

# Student Change of Circumstances (ChoCs) Policy

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# Student Change of Circumstances (ChoCs) at Northumbria

This document sets out the University's Policy for student Change of Circumstances (ChoCs) management and provides guidance to Taught students and staff on the key principles and processes involved.

For clarity, Student Change of Circumstances (referred to as 'ChoCs' hereinafter) refer to the following distinct and specific processes only:

- Students Taking a Break in Studies (also known as an Interruption of Studies)
- Students Withdrawing from a Programme of Study (and leaving the university)
- Students Transferring to a different Programme of Study (within the university)

Northumbria University takes a positive and proactive approach to supporting students who are thinking of leaving their programme (including students leaving the university and transferring to another Higher Education institution), transferring to another programme (within the university), or taking a break in their studies (interruption of studies).

The nature of this approach and relevant support is outlined within this Policy.

The ChoCs process is managed by the Student Success Team within Student, Library and Academic Services, with input from other stakeholders detailed within this Policy. Staff should consult the [Academic Guide to Change of Circumstances \(ChoCs\)](#) document hosted on the University's Intranet pages for further support and guidance (see 11. Sources of Support and Guidance for Staff).

Where possible and appropriate, students should be proactively supported to continue their studies in the first instance (see 10. Sources of Support and Guidance for Students, and Appendix A – Overview of ChoCs Process).

Where individual personal circumstances will likely prevent a student from continuing their programme (even with full support of Northumbria's key university support services and processes), students will be fully supported to make an informed and timely decision to either take a break in studies, explore options to transfer programmes, or withdraw from their programme.

The approach and systems outlined within this Policy apply only to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students, at Newcastle and London Campuses. Exceptions include some Collaborative Venture (CV) programmes where signposting and support (case management) is provided by specialist teams other than the Student Success Team. Details are provided in relevant Programme Handbooks.

Apprentices are also supported with input from their employers and the Educational Partnerships team. Support for Postgraduate Research Students is provided by Northumbria's Graduate School.

## 1. Initiating a ChoC request

1.1 ChoC requests can only be considered and actioned if initiated via the formally agreed university procedure, i.e., through the Student Portal via the article: ['Thinking about changing course \(transfer\), taking time out \(interruption\) or leaving the University \(withdrawal\)'](#). In exceptional circumstances where a student is unable to engage with the agreed procedure, the University may raise a request on their behalf.

1.2 Before initiating any ChoC request, students should:

- Read the Student Guide to Change of Circumstances (ChoCs) available on the Student Portal here: [‘Thinking about changing course \(transfer\), taking time out \(interruption\) or leaving the University \(withdrawal\)’](#).
- Contact their Programme Leader or Personal Tutor in the first instance to discuss their circumstances (where appropriate).
- Make every effort to understand any funding or immigration implications of their request, including fee liability (see 9. Fee Liability).
- Discuss any concerns or issues relating to their circumstances or any of the above, with the Student Success Team, as soon as possible (note, students in crisis should seek immediate help and support: details are available in the Student Guide to Change of Circumstances or via the Student Portal here: <https://myportal.northumbria.ac.uk/Help-and-support/Support-and-Wellbeing/Counselling-and-Mental-Health-Support/Accessing-urgent-mental-health-support>).

1.3 Students who have initiated a ChoC request are expected to:

- Respond to any requests for further information from Programme Leaders, the Student Success Team or Applicant Services in a timely manner in order to progress the request, including confirming a final decision and agreed return date with the Programme Leader (for breaks in study).
- Have a formal discussion with their Programme Leader and/or coach, and their employer before confirming a final decision (Apprentices).
- Make an informed final decision, considering all relevant advice and guidance available and provided, in relation to their request.

## 2. Taking a Break in Study (Interruption of Studies)

2.1 Requests to take a Break in Study (Interruption of Studies) must be made via the university’s formally agreed procedure (see 2. Initiating a ChoC Request).

2.1 For Apprentices a break in studies will be instigated by the University where there is no evidence of active learning for 4 consecutive weeks.

2.2 A Break in Study (Interruption of Studies) is an agreement between the University (via the Programme Leader or their nominee) and the student enabling a student to temporarily suspend their student status with a view to returning to studies at a pre-agreed date in the future. Breaks in Study are commonly requested to allow a student time to deal with unforeseen personal circumstances.

2.3 Breaks in Study are not normally refused; however, the return date must be agreed by the Programme Leader (and in some cases, the Faculty Registrar, see Appendix B). Where a break in study is refused, the Programme Leader will provide the student with a rationale as to why it is not possible.

2.4 Students may be permitted to interrupt their studies (Break in Study) and return to re-enrol normally within a maximum period of two years to complete their programme, i.e., students will normally be

approved for current year of study plus one additional academic year and will return on the tuition fee of the academic year they joined the University if they return within the maximum two-year period (see 9. Fee Liability).

- 2.5 Mitigating circumstances for longer interruptions must be via agreement with the Programme Leader and Faculty. Where a student returns after an interruption of more than two years, they would return on the tuition fee applicable to new students on their year of return.
- 2.6 The University cannot guarantee that the Programme, either in its entirety or as it is being delivered at the point of interruption, will be available on the student's return to study.
- 2.7 Programme Leaders are responsible for informing their students who are currently on a Break in Study if their programme is no longer running. Information regarding what happens if a programme is changed or discontinued whilst a student is taking a break in studies can be found within the [Handbook of Student Regulations](#).
- 2.8 The Student Success Team will contact students on a break in study around 2 months prior to their agreed return date to confirm their intentions, ensure that the Academic Support Team have the student's record and that it is ready for re-enrolment, and provide advice and support to facilitate their transition back to Northumbria.
- 2.9 Students successfully appointed as Sabbatical Officers within the Students' Union should inform the Student Success Team of this as soon as possible, by initiating an Interruption request and confirming the details of their appointment within the comments section of their initiation. Additional support and guidance will be provided to successful Sabbatical Officers by the Student Success Team as needed.

### **3 Transferring to another programme at Northumbria**

- 3.1 Requests to Transfer programmes must be made via the university's formally agreed procedure (see 2. Initiating a ChoC Request).
- 3.1 Whilst a request for a programme transfer is being considered, students must continue to engage with their programme of study where possible. There may be serious implications for non-attendance during this time, for example breaking the conditions of a Student Route/Tier 4 visa which may lead to visa curtailment for international students. If there are issues preventing a student from attending, the student should inform the Student Success Team upon ChoC initiation immediately.
- 3.2 Requests for a programme transfer are facilitated by the Student Success Team but managed by Applicant Services. In some instances, Transfer decisions may depend upon successful completion of the current programme or other criteria being met, including for example rules set out by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). In other instances, students may be placed on a Break in Study (with their permission) until they are able to enrol onto their new programme.
- 3.3 Initial Transfer decisions will normally be available to students in 10 working days. Students will be informed of any delays in Transfer decisions.
- 3.4 Students wishing to Transfer to a programme at another institution must formally Withdraw from their programme at Northumbria first, 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 and immigration support.

- 3.5 Requests to Transfer onto a programme for which teaching has already commenced (e.g., requests received at the start of an academic year, i.e., Late Transfer requests) may not be accepted if the programme is at full capacity, the request is made beyond the last date of enrolment, or they have missed more than three weeks of teaching on their target programme.
- 3.6 Transfer decisions are subject to entry criteria checks, availability of spaces, and adherence to any deadlines for application established (which may vary by programme).
- 3.7 Requests received after the 'latest date for enrolment' (agreed by University Executive) are subject to additional approval by the Programme Leader and Faculty Registrar, and students may be asked to sign a Learning Agreement Document if their request is approved. The latest date for enrolment will be published on the Student Portal in advance, and as soon as possible at the start of the academic year.

#### **4 Withdrawing from a programme of study at Northumbria**

- 4.1 Requests to Withdraw from a programme of study must be made via the university's formally agreed procedure (see 2. Initiating a ChoC Request).
- 4.2 A Withdrawal initiation cannot normally be processed without a formal ChoC initiation. Failure to inform the university of a planned or actual programme withdrawal may have serious implications for students such as financial or immigration issues. Students who leave their programme of study without first initiating a ChoC may subsequently be withdrawn via other university processes such as Withdrawal For Non-Engagement (see [Student Attendance and Engagement Monitoring Policy](#)). In such instances, funding bodies, sponsors, or UKVI will be informed (where appropriate).
- 4.3 Students who complete the withdrawal process will be recorded as withdrawn rather than having their assessment profile recorded at the next Programme Assessment Board (PAB) as having failed.

#### **5 Automatic and Internal Notifications of ChoC Initiations**

- 5.1 Programme Leaders will receive email confirmation that a student has initiated a ChoC request (see 6.2 for exceptions).
- 5.2 Students will have the option to prevent a Programme Leader Notification, should they wish to do so. In such circumstances, advice and support will initially be provided by the Student Success Team after initiation.
- 5.3 Details of any ChoC requests initiated by international students are also made available to the Immigration Advice Team (part of WIFT). The Immigration Advice Team may proactively offer Immigration advice to students considering a ChoC to help prevent any later issues developing that may jeopardise the student's Visa status.

#### **6 ChoC Case Management**

6.1 Student ChoCs are case managed by the Student Success Team. At the point of initiation, all requests will receive an automated response, will be individually triaged, and additional support and signposting will be provided where required.

6.2 All students will be given the opportunity to discuss their intentions or ask specific questions about the process with the Student Success Team before deciding to initiate a ChoC request as outlined in the Student Guide to Change of Circumstances available [here](#) (see 10.3).

6.3 Once a decision has been confirmed, the ChoC case will be closed, and the student notified of the outcome.

6.4 Student ChoC initiations should be completed (i.e., open ChoC Cases closed with a decision) within 21 days of initiation. This allows time for guidance and support to be provided and provides an endpoint for students who may no longer be engaging with the process or their studies (see 9. Fee Liability). Closing ChoC cases after 21 days ensures compliance with UK Visas and Immigration requirements around attendance and engagement, enabling other monitoring processes to be re-established after this period, such as the university's [Attendance and Engagement Monitoring Policy](#), if appropriate.

## 7 Student Record Processing

7.1 Student record processing is managed by Academic Support teams. Records will normally be updated within 3 working days upon receipt of confirmation of final ChoC decisions (ChoC case closure). Once student records are updated, notifications are sent to relevant and appropriate internal University Departments, i.e.:

- Finance Department.
- Programme Leader and Personal Tutor
- University Compliance Team (for Visas and Immigration monitoring purposes, if appropriate).
- University Accommodation.
- Timetabling Team.
- Practice Placements Team (if appropriate).
- Examinations Team.
- Student Accessibility Team (if appropriate).
- Educational Partnerships Team (if appropriate).

7.2 In addition, the University is obligated to inform appropriate and relevant third parties of a confirmed student ChoC, such third parties include (but are not limited to):

- Student Finance England or other appropriate and relevant funding bodies e.g., Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).
- [UK Visas and Immigration \(UKVI\)](#).

- Third party Sponsors.

## 8 Fee Liability (and dates)

- 8.1 Students taking a Break in Study or Withdrawing are liable for a portion of the fees charged for the academic year, as set out in the [Handbook of Student Regulations](#) (Taught). Students will be reminded of their fee liability obligations by the Student Success Team prior to confirmation through student guides, the Student Portal, and as part of the case management process itself. Students transferring programmes may also be liable for fees (see 4. Transferring to Another Programme at Northumbria).
- 8.2 The University will determine the student's official Break in Study or Withdrawal date to be the date the student formally confirms their decision, via the Change of Circumstances Portal. This date will determine any fee liability. Where a request is progressed on behalf of a student within 21 days of initiation, the official Break in Study or Withdrawal date will be determined as the date of initiation plus 21 days.
- 8.3 Where students initiate a ChoC request, but do not subsequently confirm their decision, the University reserves the right to process Withdrawal and Break in Study requests after 21 days of initiation if the student is no longer attending or engaging with the process or their studies. This is in line with the [Handbook of Student Regulations](#) (Taught). In such instances, the Withdrawal date will be determined at the discretion of the Student Success Team considering the date of initiation, last date of attendance or engagement (where applicable), and published fee liability cut-off dates.
- 8.4 Students taking an interruption of study will normally be approved for current year of study, plus one additional academic year, and will return eligible for the tuition fee structure of the academic year they joined the University. This is in line with the [Handbook of Student Regulations](#) (Taught).
- 8.5 Students with interruptions approved for longer than two academic years (see 3. Taking a Break in Studies) will be considered as a new student and return on the approved tuition fee (for new students enrolling) for that academic year. This applies to students returning to the same course, or a changed course. This is in line with the [Handbook of Student Regulations](#) (Taught).
- 8.6 Students who suspended without the agreement of the University, or transferred courses without the agreement of the University, will be treated as a withdrawal / abandonment and the student would be considered as a new student were they to re-enrol. This is in line with the [Handbook of Student Regulations](#) (Taught).

## 9 Sources of Support and Guidance for students

- 9.1 Students should be directed to the Student Portal article: [‘Thinking about changing course \(transfer\), taking time out \(interruption\) or leaving the University \(withdrawal\)’](#) in the first instance.
- 9.1 Within that article, students should also read the Student Guide to Change of Circumstances.
- 9.2 If students are unsure about whether to initiate a ChoC request, they can contact the Student Success Team by raising an enquiry at the bottom of the above Student Portal article.



- 9.3 The Student Life and Wellbeing Service offer specialist advice on the support of students who may be experiencing serious welfare concerns which impact their ability to study, as well as specialist immigration advice.
- 9.4 Careers and employment support is also available via the Graduate Futures Service.
- 9.5 Postgraduate Research Support Teams will offer specialist support and advice concerning postgraduate research students.

## **10 Sources of Support and Guidance for staff**

10.1 Academic Staff should be directed to the intranet article:

<https://one.northumbria.ac.uk/service/sls/studentengagement/howwesupportstudents/changesofcircumstances/SitePages/Home.aspx> in the first instance.

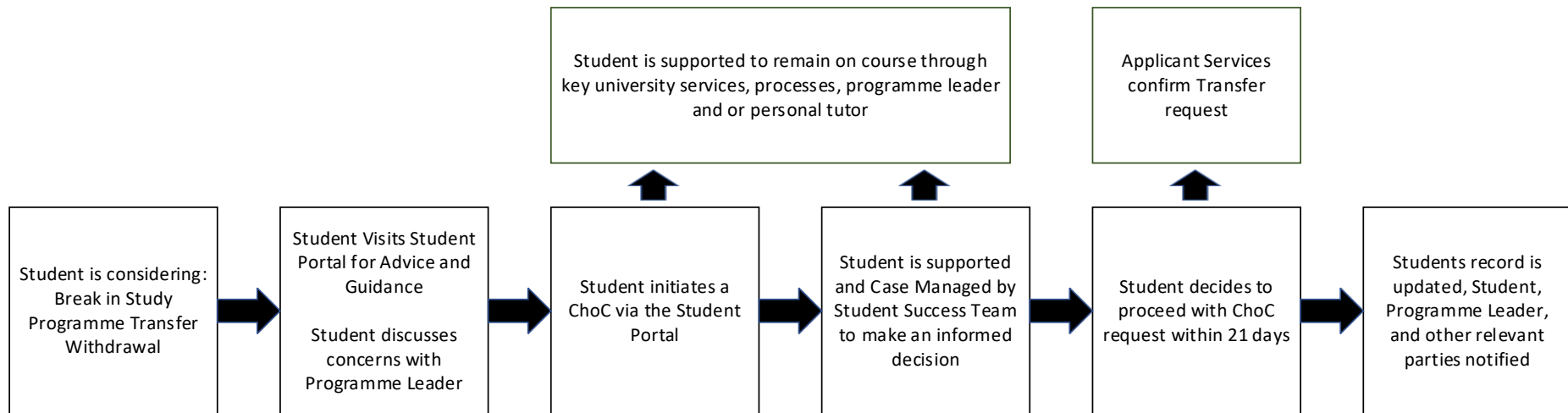
- 10.1 Within that article, staff should read the Academic Guide Change of Circumstances (ChoCs) which also provides contact details for the Student Success team in case of individual queries.

## **11 Equality and Diversity**

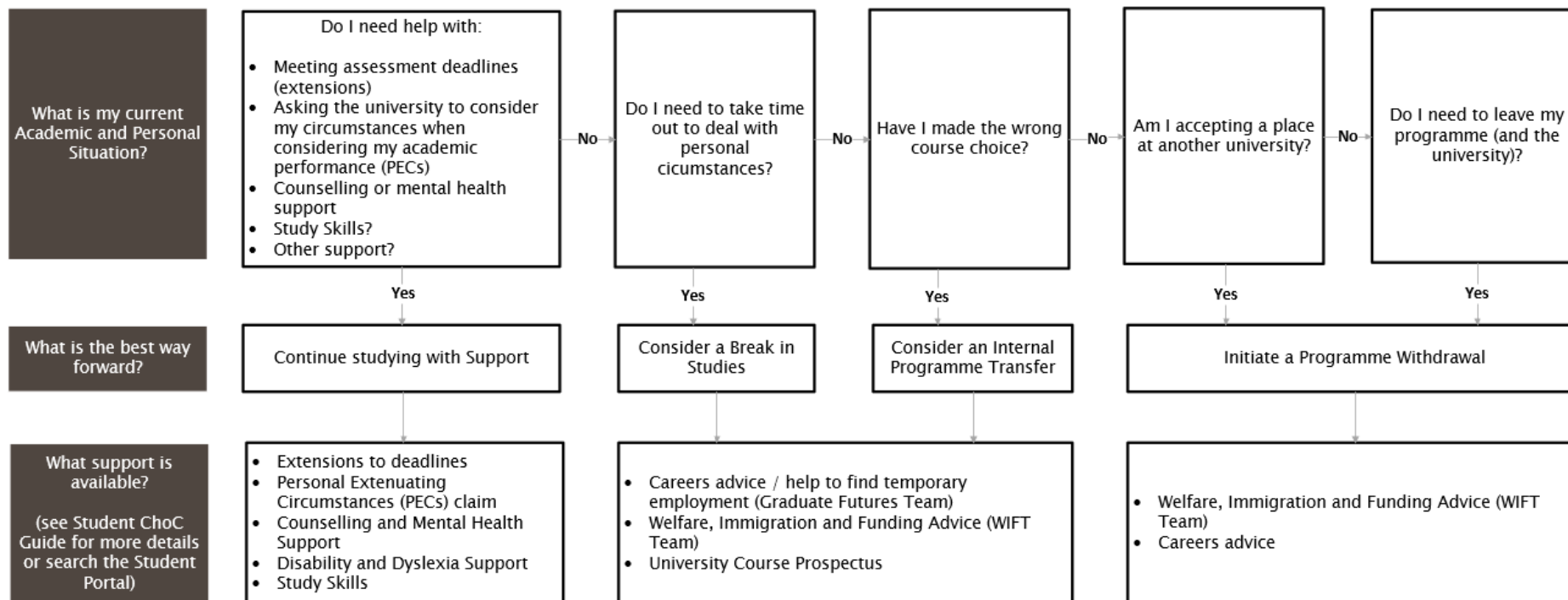
- 11.1 In line with the University's Policy on Equality and Diversity, the University will make every effort to accommodate the needs of disabled staff and students throughout the Student Change of Circumstances (ChoCs) process.
- 11.2 Disabled students must make their needs known to the Student Accessibility Team who, in conjunction with the Student Engagement Team, will ensure that the requirements of disabled students be considered whilst advice, guidance and support is offered during the ChoCs process.
- 11.3 Disabled staff should make their needs known in line with the Disability Disclosure and Reasonable Adjustment Procedure in order that required adjustments can be considered.
- 11.4 The University understands that there may be times when a student is unable to use the ChoC Portal or Student Portal to initiate a request. Where this is the case students should contact Ask4Help at any Student Central location so that alternative arrangements can be made to enquire about or raise a ChoC request.

## Appendix A – Overview of ChoCs Process

### High Level Overview of Student Change of Circumstances Process



### Student Change of Circumstances (ChoCs) Decision Tree



## ChoC Decision Support Checklist

Where possible, we will always look to support your continued study with us first, by taking the time to understand your situation, and determining with you whether university support services and processes can help you stay on track.

Please contact your Programme Leader as soon as possible, and use the below to inform your discussion and help you make an informed decision:

- Contact your Programme Leader to discuss your concerns
- Understand your personal situation and academic progress to date
- Identify with your Programme Leader the help and support you may need to help you stay on track
- Determine which course of action is best for you (use the Decision Tree above)
- Understand the funding, fee and immigration implications
- If you are requesting a transfer, consider contacting the Programme Leader of your new chosen programme for further information about what you can expect.
- If taking a Break in Study, agree an appropriate return date with your Programme Leader (use the Table below)

## Appendix B – Break in Study Approval and Return Table 2022.23

Break in Study (Interruption) Approval and Return Table for Taught Students 2022/23

Point of ChoC Initiation	Semester 1		Semester 2		Semester 3	
	Teaching Weeks 1 - 12	Assessment Period	Teaching Weeks 1 - 12	Assessment Period	Teaching Weeks 1 - 12	Assessment Period
	Between enrolment and end of Teaching Week 12	After teaching week 12 and before end of Semester 1 Assessment Period	During Second Semester	After teaching week 12 and before end of Semester 2 Assessment Period	During Third Semester (where applicable to programme)	After teaching week 12 and before end of Semester 3 Assessment Period
Fee Liability as % of tuition fee for academic year* **	<p>Home: Term 1 = 25% of the total academic year's fee</p> <p>Home: Term 2 (9 January 2023 onwards) = 50% of the total academic year's fee</p> <p>International/EU student (commencing 2021/22 onwards): First 4 weeks since enrolment = 0%, after 4 weeks within Term 1 = 50% of the total academic year's fee (the University will retain in full any deposit)</p> <p>International/EU student (commencing 2021/22 onwards): Term 2 (9 January 2023 onwards) = 100% of the total academic year's fee (the University will retain in full any deposit)</p> <p><i>For London Campus or Carousel Distance Learning Students please visit Section 13 of the Handbook of Student Regulations*</i></p>		<p>Home: Term 2 = 50% of the total academic year's fee</p> <p>Home: Term 3 (17 April 2023 onwards) = 100% of the total academic year's fee. On your return your fees will be calculated based on the amount of credits you will be studying and will be a maximum of 75% of your programme fees.</p> <p>International/EU student (commencing 2021/22 onwards): Term 2 = 100% of the total academic year's fee (the University will retain in full any deposit)</p> <p>International/EU student (commencing 2021/22 onwards): Term 3 (17 April 2023 onwards) = 100% of the total academic year's fee (the University will retain in full any deposit)</p> <p><i>For London Campus or Carousel Distance Learning Students please visit Section 13 of the Handbook of Student Regulations*</i></p>		<p>Home: Term 3 = 100% of the total academic year's fee. On your return your fees will be calculated based on the amount of credits you will be studying and will be a maximum of 50% of your programme fees.</p> <p>International/EU student (commencing 2021/22 onwards): Term 3 = 100% of the total academic year's fee (the University will retain in full any deposit)</p> <p><i>For London Campus or Carousel Distance Learning Students please visit Section 13 of the Handbook of Student Regulations*</i></p>	
Main Eligible Return Date	Start of year (i.e. Semester 1) within the next two academic years		Start of Semester 2 within the next two academic years		Start of Semester 3 within the next two academic years	
Main Eligible Return Approval	Programme leader (using Programme Leader ChoC Guidance Document)		Programme leader (using Programme Leader ChoC Guidance Document)		Programme leader (using Programme Leader ChoC Guidance Document)	
21 Day Rule Default***	Start of year (i.e. Semester 1) within the next two academic years		Start of Semester 2 within the next two academic years		Start of Semester 3 within the next two academic years	
Secondary Return Option			Start of year (i.e. Semester 1) within the next two academic years		Start of year (i.e. Semester 1) within the next two academic years	
Secondary Return Approval			Programme Leader and Faculty Registrar Approval		Programme Leader and Faculty Registrar Approval	
21 Day Rule Default***	Start of year (i.e. Semester 1) within the next two academic years		Start of Semester 2 within the next two academic years		Start of Semester 3 within the next two academic years	

\*Please see Handbook of Student Regulations for full details <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/leadership-governance/vice-chancellors-office/legal-services-team/handbook-of-student-regulations/>

\*\* See also: <https://northumbria.ac.uk/study-at-northumbria/fees-funding/money-matters/fee-liability/> and <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/university-services/student-library-and-academic-services/registry-records-and-returns/academic-calendars/> for Term and Semester dates.

\*\*\*21 Day Rule refers to option of University to progress a Break in Study/Interruption request without student confirmation, within 21 days of initiating the request, if the student is no longer engaging with the process or studies (see Handbook of Student Regulations for more info)

## Appendix C – Data Capture to Support the ChoCs Process

The University will collect student data for the purposes of processing student ChoCs as outlined in this Policy. This Policy forms part of the University Learning and Teaching contract (as set out in the Handbook of Student Regulations<sup>1</sup>) and by enrolling at the University, students agreed to the University processing their data under legal basis 'processing is necessary for the performance of a contract'.

Limited processing of special category data relating to individual personal circumstances may be collected and required under this Policy in order to provide effective support and guidance to students. Students will be consenting to processing of this data upon submission of such information. Further processing of data for management reporting which does not affect the student may be permitted under 'Legitimate Interests'. All student information is retained in accordance with University retention Policy and communicated via the Student Privacy Notice<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/leadership-governance/vice-chancellors-office/legal-services-team/handbook-of-student-regulations/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/leadership-governance/vice-chancellors-office/legal-services-team/gdpr/gdpr--privacy-notice/>