



BIRMINGHAM CITY  
University

# CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES POLICY

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Student and Academic Services

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## 1. Introduction

1. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Academic Regulations and Tuition Fees Payment Policy.
2. Birmingham City University takes a positive and proactive approach to supporting students who are considering leaving their course, transferring to another course, or taking a break in their studies. This Policy sets out the process for student-initiated change of circumstances.

## 2. Definitions

1. Student Change of Circumstances (referred to as 'ChoC' hereinafter) refer to:

### Break in Study (BiS):

- The formal process by which a student can request a temporary break in their studies or where there is a university led decision which requires a student to take a temporary break in their studies.
- For an apprentice this may also be referred to as a Break in Learning.
- A student will be on a break from their studies for an agreed period, up to one academic year. During this time the student will not have access to teaching, resources or buildings. This means that a student will not be able to continue with their studies or submit assessments or take exams.
- International students on a Student Route Visa will be required to return to their home country whilst on a break in study.

### Permanent Withdrawal (PWD):

- The formal process by which a student can request to permanently withdraw from their course to leave the University.
- Access to BCU resources, teaching, systems and buildings will cease when a student is permanently withdrawn from their course.

### Course or Route Transfer:

- The formal process by which a student can transfer to a different course or route/pathway within the University.

### Resumption of Studies

- The date, agreed between the University and student, when the student will return and resume their studies. For apprentices, the date will also be agreed with their employer.

2. 'We', 'Our' and the 'University' refers to Birmingham City University.
3. When referring to processes which are the same for students and apprentices, the term used will be "students". Where the policy relates to apprenticeship provision only, the term "apprentice" will be used.
4. APTEM is the university record system for apprenticeships.

### 3. Principles

1. This Policy applies to all undergraduate (UG), postgraduate taught (PGT) courses including continuous professional development (CPD) courses. For students studying at partner institutions in the UK or overseas, they should refer to the partners process.
2. This Policy does not include university-initiated change of circumstances which result from situations including (but not limited to):
  - Academic performance as outlined in the Academic Regulations.
  - Attendance and Engagement monitoring as outlined in the relevant policy (see Student and Apprentice Attendance and Engagement policies within the [Student Contract](#)).
  - Fitness to study, fitness to practise or precautionary suspension under the University's student disciplinary procedure outlined in the relevant policy: (see [Student Governance Procedures](#) within the Student Contract).
  - Non-payment of tuition fees as detailed in the [Tuition Fees Payment Policy](#).
3. This Policy is owned by Student and Academic Services (SaAS), specifically Delivery Services, whose role is to work collaboratively across Student and Academic Services and to oversee and support the co-ordination of this policy and associated processes, in conjunction with the Faculty Student Centres (FSC).
4. The FSC manages all ChoC requests by working with key BCU departments. The FSC will provide students with full support, advice and guidance throughout the process.
5. For Postgraduate Research (PGR) students, the Doctoral Research College (DRC) manages the processes relating to PGR requests for ChoC's.
6. Students will be supported to continue their studies if possible and/or appropriate.
7. Where individual personal circumstances are likely to prevent a student from continuing with their course, students will be fully supported to make an informed and timely decision to either take a Break in Study, explore options to transfer to another course at the University, or withdraw from their course. We may make use of the [Fitness to Study Procedure](#) to place a student on a Break in Study where individual personal health circumstances are likely to prevent a student from continuing with their course and time away from study is considered to be in the student's best interests.

8. Apprentices who may need to take a Break in Study will be supported with input from their FSC, their employers and the Apprenticeships Delivery and Compliance Team.
9. This Policy ensures that we are compliant with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements and that the relevant PSRB is informed when a student's ChoC has been confirmed. This includes:
  - UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) for Student Route Visa Holders,
  - Student Finance England (SFE) or equivalent funding body,
  - Third Party Sponsors and employers,
  - The Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for apprentices.
10. Where a student is a new entrant and has not fully enrolled on their course, any transfer should be dealt with via Recruitment and Admissions. For continuing students, any course transfer should be dealt with via Faculty Student Centre.. For apprentices, this would be dealt with by the FSC and the Apprenticeships Delivery and Compliance Team.

#### 4. Requesting a ChoC

1. A student can make a request for a ChoC by contacting their FSC.
2. Details on how to submit a ChoC are available from the FSC, this will be submitted online.
3. At the point a request is made, the student will receive an acknowledgement email. The student request will be individually triaged and based on a student's circumstances and reasons for requesting a ChoC additional support, advice and signposting will be provided where deemed appropriate.
4. The FSC will also assist in arranging a meeting, where necessary, between the student and a member of the Academic Course Team to discuss their request and provide academic advice and guidance. Where a discussion has already taken place with the Academic Course Team a further discussion may not be necessary.
5. The FSC will ensure that the student is provided with the appropriate information needed to make an informed decision about their ChoC request. This will include understanding any funding implications that their request may have, such as fee liability (see section 11. Fee Liability) and access to funding and services that will cease once their ChoC is agreed, for example disability support. Advice will also be available for students with SFE funding (or equivalent funding body) and maintenance loan implications. Student Route Visa holders will be advised of any immigration and visa implications when taking a ChoC.
6. For apprentices, there may be implications for their employment and the FSC will co-ordinate the provision of advice and guidance by liaising with the employer and the University's Apprenticeships Delivery and Compliance Team.

Following the provision of advice and guidance via the FSC, students are expected to respond to any requests for further information from the University in a timely manner. Failure to respond will result in delays in processing the ChoC request and could impact the final ChoC date recorded in the student record system. Any fee liability for the student will be calculated on the basis of this date, this means that the student will be liable for fees up until the agreed ChoC date. Please note that apprentices are not liable for fees.

## 5. Processing a ChoC request

1. Student ChoC requests will normally be completed (i.e., open ChoC requests closed with a decision) within 14 days of initiation. The request will be finalised after a maximum of 14 days to allow time to ensure that the student has received advice, guidance and support in relation to their request.

We will consider the official ChoC date as the date the ChoC is formally agreed between the University and the student. For any university-initiated ChoC, the date recorded in the student record system will determine the tuition fee liability. In exceptional circumstances the ChoC may be backdated, for example, where there is evidence of zero attendance on the course.

2. The timeframe for completion of a ChoC for an apprentice will normally be 28 days, additional time may be required to ensure that the apprentice receives the input required from the University and their employer.
3. Due to the requirements of the ESFA, the final date of an apprentice's ChoC is recorded in APTM and the student records system, will be the last date of evidenced learning detailed in the apprentices off the job logs.
4. If the student has not engaged with the process within the 14-day timeframe, the FSC will contact the student to re-confirm the student's intention after 14 days. The student will be required to respond to the FSC within 7 days to formally confirm their ChoC request in writing. If the student fails to respond and is no longer attending and engaging with their studies, we reserve the right to process the ChoC on behalf of the student. The official ChoC date will be recorded as date of initiation plus 14 days. If there is evidence of attendance and engagement, the ChoC request will be closed without being processed and the FSC will follow up with the student to confirm this action.
5. Applying a timeline of 14 days to this process, ensures compliance with UKVI requirements and provides a timely update of a ChoC to SFE (or equivalent funding body) if required (see Section 11 Fee Liability).

6. Where apprentices fail to respond, attend and engage we reserve the right to process the ChoC on their behalf as agreed with the employer using the last date of evidenced learning.
7. The FSC will be responsible for overseeing the student record processing following the agreement of a ChoC, see appendix 1.

## **6. Sources of support for students**

1. Students are encouraged to engage with relevant support services in advance of submitting their ChoC request, to help ensure that the request represents an informed decision, see appendix 2.
2. The FSC will support the student and course team where required by signposting to appropriate services that may assist the student in making their final decision when initiating a ChoC.
3. Any student experiencing a mental health crisis should seek help and support from the university's Mental Health and Wellbeing team via [Report and Support](#).

## **7. Break in Study**

1. A Break in Study is an agreement between the University and the student to temporarily pause their studies. At the point a Break in Study is requested, the FSC, via the Academic Course Teams, will facilitate a review of the student's academic performance, will confirm the student's return date and any assessments that will be set prior to re-entry. International students will be required to return to their home country when on a break in study. For apprentices, the resumption date will also be agreed with the employer. Where a Break in Study is refused, the FSC will provide the student with a rationale to explain why this is not possible.
2. A Break in Study may be approved for up to one academic year of study. In exceptional circumstances, and on approval by the Associate Dean (Teaching Education Student Experience) of the students; faculty or nominee, a student may be permitted to extend their Break in Study for one further academic year, provided the student is able to complete their course within their maximum registration period. The student will be required to provide supporting evidence for any extension requests, evidencing the reason which is preventing them from returning within the agreed time frame, e.g., medical records for cases related to ill-health. For details of fee implications see section 11. Fee Liability.



3. We cannot guarantee that the original course will be available upon the student's return to study. Where a student or an apprentice is taking a Break in Study, the FSC will ensure any updates in relation to changes in the course structure are communicated, and where required, the employer will be informed. Where major modifications have been made to the curriculum, the student may be required to restart at the beginning of the semester/stage to enable the new credit requirement to be met. In such cases, there may be a fee liability for the student and they will be advised by the FSC in collaboration with the Finance department.
4. Please note that fee liability does not apply to apprentices.
5. If the student no longer wishes to continue with the course, the FSC will discuss alternative options and provide appropriate guidance.
6. Following a Break in Study, students will normally restart at the beginning of the semester that they did not complete to avoid any gaps in teaching, and if applicable, fees will be liable from the resumption date. An exception to this would be courses where modules are taught and assessed consecutively rather than concurrently (e.g., where teaching is taught in a block) where a student may be permitted to restart at the point that the next module in the sequence is due to be delivered, which may not necessarily be at the start of the semester. Undergraduates have two points in the year where re-entry is permitted, at the start of semester one or the start of semester two. Postgraduate Taught students may restart at the beginning of any of the three semesters.
7. Failed assessment marks for the non-completed semester, achieved prior to the Break in Study, will be discounted from the student record prior to restarting the semester/stage, and the student will be required to complete all failed or incomplete assessments for the non-completed semester. This would be deemed as the first attempt at the assessment for the module. An exception to this would be marks completed for modules where those modules are delivered consecutively and a student is due to restart with the next module in the sequence, which may not be the first module in the semester (e.g., courses delivered in consecutive blocks).
8. The FSC will remain in contact with students on a Break in Study twice during a one-year break in study and then approximately 2 months prior to their agreed return date. The FSC will re-confirm the student's intentions in returning to their studies, ensure that the student's record is ready for re-enrolment and provide advice and support to facilitate their transition back to their studies. For an apprentice, the FSC point of contact will either be the apprentice or with the employer.
9. For Student Route Visa holders, the FSC will remain in contact with twice during a one-year break in study and then approximately 4 months prior to their agreed return date to ensure there is sufficient time for the student to apply for a new Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) and visa.



10. Where the student does not resume their studies at the start of the agreed semester/module, the student will automatically be permanently withdrawn from their course by the Friday of week 4 of teaching (of the semester in which the student is due to return) and will be notified via email. The only exception will be where an agreed extension to a break in study has been approved. For apprentices, the FSC will ensure that discussions have taken place with the employer before a permanent withdrawal is processed.
11. Where an apprentice is aware in advance that they will not be able to engage in learning for a period of 2 consecutive months or more, they must initiate a request for a Break in Study. We may also instigate a Break in Study where there is no evidence of active learning for a period of 2 consecutive months or more. This is in line with ESFA requirements (see [Apprenticeship Attendance and Engagement policy](#)).
12. Students appointed as Sabbatical Officers by the BCU Students' Union should inform their FSC of this as soon as possible, by confirming the details of their appointment via a ChoC request. If the student holds a Student Route Visa, the FSC should notify the University's UKVI Compliance Team of this appointment.
13. Students on a break in study will no longer have access to BCU buildings and limited access to services and resources provided by the University until they recommence on their course. This includes no access to teaching and learning and therefore students will not be permitted to submit assessed work or take examinations. Appendix 3 outlines services available during a break in study.

## **8. Transferring to another course at Birmingham City University (BCU)**

1. Students can transfer from their course up until Friday of week 4 from the course start date. In exceptional cases there may be instances where an in-year course transfer is permitted e.g., where the courses may have a common year of study.
2. A course transfer request does not guarantee a transfer will be approved. Whilst a request for a course transfer is being considered, students must continue to attend and engage with their original course where possible. There may be serious implications for non-attendance during this time, for example breaking the conditions of a Student Route Visa which may lead to visa curtailment for international students or withdrawal from course (see [Student Attendance and Engagement Policy](#)). If there are issues preventing a student from attending, the student should inform their FSC when a ChoC is initiated.
3. Course transfer decisions within the first semester are subject to our Admissions entry requirements, availability of spaces, and adherence to any deadlines for application (which may vary by course). The FSC will assist in the request and ensure a meeting is arranged with the Academic Team/s prior to a course transfer being approved. In some instances, course transfer decisions may depend upon successful completion of the current stage or other criteria being met, including for example rules set out by UKVI.

4. Decisions will normally be available to students within 14 days of receipt of the request. Therefore, students must ensure their request to transfer is submitted at least 14 days prior to the Friday of week 4 of the course start date.
5. Depending on the academic cycle, the student may be placed on a Break in Study until they are able to enrol onto their new course.
6. Apprentices are permitted to transfer at any point within the academic year providing this is in line with the academic course requirements. For example, if up until the point of the transfer, both courses share a common year of study, a course transfer will be permitted. However, where there are differences in the curriculum which cannot be accommodated at the point the transfer request is made, then the apprentice can only transfer at the next available academic course opportunity.

## 9. Permanent Withdrawal

1. A permanent withdrawal cannot normally be processed without a formal ChoC request, the exception to this will be university initiated permanent withdrawals. FSC will support students in seeking appropriate advice when taking a Permanent Withdrawal. Failure to inform us of a planned or actual course withdrawal may have serious implications for students such as financial, employment (apprentices) or immigration issues. Students who leave their course without initiating a formal ChoC may subsequently be withdrawn via other university processes such as withdrawal for non-attendance (see Student and Apprentice Attendance and Engagement policies within the [Student Contract](#)).
2. Students requesting to transfer to a course at another institution should permanently withdraw from their course at BCU before they enrol elsewhere. Failure to do so may have serious implications for the student, for example in terms of receiving appropriate and timely funding. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they understand their fee liability and funding remains in place to cover their studies at a new institution. For Student Route Visa holders, transferring to another institution will result in the student being required to return to their home country and re-applying for a new CAS and visa.
3. After permanent withdrawal, if a student wishes to return to study a new course at the University, an application must be made via Admissions and in all cases the current published entry requirements must be met. For an apprentice, a new application would be via the employer in the first instance before an invitation to apply is sent via APTEM.
4. Depending on the reasons for a Permanent Withdrawal, returning to study at BCU for Student Route Visa holders is unlikely to be possible.
5. When a student is permanently withdrawn from their course all access to BCU systems (including BCU email account), buildings, teaching and support services ceases with immediate effect.

## 10. Student Route Visa Holders

1. Where a Student Route Visa holder either takes a Break in Study or Permanent Withdrawal the BCU UKVI Compliance team will inform UKVI of the students ChoC within 14 days of the final decision. This will mean that Student Route Visa Holder's will need to make arrangements to leave the UK.
2. For Student Route Visa holders, the details of any course transfer will be reported to UKVI by the University's UKVI Compliance Team within 14 days of the final decision.

## 11. Fee Liability

1. This policy should be read in conjunction with the [Tuition Fees Payment Policy](#).
2. Fee liability is not applicable to apprentices.
3. Students taking a Break in Study or a Permanent Withdrawal may be liable for a proportion of the tuition fees for the academic year. Students will be reminded of their fee liability obligations by the FSC when requesting a ChoC. Students transferring courses may also be liable for fees. Where a student is funded by SFE, or equivalent funding body, the change in their circumstances is communicated to the funding body so that their records can be updated and the student's funding account/s adjusted accordingly.
4. Where a student takes a Break in Study or is permanently withdrawn and is in receipt of a maintenance loan from SFE, or equivalent funding body, a proportion of that loan may be clawed back depending on the timing of the ChoC. For example, if maintenance has been released for all of semester 2 but a student takes a Break in Study after two weeks of the semester, it is likely SFE, or equivalent funding body, would claw back the amount of maintenance intended to cover all but the two weeks of that semester.
5. Following a Break in Study, students will normally restart at the beginning of the semester that they did not complete to avoid any gaps in teaching. The student may be liable for additional tuition fees when they are returning to restart from the beginning of the semester.
6. We will agree the student's official ChoC date and this date will determine the fee liability.

# APPENDIX 1

## Student Record Processing

The FSC will manage the maintenance and processing of the student record normally within 5 days upon receipt of confirmation of final ChoC decision. Once student records are updated, notifications will be sent to relevant professional services where further action is required. Further record updates may include:

- Central Finance.
- Fees and Funding team.
- University UKVI Compliance Team (for Visas and Immigration monitoring purposes, if appropriate).
- University Accommodation.
- Practice Placements Team (if appropriate).
- Disability Support Services (if appropriate).
- Apprenticeships Delivery and Compliance Team (ESFA funding and monitoring purposes)

In addition, we are obligated to inform relevant third parties of a confirmed student ChoC. This includes but is not limited to:

- Student Finance England or other appropriate and relevant funding bodies e.g., ESFA.
- UKVI.
- Employers (apprentices only).

# APPENDIX 2

## Support Services

Service	Nature of support
Mental Health and Wellbeing team	Access to wellbeing advisers, mental health advisers, and counsellors; workshops; self-help resources; safeguarding support
Money and Childcare Advice	Advice on finance and childcare issues, including support in seeking additional funding
Disability Support	Support for students with a disability, Specific Learning Difficulty (such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD), a long-term health condition or a mental health difficulty.
Student Governance	Team overseeing the administration of the Extenuating Circumstances Procedure, for use where personal circumstances impact a student's ability to complete an assessment
Centre for Academic Success	Support to develop academic, technical, and numerical skills
BCU Wellbeing	Downloadable app to support student wellbeing and help students achieve balance, create healthy habits, and reach their potential.
Students' Union Advice Centre	Independent advisers can provide guidance on academic issues, financial issues, and housing
Security Services	Personal safety advice and support
Personal Tutors	You can seek academic support from your Personal Tutor, who can also signpost you to other sources of support.

# APPENDIX 3

Services, system access and resources available to a student on a break in studies include access to:

- Money and Childcare advice services.
- All Student Governance procedures.
- Online Mental Health and Wellbeing resources
- Disability support services.
- BCU student account including email.
- Support from FSC prior to returning from a break in studies, to enable a timely return to their course with any advice and guidance needed to facilitate the students return.

Please note that a student will not have access to BCU buildings or any teaching or learning during their break in study and this includes completing examinations and submitting assessments.