

Study Break Procedure

1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 This procedure must be followed when assessing individual requests from students for a study break during their course. The procedure is only intended for requests made by students; where the University determines that a student would benefit from a break, other policies (such as the Support to Study Policy) apply.
- 1.2 The procedure is applicable to all students enrolled on a University award including students studying at an educational partner (unless otherwise agreed at partner approval).
- 1.3 For apprentices, a separate *Break in Learning* policy applies.
- 1.4 The form associated with this procedure must be used by individual students whenever a request for a study break is submitted. The procedure ensures that all individual situations are considered and allows for fair and equitable management of students' circumstances.

2. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- 2.1 Students: to understand the implications of taking a study break by seeking advice from their Course Leader and to submit any request using the study break/withdrawal form, completing the form in full (an electronic signature is acceptable).
- 2.2 Course Leaders: to assist and support students who may need a study break and to consider formal requests in line with the University's procedure.
- 2.3 Course Administrator: to advise students on the process and confirm in writing to the student the outcome of the request and of any conditions which may apply, to update the student record system to reflect that the student is on a study break and inform relevant staff, and to ensure the student is invited to undertake online registration when appropriate for their return.
- 2.4 Assessment Board: to consider student assessment outcomes and profiles including those of students who have taken a study break over the period of time under consideration. To confirm unit marks and/or identify and confirm units where further work is required, and to ratify student outcomes.
- 2.5 Under this procedure and associated procedures any University role or officeholder may act through their appointed nominee.

3. PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 Students need to request permission for a study break and consult with an appropriate key member of staff. The University is not obliged to offer a study break to any student and students are normally allowed only one period of interruption during their course to help ensure they remain within the registration period and that the intended learning outcomes remain current, although all individual circumstances are considered.
- 3.2 All requests for study breaks will be considered in line with this procedure to ensure parity and equity for all students and avoid any student gaining an unfair advantage by taking a study break before major pieces of assessment. Students should therefore be aware that it may not always be possible to permit a break.
- 3.3 When deciding whether a student should be permitted a study break, consideration should be given to the duration of the course and the registration period remaining to the student. Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements should also be considered. The University needs to be confident that by extending the registration period, the student's experience and the award that they will eventually receive will still be relevant to the workplace. In cases where the time remaining would not allow the student to complete their studies within the maximum period of registration if the student were to have a study break, the decision on whether to permit the student a study break, and to extend the registration period accordingly, must be taken by the Course Leader (or equivalent) in consultation with the relevant Assessment Board Chair and Academic Registrar.
- 3.4 A study break might mean that the University would have to deliver units that are equivalent to units which are no longer running or the student may be required to take units that were not part of their original degree structure. These situations should be managed and care should be taken to ensure broad equivalence of intended learning outcomes.
- 3.5 Students seeking a study break cannot opt to repeat a unit which they have already successfully completed. Students will have to attend from the start of any units they have not achieved. Normally this will mean resuming their studies from the start of the semester in which those units are delivered. Students are encouraged to attend (without assessment) other units completed prior to the study break to help keep up their knowledge base.
- 3.6 Students should be supported to continue their studies without a break wherever possible. Consideration should be given to each student's circumstances and whether support can be offered to enable the student to continue studies with their current cohort. For example:
 - student circumstances may justify an extension under the *Exceptional Personal Circumstances Policy*,
 - a student may be able to continue their studies with additional learning support.
- 3.7 Students should normally be required to complete units before interrupting their study where possible although it is accepted that there will be instances when a break mid-unit is unavoidable, especially when studying units which span both semesters.
- 3.8 Where a student has completed the taught part of a unit(s), the student should normally be required to complete the unit assessment(s) (by extension if necessary). This is to ensure parity and equity for all students and avoid any student gaining an unfair advantage by taking a study break before major pieces of assessment. The Course Leader has the right to grant

extensions based on the valid reasons documented and evidenced on the study break/withdrawal request form (which may or may not align with the definition of exceptional personal circumstances within the *Exceptional Personal Circumstances Policy*).

- 3.9 Study breaks can be up to 12 months in length. Extensions to a study break may be considered by following the same procedures. Any request that would result in a study break lasting longer than 12 months must be referred to the Academic Registrar for approval.
- 3.10 If a student sponsored by the University through the Student Visa Route wishes to request a study break, it is essential that they are advised to seek advice from Registry, as there may be implications for their visa conditions. No such student should be advised to interrupt and remain in the UK without seeking advice from Registry first. If the break is agreed, all details need to be reported to Registry for onward reporting to the Home Office. For further guidance, see the *Immigration Sponsorship for Students Policy and Procedures*.

4. CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST FOR STUDY BREAK

- 4.1 In all cases of a study break the following principles should be adhered to:
- a) Students need to demonstrate a clear and valid reason for their request supported by evidence (if applicable).
 - b) Each student's situation will be different and should be dealt with on an individual basis.
 - c) Staff should be careful to ensure that students are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by the decision as compared with students who are continuing with their study.
 - d) Any student wishing to request a study break is required to fully complete and sign the study break/withdrawal request form (electronic signatures are acceptable).
 - e) Where possible, students should be required to complete units before interruption (by extension if necessary). Where this is not possible, each student should be advised on their individual position and the study break request form updated accordingly, for example where a student takes a break mid-unit, they are expected to repeat the unit with attendance (see 3.5 and 3.8).
 - f) There may need to be a mixed solution if more than one unit is affected, dependent upon the types of unit(s) involved and the assessment schedule for the programme as well as the situation of the student. For instance, a study break may be granted but the student may be able to complete some but not all units through extension arrangements.
 - g) If a study break is agreed upon mid-unit, then the student should be clear at the point of the break what their position will be at the planned point of return to study and the decision recorded on their student record. The student should be advised that the situation may be different if they were to return at a different time than originally intended.
 - h) If assessment has taken place, or there is a record of achieved practice competencies (where relevant), or substantial work has taken place within a unit, an academic judgement will be made as to whether the student is able to return to complete the unit at a later point, or whether the student will be required to start the unit again. If there is any doubt, a second academic opinion should be sought. In addition, the student must be advised that all assessment outcomes are subject to ratification by the next Assessment Board.

- i) The student profile should be considered by the next Assessment Board for ratification and noted on the student record to ensure clarity in terms of the student's position at the point of return to study (and marks are ratified if there is a mark involved). Where there is a possibility that the student's registration period on the course might be exceeded, the guidelines in section 3.3 should be followed.
- j) Students should ensure that they understand the impact of a study break on their liability for tuition fees. Advice can be sought from Student Finance.
- k) Students must be made aware of the implications of taking a break in study, such as the cessation of access to University campus and facilities and free treatment as applicable, and surrendering their eligibility to apply for and participate in student schemes or discounts, including Council Tax exemptions and student travel or photo card schemes, for the duration of the suspension of their studies. Eligibility is restored following their return to study upon completing re-enrolment.

Version	2.4
Approved by	Academic Board
Policy Owner	Academic Registrar
Reference /source	Internal
Date approved	19 July 2024
Effective from	August 2024
Review date	2024/25
Target	All students
Policy location	Sharepoint, website
Equality analysis	No direct impact. The policy provides for reasonable adjustments to be made, where appropriate, for students with specific protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Monitoring will be undertaken to assess whether there is any differential impact in the handling of cases.