LOA of more than 60 days. Further advice and support is available from the UKVI Compliance Team at the University.
 - *the financial implications of LOA.* PGR in receipt of a bursary should note that their bursary payments will be suspended during a period of LOA.
2. whether there are University support services (e.g. Counselling Services, Chaplaincy, The Students' Union) that may be able to provide additional support for the PGR during this time? This additional support may help the PGR through a difficult time, facilitate the PGR in returning early from LOA, or help keep the PGR connected to the University and provide a sense of belonging during a difficult time.
3. what pastoral support from their supervisory team would the PGR wish to receive during their LOA? – you will note from the University of Wolverhampton Research Regulation 3.31 'Whilst on a Leave of Absence, a student will⁴ have restricted access to university services and facilities, including their supervisor in respect of their research work, but will be encouraged to keep in touch with their supervisor for pastoral support'. To this end, supervisors should not expect to receive work from the PGR or to comment on any work that they receive. However, PGRs and their supervisors should discuss:
- *whether the PGR would like to have contact with their supervisors during their LOA?* PGR and their supervisors should discuss the frequency of these communications, which of the supervisory team makes the contact and in what format (phone calls, emails, video conferencing etc); both parties should be comfortable with this contact and how it transpires. The supervisor who makes this contact should update the PGR's e-vision record if/when these forms of contact are made. In relation to this contact, PGR and their supervisors should discuss what they feel is an appropriate level of disclosure to be included in these log entries.
 - *the type of access to the University facilities that the PGR may require during LOA.* – For example, a PGR might wish to attend a lecture or seminar as part of a lecture or seminar series or attend a social event with fellow PGR. These types of activities are important in helping a PGR's sense of belonging. If a PGR is on LOA for several months (especially if due to Maternity or Parental Leave), PGRs and their supervisors may wish to discuss whether Keeping in Touch Days are appropriate. During Keeping in Touch days PGRs may wish to meet with their supervisory team for a chat, coffee or lunch, attend a workshop or PGR event of their interest, or just spend some time in the University. However, PGRs are not expected to conduct their research during their Keeping in Touch days. The frequency of these meetings should also be discussed and should occur at a frequency that both PGRs and their supervisors are happy with, however we would not expect these to exceed once every 3-4 months.
4. The process to return from LOA. When a period of LOA is completed, a PGR is expected to inform the University of their intention to return to their research degree. This is completed by the PGR via an e-vision task. If a PGR fails to return from a Leave of Absence and enrol within 14 calendar days of the expected date of return, they will be considered to have withdrawn and will be de-registered from the course. PGRs and their supervisors may use the negotiation contact points or Keeping in Touch Days to ensure that this activity is understood. Once a PGR has returned to study, the PGR and supervisor(s) should meet to discuss future work, renegotiate long and short-term research plans, CPD plans and agree actions for the next period of research.

⁴ When a student has a Support to Study Level 4, known as 'A Supported Leave of Absence' they will have access to university services and amenities.