

# Research Degree Regulations Schedule G

Research Degree Support to Study Procedures

01 October 2023 – 30 September 2024



Edge Hill  
University

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## Summary

The Research Degree Support to Study Procedures can be used by the University where there are concerns that a postgraduate researcher (PGR) is not fit to study. It is an open and supportive framework for dealing with a situation where a PGR's health, wellbeing or behaviour could have a detrimental impact on their own or others ability to progress and function.

## Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to provide an effective framework to support PGRs where physical or mental ill health and/or disability is having an adverse impact on their research and/or ability to live independently and safely, and/or is impacting on the health, safety, wellbeing, or academic progress of others. It encourages early intervention and the use of a transparent process to involve the PGR in discussions about the support they may need to conduct their research. The procedures apply to all PGRs, on any research degree route, on any University activities in and out of term time, living on or off campus.

## Regulations

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1. Edge Hill University (the University) aims to be welcoming and inclusive by successfully admitting and supporting PGRs with a broad range of needs.
- 1.2. The University is therefore committed to supporting the wellbeing of PGRs and staff. We do this by providing an environment that is safe, conducive to research, and which fosters the ability to flourish.
- 1.3. In this context the University recognises that PGRs may experience a range of difficulties throughout their studies related to academic and personal factors and has several policies which are designed to address concerns about a PGR's academic progress or support needs.
- 1.4. This Research Degree Support to Study Procedures document (referred to as 'the Procedures') is intended for use where the progress, behaviour, disruption or risk presented by a PGR is perceived to be serious or potentially serious and where this is linked to the health or wellbeing of the PGR.
- 1.5. The Procedures are intended to be supportive rather than disciplinary in nature.
- 1.6. The Procedures apply to all PGRs, on any research degree route, on any University activities in and out of term time, living on or off campus.
- 1.7. The procedures relate to the whole PGR experience and not just a PGR's ability to engage with their research.

## 2 Guiding principles

- 2.1. The University is a community and as such, decisions will be made in the context of the whole community giving due regard to the health and wellbeing of staff and other PGRs.
- 2.2. PGRs are required to fully engage with this procedure and any recommendations made under it. If a student fails to engage or is unable to engage fully in the procedure, the University may continue with the procedure and make reasonable decisions in the PGR's absence.
- 2.3. The University has a wide range of support services and PGRs will be encouraged and supported to engage with those services.
- 2.4. All PGRs are allocated at least one supervisor and are encouraged to engage with that support and discuss any challenges with their supervisor as early as possible.
- 2.5. PGRs are encouraged to seek independent advice to support them through the procedures from the Edge Hill Students' Union Advice Centre.
- 2.6. The University operates under General Data Protection Regulations 2018.
- 2.7. The University is mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and all decisions will be proportionate and carefully considered.
- 2.8. Where appropriate, the PGR will be kept informed of progress and provided with a written explanation regarding any decisions or actions to be taken.
- 2.9. The University reserves the right to refer a PGR to Occupational Health or request a medical opinion from an impartial relevant professional at any stage during the implementation of this procedure. In some cases, this may require a decision to be delayed until the result has been received and can be fully considered.
- 2.10. Where possible, decisions will be made in agreement with the individual PGR.
- 2.11. PGRs can make independent decisions regarding their studies and request advice or support at any time. Support available includes (but is not limited to):
  - Accessing support services
  - Requesting an extension
  - Applying for Personal Circumstances
  - Requesting an interruption of studies

- 2.12. The University reserves the right to escalate matters to Stage 2 or Stage 3 of these procedures without passing through the intermediate stages if a PGR presents serious concerns or risks to their own wellbeing or that of others.
- 2.13. The University reserves the right to start the procedure at the Return to Study stage in order to determine whether a PGR is fit to return after a voluntary break in studies instead of, or in addition to, use of the progress review process. This would only apply in cases where the University is aware that the PGR has had a significant health issue and may be used even if the Support to Study Procedure has not been started at a previous stage.
- 2.14. When decision makers consider outcomes within this procedure, this will be done in order of increasing seriousness. Where possible, a PGR will be supported to continue to study where they are fit to do so and any risk can be reasonably managed.
- 2.15. A member of staff at an appropriate level may be assigned to act on behalf of any role holder named in these procedures. The role holder can be substituted for any reason, and this includes but is not limited to:
- to replace someone who has previously made a decision under the same procedures with the same PGR;
  - to speed up a process where the role holder is unavailable.

### 3 Indicators for use of the Research Degree Support to Study Procedures

3.1. Concerns about a PGR may occur for many reasons. Those could include, but are not restricted to the following examples:

- significant deterioration in physical or mental health;
- significant deterioration in attitude and/or attendance;
- disregard for one's own and/or others' health and safety;
- inability or refusal to communicate effectively with fellow PGRs, staff and professionals;
- inability or refusal to appreciate risks of physical danger to oneself or others;
- inability or refusal to engage effectively and independently in supervisory meetings, postgraduate researcher development sessions, and/or the conduct of one's research (with appropriate support mechanisms, physical and reasonable study support adjustments as necessary);
- inability or refusal to engage effectively and independently in one's duties as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA);
- inability to undertake assessment and engage with the assessment process (with appropriate adjustments as necessary);
- inappropriate emotional or psychological symptoms or behaviours;
- PGR self-declaration of being unfit to study and/or disclosure that ongoing study is having a detrimental impact on the PGR's health;
- concerns raised by a third party;
- behaviour, which would otherwise be dealt with as a disciplinary matter, where it is considered that the behaviour may be the result of an underlying physical or mental condition;
- instances where an individual's condition, conduct or behaviour places unreasonable demands on staff or other members of our community;
- difficulties with living communally, disruptive behaviour and/or unrealistic expectations of support from other PGRs or students.

### 4 Other relevant policies and procedures

4.1. There are a number of other University policies and procedures that may be relevant. These include but are not limited to:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Student Disciplinary Regulations
- Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research
- Research Degree Regulations

4.2. Relevant staff with knowledge of the situation will determine the most appropriate procedure to be followed in each case.

4.3. In order to determine which procedure will be followed, it may be necessary for appropriate staff to arrange an additional meeting with the PGR or collect additional information/evidence.

## 5 Risk assessment and temporary conditions

- 5.1. In exceptional circumstances a PGR's ability to manage their health, wellbeing or behaviour may have reached a critical stage. There may be urgent, serious concerns raised about a PGR's wellbeing, actions or behaviour which put the health, safety, wellbeing or academic progress of themselves or other members of the University at immediate risk.
- 5.2. In these circumstances an immediate risk assessment will be conducted a Student Services Senior Manager to determine the immediacy and seriousness posed by the perceived risk.
- 5.3. Where possible, appropriate staff will be consulted and all information available will be considered to reach an informed decision.
- 5.4. The risk assessment is based on the information available at that point in time and has two possible outcomes:
  - the level of risk to the PGR and others is deemed to be within acceptable levels and the PGR can remain in accommodation and continue with their research until a Support to Study Panel can be arranged;
  - the level of risk to the PGR and others is currently unacceptable, and conditions need to be put in place until a Support to Study Panel can be arranged.
- 5.5. The temporary conditions that can be put in place under 5.4 above can include anything that is deemed reasonable and appropriate in an attempt to ensure the safety of the PGR or others. Temporary conditions may include but are not limited to any of the following:
  - a temporary requirement for the PGR not to attend sessions on campus;
  - a temporary requirement for the PGR to stop working on the research;
  - a temporary requirement for supervisory meetings to stop;
  - a temporary requirement for the PGR to avoid all contact with members of the supervisory team (confining contact to the Graduate School and appropriate central services);
  - a temporary requirement for the PGR not to enter specific areas of the campus;
  - a temporary requirement for the PGR to move rooms in their on-campus accommodation;
  - a temporary requirement for the PGR to leave the on-campus accommodation;
  - a temporary requirement for the PGR not to enter the campus at all.
- 5.6. Depending on the level of risk, the temporary conditions may need to be implemented immediately but where possible, reasonable notice will be given to the PGR.

- 5.7. If the outcome of the risk assessment is that the level of risk is unacceptable and temporary conditions are put in place, where possible this information will be delivered in person by a member of the Wellbeing Team or another nominated suitable person.
- 5.8. The following information will be presented in writing to the PGR within 24 hours of the risk assessment being conducted:
  - The outcome of the risk assessment.
  - Any/all conditions put in place and the timescales for implementation.
- 5.9. If considered necessary to protect or support the PGR or others, individuals such as flat mates or services staff may be informed of the outcome of the risk assessment. Minimum information will be shared to enable protection or support to be provided.
- 5.10. The PGR may ask for the conditions to be reviewed but must do so within 10 working days of the date on the written notice. The PGR may also request a review of the conditions at any time if there is a material change in the circumstances of their case. Any such requests or information provided relating to the conditions must be in writing. The Conditions Notice will include details of where to direct such requests.
- 5.11. The risk assessment can be reviewed by the Student Services Senior Manager at any time. This may be necessary if the PGR's health deteriorates, or if behavioural issues escalate.
- 5.12. If the Support to Study Panel cannot take place within 4 weeks from the date the outcome of the risk assessment is communicated to the PGR, a review of the risk assessment will be conducted to ensure all conditions imposed remain suitable and reasonable.
- 5.13. At the risk assessment review the Student Services Senior Manager may maintain the conditions, amend the conditions (the number of conditions may be increased or decreased), or remove the conditions. The outcome of the review risk assessment will be communicated in writing to the PGR.
- 5.14. Any conditions will remain in place until the outcome of the Panel meeting is communicated to the student.

## 6 Stage 1 Emerging Concern – Early Intervention

- 6.1. When a PGR is struggling with health or behaviour management, early intervention can often avoid a crisis and where possible this should commence at Stage 1.
- 6.2. Any member of staff within the University may become aware of presenting issues affecting a PGR's health, safety, wellbeing or behaviour.



- 6.3. Staff outside of Student Services must discuss their intentions with a member of the Wellbeing Team before invoking Stage 1 of this procedure. This will ensure any pertinent information about the PGR is also considered. In all cases the Graduate School must also be consulted to ensure that any relevant information about the PGR is considered.
- 6.4. Working collaboratively, staff will agree who will contact the PGR.
- 6.5. A member of staff will meet the PGR<sup>1</sup> to discuss and consider;
  - the health and wellbeing of the PGR;
  - the behaviour that is being displayed and the concerns this raises;
  - the limits of any support that can be provided;
  - an action plan that will support the PGR to reach agreed goals within an agreed timescale.
- 6.6. The member of staff will follow up with the PGR setting out all agreed actions and timescales in writing within 5 working days of the meeting.
- 6.7. Where the staff member is not from Student Services, a copy of the written communication will be sent to the Wellbeing Team. The Graduate School will also be sent a copy of all communication relating to these procedures.
- 6.8. If the PGR engages positively at this stage and the situation improves, there may be no need for further action.
- 6.9. If the issues are not resolved within the agreed timescale or the situation deteriorates, the decision can be made to progress to Stage 2.

## 7 Stage 2 Continuing Concern – referral to the Head of Counselling and Wellbeing

- 7.1. If the informal action taken at Stage 1 has not been successful, or the matter is too serious, Stage 2 (or exceptionally Stage 3) of the procedures may be initiated.
- 7.2. To begin Stage 2 the member of staff will discuss their concerns with the Head of Counselling and Wellbeing. If deemed appropriate these procedures will be invoked at Stage 2 by the Head of Counselling and Wellbeing.
- 7.3. The PGR will be invited to attend a review meeting with the Head of Counselling and Wellbeing and other members of staff as appropriate to review the concerns raised.

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<sup>1</sup> At all stages, and for all meetings, there will be an additional member of staff present to record the outcome(s) of the meeting.

- 7.4. Other members of staff who may attend the meeting may often include (but not be limited to):
- members of the Inclusion or Wellbeing team;
  - members of the Graduate School team;
  - the relevant Graduate School Research Degree Contact;
  - the Director of Studies and other members of the supervisory team, and
  - members of staff from the department in which the PGR is based for supervisory purposes.
- 7.5. The following information will be presented in writing to the PGR:
- meeting date, time and location;
  - a summary of the concerns raised relating to the PGR's Support to Study;
  - those who will attend the meeting;
  - the right of the PGR to be accompanied to the meeting, including information about the Edge Hill Students' Union Advice Centre;
  - that the meeting is being dealt with under Stage 2 of the Research Degree Support to Study Procedures, and
  - a copy of the procedures.
- 7.6. The PGR will be given at least 48 hours' notice of the meeting where possible.
- 7.7. The PGR should make all reasonable endeavours to attend the arranged meeting and if there are good reasons why it is not possible for the PGR to attend, reasonable efforts will be made to find a more suitable time for all attendees.
- 7.8. If the PGR refuses to co-operate, fails to attend or cannot engage with the process, the meeting may still take place without the PGR being present.
- 7.9. During the meeting the PGR will be encouraged to reflect on whether they feel they are fit to study and/or wish to continue on their programme of research.
- 7.10. If the PGR makes a decision during the meeting that they wish to take a break from their studies then they will be given an opportunity to discuss their options and complete appropriate paperwork. Any further decisions under the procedures will then be postponed pending the processing of the requested amendment to their registration status.
- 7.11. Interruption of study (as outlined in section N11 of the Research Degree Regulations) may be an option for a PGR who feels that would be an appropriate course of action in the circumstances and who has not already had the full period of interruption of studies permitted by the Research Degree Regulations. When considering the relevant options, due regard will be given to the academic judgement of the Graduate School to ensure that the student has a reasonable prospect of success.

- 7.12. In cases where the PGR has already had the full period of interruption of studies permitted by the Research Degree Regulations, please see section 9.
- 7.13. If the PGR states that they wish to request an interruption of their studies but does not complete the appropriate paperwork, or changes their mind after the meeting, a decision will then be taken by the Head of Counselling and Wellbeing as described in 7.15 below.
- 7.14. Any PGR who is granted an interruption of studies at this stage will need to meet the requirements of the Return to Study section of these procedures (as described in section 10) at the point they wish to return.
- 7.15. After the meeting one or more of the following decisions will be made by the Head of Counselling and Wellbeing:
- i. No further action will be taken and the Support to Study procedure will be closed
  - ii. The PGR does not wish to engage with support, and a referral to Stage 3 of this procedure, or referral into a different University process may be made.
  - iii. Referral for consideration under a different University process
  - iv. The PGR is fit to continue their research under certain conditions, and an action plan will be discussed and shared with the PGR. The PGR is required to engage with and commit to the conditions and action plan if they wish to continue with their research.
  - v. Escalation to Stage 3 of the Support to Study procedure
- 7.16. Where the PGR is referred into a different University process, this could include, but is not limited to, those listed in section 4.
- 7.17. The following options are examples of the conditions that may be considered under option iv above. These are not exhaustive and the decision makers can consider any other reasonable condition(s).
- The PGR is not able to reside on campus.
  - The PGR must attend regular meetings with academic staff.
  - The PGR must submit any agreed assessments within an agreed timeframe
  - The PGR must engage with University support services, eg Wellbeing team, Inclusion team.
  - The PGR must engage with external professionals, such as GP, mental health services, online services and Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).
  - The PGR must communicate effectively with the University, especially around confirming the ability to stay safe.
  - The PGR must take appropriate action to access support when at risk.
  - The PGR must continue to engage with the Support to Study meetings.

- 7.18. Where an action plan is required, a Stage 2 Support to Study review meeting will be put in place to monitor the PGR's progress. The timescale of the review meeting will be based on the specifics of each case. The outcome of the review meeting can be any of the decisions described in section 7.15 above and include the ability to add conditions and create a revised and updated action plan under option iv.
- 7.19. If the PGR's health deteriorates or behavioural issues escalate before the review meeting date, the review meeting may be brought forward, temporary conditions may be put in place via a risk assessment (as per section 5), and/or the case may be escalated to Stage 3.
- 7.20. The PGR will receive a verbal update on the high-level outcome of the meeting as soon as possible after the meeting, and usually within 48 hours.
- 7.21. The Head of Counselling and Wellbeing will inform the PGR of the outcome of the meeting in writing, along with any agreed action plan, within 10 working days of the meeting date.

## 8 Stage 3 Critical, Serious Concerns – Support to Study Panel meeting

- 8.1. Where concerns raised about a PGR are of a sufficiently critical, or serious nature, where a risk assessment has been conducted under these procedures or where the outcome at stage 2 is for escalation to stage 3, a Support to Study Panel meeting will be arranged.
- 8.2. A Panel Secretary will be nominated by the Head of Student Casework.
- 8.3. The Panel Secretary is responsible for making administrative arrangements and informing the PGR, in writing, of the date and time at which the Panel will take place.
- 8.4. Where possible at least 5 working days' notice will be given to the PGR of the Panel meeting. Any risk to the PGR or other members of the University community during this period will be managed using a risk assessment and temporary conditions as described in Section 5.
- 8.5. During the risk assessment, the panel will consider the potential impact of waiting 5 working days for the Panel meeting. If the risk is judged to be too great, or if the temporary conditions are not adequately able to manage the risk, the University reserves the right to hold the Panel meeting sooner. In these cases, the PGR will be given at least 48 hours' notice of the meeting where possible.

- 8.6. The PGR can make a request to the Panel Secretary for the Panel meeting to be held sooner than the usual 5 working days' notice. This would usually be for a reason that would be beneficial to the PGR's mental health or wellbeing. In these cases, the University will make every effort to bring the Panel meeting forward where staff availability and administration allows.
- 8.7. The members of the panel will usually include:
- the Director of Student Services (or nominee), who will act as Chair;
  - a representative of the Graduate School;
  - the Director of Studies;
  - an appropriate senior representative from Student Services who has not been involved in supporting the PGR.
- 8.8. Where the Chair feels it may be appropriate, they may also invite any other member of University staff to sit on the panel and this may include, but is not limited to:
- an appropriate representative from the Inclusion team;
  - an appropriate representative from the Accommodation team.
- 8.9. The Panel Secretary will also attend the Panel to make a written record of the meeting.
- 8.10. The member of Student Services who has been supporting the PGR may be invited to attend the meeting to give information but will not be part of the decision-making process.
- 8.11. PGRs are encouraged to bring a friend to accompany them at the Panel meeting. Although this procedure does not relate to academic conduct, the main principles of the document describing the 'Role of a Student's Friend in Academic Conduct Procedures' will be applied.
- 8.12. Normally, it is expected that a person acting as the PGR's Friend will be a member of the Edge Hill University community, but exceptionally the Head of Student Casework may agree to allow a friend to attend from outside the University.
- 8.13. The following information will be presented in writing to the PGR as soon as possible:
- the date, time and location of the Support to Study Panel;
  - a summary of the concerns raised in relation to the PGR's Support to Study;
  - those who will attend the Stage 3 meeting;

- the right of the PGR to be accompanied to the meeting including information about the Edge Hill Students' Union Advice Centre;
  - that the meeting is being dealt with under Stage 3 of the Research Degree Support to Study Procedures, and
  - a copy of the procedures.
- 8.14. The PGR should make all reasonable endeavours to attend the arranged Support to Study Panel and if there are good reasons why it is not possible for the PGR to attend, reasonable efforts will be made to find a more suitable time for all attendees.
- 8.15. The PGR is expected to attend the Panel meeting in the designated forum. Where appropriate, the Head of Student Casework may agree that a PGR can participate through another means (for example via an online platform).
- 8.16. If the PGR refuses to co-operate, fails to attend or cannot engage with the process, the Support to Study Panel may still take place without the PGR being present.
- 8.17. If the PGR cannot or chooses not to represent themselves in person, they have the opportunity to submit a written representation to the Support to Study Panel.
- 8.18. As in Stage 2, a PGR may apply for an interruption of studies at this stage if the full period of interruption permitted by the Research Degree Regulations has not already been taken. In cases where the full period of interruption has been taken, please see section 9.
- 8.19. Any PGR who is granted an interruption of studies at this stage will need to meet the requirements of the Return to Study section of these procedures (as described in section 10) at the point they wish to return.
- 8.20. Any conditions previously imposed will remain in place until the outcome of the Panel meeting is communicated to the PGR.
- 8.21. To ensure a fair hearing takes place, the University has a set process with which Panels must comply. This process is detailed in Annex A in the form of an agenda for Panel meetings.
- 8.22. Adhering to the process set out in Annex A will ensure that the Panel has considered all available information that is relevant to the case.
- 8.23. At the Support to Study Panel, those present will examine all relevant information, including as necessary, medical reports and/or risk assessments. The PGR's understanding of the issues/concerns that have been raised will be ascertained. The impact of the PGR's health and/or behaviour upon them or on other members of the University community will be discussed.

- 8.24. When all evidence has been presented, the Panel will commence their deliberations in private. Panel members are expected to be open with their discussions and to base their decision on the evidence that has been presented to them.
- 8.25. Following the meeting one or more of the following decisions will be made by the Panel. The Chair has the power to make the final decision if the Panel is unable to make a unanimous decision.
- i. No further action will be taken and the Support to Study procedure will be closed.
  - ii. Referral for consideration under a different University Process.
  - iii. The PGR is fit to continue to study under certain conditions, and an action plan will be discussed and shared with the PGR. The PGR is required to engage with and commit to the conditions and action plan if they wish to continue with their studies. The PGR will be referred (back) to stage 2 of the procedure and the action plan will be kept under review.
  - iv. The PGR is not fit to continue to study at this time, and an appropriate outcome will be determined depending on the specific circumstances of the case.
- 8.26. The points described in section 7.17 are examples of the conditions that may be considered by the panel under option iii above. These are not exhaustive, and the panel can consider any reasonable condition(s).
- 8.27. The following options are examples of what outcomes may be considered under option iv above. These are not exhaustive, and the panel can consider any reasonable outcome(s).
- A break in studies to give the PGR the opportunity to improve their health and wellbeing
  - A change to the mode of study
  - An opportunity to apply for a change to programme of study (entry requirements would need to be met)
  - Withdrawal from the programme of study with the option to apply again in the future
  - As a last resort the Panel may recommend permanent withdrawal from the University
- 8.28. Where possible decisions will be made with collaborative agreement with the PGR. Where this is not possible this decision will be taken by the Panel.
- 8.29. When deciding upon the appropriate outcome, the Panel must:
- Consider outcomes in the order outlined above, ie in order of increasing seriousness.

- Agree that the outcome is appropriate for the circumstances of the case and give reasons for the decision.
  - Where possible, be consistent with previous decisions made in similar cases concerning other PGRs.
- 8.30. The decision by the Stage 3 Panel can overrule the principles of the usual Academic Registry process, or other University procedure or practice, where the Panel believe this achieves the best outcome for the PGR.
- 8.31. The PGR will receive a verbal update on the high-level outcome of the Panel meeting as soon as possible after the meeting, and usually within 48 hours.
- 8.32. The Director of Student Services will inform the PGR of the outcome of the meeting together with any agreed action plan and/or conditions for continued attendance within 10 working days of the date of the meeting. A confirmation letter will be sent shortly thereafter.
- 8.33. Where a PGR is required to take a break in their studies, the timescale for minimum length of the break will be based on the judgement of the panel. The PGR's return to study will then be subject to the return to study procedure detailed in section 9. The appropriate options available to resume study will be explained to the PGR once the minimum break has been taken.

## 9 Election to withdraw

- 9.1. In cases where a PGR has already had the full period of interruption of study, as part of stages 2 and 3 of this procedure, a PGR may elect to withdraw from the research degree. Where that decision is reached as part of the operation of the Research Degree Support to Study Procedures, the University will undertake to consider one re-application for entry to the same research degree on which the PGR was previously registered, to work on the same research project, within a period of three years from the date of withdrawal.
- 9.2. This is distinct from termination of registration (where the University brings registration to an end). In cases of termination of registration, or in cases of withdrawal on the part of a PGR where the Research Degree Support to Study Procedures have not been invoked, the University will not undertake to consider a re-application proposing the same research project.
- 9.3. Withdrawal under the Research Degree Support to Study Procedures is, therefore, an option designed to support PGRs who have encountered long-term mental or physical health problems or behavioural problems associated with such health problems to overcome those difficulties and return to their research.



- 9.4. While the University will undertake to consider a re-application, the offer of a place cannot be guaranteed. The Graduate School will, inter alia, consider the following factors in making a decision:
- the quality of the research proposal (given that the field may have developed in the intervening period);
  - supervisory capacity;
  - the capacity of the department in which the PGR would be based;
  - the timeliness of the proposed contribution to knowledge;
  - resource requirements necessary to allow completion of the research, and
  - whether there is good reason to think that the problems which precipitated initiation of the Research Degree Support to Study Procedures have been resolved and are unlikely to recur within the period necessary to complete the research.
- 9.5. Any PGR who elects to withdraw at this stage will need to meet the requirements of the Return to Study section of these procedures (as described in section 10) at the point they wish to return if, following re-application, they are offered a place.
- 9.6. Any re-application under the provisions of the Research Degree Support to Study Procedures must propose essentially the same, or a very similar, project. Resumption of the research at a suitable stage will be considered.
- 9.7. An offer of a place cannot be made if the research has subsequently been used to gain an award at any higher education institution.
- 9.8. The Research Degree Support to Study Procedures cannot be used to facilitate withdrawal on any other grounds (including financial, practical or academic grounds). Any withdrawal on grounds not covered by the Research Degree Support to Study Procedures will not involve a commitment on the part of the University to consider a re-application.

## 10 Return to Study

- 10.1. The return to study procedure is in place to ensure that PGRs returning to study following an enforced or elected break in studies are supported.
- 10.2. Any PGRs who has taken a break or withdrawn from their research must follow this return to study procedure when returning to the University. This applies whether the PGR is returning to the same course or applying for a different course of study. It also applies whether the break or withdrawal has been required under Stage 3 of this procedure, or voluntarily elected under Stages 2 or 3 of this procedure.

- 10.3. The return to study section of this procedure may also be used to determine whether a PGR is fit to return after a voluntary break in studies. This would only apply in cases where the University is aware that the PGR has had a significant health issue and may be used even if the Support to Study Procedure has not been started at a previous stage.
- 10.4. The PGR will be contacted by the University in advance of their expected return date. PGRs wishing to resume their research will be required to complete a return to study form to provide the University with relevant information regarding their health and wellbeing, along with medical and other supporting evidence, as appropriate.
- 10.5. Medical evidence will only be accepted from a GP or relevant health professional who has enough knowledge of the PGR's circumstances to make an informed assessment of the PGR's improvement in health and wellbeing over the period of their break in studies.
- 10.6. The University may refer a student to Occupational Health or request a medical opinion from an impartial relevant professional, before making a decision about a student's return to study.
- 10.7. The University expects the PGR to provide reassurance and evidence of their ability to research and where appropriate to live independently at Edge Hill University.
- 10.8. After reviewing the return to study form and the medical evidence provided by the student, the PGR will be invited to attend a Return to Study Review Panel.
- 10.9. This process may take several weeks and therefore ample time should be given between the sharing of the return to study form and medical or other supporting evidence, and any potential re-enrolment date.
- 10.10. The members of the panel will usually include:
  - The Director of Student Services (who will act as chair).
  - The Director of Studies and other members of the supervisory team.
  - Members of the Graduate School team.
  - An appropriate senior representative from Student Services who has not been involved in supporting the PGR.
- 10.11. Other members of staff who may attend the meeting may include (but not be limited to):

- Members of the Inclusion or Wellbeing team;
  - The relevant Graduate School Research Degree Contact;
  - Members of staff from the department in which the PGR is based for supervisory purposes.
  - An appropriate representative from the Accommodation team.
- 10.12. The following information will be communicated to the PGR in writing:
- Return to Study Review Panel date, time and location.
  - Those who will attend the meeting.
  - The right of the PGR to be accompanied to the meeting including information about the Edge Hill Students' Union Advice Centre.
  - That the meeting is being dealt with under the Return to Study section of the Support to Study Procedure.
  - A copy of the procedure.
- 10.13. Following the Return to Study Review Panel one of the following decisions will be made by the Director of Student Services:
- i. The PGR is fit to continue their research under certain conditions, and an action plan will be discussed and shared with the PGR. The PGR is required to engage with and commit to the action plan if they wish to return to their research. The PGR will be referred - to Stage 2 of the procedure - and the action plan will be kept under review.
  - ii. The PGR is not fit to continue their research at this time, and an appropriate outcome will be determined depending on the specific circumstances of the case.
- 10.14. The options described in section 7.17 are examples of the conditions that may be considered by the panel under option i above. These are not exhaustive, and the panel can consider any reasonable condition(s).
- 10.15. The following options are examples of what outcomes may be considered under option ii above. These are not exhaustive, and the panel can consider any reasonable outcome(s).
- A further break in studies to give the PGR the opportunity to improve their health and wellbeing.
  - A change to the mode of study.
  - An opportunity to apply for a change to programme of study (entry requirements would need to be met).
  - Withdrawal from the programme of study with the option to apply again in the future.
  - Withdrawal from the University.
- 10.16. The PGR will receive a high-level, verbal update on the outcome of the panel meeting as soon as possible after the meeting, and usually within 48 hours.

- 10.17. The Director of Student Services will inform the PGR of the outcome of the meeting together with any agreed action plan and/or conditions for continued attendance normally within 10 working days of the meeting. A confirmation letter will be sent shortly thereafter.
- 10.18. Any previous decision or any conditions imposed will remain in place until the outcome of the meeting is communicated to the PGR.
- 10.19. Each situation will be different, and it may not be possible for the PGR to resume their research immediately. Suitable arrangements that reflect the particular case will be made by the Graduate School.
- 10.20. Where relevant, the PGR will be written to within 15 working days of the date on the decision letter to inform them of the options available to them to return to their studies. The PGR will need to consider any financial implications before they make a decision about their return. It is the PGR's responsibility to find out about their own financial circumstances and to contact the relevant funding bodies. Support to do so can be provided if needed.

## 11 Appeals

- 11.1. PGRs have the right to appeal against any decision taken under Stage 2, Stage 3 or the Return to Study section of these procedures.
- 11.2. Appeals will only be accepted if based on one of the following grounds:
  - that there was a material procedural irregularity which may have affected the outcome;
  - that there is evidence which was not considered by the Investigating Officer which may have affected the outcome and which the PGR could not reasonably have been expected to have submitted at the time, or
  - the decision made by the Panel was unreasonable in all the circumstances.
- 11.3. PGRs may wish to seek advice from the Edge Hill Students' Union Advice Centre.
- 11.4. Appeals against a decision made at Stage 2, Stage 3 or the Return to Study stage, must be made in writing to the Student Casework Team within 10 working days of the date on the decision letter, clearly stating the grounds for appeal.
- 11.5. On receiving written notice of an appeal, the Head of Student Casework will appoint a senior manager from the University to consider the PGR's appeal. Senior managers for this purpose are defined as any member of staff on a Management contract.
- 11.6. The senior manager can consult with any member of staff that may be able to provide relevant information, in order for them to consider the appeal. This can include but is not limited to, the original decision makers or Panel members.
- 11.7. The senior manager will make one of the following decisions regarding a Stage 2 appeal:
  - Dismiss the appeal, or
  - Uphold the appeal and decide how the case should be managed. This could include referring the matter back to an earlier level of this procedure for reconsideration, making an alternative decision, referring to another relevant member of staff to make the decision, or any other reasonable course of action.

- 11.8. The senior manager should provide an outcome to the appeal no later than 20 working days after the PGR lodged their appeal with the Head of Student Casework. Where a decision cannot be made in that time, the Student Casework team will write to the PGR to advise them of the reason for the delay and propose a new date by when a decision can be expected to have been made.
- 11.9. The senior manager's decision will be final.
- 11.10. Where a PGR remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their appeal, they have the right to contact the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#)
- 11.11. PGRs may also wish to seek advice from the Edge Hill Students' Union Advice Centre.

### Key to Relevant Documents

As covered in section 4 there are a number of other University policies and procedures that may be relevant. Those include but are not limited to:

- [Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Student Disciplinary Regulations](#)
- [Code of Practice for Research](#)
- [Research Degree Regulations](#)

## Annexes

### Annex A - Agenda for Stage 3 Support to Study panel

Prior to the formal commencement of the meeting, panel members will deliberate in private to discuss the case and highlight any areas which they believe require discussion.

1. The Chair will call for the PGR and any friend/representative to enter the room and will
  - welcome the PGR to the meeting and introduce each member of the panel
  - outline the panel's remit and the procedure that will be followed
2. The Chair will outline the concerns that have been raised which have resulted in referral to Stage 3 of the Support to Study procedure.
3. The Chair will invite the PGR to respond to the concerns and to disclose any new information or new evidence.
4. The Chair will then invite the faculty representative to discuss the PGR's academic position.
5. The Chair will invite questions from
  - panel members
  - the PGR
6. When the Chair is satisfied that the panel has received all of the relevant information and evidence, they will ask the PGR if they have anything further to add. The Chair will also ask the PGR whether they feel they have had a fair opportunity to present their case to the panel.
7. The Chair will outline that the panel will now consider their decision in private. The PGR should be informed that the decision will be communicated to them in writing within 10 working days. The Chair will then ask the PGR and any friend/representative to leave the room.
8. The Panel will consider the information and evidence heard and discuss whether they believe the PGR is fit to study. They must then discuss what outcome is appropriate in the circumstances.
9. Close.

## Endmatter

<b>Information</b>	<b>Ownership/Review</b>
Title	Research Degree Support to Study Procedures, Schedule G
Policy Owner	Dean of the Graduate School
Approved by	Academic Board
Date of Approval	September 2021
Date for Review	July 2024 (last reviewed August 2023)