



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Code: QA287
Title: **Student Leave of Absence Policy – Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduates**
Date: October 2022
Approval: Academic Council

1 Purpose

University of Galway recognises that for some students to successfully complete a programme of study their circumstances may require them to take a Leave of Absence from that programme. The purpose of this policy is to outline the application process for students and to outline the impact that taking a Leave of Absence will have when the student returns to their programme.

2 Description

- 2.1 A variety of reasons may require students to take a Leave of Absence for a period of time during their studies. A Leave of Absence is available to support students who need time off for personal, medical, professional or academic reasons.
- 2.2 **Students are responsible for making it known to the Dean of College or designated office that they may need a Leave of Absence as soon as possible** and in advance of any period of time off.

3 Definitions

3.1 Leave of Absence

A Leave of Absence is defined as an extended period of time (See: 5.2) away from the programme of study. The purpose of a Leave of Absence is to enable a student to take an approved and specified period of time off before returning to the programme.

3.2 Authorising Authority

Leave of Absence is granted by the Dean of the relevant College or their designated office or equivalent Head of Unit or in exceptional circumstances, the Dean of Students. The Dean, or designated office will consult with the relevant Programme Director, Year Co-ordinator or Student Affairs Committee before reaching a decision. The Dean of Students will also consult with the relevant Dean, or designated office or relevant Programme Director or Year Co-ordinator before leave is granted.

4 Scope

This policy applies to all Undergraduate and Postgraduate taught students of University of Galway with the exception of First Year Undergraduate Students who wish to defer their 1st year before taking Semester 2. Research students must refer to the *QA245: University Guidelines for Research Degree Programmes* regarding Leave of Absence guidelines for their programmes (see section 5.7.1).

Students Experiencing Pregnancy, Maternity and Paternity must refer to *QA153 Policy on Supports for Students Experiencing Pregnancy, Maternity and Paternity*.

First Year Undergraduate Students who wish to defer their 1st year before taking Semester 1 are out of scope of this policy and must refer to *QA258-Approved Leave in Special Circumstances*.

5 Principles

5.1 Discretion

5.1.1 The utmost discretion will be exercised when considering applications. Applications for Leave of Absence will be dealt with in a sensitive manner and only staff members who need to be consulted in connection with an application will be involved in the application process. Notification to other relevant Academic Staff or University Offices of Leave of Absence granted **will not** detail the reasons for the granting of leave.

5.2 Duration

5.2.1 Academic considerations are critical in considering any application for Leave of Absence. This policy is not definitive about the Leave of Absence period overall though typically, the amount of leave granted will not exceed one academic year. Should a student require a longer period of leave, they should apply to their College Office for an extension of the leave prior to its expiry. It may not be possible to carryover previously passed modules as exemptions as programmes may change and students will be required to take modules currently on offer upon their return to their programme, College Office will advise students on module selection on their return to studies.

5.2.2 The duration of a Leave of Absence must not exceed 2 years per stage as per Marks and Standards applicable to that programme or otherwise as specified by the specific Programme regulations.

5.2.3 Students on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes may apply for a Leave of Absence for:

- an entire academic year (01-Sep to 31-Aug), or;
- Semester 2, Trimester 3 and Autumn (1-Jan to 31-Aug)

(Please see section 10 for description of Assessment periods)

5.3 International Students

5.3.1 When a Non-EU student is on Leave of Absence, the International Affairs Office is obliged to inform the local GNIB (Garda National Immigration Bureau) Office who on a case-by-case basis decide on "leave to remain status". (see 5.10.3 below)

5.4 Retrospective Leave of Absence

5.4.1 A retrospective Leave of Absence is not normally permitted. However, it may be granted by the Dean or designated office where they are satisfied that the student had extenuating circumstances which precluded them from applying for leave in advance.

5.4.2 Supporting documentation must be provided in all cases when a retrospective Leave of Absence is being applied for.

5.5 Approval

5.5.1 Approval of Leave of Absence is a matter for the Dean of College or their designated office or Dean of Students or equivalent Head of Unit or Student Affairs committee following discussion with relevant staff members, as detailed in Section 3.2 above.

- 5.5.2 A student may be required to take a Leave of Absence following a disciplinary or Fitness to Study Policy review.

5.6 Status

- 5.6.1 During an approved Leave of Absence, the student's participation in his/her programme is suspended.

5.7 Circumstances in which an application for a Leave of Absence may be refused

- 5.7.1 First semester of the programme (e.g. first Semester on a 1st Year Undergraduate programme): Applicants to University of Galway undergraduate programmes may seek to defer a place offered through the CAO, and should refer to the CAO Website and/or to the Admissions Office website for information on how to defer a place before they accept it. In the event that someone has accepted a place through the CAO and wishes to defer it, they must contact the Admissions Office in University of Galway. Such deferrals are accepted by the Admissions Office where the student has not registered. If a student has registered and wishes to defer, they must withdraw from their programme through the Student Registry Helpdesk (SRH).
Please see QA258 Approved Leave in Special Circumstances for First Year Undergraduate Students for further information.
- 5.7.2 Depending on the programme requirements and structure (including clinical or work placement components), it may not be possible to grant a Leave of Absence. Leave of Absence is granted on a case by case basis.

5.8 Fee Implications

- (i) Students are liable for all elements of the fee i.e. the Student Contribution (where applicable), the Tuition Fee and the Student Levy, at the time of registration. The Fee liability for a student granted a Leave of Absence is determined by the Leave of Application date and the duration of the approved leave. The student must consult with the Fees Office at the earliest possible opportunity regarding the fee implications of their proposed Leave of Absence. See section 5.8.1 for further detail.
- (ii) Following a period of approved leave, and where a student owes a debt to the University, that student may not re-register, until they have resolved any outstanding fee issues.
An approved Leave of Absence may have financial implications for students in receipt of maintenance and /or fee grants. University of Galway cross-checks Leave of Absence decisions with grant payments and regularly confirms the Registration status of students with funding agencies in an Academic Year. See 5.8.2
- (iii) An approved Leave of Absence may have financial implications for students in receipt of maintenance and /or fee grants. University of Galway cross-checks Leave of Absence decisions with grant payments and regularly confirms the Registration status of students with funding agencies in an Academic Year. See 5.8.2
- (iv) The Fees office will automatically process a refund where an approved Leave of Absence results in a credit balance on the student's fee account in accordance with the QA306 Fee Refund Policy.

5.8.1 Undergraduate/Taught Postgraduate Fees

(i) Full Year Leave of Absence

- If a Leave of Absence is approved for a full Academic year, then there is no fee liability as long as approval has been granted under this policy prior to the 31st October of the Academic Year in question.

- If a Leave of Absence is approved for a full year after the 31st October, (and before the 1st of February) of the Academic Year in question, the student is nevertheless liable for fees in respect of Semester 1, i.e. half their tuition fee, half the student contribution (UG only) and the full student levy.

(ii) Semester 2 Leave of Absence

- If a Leave of Absence is approved for Semester 2 before 31st January of the academic year in question, the student will only be liable for Fees in respect of Semester 1 (i.e. half their tuition fee, half the student contribution (UG only) and the full student levy) for that year.
- If a Leave of Absence is approved for the remainder of Semester 2 after 31st January, the student is nevertheless liable for their annual fee.

5.8.2 Students in Receipt of Funding

It is the responsibility of students to make themselves aware of any funding implications a Leave of Absence will have on their course participation in both the Academic year for which their Leave of Absence is approved and the academic year they return to their course of study. Where a student takes a Leave of Absence, there may be a requirement to return some/all of the monies received under their grant scheme, if applicable. There may also be implications for any maintenance grants received for the period of their approved Leave of Absence. University of Galway will invoice funders for fees in accordance with 5.8 and 5.8.1. above.

5.8.3 Fees on Returning from an Approved Leave of Absence (Undergraduate/Taught Postgraduate)

- If a student returns from an approved Leave of Absence to the same course, and had previously been liable for 1 semester only (in accordance with 5.8.1. above), the student will be liable for half the tuition fee, half the student contribution (UG only) and the full student levy on registering in the new academic year.
- If a student returns from an approved Leave of Absence to the same course and had previously been liable for the full fees (in accordance with 5.8.1 and 5.8.2 above), the student will be required to pay the relevant repeat year fee on registering in the new academic year.

5.9 Assessment and Module Implications once Leave of Absence is granted

- 5.9.1 A student who takes a Leave of Absence, and who has completed a module, will not go before an Exam Board as the student is not considered a registered student when the Exam Board takes place.
- 5.9.2 Students on a Leave of Absence are not permitted to sit any University exams while on a Leave of Absence.
- 5.9.3 Students on a Leave of Absence will not receive an official transcript of results for that Academic Year and therefore cannot apply for a formal exam appeal or recheck.

5.10 Other Implications

- 5.10.1 It is the responsibility of the student to make themselves aware of any other academic or administrative implications that the taking a Leave of Absence might have. Advice can be sought from the relevant College Office, the Fees Office, and Student Services.
- 5.10.2 During a Leave of Absence, the student will not be entitled to supervision or use of any University facilities and services e.g. Library, VLE etc.

- 5.10.3 International Students resident in Ireland on a student visa must seek advice from the International Office before making an application for Leave of Absence. Any Leave of Absence could seriously affect their legal residency status in Ireland.

5.11 Returning to University

- 5.11.1 A student is governed by the current University Rules, Regulations, Codes and Policies, and the Programme regulations and structures that are in place when they return from a Leave of Absence.
- 5.11.2 A student must meet with their Programme Director prior to their return to University to discuss the Academic requirements of their programme, where the Programme Director will advise the student of the modules the student must take to fulfil the course requirements.
- 5.11.3 Where a programme has been discontinued or substantially changed upon the student's return, where possible, the student will be offered a place on another suitable programme or combination of modules where possible.

6 Process

- 6.1.1 A student must consult the Programme Director, School or College office when they wish to apply for a Leave of Absence.
- 6.1.2 A student will make a request to the Dean of the relevant College, or designated office, using the Leave of Absence form. The Dean or designated office may, in exceptional circumstances and with the student's consent, engage with a third party (e.g. a parent, spouse, next-of-kin, or the Dean of Students) to complete the formalities of the Leave of Absence process.
- 6.1.3 Where applicable, the Dean or designated office will consult with relevant staff members and make a decision regarding the requested Leave of Absence. Where a Leave of Absence is granted, the date of application will become the start date for the Leave of Absence for fee liability purposes.
- 6.1.4 If a Leave of Absence is approved, the Dean or designated office will forward the "Approved Leave" correspondence to the student, and copy the Programme Director or Year Coordinator for the Discipline, Registry, the Fees Office and the International Office (where applicable), to ensure that appropriate adjustments can be made to the student's record and fee liability.
- 6.1.5 Once the student is due to return, they must re-register or apply for an extension to their leave (by contacting the Programme Director and School or College Office). See 5.11 above.

6.2 Appeal Process

- 6.2.1 A student may wish to appeal the outcome of their Leave of Absence application should a Leave of Absence be denied.
- 6.2.2 The student can appeal through the Office of the Registrar and Vice President and an outcome will be decided in a timely manner.

7 Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the key parties – the student, the College, Programme Director, Registry, Fees Office, International affairs, Students Union are as defined below

7.1 The Responsibilities of the student

In order that the University may best support students making an application for a Leave of Absence from their programme, the student must:

- 7.1.1 Seek advice and support as soon as possible where they think they may need to take some time off from their programme

- 7.1.2 Ensure that they are fully aware of all the implications of taking a Leave of Absence
- 7.1.3 Make a formal request to the Office of the Dean of College or designated office
- 7.1.4 To inform SUSI (or any funding bodies) of their approved Leave of Absence
- 7.1.5 Inform International Affairs Office where applicable
- 7.1.6 Inform Fees Office of the Leave of Absence

At the end of their Leave of Absence period, a student must:

- 7.1.7 Contact the Programme Director to discuss return to study and curriculum options
- 7.1.8 Pay any outstanding fees to the University which are owing, See 5.8 above
- 7.1.9 Contact the Dean of Students if returning from a Leave of Absence where a Disciplinary matter is outstanding
- 7.1.10 Register for the course and modules as advised by the Programme Director to ensure full access to the University's facilities and services
- 7.1.11 To inform SUSI (or any funding bodies) of their return from Leave of Absence
- 7.1.12 Inform International Affairs Office where applicable

7.2 The Responsibilities of the College or School Office

- 7.2.1 Advise students as to the implications of taking a Leave of Absence
- 7.2.2 Direct students to the appropriate offices, e.g. Fees Office, for advice on the implications of taking a Leave of Absence
- 7.2.3 Keep accurate records of Leaves of Absence granted and the approved return dates
- 7.2.4 Advise and notify Discipline of the approved Leave of Absence
- 7.2.5 Process requests for extensions to a Leave of Absence
- 7.2.6 Advise students returning from leave on the process for re-registration and re-engagement with their studies

7.3 The Responsibilities of the Programme Director / Programme Co-ordinator

- 7.3.1 Advises student of the implication of taking a Leave of Absence
- 7.3.2 Advises Module Co-ordinators to download all relevant assessment information from the VLE

When a student returns from a Leave of Absence, Programme Director / Programme Co-ordinator must:

- 7.3.3 Meet with the student in advance of the programme starting and advise the student of the module options they must take to meet programme requirements
- 7.3.4 Advises the Discipline(s) of the modules the student will be taking
- 7.3.5 Advises Module Co-ordinators to re-instate all relevant assessment information on the VLE

7.4 The Responsibilities of the Module Co-ordinators

- 7.4.1 Downloads and keeps secure all relevant assessment information for the student from the VLE
- 7.4.2 Re-instates all relevant assessment information for the student on the VLE when they return from their Leave of Absence

7.5 The Responsibilities of Registry

- 7.5.1 To amend the Student's status to Leave of Absence and to include a Note on the Student Record system
- 7.5.2 Inform SUSI of the changed status (if applicable)
- 7.5.3 Admissions Office to advise 1st Year UG in the 1st Semester of their programme and update with a note on the Student Record system

When a student returns from a Leave of Absence, Registry must:

- 7.5.4 Invite the student to register for their programme and modules as directed by the **Programme Director / Programme Co-ordinator**

7.6 The Responsibilities of the Fees Office

- 7.6.1 To modify the Fees liability for the student when the Leave of Absence is granted

7.7 The Responsibilities of the Students Union

- 7.7.1 To provide support and information to a student considering taking a Leave of Absence

7.8 The Responsibilities of Student Services

- 7.8.1 To provide the following agreed supports to students while they are on a Leave of Absence: -
- Support on general queries via the Student Enquiry Centre – drop in or via email
 - Student Advisers - one to one support can be continued if this has already been established before the Leave of Absence or if referred to the Student Adviser by another unit/service while on Leave of Absence
 - Chaplaincy - one to one support can be continued if this has already been established or if referred to Chaplaincy by another unit/service while on Leave of Absence
 - Career advice and guidance - one to one appointments and information via the Career Development Centre
 - Societies - continue as a Societies Committee member for the remainder of the year if the Leave of Absence is mid academic year.
 - Counselling appointments – available by contacting the Counselling Service
 - Disability Advisory to support planning and preparation for return to study
 - Specialist supports, such as occupational therapy and assistive technology supports are provided, as required, on a case-by-case basis.
 - Support from the Traveller Education Officer (TEO), Mature Student Officer(MSO) and Access Advisors as applicable

8 Related Documents

QA258	Approved Leave in Special Circumstances for First Year Undergraduate Students
QA245	University Guidelines for Research Degree Programmes
QA616	Student Code of Conduct
GS 080	Research Graduate Students Leave of Absence form
QA306	Fee Refund Policy
QA282	Student Course Withdrawal Policy
QA228	Undergraduate Marks and Standards
QA236	Postgraduate Marks and Standards
QA153	Policy on Supports for Students Experiencing Pregnancy, Maternity and Paternity
QA269	Fitness to Study

9 Policy Owner & Approvals

This Policy is owned by the Secretary for Governance & Academic Affairs.

The Policy is approved by Academic Council.

Dean of Students, Students Union, Colleges, Schools, Fees Office, Student Services and Registry have been consulted on this Policy.

Registry are responsible for updating the policy.

10 Assessment Period Definition

Assessment Period	Months
Semester 1	Sept, Oct, Nov & Dec
Semester 2	Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May
Trimester 3	Jun, July, Aug
Autumn	Aug (Repeat Examination session)