



University of
St Andrews

Leave of Absence, Re-engagement and Withdrawal

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Purpose	This policy outlines and addresses the conditions and processes through which students can take Leave of Absence, re-engage with their studies following a period of temporary absence, or to cease attending the University through a process of Withdrawal.

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1.9	Minor amendments to include Registry process text for clarification – updates to sections 2.2.1 and 3.2.3	Updated	Deputy Head of Education Policy and Quality	January 2026

Policy on Leave of Absence, Re-engagement, and Withdrawal

1. Introduction

The policy outlines and addresses the conditions and processes through which students can take Leave of Absence, re-engage with their studies following a period of temporary Leave of Absence from their studies, or take more permanent steps to cease attending the University through a process of Withdrawal.

2. Leave of Absence

2.1. Principles

The term 'Leave of Absence' is used to denote a period of time where the University permits a student to temporarily disengage with their studies and return at a later date. Leave of Absence can be requested by the student, but is not a guaranteed right. Leave of Absence is a support mechanism the University offers in order to allow students an intermission in their studies to address a variety of circumstances.

For students engaged in taught programmes, when a Leave of Absence is applied to a given semester, any progress in all modules within that semester will be removed from the student's record and replaced with an indication that Leave of Absence was taken. For students engaged in postgraduate research programmes, an intermission in their study period will be applied, their expected end date extended to account for the period of leave taken, and an indication on their student record that leave of absence was applied during this period.

Students engaged in online programmes who wish to pause their studies may either choose to take a Leave of Absence, as detailed in this policy, or may choose to manage their engagement with their studies more flexibly through the advising process. In the latter case, online students may engage at their own pace in accordance with programme requirements (specifically, minimum credits per year and maximum programme length); any such arrangements must be agreed with the student's adviser of studies.

The granting of Leave of Absence may alter the student's circumstances in such a way that the student is affected by non-University legislation and policy (such as the requirements of funding bodies, visa regulations, and council tax liability). It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they make themselves aware of any implications, and meet any additional requirements that a change of circumstances may impose upon them. Students are therefore required to meet with the relevant advisors and officers within the University in order to ensure they are fully aware of the implications involved in taking leave.

While the University cannot guarantee that the same programme of study will still be available following a Leave of Absence period, the University keeps a note of students on leave and will ensure when making such changes that there are acceptable pathways available for completion.

2.2. Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Students – Requesting a Leave of Absence

2.2.1. Conditions for a Leave of Absence request

Student Request for Leave of Absence: A student may request for a Leave of Absence where particular circumstances have affected, are currently affecting, or will affect the ability of the student to engage with their studies.

The deadline for submitting a request for a Leave of Absence for the current Semester is normally the Friday of Week 9. In some circumstances, the following rules will apply:

- For any programme which has teaching timetables that do not align with the University's published semester dates, the deadline for submitting a request for Leave of Absence for the current session is two weeks before the last day of teaching.
- For any leave of absence request submitted when the student is undertaking a final module in a PGT programme, the deadline for submitting a request is two weeks before the advertised submission date (without taking any extensions into account).

A student may request Leave of Absence for up to a maximum of four semesters in total during their period of registration. For students taking fully flexible online programmes which permit shorter periods of leave, Leave of Absence may be requested for a maximum of twenty-four months in total during the period of registration.

Compulsory Leave of Absence: There may be situations where a compulsory Leave of Absence will be required. Examples include, but are not restricted to, failing to meet the University Senate Regulations for attendance, non-payment of tuition fees, as a consequence of misconduct, or as a result of a student's fitness to study.

2.2.2. Date of Final Attendance and Duration of Leave of Absence

Leave of Absence is granted on the basis of the student's last date of attendance at the University, and not the date the application is made or approved.

The possible durations of Leave of Absence for students engaged in Taught Programmes are outlined below. Whilst the maximum durations of Leave of Absence permitted by the University are listed below, it should be noted that length of Leave of Absence a student can take may be subject to programme requirements and might be shorter than the durations outlined below:

- *Undergraduate Students:* The minimum duration of Leave of Absence is one semester with a maximum of up to four semesters in total during the period of registration.
- *Taught Postgraduate Students:* During teaching weeks, the minimum duration of a Leave of Absence is one semester. Shorter periods of leave may be

granted during the dissertation period of the PGT programme. For students enrolled on online programmes comprised solely of flexible (FLEX-coded) modules rather than semester-based modules, shorter periods of leave may be granted at any point during the programme of study.

- *Students on Inbound Study Abroad or Exchange Programmes:* A Leave of Absence will only be granted for a minimum of one semester if the programme of study permits the student to return to the host institution following the Leave of Absence to complete their Study Abroad or Exchange programme. Further information about Leave of Absence processes for visiting students can be found in Section 6.7 of the [Exchange and Study abroad student policy](#).
- *Non-graduating, credit-only Life-long Learning Students:* A Leave of Absence is not permitted for these students.

2.2.3. Procedure for requesting a Leave of Absence

Students considering a Leave of Absence, may wish to speak to an adviser in Student Services (theasc@st-andrews.ac.uk) so that they can receive support, advice, and ensure they have considered alternative options to Leave of Absence where possible.

At the point a student decides to request a Leave of Absence, they must contact the Registry Officer (Student Support – UG/PGT) (reg-support@st-andrews.ac.uk) who will advise on the implications involved in taking a Leave of Absence and the necessary steps students will need to take in order to apply for Leave of Absence. The Registry Officer will also liaise with the School/Department and the relevant Associate Dean (Students) on the student's behalf. The following information may also be required:

- The duration of the period of Leave of Absence the student wishes to take from their studies.
- The grounds for the Leave of Absence (e.g., medical or personal, giving brief details of the circumstances).
- Documentary support for the request if appropriate.

Students will also need to consider carefully the significant financial and/or visa implications of requesting a Leave of Absence, as well as implications with regard to the right to remain in University Accommodation. Students who hold Student Route visa sponsorship should be particularly mindful of the implications Leave of Absence has on their leave to remain in the United Kingdom and must check these implications when considering applying for a Leave of Absence. The Registry Officer will advise on these implications and also direct students to the relevant advisers and officers within the University to discuss these issues.

2.3. Research Postgraduate Students – Requesting a Leave of Absence

2.3.1. Conditions for requesting a Leave of Absence

A student may request a Leave of Absence where exceptional circumstances affect the ability of the student to engage with their studies. Late requests for Leave of

Absence are not normally approved without the explicit permission of the Associate Provost Students.

Compulsory Leave of Absence: There may be situations where a compulsory Leave of Absence will be required. Examples include, but are not restricted to, failing to meet the University Senate Regulations for attendance, as a consequence of misconduct, or as a result of a student's fitness to study.

2.3.2. Date of Final Attendance and Duration of Leave of Absence

Leave of Absence is granted on the basis of the student's last date of attendance at the University, and not the date the application is made or approved.

The durations of Leave of Absence for students engaged in Research Postgraduate programmes is outlined below. Whilst the maximum durations of Leave of Absence permitted by the University are listed below, it should be noted that length of Leave of Absence a student can take may be subject to programme requirements and might be shorter than the durations outlined below:

- The minimum duration of a Leave of Absence for a Postgraduate Research student is one month, with a maximum duration of one year.
- Multiple or Further Leave of Absence requests can be made by students, but the total amount of Leave of Absence accumulated on a student's record may not exceed two years.
- Students may not request a Leave of Absence extending beyond their current expected end date.

2.3.3. Procedure for taking a Leave of Absence

Students considering a Leave of Absence, may wish to speak to an adviser in Student Services (theasc@st-andrews.ac.uk) so that they can receive support, advice, and ensure they have considered alternative options to Leave of Absence where possible.

At the point a student decides to take a Leave of Absence, they must contact the Registry Officer (Student Support – PGR) (reg-support-pgr@st-andrews.ac.uk) who will advise on the implications involved in requesting a Leave of Absence and the necessary steps students will need to take in order to request a leave. The Registry Officer will also liaise with the School/Department and the Associate Provost Students on the student's behalf. The following information may also be required:

- The duration of the period of Leave of Absence the student wishes to take from their studies, including initial and final dates.
- The grounds for the Leave of Absence (e.g., medical or personal, giving brief details of the circumstances).
- Documentary support for the request if appropriate. This should always be provided if the request is on medical grounds. It is the responsibility of the student to obtain such medical evidence (e.g., in the form of a certificate from the student's doctor).
- A supporting letter from the DoPGR or their delegate.

- If notification to a research council/sponsor is required, then all information required by the research council/sponsor should be submitted with the request.
- The request should be made in MMS as soon as possible. If, for example, there is a possibility that an illness may be long-term, then a reasonable initial period of leave should be requested, and further periods as and when appropriate.
- If the Leave of Absence is approved, Registry will send a notice to the student stating the dates for which leave has been granted. If a student is sponsored by a UK research council or sponsor, it is important that these dates are adhered to in correspondence with research councils or sponsoring bodies.

Students will also need to consider carefully the significant financial and/or visa implications to taking a Leave of Absence, as well as implications with regard to the right to remain in University Accommodation. Students who hold Student Route visa sponsorship should be particularly mindful of the implications Leave of Absence has on their leave to remain in the United Kingdom, and must check these implications when considering applying for a Leave of Absence. The Registry Officer will advise on these implications and also direct students to the relevant advisers and officers within the University to discuss these issues.

2.3.4. Compassionate Leave

There may be situations where postgraduate research student on a Student Route international student visa is unable to take a leave of absence but needs a short interruption of studies or break from other University related activities due to a bereavement or other serious personal or medical matter. It may be possible for a period of Compassionate Leave to be granted, within the bounds of Student Route regulations, for up to 60 days without necessitating that the student applies for a new Visa. Student Services and the Registry Support Officer (PGR) must always be consulted before any period of Compassionate Leave can be agreed. Compassionate Leave cannot be granted retrospectively.

2.4. Student status and access to the University during Leave of Absence

For the period a student is on Leave of Absence, their student status is set to 'interrupted' as the student is not in attendance at the University. Consequently, the access a student on Leave of Absence has to the University is limited, and students do not receive any form of tuition or academic supervision, nor formally attend and participate in University societies and sports clubs. A place in University Halls of Residence and University maintained accommodation is not provided to students who have taken a Leave of Absence and following the approval of a Leave of Absence students will receive further information from the University Student Accommodation Office about making arrangements to vacate their accommodation. In connection to this, and in relation to Section 3.2.2 of this policy, when a student is due to re-engage with the University, they will not be able to take up residence in a University hall or University managed-accommodation until they have completed the process of re-engagement with the University.

Students are expected to correspond with both Student Services and Registry under the terms and conditions agreed as part of their Leave of Absence and expected re-

engagement. Students therefore continue to have access to their computer accounts for the purposes of this communication, and also have access to the University Library on the same terms as offered to the general public who wish to use its facilities and consult its collections.

Where it is necessary, students on Leave of Absence may make an arrangement to receive on-going support from Student Services. Such an arrangement is especially recommended for students who remain in the local area throughout their Leave of Absence. This is however at the discretion of Student Services, and the terms of this arrangement must be agreed at the time Leave of Absence is arranged.

Students who have an employment or volunteering agreement that is reliant on their status as an active and registered student (e.g., tutoring, assistant wardenship) will not be able to continue in such an agreement whilst on Leave of Absence. It is therefore important that students considering Leave of Absence check the conditions of any employment or voluntary agreement with the University that may be reliant on their status as an active and registered student.

In all cases where concerns arise in relation to student status and access to the University during Leave of Absence, we would encourage students to discuss these concerns with Student Services at the time they meet with an adviser as part of the Leave of Absence application process.

3. Re-engagement

3.1. Principles

The term 'Re-engagement' denotes the process by which students return to the University and their studies following a Leave of Absence. In order to re-engage, students must demonstrate that the circumstances under which they were granted Leave of Absence have been resolved. When the terms of Leave of Absence require it, students are expected to evidence their fitness to return to study within the specified time limits following their period of Leave of Absence. If a student is unable to do this, then they will not be permitted to re-engage with their studies and will be required to request further Leave of Absence if this is still permissible. If a student fails to communicate with the University within a defined period following a request to state their intentions on re-engagement, then the student's studies will be terminated

3.2. Procedure and Conditions for Re-engagement

3.2.1. Statement of Intention to Return following Leave of Absence

Students on a Leave of Absence will be contacted by Registry prior to their expected return date, and asked to select one of the following options:

- *Return to Study*: The student declares that they are able, and if appropriate, fit, to return to study on the expected return date. Students wishing to return to study and therefore re-engage with the University on this basis should consult point 3.2.2. below;

- *Request a further Leave of Absence:* The student requests a further period of Leave of Absence, providing reasons and relevant documentation where required;
- *Request for permanent Withdrawal from the University:* The student requests withdrawal (see Section 4 of this policy).

3.2.2. Re-engagement with the University and Associated Conditions

In order for a student to re-engage with the University they must be able to provide evidence to demonstrate that the circumstances for which they were granted a Leave of Absence have now been managed and that, where applicable, any conditions of re-engagement have been met. Students who intend to reside in University Halls of Residence or University-managed accommodation must have completed the re-engagement process prior to taking residence at the University (please also refer to Section 2.4. of this policy). The Dean of Learning and Teaching or their delegates may request occupational health report and/or meeting before the student can re-engage following a period of leave of absence.

- *Undergraduate Students*

Undergraduate students are expected to have re-engaged by the Monday of Week 1 in the given semester of return. If students are due to complete deferred assessments/reassessments, then the student will be required to have re-engaged with the University prior to completing these. If a student does not complete the re-engagement process by Monday of Week 1 of the given semester of return, then they will be offered the option of a further Leave of Absence. This offer will be made if they have not yet reached the maximum permitted duration of Leave of Absence.

- *Postgraduate Taught Students (PGT)*

Postgraduate Taught students re-engaging following a Leave of Absence ***taken during the taught component*** are expected to have re-engaged by the Monday of Week 1 in the given semester of return. If students are due to complete deferred assessments/reassessments, then the student will be required to have re-engaged with the University prior to completing these. If a student does not complete the re-engagement process by Monday of Week 1 of the given semester of return, then they will be offered the option of a further Leave of Absence. This offer will be made if they have not yet reached the maximum permitted duration of Leave of Absence.

Postgraduate Taught students re-engaging following a Leave of Absence ***taken during the dissertation component*** will be required to have re-engaged by a date as agreed by the Registry Officer (Student Support – UG/PGT). If a student does not complete the re-engagement process by this agreed date, then they will be offered the option of a further Leave of Absence. This offer will be made if they have not yet reached the maximum permitted

- *Research Postgraduate Students (PGR)*

Postgraduate Research students must re-engage by their expected return date. If they fail to re-engage within the three weeks following their expected return date, fail to

request a further leave of absence (where permitted in the regulations), or seek advice from the Associate Provost Students on their situation, then they potentially face termination of studies with no right to appeal under the terms as outlined under Failure to Re-engage (3.2.3. of this policy).

3.2.3. Failure to Re-engage

- *Undergraduate Students*

If an Undergraduate student due to return to study does not complete the re-engagement process by Monday of Week 1, and following this deadline does not then obtain approval for further Leave of Absence by Monday of Week 4, then the University will consider the student to have failed to re-engage. Consequently, Registry will close the student's record and their studies at the University will be terminated with no right to appeal. An email will be sent to the student's contact and home email address upon the closure of their Student Record.

- *Postgraduate Taught Students*

If a Postgraduate Taught student due to return to study following a Leave of Absence ***taken during the taught component*** does not complete the re-engagement process by Monday of Week 1, and following this deadline does not then obtain approval for further Leave of Absence by Monday of Week 4, then the University will consider the student to have failed to re-engage. Consequently, Registry will close the student's record and their studies at the University will be terminated with no right to appeal.

If a Postgraduate Taught student does not re-engage with their studies following a Leave of Absence ***taken during the dissertation component*** or apply for further leave of absence (where permitted in the regulations) by the Monday of the 4th week following their expected re-engagement date, then the University will consider the student to have failed to re-engage. Consequently, Registry will close the student's record and their studies at the University will be terminated with no right to appeal. An email will be sent to the student's contact and home email address upon the closure of their Student Record.

- *Research Postgraduate Students*

If a Research Postgraduate student does not re-engage with their studies or apply for further leave of absence (where permitted in the regulations) by the Monday of the 4th week following their expected re-engagement date, then the University will consider the student to have failed to re-engage. Consequently, Registry will close the student's record and their studies at the University will be terminated with no right to appeal. An email will be sent to the student's contact and home email address upon the closure of their Student Record.

4. Withdrawal

4.1. Principles

The term 'Withdrawal' denotes the process by which a student permanently leaves the University, and this decision may be based on circumstances that are linked to

changes in circumstance linked to health or personal life, or to facilitate a transfer to another institution of Higher Education.

It differs from 'Leave of Absence' in that withdrawal is a permanent discontinuation of studies in comparison to the temporary intermission from studies that Leave of Absence provides. Further to this, withdrawal differs from 'Termination of Studies' in that withdrawal is a voluntary choice made by the student to discontinue their studies at the University. This stands in significant contrast to termination where studies are discontinued by the University as a result of poor performance or other unresolvable issues.

In cases where a student is considering withdrawal, they are encouraged to engage with the sources of support and advice available within the University before finalising their decision in order to ensure that all other avenues and potential solutions are fully explored. Once a student withdraws from their studies, this is final, and there are no barriers to withdrawal should a student wish to do so. The University does however encourage students to consider withdrawal carefully before finalising the process. The student will may also be affected by non-University legislation and policy as a result of the withdrawal (such as by the requirements of funding bodies, visa regulations, and council tax liability). Students who hold Student Route visa sponsorship should be particularly mindful that Withdrawal from the University will result in withdrawal of their Student Route visa which in turn will affect their leave to remain in the United Kingdom. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they make themselves aware of any implications, and meet any additional requirements that a change of circumstances may impose upon them. A student wishing to return to the University following withdrawal must formally seek readmission.

4.2. Procedure for Withdrawing from the University

Students considering withdrawal should in the first instance speak to an adviser in Student Services (theasc@st-andrews.ac.uk) so that they can receive support, advice, and ensure they have considered all the alternative options to withdrawal where possible. Once a student has made the decision to withdraw they will then be required to contact the relevant Registry Officer (Student Support) for their request to be considered and approved by the relevant Associate Dean (Students)/Associate Provost Students.

4.2.1. Procedure for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Students

When an undergraduate or taught postgraduate student makes the decision to withdraw, they must contact the Registry Officer (Student Support – UG/PGT) (reg-support@st-andrews.ac.uk) who will meet with the student to discuss the implications of permanent withdrawal from the University. The student will be asked to state the effective date and reasons for withdrawal, and once all the academic, financial and/or visa implications have been addressed, the Associate Dean (Students)/Associate Provost Students or their delegated officer will approve the withdrawal. Registry will then send a notice stating the date of the withdrawal to the student.

For overseas students there may be visa implications if a student withdraws from their studies at the University. When a student is no longer registered at the University, the

University can no longer sponsor them to remain in the UK and will inform the UKVI of the student's withdrawal. Students should ensure that they take advice on their particular situation.

Students who are undertaking a final module in a PGT programme at the point when they request withdrawal must make their withdrawal request two weeks before the advertised submission date of the final project or dissertation (without taking any extensions into account).

This is to ensure that records clearly discern between withdrawals and failure to complete, and so that we know when a student is no longer intending to actively engage with the University. Under current processes, there is a risk that this is only discovered when OX is reported for someone who effectively withdrew but did not formalise the request.

4.2.2. Procedure for Research Postgraduate Students

A research postgraduate student wishing to withdraw from a research postgraduate programme should write to the Registry Officer (Student Support – PGR) (reg-support-pgr@st-andrews.ac.uk), stating the effective date and reasons for withdrawal. Before formally withdrawing students are advised to discuss the implications of withdrawal with their supervisor or DoPGR and the Registry Officer. It is also strongly advised that the student discuss any financial or visa-based implications of withdrawal with Registry. The supervisor or DoPGR should confirm the date of withdrawal, the Associate Provost Students or their delegated officer will then approve the request, and Registry will send a notice to the student stating the date of withdrawal.

In the case of students sponsored by UK research councils or similar bodies, this date should be adhered to in correspondence with the research councils or other bodies. In such cases the principal supervisor is also responsible for ensuring that the sponsor has been informed of the withdrawal.

For overseas students there may be visa implications if a student withdraws from their studies at the University. If a student is no longer registered at the University, the University can no longer sponsor them to remain in the UK. Students should ensure that they take advice on their particular situation.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
1.0	New policy introduced dealing with leave of absence, re-engagement and withdrawal. Replaces the previous policy on leave of absence.		Alex Griffiths, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	17/12/2018
1.1	Addition of compassionate leave for Tier 4 PGR students		Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	01/06/2019
1.2	Minor amendment to section 2.2.1	Updated	-	June 2020
1.3	Changes to titles/contact details to reflect decanal restructuring	Updated	-	February 2021
1.4	Changes to Associate Provost titles	Updated	Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	02/08/2021
1.5	Added deadline specifications for PGT final modules and programmes outwith University semester dates.	Updated	Jennifer Norris, Administrative Officer, Proctor's Office	31/10/2022
1.6	Changed terminology relating to student route visas.	Updated	Academic Policy Officer, Education & Student Experience	13/11/2023
1.7	Three minor amendments to PGT withdrawal, UG re-engagement, and Leave of Absence for online students	Updated	Administrative Officer	25/05/2024

1.8	Amendments to LoA for online flexible programmes and re-engagement for ScotCOM students.	Updated	Academic Policy Officer (Digital & Student Experience)	July 2025
1.9	Minor amendments to LoA to include Registry process text for clarification – updates to sections 2.2.1 and 3.2.3	Updated	Deputy Head of Education Policy and Quality	January 2026