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Leave of Absence

Taking a break from studies due to the impact of Covid-19

What is a Leave of Absence?

A '[Leave of Absence](#)' is an extended break from studies where a student may be unable to engage with their studies for a prolonged period of time, usually 4 weeks or more (and usually a maximum of one year at a time). This allows them to take time off and return when they are once again able to study. They would usually return at the point where they left off, but in the following academic year.

A Leave of Absence may be most applicable where a student is:

- Unable to engage in teaching and learning in the summer term.
- Also unlikely to be able to study and undertake assessments in late summer i.e. if their personal circumstances are likely to have a significant and continuing impact on their studies for the foreseeable future.

Where the impact on a student's ability to study is temporary and short-term, submission of an exceptional circumstances claim may be a more appropriate option, to request an extension (for written coursework) or a deferral of online exams or assessments to the late summer assessment period.

Information about the University's Exceptional Circumstances process, which has been updated to take into account the current impact of Covid-19, can be found [here](#).

It is advisable to discuss your situation and possible options with your academic supervisor or other member of staff within your department. You can also contact the Student Hub for advice and guidance on taking a leave of absence, and confidential advice and support is also available from the advice services at YUSU and the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) – contact details can be found further down.

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Reasons for taking a Leave of Absence

There is a broad range of reasons for which a student is eligible to take a Leave of Absence from study (e.g. personal or family circumstances, health reasons or family issues). Similar to recent changes in requirements for Exceptional Circumstances claims, medical evidence is **not required** during this time if a leave of absence is requested on the basis of health issues (physical and/or mental wellbeing), and students are able to self-certify. Indeed, students are advised not to visit or contact medical practitioners solely for the purpose of obtaining supporting evidence.

While medical evidence will not be required when requesting a leave of absence for medical reasons, students are strongly encouraged to obtain confirmation from a medical or other professional confirming that they are fit to return if the current Covid-19 situation is resolved prior to their proposed resumption of study.

The University has updated its leave of absence guidance and how some absences will be categorised to take into account both the variety of ways in which Covid-19 will affect students and the challenges that might be faced in providing supporting evidence that would normally be required. So:

- Students will only be placed on standard medical leave of absence if they already have appropriate medical evidence available (and they *should not* contact medical professionals to obtain new evidence)
- Students with medical circumstances who do not have pre-existing, available evidence will instead be placed on '**Compassionate (Medical Self-Certified)**' - **Code 26** leave of absence, which allows medical leave without needing to provide supporting evidence
- Students taking leave of absence *because of the impact of Covid-19* will be placed on '**Covid-19 - code 25**' leave of absence

What the process involves

Firstly, it is advisable to talk to your supervisor to speak to them about your options and whether this may be suitable for you and your individual situation.

If it is agreed/decided that a leave of absence may be best, you should then complete **Part A** on the Leave of Absence Form and email it to your supervisor.

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Your supervisor and department will then complete the remaining sections of the form and forward it on for approval.

The form is downloadable as a Word document at the bottom of this [webpage](#).

You should ensure that this is completed before the proposed start date of your Leave of Absence, if possible.

For leave of absence requests that also include a request to repeat study from earlier in the academic year (i.e. Autumn and/or Spring terms), evidence of their circumstances and impact on their ability to study during that time would be required. This might be existing independent medical evidence if available, and otherwise additional information may be taken into consideration (e.g. attendance records, a supervisor statement).

When completing your section of the form, you should include

- A brief **description** of your individual circumstances
- How these circumstances have **impacted** your ability to study or complete your assessments. Examples might include being physically unable to because of health symptoms or due to having to prioritise family or employment commitments. This might also include whether your focus, concentration, or time management has been affected by these particular circumstances.
- The proposed start date of your leave of absence

Additional Information

As noted above, students are advised to submit a leave of absence request prior to the proposed start date and prior to assessments if possible. Retrospective claims for repeat of study of the summer term can be considered, and without supporting evidence, but it would be necessary for the student to provide good reason why they might not have been able to submit an exceptional circumstances claim or leave of absence request prior to this point.

For forms that include a request for a repeat of study for the period prior to March 2020, it would be necessary to provide evidence or information to clearly demonstrate how you were unable to benefit from teaching over that period of time in order for a repeat

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of study to be considered. Please note too that, as students are not able to receive student finance while on a leave of absence, eligibility for student finance will be based on the last date of engagement with studies – this in turn may impact on access to and eligibility for further student finance. You can contact the Student Hub for advice and guidance on financial matters [here](#).

For students in their final year of study, if requesting a leave of absence after the last date of teaching, a [programme extension](#) rather than a leave of absence may be required. If you're not sure, it is advisable to speak to your supervisor or department to discuss options.

Postgraduate researchers (PGTs)

For Postgraduate researchers, extension and Leave of Absence processes are a little different:

- You can request an extension to your submission/resubmission deadline if you are within three months of that deadline, by completing the COVID-19 contingency: PGR extension request form
- Extension requests of up to three months can be considered and approved by the Research Student Administration team without requiring support for the request from your supervisor or department. If approved, they will be notified of the change to your deadline/s.
- Requests for extensions of more than three months would need approval from the University's Special Cases committee and would also require consultation with your supervisor/department before being approved.
- As noted elsewhere in this document, it is advisable to discuss your circumstances and the impact on your studies with your supervisor to help inform options that you may consider and the support that you are able to get from your department.
- Where the disruption to your studies is likely to be significant and ongoing, and/or where your ability to proceed with your research is restricted, a Leave of Absence is an option that can be considered.

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Practicalities and considerations

Students on a leave of absence would normally **not**:

- be expected to continue studying while on a break from their programme
- be able to continue living in University accommodation and would need to complete a 'Request to Vacate form available from Accommodation Services;
- be permitted to use University resources (attend lectures, seminars, supervision or thesis advisory panel meetings, or work in a laboratory) for the duration of their absence
- be required to pay tuition fees – though they would also not be able to receive student finance

Students on a leave of absence would normally:

- be able to access University IT Support service – including continuing to have access to their UoY email account
- be able to accessing Library resources, including full borrowing rights
- be able to access advice and support from Careers Services, Student Hub, and the Students' Unions (and participate in student union societies as an 'associate' member)
- be able to seek employment and volunteering opportunities

There are a number of practical considerations involved in taking a break from studies, and a range of advice and support to help you understand and consider your options.

Finance – the Student Hub has a number of specialist financial advisers who can discuss the financial implications of taking a leave of absence. This might include: when your student finance ends and eligibility for student finance on your return to study (particularly if repeating study or if your period of absence takes you beyond the usual eligibility threshold); tax (e.g. council tax) and eligibility for benefits/funding. Please also note that if you receive funding which is not from the Student Loans Company this may also be affected by a period of leave of absence. You are strongly encouraged to discuss this with your funding provider. The Student Hub can be contacted via their self-referral [form](#) on the University website.

Visa status - If you are a Tier 4 student, taking a period of leave of absence may also affect your visa status. Tier 4 visa students considering a period of leave of absence are

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therefore strongly encouraged to contact the University's Immigration Advice team at immigration@york.ac.uk in order to discuss this.

Accommodation – If you are resident in University accommodation, taking a break from your studies may affect your contract. If you have a tenancy agreement in private accommodation too, you may be subject to a notice period to break the contract or may be required to find a replacement tenant. At this time, it is recognised that it may not be possible to vacate existing accommodation or relocate as normally expected when taking a leave of absence and so students are encouraged to discuss housing and tenancy issues with a Student Adviser at the Student Hub.

Return to Study

Sometimes there are requirements to meet to be permitted to return from leave of absence - conditions of return. These conditions are usually either:

- **Academic** – a requirement to undertake and pass outstanding assessments in order to progress to the next stage of a programme of studies

OR

- **Medical** – where an absence has been taken for medical reasons, confirmation, in the form of a supporting letter from a medical practitioner, that the student is now fit to study

Access to NHS and other services is necessarily restricted, and requirements for provision of medical evidence when requesting a leave of absence for medical reasons have therefore been revised, and it is unclear how long access to such services may remain restricted and if this will still be the case for some students when they are due to resume their studies. If the current Covid-19 situation is resolved prior to their proposed resumption of study, students are strongly encouraged to obtain confirmation from a medical or other professional confirming that they are fit to return in case it is required.

Individual students will be notified of any specific requirements related to their resumption of studies by the University prior to their return.

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Key Documents and Info

- 'Take a break from your studies' [webpage](#)
- 'Leave of Absence' [webpage](#)
- Exceptional Circumstances Affecting Assessment [webpage](#)
- University Covid-19 [website](#)
- Student Hub [webpage](#)

Further Advice and Support

University services for advice and support are still available online, such as the Student Hub and Open Door. You can find full details of available services [here](#).

Student Union Advice Services are still offering advice and guidance to students via email, phone or Hangouts Meet appointments:

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