

Graduate Suspension of Status

1. Definitions

Suspension of status

Suspension of status 'stops the clock' for all elements of a student's degree, including residence, fees and terms for which a particular status may be held. During this period, a graduate will not be considered to be on course, and will not hold enrolled status.

Suspension of status is sometimes colloquially referred to as suspension, rustication, or 'intermission'. For clarity in this document and elsewhere, the College uses the term 'suspension of status' as this is the term used by the University. Whilst suspension of status may come about as the result of a disciplinary action (see below), students should be reassured that the term itself is neutral, and that suspension on health or welfare grounds has no negative or disciplinary connotation.

In the absence of department and college permission, a graduate ceasing their studies will be deemed to have withdrawn.

Withdrawal

A graduate may withdraw from their studies at any time and by such withdrawal leaves the College, the University, and their course. Students who have withdrawn are not enrolled at the University and will only be able to return to their course by formally applying for reinstatement within 24 months of their withdrawal. Reinstatement is not automatic.

2. Principles of graduate suspension of status

Graduates do not have an automatic right to suspend status. In all cases, graduate suspension of status must be agreed by the department/faculty and the College. A suspension of status may arise in one of two ways. Firstly, when a graduate wishes to suspend status on medical or other personal/welfare grounds (for example, bereavement, parenthood¹, need to care for others, academic placements, internships, etc.). Secondly, on rare occasions, the College and the student's department/faculty may decide it is necessary to suspend a graduate's status (i) if there are severe concerns about their fitness to study², or (ii) for disciplinary reasons (academic or non-academic).

Where a graduate's academic work is concerned, the department will take the lead, and the College will normally defer to their judgement and recommendations. Where a suspension of status arises on medical, welfare, or other personal grounds, we would also expect graduates to discuss the matter with their department or faculty. The College will respond sympathetically to requests made on these grounds and will support graduates to navigate the process of suspending their studies. The College will make reasonable adjustments in cases covered by the Equality Act 2010. Suspension of status on medical grounds may require medical certification, typically from the GP (doctor) with whom a student is registered in Oxford, in support of the request.

¹ For guidance from the University on resources for student parents, see <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/childcare>

² For the University's Fitness to Study policy and procedure, which will apply in a departmental or faculty context, see <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/fitness-to-study>. If the concern about fitness study occurs in the college context, then the following policy may be followed https://admin.wadham.ox.ac.uk/media/documents/Wadham_Fitness_to_Study_Policy_v4_for_GB_XISuDiv.pdf

3. Process for suspension on health or welfare grounds

Requests to suspend status should be made via the 'My Student Record' section in Student Self-Service, and will be considered by your departmental Director of Graduate Studies, your supervisor, and the College's Tutor for Graduates. Before submitting a request to suspend status, you should discuss the grounds of suspension with your department. You may also discuss a suspension request with an appropriate member of staff in College, such as your College Advisor, the Tutor for Graduates, the Academic Administrator, or the Senior Tutor. Cases of suspension are considered on an individual basis, taking into account all relevant information (including medical) and are always treated holistically, with the particular student in mind.

A request to suspend status is usually preceded by a period of discussion and on-course support. Students considering suspending status or withdrawing from their course are encouraged in the first instance to consult the relevant sources of support available to them. These include their supervisor, their departmental Disability Coordinator, their College advisor, the College's Senior Tutor, Tutor for Graduates, Welfare Lead and Advisors, Academic Administrator and Disability Coordinator, College Nurse, College GPs, and MCR Welfare Reps. College will do everything it reasonably can to assist an graduate to remain on course, rather than to suspend their status. In some cases, suspension of status will be the best course of action, in others it may not.

Discussion regarding suspension of status will seek to ensure that the student has fully considered the implications of suspension, including its pros and cons. It will also include discussion of domestic and other arrangements, including any charges made for College rooms vacated, means of communication during the period of suspension (e.g. confirming which email address will be checked), and the possibility of College accommodation on return to studies, in cases where the student was living in College prior to suspension

In all suspension discussions, students are welcome to be accompanied by a supporting person³.

4. Decision

The College aims to deal with cases covered by this policy as quickly as possible so that delay does not aggravate any difficulties with academic progress.

Decisions on graduate Suspension of Status will be available via Student Self Service. Students will be notified by email. Any conditions attached to that suspension or return will also be available via Student Self Service. Decisions made by the College will be confirmed within a reasonable timeframe (no later than 28 days from the date of the informal agreement, subject to receipt of necessary medical evidence where this is required).

If your application for suspension of status is declined by your department or faculty and you are dissatisfied with this decision, you can follow the [University Student Complaints Procedure](#).

³ For example, a friend, tutor, MCR representative or member of the college welfare team or Oxford SU Student Advice Service. Contact details for the welfare team at Wadham, members of staff and students, can be found at: <https://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/current-students/student-welfare>. Oxford SU's Student Advice Service is also happy to provide support and to accompany students: <https://oxfordsu.org/advice-wellbeing/>

5. Conditions of suspension and return

Medical

In the majority of cases the College will not stipulate any medical conditions when it approves a graduate's request for suspension on medical grounds and it will be the graduate's department who make the determination of whether the student is fit to study.

In exceptional circumstances, for a suspension on medical grounds the College may require a letter of support from the College GP, or a relevant specialist supporting a student. If the College requests this evidence, the College will specify the information that is required. Generally, a medical letter should support the student's view that they are not fit to study, give the reasons why this is so, and detail the intended treatment in support of recovery.

Students requesting suspension of status on medical grounds will be expected to follow medical advice and appropriate treatment as agreed with a doctor (typically the GP with whom a student is registered in Oxford) in order to address their health problems. Students reading Medicine may also need to satisfy departmental requirements appropriate to the course.

Where the College has stipulated it as a condition for return from suspension, the College must receive a medical assessment from the doctor, stating whether or not the student is medically fit to resume study. The doctor's assessment will, as appropriate, take into account reports provided by other clinicians involved in the care of the student during the period of suspension. In the event that the Senior Tutor doubts the adequacy of the evidence supplied, they may require additional evidence to be supplied and/or require the student to obtain the opinion of the College GP.

Students who need to submit medical evidence are therefore encouraged to arrange an appointment with the doctor (again, typically the GP with whom a student is registered in Oxford) around ten weeks prior to the Wednesday of 0th Week of the term in which the student's return is anticipated, so that necessary paperwork can be submitted in good time (at least six weeks before the student's anticipated return), outstanding conditions addressed, and appropriate support or necessary reasonable adjustments put in place.

Students are encouraged to provide full disclosure to the doctor, who will then only communicate to the College what has been agreed with the student, and what is relevant for return.

Confirmation of a student's medical fitness to return does not need to entail a full recovery: a student might continue to be in receipt of health-care or welfare support on returning to studies, as agreed with the doctor, but be managing their medical condition sufficiently well for the doctor to be able to recommend to the College that they can return to full-time study.

The College is responsible for determining, in the light of the doctor's assessment, whether the student is fit to study and whether any other conditions of return have also been met.

Academic

Any academic conditions will be set by the department/faculty, and not by the College.

Other

Students must settle any outstanding battels before returning into residence.

6. Timing and duration of suspension

Application for suspension of status should be made and approved in advance of any requested periods of suspension or, if this is not possible, in the first few weeks of the requested period. Any term of study that has been completed by the time of suspension is not normally allowed to be repeated. Circumstances that have affected study in a given term should already have been raised within the student's department/faculty as and when they arise, and addressed during the term. There might be exceptions, such as when a condition is raised early on in term and, in consultation with the student's department/faculty and the College, a student attempts to continue study without suspension, but this proves ultimately unsuccessful, or where a serious situation has not been recognised at an earlier stage. In such cases, any period of 'repeat study' cannot be assumed, but might be considered.

For graduates on research degrees, it may be possible in some exceptional circumstances to approve a period of suspension one or two terms in the past. However, retrospective suspension should not be requested for a period more than a year in the past. Where additional time is required to complete a thesis, graduates should consider applying instead for a period of extension.⁴ Students undertaking research work will also need to discuss with the department/faculty their re-integration into an ongoing project and/or the continued availability of their supervisor.

The University's rules state that the term's fees or continuation charge must normally be paid if a student is on course beyond Monday of 4th week of that term. In practice, this means that a suspension should have been discussed and agreed by Friday of 3rd week of the term of suspension if fees are not to be incurred and the term is to be re-taken. The University regulations state that graduate taught students may not suspend for any longer than the length of their course. Graduate research students cannot suspend for more than six terms in total. Graduates may not apply for more than three terms of suspension at a time. Graduates on student visas should consult the Student Immigration team on the impact that suspension of studies will have on their visa, which could include curtailment. Because of Home Office rules on the maximum duration of student visas, it may not be possible for some students to suspend for more than two years in aggregate.

7. Access to University facilities

A graduate whose status is suspended will no longer be on course. Graduates whose status is suspended will normally have access to certain University facilities as set out by the University.⁵ This will include the provision of an active University card, which will in turn allow access to online facilities and resources, use of the University libraries, borrowing rights from faculty and sub-faculty libraries (unless a block has been put on the University card e.g. for non-payment of library fines), and an active University email account. However, in many cases taught students will not have access to material on departmental Canvas sites during their period of suspension.⁶

8. Academic support

Academic support needs arising from a period of suspension should be discussed with the graduate's faculty or department.

⁴ See the University's Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees for more information:

<https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/education-committee/policies/research-degrees>

⁵ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/graduate/status>

⁶ Students who are suspended due to non-payment of fees will have all services withdrawn.

9. Communication

Where this policy requires communication to a student in writing, the normal method is by email to the recipient's University email account. An email will be regarded as having been delivered to the recipient at the time of writing.

Students are asked to routinely check their University email account whilst suspended, or forward this to a private account, so that the College can stay in contact during this period. This is especially pertinent to taught graduates with regard to any communications relating to course and/or examination entries. During a period of suspension, students will not normally be included on College or course mailing lists, and may need to remain in proactive contact with supervisors and administrators regarding matters such as option choices on return.

10. Welfare support

It is important to recognise that colleges and the University are places of academic study and cannot play a significant role in the welfare support or treatment of a graduate while their status is suspended.

A student whose status is suspended will inevitably face a certain amount of disruption to their support networks. As part of preparing to suspend, students should consider how to ensure that they will have the support that they will need during their time out. Students on medical suspension will have access to University facilities as set out by the University; however, this support must not be a substitute for specialist support for the relevant medical condition.

The College welfare team can assist students with planning their transition to and from suspension, and can help with identifying potential sources of support during a student's period of suspension. However, the welfare team cannot provide ongoing welfare support for suspended students, which should instead be sought from appropriate professionals.

The University's Counselling Service may also provide students whose status is suspended with help on the same basis as for students on-course; that is on a short-term basis. The Counselling Service will not be able to substitute for NHS (or overseas) support at home, but can assist in helping students to think about the services they will need, and can offer online appointments to students who have already left residence. Students may also find it helpful to access the Service before returning to study to help re-engage with academic work and College life.

Oxford SU's Student Advice Service⁷ can provide both advice and support to graduates considering and returning from suspension. The University's Careers Service is also available to students whose status is suspended.⁸

Suspended students may also find it helpful to contact relevant members of the MCR committee, such as the Welfare rep (mcr.welfare@wadham.ox.ac.uk)

11. Disability Advisory Service

For some students, medical factors that led to suspension of status may suggest a condition that can be supported by the University's Disability Advisory Service.⁹ If a student suspects that support from

⁷ <https://oxfordsu.org/advice-wellbeing/>

⁸ <http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/>

⁹ Contact details for Wadham's dedicated link advisors at the Disability Advisory Service can be found on their [website](#); further details on college support for students with disabilities can be found [here](#).

the Service might be helpful, they are strongly encouraged to make contact prior to their return so that appropriate assessment can be scheduled and support put in place. The process of agreeing and funding support can take a surprisingly long time, and a student may put themselves at a disadvantage if appropriate support cannot be put in place by the time of their return.

12. Domestic arrangements

Graduates who are in College accommodation at the time that their suspension is approved will generally be expected to leave residence within a reasonable time period (no longer than the end of the term in progress), to be agreed with the Accommodation Manager. The College will attempt to re-let College rooms vacated by suspended students, and will not charge rent beyond residency for any suspended students. Students must notify domestic offices promptly, and if possible in advance of their departure.

The College is not able to guarantee accommodation to graduates returning from suspension. However, if a graduate is living in College accommodation when their suspension is approved, the College will make a reasonable effort to secure and offer College accommodation on their return. Students falling under the provisions of the Equality Act, and/or who believe they may need particular domestic arrangements owing to any medical need, are encouraged to discuss this with the Senior Tutor and Disability Coordinator as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements might be made.

Students suspending are advised to contact the Accommodation Manager (accommodation@wadham.ox.ac.uk) at the point of their suspension, to note their interest in accommodation on return.

13. Access to College

A period of suspension from studies is a time for recovery and/or reorientation, and students tend to benefit more from this if they are able to take some time completely away. Suspended graduates are encouraged to consider whether leaving Oxford might be in their best interests. This may depend on the duration of the period of suspension. We know that there are many reasons why leaving Oxford may not be the best possible course of action. Students who are staying in Oxford need to be aware that this can be a challenging option, and to carefully consider how they will spend their time as an Oxford resident who is not currently an enrolled student of the University.

Suspended graduates are advised to limit their use of College facilities and their visits to College premises. It is permissible for suspended graduate students to visit College two or three times a term to, for example, attend MCR events, but it would generally not be appropriate for them to take any ongoing part in College organisations, activities or employment. During a period of suspension, students must ask for the Tutor for Graduate's permission in writing before visiting College premises or using College facilities (including the College's accommodation annexes).

Once conditions to return have been satisfied, a returning student may request to come back to residence in the weeks of the vacation preceding the start of the term in which they will return.

14. Financial arrangements

While their status is suspended, a student will no longer have enrolled status with the University and will therefore not be required to pay fees (unless the suspension commences after Monday of 4th week of the first term of suspension, in which case fees will be payable for that term); nor will they normally be eligible for university student financial support (including support from the College). Once suspension of status is agreed, the College will inform University administration, which will in

turn inform any UK or other student funding body. PGCE students and clinical medics are advised to note that, in our experience, it can take between four and six weeks for the change in student status to be processed by Student Finance England (SFE).

Living expenses incurred during suspension may be difficult to manage, as students are not normally entitled to stipends or maintenance support while their status is suspended. Students are encouraged to make contact with their funding body within a month of their suspension being formally approved to discuss their funding status and what funding, if any, will be available on return from suspension.

Historically students on suspension have been liable for Council Tax. Some local authorities, including Oxford, now appear to be taking a more lenient line, and you are advised to contact the Council as soon as possible after you suspend to inform them of your situation and clarify whether or not you will be liable for Council Tax. It is at the discretion of individual local councils whether or not suspended students are exempt from council tax, and individual circumstances may be taken into account. Students who are remaining in Oxford while on suspension can request a letter from the Academic Office be sent to the city council, which will allow them to consider the student for remission from council tax if the student is suspended on, for instance, medical grounds. Students on suspension may also be ineligible to apply for some forms of state benefits to which members of the general public would otherwise be entitled.

Taught students who are withdrawing from exams only do not normally repeat the term on return from suspension, but return to sit exams only, at a time determined by their Faculty or Department. These students will not be liable for tuition fees for that period, but nor will they be entitled to access any form of tuition.

15. Overseas students

Students who have been studying at Oxford on a student visa may be unable to remain in the UK and need to return to their country of residence promptly if their status is suspended. The University has a duty to inform UK Visas and Immigration when a student suspends, and students are advised to check on the University's webpages for overseas students for further information on their rights and responsibilities: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/visa/during/changes>. Students can also access individual advice via student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk.

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