

NTU PGR Phased Return Policy

All doctoral candidates who have undertaken an absence due to long term sickness whilst studying at NTU are eligible to take advantage of the phased return to study scheme. This option is available to the returning doctoral candidate in agreement with their supervisory team, PGRT and in consultation with the Doctoral School and Student Support Services. A phased return can consist of the following or a combination of the following:

- Amended study and associated duties;
- Altered hours of work;
- Reasonable workplace adaptations.

On the expectation that the doctoral candidate is returning from long-term sickness, an initial meeting will need to be set up with the supervisory team and PGRT. The Doctoral School and Student Support Services may be invited to the meeting should they be required. The meeting will need to assess the feasibility of making reasonable temporary adjustments to the nature of the research project, including reduced working hours, part-time working and other flexible working arrangements to facilitate a return to the programme of research. During the 'return to study meeting', the attendees must confirm that the doctoral candidate is in a position to return to their programme of research and all must agree on any phased return/reasonable adjustment. Candidates will normally be required to provide a fitness to work notification before returning to their programme of research.

The key objectives of the return to study meeting should be to:

- i) confirm the nature of the condition or illness which the doctoral candidate is suffering from and any factors affecting their programme of research that may have arisen during their absence,
- ii) establish what level of study, practical work or fieldwork the doctoral candidate can do with respect to their programme of research and the reasons/limitations, which may prevent the doctoral candidate from being able to continue with their programme of research or carry out certain tasks,
- iii) establish how many hours of study or associated duties the doctoral candidate can reasonably be expected to undertake and over what period of time (within the four weeks) the doctoral candidate should work towards achieving a return to their normal hours of study or associated duties;
- iv) determine whether the doctoral candidate is taking any medication that may cause side effects that may impact on their ability to carry out their normal duties as part of their programme of research,
- v) offer any additional help or support to the doctoral candidate if needed and within the capabilities of the supervisory team, Academic School, Doctoral School and/or NTU centralised support networks (e.g. SSS, NTSU, ISS etc).

A reasonable and common-sense approach should be applied when considering a phased return to the programme of research to ensure that the rehabilitation plan is proportionate to the situation.

Reasonable adjustments

Medical advice may recommend that support is given to a doctoral candidate to assist their return to their programme of research from long-term sickness absence.

Additional responsibilities are also placed on the University by the Equality Act 2010, regarding **reasonable adjustments**, where the doctoral candidate has a recognised disability.

Where ill-health, injury or other impairment meets the relevant criteria to be classed as a disability under the Equality Act 2010, the University has a duty to consider reasonable adjustments to working and postgraduate research arrangements.

Where medical advice has recommended 'reasonable adjustments', it is important that advice is sought from Student Support Services when determining what adjustments are 'reasonable' and what can be accommodated. Agreement with the Academic School and Doctoral School will be required and will depend on the individual circumstances. Possible reasonable adjustments include:

- Transferring to another working/study location;
- Offering flexibility in working hours/patterns, i.e. working from home, altered start and finish times, reduced hours;
- Providing additional training;
- Acquiring new or modifying existing equipment and tools, including IT, modified keyboards etc.;
- Making adjustments to premises;
- Modifying instructions and manuals, to make them more accessible;
- Using a reader;
- Providing more supervision;

These adjustments will always depend on the individual's circumstances, looking at the doctoral candidate's medical condition, the research programme that they are enrolled on and the impact of their absence will have on the nature of the research programme.

Any reasonable adjustments which are agreed will need to be confirmed in writing to the doctoral candidate and recorded centrally in the doctoral candidate 'student' file by the Doctoral School.

A phased return to studies would not normally exceed **one month (four weeks)** but in exceptional circumstances consideration should be given to agreeing further extension of this period, subject to approval by the relevant PGRT and recorded by the Doctoral School. The phased return extension will be reported at the next School Research Degree Committee (SRDC) for information.

If medical advice for a doctoral candidate who is absent due to a long-term illness suggests an extended phased return or a need to initially undertake light duties, a review period will be agreed.

1) Amended duties

It may be as part of the fitness to work notification that a recommendation is made that the doctoral candidate should not carry out all the related duties of their research programme for the duration of the phased return.

In these cases, the supervisory team should agree with the candidate how to cover any elements of the research programme that cannot be performed

For more long-term changes, doctoral candidates should explore redesigning their research project with their supervisory team. An [application for project redesign](#) can be made using the linked form.

2) Altered hours

Through the fitness to work notification a GP may suggest that the pattern of working hours is changed, Doctoral education is a flexible mode of study in terms of day to day working hours, however, the number of hours through a phased return may be reduced.

The supervisory team and the doctoral candidate are required to keep a local record of hours not worked under a phased return. This should be returned to the Doctoral School at the end of the phased return and will be kept within the 'student' file. For context this may help to support a request for extension towards the end of the doctoral candidate's registration period.

3) *On-campus environment adaptations*

On-campus environment adaptations may be recommended in the fit note if a GP believes that some physical adaptations are needed to help the doctoral candidate return to their programme of research e.g. moving a workstation to the ground floor or near a lift if the doctoral candidate has difficulty with mobility.

Small items of adaptive equipment may be purchased by the Academic School directly from the University's office equipment suppliers and will be funded through the Academic School budget. Larger adaptations may need to with the relevant Associate Dean of Research and/or Dean who may need to take advice from the University Health and Safety team before purchase.

Longer-term issues that are affecting a doctoral candidate's return to their programme of research should be assessed by the supervisory team and PGRT in conjunction with the Doctoral School and Student Support Services. Through the [NTU Quality Handbook Section 11: Research Degrees](#) and associated guidance, a doctoral candidate has the ability to suspend their studies. Doctoral candidate may normally suspend their studies for a period of not less than a month and not more than a year at a time. The total number of suspensions a candidate is permitted should normally total no more than one-third of the maximum registration period.