

Exceptional Welfare Extension Policy and Procedure

Introduction

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) will consider extensions of awards up to 13 weeks for PhD, Split Site, and Master's Scholars where there are serious and compelling welfare reasons that have caused significant disruption to their studies and PhD progression.

Scholars who wish to use this procedure are encouraged to read the accompanying guidance for this policy. The guidance provides much more detail about the purpose of the policy, how the grounds for exceptional circumstances are considered, and how the CSC decides on the outcomes of exceptional extension requests.

PhD and **Split Site** Scholars can submit a request for an exceptional welfare extension to mitigate for:

- a circumstance that meets this policy's **definition of exceptional welfare**; and
- meets one of this policy's **grounds for an exceptional welfare** extension; and is
- a defined period of continued absence from studies for exceptional welfare reasons of 4 or more weeks; or is
- a significant disruption of 4 or more weeks due to exceptional welfare reasons

Master's scholars can submit a request for an exceptional welfare extension in cases where:

- they have successfully been granted an extension through their university's formal mitigation/exceptional/extenuating circumstances procedure.

Definition of Exceptional Welfare

The procedures covered in this policy apply only to welfare circumstances that are exceptional. For this policy exceptional welfare circumstances are those which are:

- unforeseeable; and
- unpreventable; and
- have a significant impact on a scholar's studies or PhD progress

Grounds for Exceptional Welfare Extensions

As well as meeting the definition of exceptional welfare, requests under this policy should also fall within the grounds for exceptional welfare extensions.

Grounds that are usually considered for exceptional welfare extensions

- Serious ill-health including physical and mental health illness (for PhD and Split-Site Scholars)
- Development or worsening of a long-term illness or disability, including mental health and chronic conditions
- Failure of university to implement recommended and agreed disability support plan or of the CSC to provide agreed disability allowance and support
- Serious complications in pregnancy and maternity not already covered by the CSC Maternity and Paternity Policy
- Serious ill health in a first degree relative with significant impact on life, such as taking on unexpected caring responsibilities
- Victim of violent or sexual crime with significant disruption on life and studies
- Domestic abuse or family breakdown with significant impact on life and studies

Grounds that are not usually considered for exceptional welfare extensions

- Academic delays such as difficulties with data gathering and analysis, issues or complaints regarding university supervisor, academic support from the university, or general lack of progress with thesis or taught modules
- Lack of access to university resources
- Field work delays that fall within reasonable consideration of risk assessment
- Attending courses, conferences, or writing papers, articles and journals that are not core to a scholar's final PhD thesis
- Minor illnesses for less than 4 weeks duration
- Bereavement (please see compassionate air fare and extension policy)
- Maternity and paternity leave (please see maternity and paternity policy)
- Disabilities where support plan and additional provision has been provided
- IT difficulties, such as lack of access to IT equipment, or failure to back up documents
- Late arrival to the UK or late enrolment on programme due to family issues, such as delays to dependants' visas, or making arrangements for school and housing
- General domestic and family problems
- Financial difficulties

- Employment or extra-curricular commitments

Submitting and exceptional welfare extension request

Requests for exceptional welfare extensions must be made on the correct [request form](#) and sent to welfare@cscuk.org.uk. Scholars should notify the CSC as soon as they become aware of their need to request an extension or from when their exceptional circumstance arises and no later than two weeks after the start of the exceptional circumstance. Where scholars are taking a defined period of absence due to an exceptional circumstance scholars must notify the CSC of when their absence starts and ends, and no later than 2 weeks after each date. The CSC will not consider retrospective applications for exceptional extension requests where the scholar had not notified the CSC at the time of the exceptional circumstance.

All claims must be supported by relevant supporting evidence. For more information and advice about completing the exceptional welfare extension form and submitting evidence please see the accompanying guidance to this policy.

Notification of decision

All requests for an exceptional welfare extension will be considered within the CSC Secretariat. The CSC Secretariat may decide to extend a Scholarship as requested (up to 13 weeks), partially accept a request for a shorter period than requested, or refuse the request.

Scholars will receive written confirmation from their Programme Officer of any extension granted outlining the details of the decision made and any new tenure dates and conditions.

General conditions

- All requests for exceptional welfare extensions are reviewed on an individual basis, however, fairness to all scholars is a consideration when assessing claims.
- PhD scholars who are absent from the UK for 4 weeks or more in a year, and Masters scholars who are absent from the UK for 2 weeks or more in a year will have their award suspended as per the usual award conditions. Extensions cannot be considered for any period where a scholar is on suspended status.
- All requests for an exceptional welfare extension are subject to the agreement of a university to extend a Scholar's registration. Confirmation from a university for a leave of absence or an extension does not on its own guarantee an extension of award from the CSC.

- The CSC would not expect that tuition fees are charged for any agreed extension periods.
- Scholars should notify their university if they are going to be absent from their studies. UK visa regulations mean that it is at the discretion of the institution sponsoring a Scholar's visa whether they support an absence from studies.
- PhD Scholars whose welfare circumstance overruns the end of their original tenure can defer their airfare and move on to a half rate stipend as normal. In these cases, the stipend paid during any period of extension granted will reflect stipends received during the period of exceptional welfare circumstance. For example, if a Scholar is on leave for welfare reasons for the last 2 weeks of their original award and then the first 2 weeks of the deferment period on half-rate stipend, then an agreed extension in this example would fund 2 weeks at full stipend and 2 weeks at half-rate stipend.
- The maximum exceptional welfare extension for an award is 13 weeks. The length of extension will also be capped by the amount of time left on award, if it is less than 13 weeks. For example, if a scholar takes welfare leave 5 weeks before the end of their original tenure then the maximum extension that they can receive is 5 weeks.
- PhD Scholars can only submit one request for an exceptional extension during the writing up period.
- Only CSC Secretariat staff who are directly involved with deciding on exceptional welfare extension claims will have access to claim forms.

Please note that the Commission reserves the right to change its policies for its own reasons or in response to external changes. All the above is subject to the agreement of the UK host university and UK Home Office whose policies are subject to change

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