

# PGR LEAVE SUPPORT POLICY

Version No.	Description	Author	Approval	Effective Date
1.0	A policy confirming the provision of PGR Leave Support	Strathclyde Doctoral School	18 <sup>th</sup> November 2020	From AY 2020-21
1.1	Amendments to Carers Leave and Addition of Compassionate Leave to Policy	Strathclyde Doctoral School	17 <sup>th</sup> November 2021	From AY 2021-22
1.2	Amendments to Compassionate Leave to create Discretionary Leave provision	Strathclyde Doctoral School		
1.3	Amendments to Medical Leave to align with change to UKRI training grant terms and conditions	Strathclyde Doctoral School		From AY 2025-26

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## POLICY STATEMENT

1. The University of Strathclyde is committed to promoting a positive attitude to work-life balance and has a range of benefits policies that help staff and students accommodate personal and family commitments. In line with this, the University aims to encourage doctoral research student well-being through the provision of paid (stipend payment) leave support to ensure their ongoing academic success.

## SCOPE

2. A review of the Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) lifecycle revealed inconsistencies in leave provision for doctoral students across the University. To address this and promote equality of opportunity, the University of Strathclyde established the PGR Leave Support Fund. This Fund allows all funded doctoral students receiving a University-administered stipend to apply for paid leave (stipend payment), **regardless of their source of funding**. Eligible leave includes Medical, Maternity/Birth Parent, Paternity/Partner, Shared Parental, Adoption, Carers, and Discretionary leave.

## ELIGIBILITY

3. Only doctoral research students are eligible to apply for this Fund.
4. Applicants must be fully registered at the University, and be in receipt of a stipend (maintenance grant) to be eligible to apply.
5. Both full-time and part-time doctoral research students are eligible to apply. Part-time students will be funded on a pro-rata basis, as per their standard stipend payments.
6. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)<sup>1</sup> funded students are only eligible to apply for Carers Leave, Shared Parental, or Discretionary Leave through this Fund, as funding for periods of Medical, Maternity, Paternity, or Adoption Leave are covered by the UKRI grants through which their studentships are funded.
7. Doctoral research students beyond their funded period and/or registered as 'Completing' are not entitled to paid leave through this Fund.
8. UKRI funded students are entitled to a number of days annually for paid carers leave, special leave (including bereavement), and additional disability-related leave including where adjustments have been delayed. Where a period of up to three months' leave is required under either Carers' Leave or Discretionary

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<sup>1</sup> [1 UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) encompasses the 7 research councils: the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), and the Medical Research Council (MRC).

Leave, all students—including those funded by UKRI—are expected to apply to the PGR Leave Fund, which provides support for extended leave in these categories.

9. Applicants are required to take [Voluntary Suspension](#) for the associated period of leave. This allows fee payments to be suspended and the studentship duration to be extended in line with the period of leave.
10. International students who hold a visa to study in the UK should discuss any potential visa implications resulting from taking voluntary suspension with the [Visa Compliance](#) team as early as possible.
11. For international students holding a visa who are unable to take voluntary suspension, applications to the PGR Leave Support Fund will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The level of paid leave support available will be subject to the conditions of their visa.
12. Students should contact their Departmental/University administrative contact and Supervisor as soon as possible when considering taking [Voluntary Suspension](#) and applying to this Fund, as it may have an impact on their studentship funding package.
13. All applications must be approved prior to any leave being taken. Retrospective applications will not be considered except in cases of medical emergency or exceptional circumstances. Doctoral research students in receipt of support from this Fund will receive payments at the same level as their monthly stipend payments during the paid leave period.
14. If a doctoral research student withdraws after or during the period they are receiving support through this Fund, they are not required to repay the funding received.
15. Any overpayments made to a student, due to withdrawal during a period of paid leave, must be repaid to the University.
16. All applications to the Fund will be managed on a case-by-case basis and considered on the basis of the information provided in the dedicated application form.
17. Departments, Faculties and/or external funders may provide further cover beyond the provision of the Fund for any type of leave. This is entirely at their discretion, should they deem it necessary, and the funds are available to do so.
18. Stipend payments can only be made on a monthly basis. Therefore, where a doctoral research student is granted paid leave under the Fund that starts or ends in the middle of a month, this will be rounded up or down to the nearest month.

## **MEDICAL LEAVE**

19. The Fund can cover stipend payments for absences covered by a medical certificate for up to 28 weeks in a rolling 12-month period.
20. Periods of medical leave after the initial 28 weeks can be taken, but no stipend can be provided through the Fund.
21. Cumulative periods of medical leave can be applied for up to the maximum of 28 weeks in a rolling 12-month period.
22. Voluntary Suspension must be taken for the period of leave to allow fee payments to be suspended and the studentship duration to be extended in line with the period of leave. The student should complete the Voluntary Suspension Form and submit this to their Supervisor/Departmental administrative contact who will arrange for the form to be processed within the Department and Faculty and sent to Student Business for approval.
23. Medical Leave may be curtailed at any point, but students must inform the Fund managers to ensure fee and stipend payments are managed correctly.
24. An initial shorter period of Medical Leave may be extended, up to a maximum of 28 weeks leave with stipend paid. A new application to the Fund must be submitted, as well as further Voluntary Suspension applied for.
25. There is no qualifying period for Medical Leave.
26. Recipients of the Fund may be required to provide evidence (e.g. a fit note) to the University that they are fit to return to their doctoral research work prior to being able to return. This would only apply to those on leave due to illness/health conditions.

## **MATERNITY/ BIRTH PARENT/ PATERNITY/ PARTNER/ SHARED PARENTAL/ ADOPTION LEAVE**

27. An individual risk assessment must be conducted for a student who informs the University that they are any of: (i) pregnant; (ii) breastfeeding; or (iii) have given birth in the last 6 months.
28. Doctoral research students can apply for up to 12 months of Maternity/Birth Parent or Shared Parental Leave.
29. The first 6 months of Maternity/Birth Parent Leave will be paid at the doctoral research student's standard monthly stipend rate. The following 3 months are paid at a level commensurate with University employee entitlements to statutory maternity pay. The final 3 months are not paid.
30. Adoption Leave will be granted on the same basis as Maternity/Birth Parent Leave.

31. In the event of the loss of a baby after the 24th week of pregnancy, including stillbirth or neonatal death, leave will be granted on the same terms as Maternity/Birth Parent Leave.
32. In circumstances where the mother, birth parent, or main adopter passes away during or shortly before the period of Maternity/Birth Parent or Adoption Leave, their partner will be entitled to leave on the same basis.
33. Part-time students will receive Maternity/Birth Parent/Paternity/Partner/Shared Parental/Adoption Leave pay on a pro-rata basis through their stipend and if they are working part-time, may receive a further pro-rata payment from their employer (dependent on employer's terms and conditions). Part-time students working full-time are not eligible for a stipend and therefore will not be eligible to apply to this Fund.
34. Partners, who are doctoral research students, are entitled to 1 month paid Ordinary Paternity/Partner Leave at their standard monthly stipend rate.
35. Parents/partners may be entitled to up to 50 weeks of Shared Parental Leave; this may include paid and unpaid leave, depending on the individual circumstances.
36. There is no qualifying period for Maternity/Birth Parent/Paternity/Partner/Shared Parental/Adoption Leave.
37. [Voluntary Suspension](#) must be taken for the period of Maternity/Birth Parent/Paternity/Partner/Shared Parental/Adoption Leave to allow fee payments to be suspended and the studentship duration to be extended. The student should complete the [Voluntary Suspension Form](#) and submit this to their Supervisor/Departmental administrative contact who will arrange for the form to be processed within the Department and Faculty and sent to Student Business for approval.
38. Where both parents/partners hold doctoral research studentships at the University, each must submit a separate application. If both parents/partners decide to take leave at the same time, the combined leave taken counts against the overall leave entitlement (e.g. if both parents/partners take 4 weeks leave each simultaneously, it will count as 8 weeks from the overall leave and pay provision).
39. Paternity/Partner Leave applicants must provide evidence to the Department that their partner has either returned to work or will be taking Shared Parental Leave.
40. Maternity/Birth Parent/Paternity/Partner/Shared Parental/Adoption Leave recipients may curtail their leave at any point, but must inform the Fund managers.
41. Maternity/Birth Parent Leave applicants must take the [statutory 2 weeks Maternity Leave](#) following the birth of the child.
42. Maternity/Birth Parent/Paternity/Partner/Adoption/Parental leave recipients may increase the period of leave up to the set maximum, but must inform the Fund managers 1 month in advance and also submit a new application if eligible for additional funding through the scheme.

## **CARERS LEAVE**

43. Student carers are encouraged to read the University's [Student Carers Policy](#) for further information on available support at the University.
44. In order to receive support from the Fund, a student must be recognised by the University as a student carer. On receipt of an application for Carers Leave, the Fund managers will contact the Widening Access Team to obtain confirmation that the University is aware of the student's carer status.
45. A definition and evidence of status of a student carer is outlined in the University's [Student Carers Policy](#).
46. The Fund can cover stipend payments for absences of up to 3 months within a 12-month rolling period.
47. [Voluntary Suspension](#) must be taken for the period of leave to allow fee payments to be suspended and the studentship duration to be extended in line with the period of leave. The student should complete the [Voluntary Suspension Form](#) and submit this to their Supervisor/Departmental administrative contact who will arrange for the form to be processed within the Department and Faculty and sent to Student Business for approval.
48. Part-time students will be funded on a pro-rata basis, as per their standard stipend payments.
49. There is no qualifying period for Carers Leave.
50. Applications will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, including any documentation required to confirm the leave requirement.

## **DISCRETIONARY LEAVE**

51. Students are encouraged to explore the [Disability and Wellbeing Service](#) for further information on available support at the University.
52. Eligible students can apply to the Fund for up to 3 months paid Discretionary Leave within any 12-month period.
53. Discretionary Leave may be granted in a range of circumstances, including but not limited to: the death, serious injury, or serious illness of an immediate family member; the student being a victim of serious crime; pregnancy loss before the 24th week of pregnancy (either personally experienced by the student or by their partner); witnessing or being involved in a traumatic event; undergoing gender transition; experiencing non-medical difficulties related to a disability (including those arising from delayed adjustments beyond the student's control); or undergoing a significant family breakdown.
54. An immediate relative is defined as a parent, partner, sibling or child.
55. Discretion may be exercised in the event of the death of a close relative not classed as an immediate relative, for instance where the student is residing with a grandparent who has died.

56. [Voluntary Suspension](#) must be taken for the period of leave to allow fee payments to be suspended and the studentship duration to be extended in line with the period of leave. The student should complete the [Voluntary Suspension Form](#) and submit this to their Supervisor/Departmental administrative contact who will arrange for the form to be processed within the Department and Faculty and sent to Student Business for approval.
57. Part-time students will be funded on a pro-rata basis, as per their standard stipend payments.
58. There is no qualifying period for Discretionary Leave.
59. Applications will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, including any documentation required to confirm the leave requirement.

## APPENDIX A – Processes and Procedures

### 1. Initial Stage

- a. In the first instance, doctoral research students must contact their primary Supervisor to discuss any potential leave requirement.
- b. The relevant Departmental PGR administrative staff member should also be informed about the potential Voluntary Suspension as soon as possible, to enable them to check for any potential impact on the doctoral research student's funding.
- c. The supervisor and student are responsible for ensuring that funders are made aware of any changes to a student's status/end date relating to this policy.

### 2. Application Stage

- a. The doctoral research student should ensure they have read the PGR Leave Support FundPolicy document and should address any queries to the [Fund Managers](#).
- b. The doctoral research student must complete and sign the dedicated PGR Leave Support Fund application form.
- c. The doctoral research student's primary Supervisor should sign the application formbefore it is submitted to the Departmental PGR administrative colleague.
- d. The doctoral research student must provide evidence to the Department of the leave requirement where appropriate (medical certificates, [MATB1 form](#), etc.). To ensure that personal data is shared with as few members of staff as possible, these documents should not be provided to the Fund Managers. Departments will be required to confirm that they hold these documents. Departments are responsible for gathering and storing personal data in line with the [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#).
- e. The student must also complete and submit a [Voluntary Suspension](#) form for the appropriate period.

### 3. Review Stage

- a. The Department must ensure applications are fully completed and signed, and submit the form to the [Fund Managers](#).
- b. The Departments should keep records of all documentation submitted.
- c. The Fund Managers will process and review all applications.
- d. The Fund Managers will inform the Department of the outcomes of all applications, and ensure up-to-date records are held on all applications.

### 4. Award Stage

- a. The Department should inform all applicants of the outcome.
- b. The Department must update the PGR Studentship System, inform the Finance Office of any necessary financial changes and process any FMS journals required.
- c. Successful doctoral research applicants to the Fund must update Supervisors, Department and/or the Fund Managers of any relevant changes to circumstances.
- d. Supervisors and Departments are expected to provide appropriate support to doctoral research students on return to their studies, including phased returns where appropriate.