

Postgraduate Research Academic Calendar and Start Dates Policy

Summary

This policy provides the parameters governing the structure of the University of Bristol academic calendar for Postgraduate Research (PGR) students. The policy also defines the available start dates for research degree programmes at the University.

Control information:	Control detail:
Owner	Deputy Director of Education Quality and Policy, Education and Student Success
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Sponsor	Director of Education Quality and Policy, Education and Student Success
Consulted	University Postgraduate Research Committee, Education Operations
Approved by	University Executive Board
Responsible area	Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO)
Version	2
Approval date	23 June 2026
Effective date	01 August 2026
Date of last interim review	NA
Full review period	3 years
Date of next full review	25 July 2028
EIA completion date	10 July 2025
DPIA assessment date	01 July 2025
Reporting requirements	N/A

Applicable statutory, legal or best practice requirements	N/A
Keywords	Academic calendar, Application, ATAS, Intake points, Key dates, PGR, Research programmes, Registration, Start dates, Teaching blocks, Teaching year.
Related information	Structure of the Academic Year Guide Key dates process document University dates University Academic Calendar Policy

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1. Updates to this policy

- 1.1. This policy is an amalgamation of the PGR aspects of the 2025/26 University academic calendar policy and the 2025/26 PGR start dates policy.
- 1.2. Information on latest registration dates for PGR students has been added to the policy.
- 1.3. The number of permitted start dates in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences has reduced, but with an exception in relation to clinicians.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The policy provides the rules governing the structure of the University of Bristol academic calendar, which forms part of the University key dates, in relation to postgraduate research (PGR) students.
- 2.2 The policy also sets out the University's restrictions on postgraduate research (PGR) programme start dates to a defined set of intake points across the year to optimise the:
 - the PGR student experience of starting a research degree
 - efficient management of PGR processes such as registration, funding management and annual progress monitoring.
- 2.3 There is a separate University academic calendar policy that covers taught students and provides the framework for setting significant teaching and related assessment events.

3 Scope

- 3.1 The policy applies to applicants, starters, and students registered on PGR programmes at the University.
- 3.2 PGR students who undertake a taught component are also covered by the teaching and related assessment dates of the academic year, which are derived from University academic calendar policy. PGR programmes that have a taught component will be more aligned with the teaching dates of the academic year and so only a subset of the permitted PGR starts dates will be available for those programmes.

4 Definitions

- 4.1 **Academic calendar.** The system for defining the structure of the academic year with the University academic calendar policy setting the dates for the major teaching and related assessment events. PGR programmes align with the academic year where this is appropriate, including for any taught components.
- 4.2 **Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS):** ATAS applies to certain international students and researchers who want to study or conduct research in specific sensitive technology-related fields in the UK. The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) administers the scheme and issues ATAS certificates.
- 4.3 **Key Dates.** Landmark dates for each academic year, including bank holidays and closure days, Open days, academic calendar dates, and accommodation tenancy dates. Includes all dates published on the [University dates webpage](#).
- 4.4 **Postgraduate research (PGR):** Advanced, independent study that aims to contribute original knowledge to a specific academic field. The University offers a range of doctoral and research master's degrees.
- 4.5 **Teaching block (TB):** A block of weeks allocated to teaching delivery.

5 Responsibilities

- 5.1 **University Executive Board (UEB).** The University Executive Board approves dates for each academic year in line with this policy and with the University academic calendar policy. Confirmation of the academic calendar is a responsibility of Senate, which is delegated to the Vice-Chancellor as Chair of Senate and managed through UEB.
- 5.2 **Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO).** AQPO is responsible for the review of this policy and for the University academic calendar policy. Appropriate consultation on any proposed changes to these policies will be undertaken. Any changes to the academic calendar structure that would impact on PGR programmes must include consultation with the University PGR Committee.

- 5.3 **Faculties:** Have the responsibility of adhering to the PGR start date principles and to the available start dates as shown in table 1 in this policy.
- 5.4 **PGR Admissions:** Have the responsibility of ensuring that accurate PGR start date information is publicised to students and included on offer letters where appropriate.
- 5.5 Further detail on responsibilities is provided in the University Key dates process.

6 PGR period of study

- 6.1 A PGR student's period of study runs from the start of their expected engagement with their degree and ends with the submission of their PGR dissertation for examination. As set out in this policy, there is a set number of permitted start dates for PGR programmes, and this provides a greater level of flexibility compared with taught programmes.
- 6.2 There are minimum and maximum periods of study depending on the degree and the mode of attendance, as detailed in the Section 4 of the PGR Code.
- 6.3 **Start date:** This is when the University expects a student to first engage with their PGR programme. Permitted start dates are shown in the PGR start dates principles section.
- 6.4 **End date:** This is when a student submits their PGR dissertation for examination. A PGR student will remain registered until they have been awarded, which will be some time after submission.
- 6.5 PGR students are generally not affected by the standard academic year structure for teaching and related assessment events unless they are involved in a taught component of a PGR degree.
- 6.6 Vacation dates in the academic calendar do not apply to PGR students. As set out in Section 6 of the PGR Code, PGR students have an annual leave provision in addition to University closure days and bank holidays.
- 6.7 Where religious festivals are not bank holidays in England, they remain part of a PGR student's period of study.

7 PGR start dates principles

7.1 Programme start dates are aligned with the academic calendar, and calendar months. Permitted start dates are as follows. Table 1 sets out the standard permitted start dates by faculty.

7.1.1 **September - main intake point.** Available start date is Monday of Welcome Week (Teaching Block 1).

7.1.1.1 Doctoral Training Entities with an integrated taught component will normally only be able to accept new students at this point.

7.1.2 January - available start date is the Monday of Preparation Week (Teaching Block 2). This intake is mainly used for students who are completing a master's degree as a condition of entry.

7.1.3 October to December and February to July - available start dates are first Monday of each month that does not fall on a bank holiday or University closure day. Table 1 sets out any additional standard permitted start dates by faculty beyond the main September and January dates. These additional intake dates should mainly be used where a September or January start date is delayed by funding, an ATAS or visa approval, or to accommodate clinical commitments. In exceptional circumstances, the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences may use a start date outside of the faculty's standard permitted start dates in table 1 (but not August) to register clinicians for a PGR programme if there are significant constraints from a funder and/or an employer that make this necessary.

7.1.4 August - no start point available to avoid disruption during a busy period, including progression, registration, and fee and funding processes.

7.2 Faculties can make a subset of their permitted start dates available for application to programmes in their portfolio.

7.3 Where a student's individual circumstances warrant it – for example, if there is a delay to funding, or to an ATAS or visa approval or to visa approval – the

faculty can choose to offer a later start date for the individual student from the list of permitted dates outlined in section 7.1.

Table 1: PGR standard permitted start dates for applicants by faculty

Month	Available start date	Arts, Law and Social Sciences	Science and Engineering	Health and Life Sciences
August	No PGR start date available			
September	Monday of Welcome Week	Yes	Yes	Yes
October	1st Monday of month			*
November	1st Monday of month		Yes	Yes
December	1st Monday of month			*
January	Monday of Preparation Week	Yes	Yes	Yes
February	1st Monday of month			*
March	1st Monday of month			*
April	1st Monday of month			*
May	1st Monday of month		Yes	Yes
June	1st Monday of month			*
July	1st Monday of month		Yes	Yes

* The Faculty of Health and Life Sciences may use a 1st Monday of the month start date outside of the faculty's standard permitted start dates in exceptional circumstances (see 7.1.3).

8. Latest permitted registration

- 8.1 PGR students are expected to commence their studies on the start date specified in their offer letter, which will be in line with the defined set of intake points in the start date principles section. For a small number of students this may not be possible for reasons outside of their control – for example, in

relation to the time taken to obtain a visa. Where there is a valid reason, the following latest registration dates apply:

- 8.1.1 New PGR students must be fully registered on their programme by 10am on the Monday 3 weeks after the start date specified in their offer letter at the latest.
- 8.1.2 Returning PGR students must be fully registered on their programme by 10am on the Monday of week 3 in the academic calendar at the latest. Returning students will start at various times in the year, but records are rolled over at the same time in late August each year. At this point, returning students will have provisional returner (PR) status irrespective of their original start date. They must then register online to retain their fully registered (R) status.