

Undergraduate 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, an undergraduate 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absence of college permission, an undergraduate ceasing their studies or going out of residence will be deemed to have withdrawn.

Withdrawal

An undergraduate 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 Students who have withdrawn are not enrolled at the University and cannot expect to return to their course at a subsequent point.

2. Principles of undergraduate suspension of status

A suspension of status may arise in one of two ways. Firstly, when an undergraduate wishes to suspend status on medical or other personal/welfare grounds (for example, bereavement, parenthood¹, need to care for others, etc.). Secondly, on rare occasions, the College may decide it is necessary to suspend an undergraduate’s status (i) if there are severe concerns about an undergraduate’s fitness to study², or (ii) for disciplinary reasons (academic or non-academic).³

Undergraduates do not have an automatic right to suspend status. Students should be reassured, however, that the College will respond sympathetically to requests on medical, or other personal/welfare grounds, and will make reasonable adjustments in cases covered by the Equality Act 2010. Suspension of status on medical grounds requires medical certification, typically from the GP (doctor) with whom a student is registered in Oxford, in support of the request.

The College will not grant suspension of status solely on the grounds that an undergraduate is, or feels, ill-prepared for examinations, or that they are underperforming on course. Applications on the grounds of a request for a break or gap year will not be considered, although exceptional, time-sensitive opportunities, such as holding Oxford SU sabbatical office, or taking up academic opportunities supported by tutors, or representing their country in a sport, may be considered.

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

² For the college policy on Fitness to Study, see https://admin.wadham.ox.ac.uk/media/documents/Wadham_Fitness_to_Study_Policy_v4_for_GB_XI5uDiv.pdf

³ In addition, on very rare occasions, the University may suspend a student for non-payment of tuition fees, see <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/undergraduate/status>

3. Process for suspension on health or welfare grounds

Requests to suspend status are considered by 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 subject tutors, Senior Tutor, Tutor for Undergraduates, Welfare Lead and Advisors, Academic Administrator and Disability Coordinator, College Nurse, and College GPs. The College will do everything it reasonably can to assist an undergraduate 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 all suspension discussions, students are welcome to be accompanied by a supporting person⁴.

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 made by the College regarding suspension of status, and the conditions attached to that suspension and return, will be confirmed in writing by the Senior Tutor within a reasonable timeframe (no later than 28 days from the date of the informal agreement, subject to receipt of necessary medical evidence).

5. Appeal

If a student is dissatisfied with the College's decision regarding a request to suspend status or a request to extend a current period of suspension, or if a student wishes to appeal against the conditions of suspension, they should submit an appeal to the Senior Tutor within 14 days of the decision letter (or a subsequent letter stipulating their conditions of suspension) being sent by email. This will lead to the calling of an Academic Panel.⁵ The purpose of a panel will be to allow fresh evaluation of all facts by an independent group of tutors, with student, tutors and those hitherto engaged with the case providing evidence as appropriate: that is, the panel will function as a formal appeal body.

Where a decision has been made under the College's fitness to study process, or following the outcome of an academic or non-academic panel, the appeals process set out in the fitness to study,

⁴ For example, a friend, tutor, SU 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 https://admin.wadham.ox.ac.uk/media/documents/Academic_Monitoring_Procedure.pdf

academic monitoring procedures or non-academic disciplinary processes respectively should be followed.

6. Communication

Where this policy requires communication to a student in writing, the normal method is by email to the recipient's Wadham 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 Wadham 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 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 tutors and administrators regarding matters such as option choices on return.

7. Conditions of suspension and return

Medical

A suspension on medical grounds requires a letter of support from the student's medical practitioner. This would usually be the College GP, who may also consider information from relevant specialists supporting a student. This medical letter should support the student's view that they are currently not well enough 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 in order to address their health problems. Students reading Medicine may also need to satisfy departmental requirements appropriate to the course.

After suspension on medical grounds, and before an undergraduate is permitted to resume study, 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 is not confident of 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 are therefore required 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 undergraduate, and what is relevant for return.

Confirmation of an undergraduate's medical fitness to return does not need to entail a full recovery: an undergraduate 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 undergraduate is fit to study and whether any other conditions of return have also been met. Medical letters must therefore demonstrate an understanding of the challenges of studying at Oxford. This means that in cases where the supporting doctor is not based in Oxford a letter from the College GP may also be required.

Academic

All enrolled students, including those who have returned from suspension of status, are expected to be in good academic standing, as defined by the College (for example, attending classes, tutorials, submitting work on time, sitting collections, performing at a level commensurate with their ability).

It is normally appropriate to set academic as well as medical conditions of return, in order to ensure that students are ready to re-integrate into their course at an appropriate level. Where academic conditions are set for students returning from medical suspension (and where the student is not concurrently under an academic disciplinary process), these are on pedagogical grounds and/or to support undergraduates in their return.

Each case of suspension is unique and will be considered carefully. In general, academic conditions will be set with regard to the College's normal academic expectations, as set out in the Student Handbook, with the College expecting students to produce work of a standard commensurate with their individual ability and circumstances and appropriate to the stage they have reached in their course: in most cases this will be of at least 2.1 standard.⁶ Where possible, academic conditions will be set at the time suspension is agreed; sometimes the details may need to be worked out shortly thereafter, particularly if a student's condition is acute and/or tutors are unavailable.

Tutors will be aware that students on suspension will have needed time to focus on their recovery, but ability to perform at a 2.1 standard is an expectation the College has of all undergraduate students (whilst it recognises that there are circumstances in which some will be unable to sustain that level). Appropriate academic assessment may often take the form of one or more invigilated collections one month prior to the anticipated date of return, with a specified level of achievement expected. Essays may alternatively or additionally be set. Failure to meet academic conditions of return will lead to discussion with the subject tutors and Senior Tutor or Tutor for Undergraduates as appropriate. If a decision is then made with which the student disagrees – for example, an extension of suspension – an Academic Panel should be called.

The College finds the setting of academic conditions of return to be a good means of assessing whether a student is ready to return to study. The mere fact of having to sit collections may also focus a student's mind on their return, and enable them to build up to the level of full-time study which will be required as soon as a student is re-enrolled on course. It is doubly important in the case of students suspending on the advice of an academic or fitness to study panel, where suspension may have been preceded by a period of under-performance, and for which additional conditions may be set.

In relation to students with disabilities, the College will follow the collegiate University's common framework, noting the requirement to make reasonable adjustments insofar as they do not compromise academic competence standards.⁷ Returning without being at a standard sufficient to fulfil the academic requirements of the course and to maintain good academic standing within the College, or without the ability to study at a full-time pace, may be seriously detrimental to a student's health, and can limit a student's opportunities to complete their studies successfully.

⁶ <https://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/current-students/student-handbook>

⁷ <https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/common-framework-for-supporting-disabled-students>

If a student was on a disciplinary or academic monitoring process at the point of suspension they would normally return at the same point in that disciplinary or monitoring process, unless it was decided prior to, or at the point of, suspension that their medical condition provided sufficient mitigation for them to be removed from that process, or for that process to be adjusted.

Other

Students must settle any outstanding course fees and other battels charges before returning into residence.

8. Timing and duration of suspension

Suspension of status 'stops the clock' for all elements of a student's degree, and so a single period of suspension of status will not normally be less than one year or exceed one year.

The University's rules state that the term's fees 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.

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 with the Senior Tutor 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 tutors and the Senior Tutor or Tutor for Undergraduates, 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.

In exceptional circumstances, a request for an extension of a period of suspension, or a further period of suspension at a subsequent point in a student's course of study, may be considered, following a fresh consideration of a case, which would include updated or new medical evidence.

Requests for suspension that exceed two years across the course will not usually be considered. Periods of suspension in aggregate exceeding two years would need to be authorised by department and University third parties, and may not be supported. It will not generally be possible for those enrolled on a student visa to suspend for more than two years in aggregate, given Home Office rules on the maximum duration of such visas.

If a student has exhausted the number of years of suspension available to them or agreed by the College, the process for withdrawal from the course of study will be initiated.

9. Access to University facilities

An undergraduate whose status is suspended will no longer be on course. Undergraduates whose status is suspended will normally have access to certain University facilities as set out by the University.⁸ 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

⁸ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/undergraduate/status>

library fines), and an active University email account. However, in many cases, students will not have access to material on departmental Canvas sites during their period of suspension.

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

10. Academic support

No tuition will be provided during a period of suspension, but subject tutors may advise students on reading materials and exercises to assist with a student's preparation for return.

How students structure their time away from their studies will depend on individual circumstances. In most cases, students who have suspended on medical or welfare grounds are encouraged to take a complete break from their studies for the earlier part of suspension, primarily attending to those factors which have led to suspension. Towards the date of anticipated return, a student is encouraged to turn towards re-engagement with their studies.

Suspended students should contact their subject tutor(s) or the Senior Tutor if they have difficulties in accessing the materials and resources they require. The College will not normally allow access to the College Library except with the permission of the Senior Tutor, nor the long-loan of texts, but it will provide a letter of introduction on request if suspended students wish to use a local University library.

Access to the College Library (as with general on-site access and accommodation) will normally be permitted by the Senior Tutor in the week or two leading up to the sitting of any required collections. Students wishing to return to residence to prepare for a pre-term collection should check with the Senior Tutor: if a room is available in College this will normally be agreed.

The personal tutor of an undergraduate on suspension will usually email a suspended student on two occasions in the second half of a period of suspension, when a student will ordinarily be starting to consider their academic preparations for return. Tutors are not expected to follow-up on non-reply, nor to provide direct tutorial assistance, but may be able to offer general advice and guidance.

Students returning from suspension will be invited to a 'return to study' meeting with the Senior Tutor and Welfare Lead shortly prior to their return to Oxford, to review the academic and domestic arrangements for return, discuss any ongoing support arrangements, and answer any questions the student may have.

11. 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 an undergraduate while their status is suspended.

A student whose status is suspended will inevitably face a certain amount of disruption to their support networks. It can be particularly challenging to remain in Oxford as a city resident who is not currently an enrolled student of the University and who is not permitted to be in College on a regular basis (as is set out in section 14). As part of preparing to suspend, students should consider how to ensure that they will have the support that they will need during their year 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.

The College is aware of the particular challenges that suspension may pose to students who are care-experienced, estranged from their families, student parents or young adult carers. 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 suspended 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 Service⁹ can provide both advice and support to undergraduates considering and returning from suspension. The University's Careers Service is also available to students whose status is suspended.¹⁰

Suspended students may also find it helpful to contact relevant members of the SU committee, either the Suspended Students Officer (su.sus@wadham.ox.ac.uk) or one of the Welfare Reps (su.welfare@wadham.ox.ac.uk).

12. 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.¹¹ If a student suspects that support from 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.

13. Domestic arrangements

It is expected that students will generally leave residence within one week of suspension being agreed. 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. Students leaving shared sets will need to notify their sharing partner as other students may be offered use of that room.

In the vast majority of cases, students returning from suspension partway through an academic year will be offered college accommodation. However, this cannot normally be guaranteed, nor confirmed until relatively close to the time of return, as it relies on other students vacating college residence, which cannot always be predicted. 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.

⁹ <https://oxfordsu.org/advice-wellbeing/>

¹⁰ <http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/>

¹¹ 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](#).

14. 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.

Students often look forward to time spent in Oxford without work and deadlines, but in fact being here while everyone else is busy with their studies can be uncomfortable and alienating. For this reason, if it is feasible for a student to spend most of their suspended time away from the city of Oxford, we would recommend that they do so. Nonetheless we know that there are many reasons why this 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 students may not take any ongoing part in college organisations, activities or employment, and are not permitted to stay in college accommodation beyond an initial period allowing for arrangements to be made to return home.

During a period of suspension, students must ask for the Senior Tutor's permission in writing should they have an exceptional reason to visit college premises or use college facilities (including the College's accommodation annexes). Ordinarily, reasons considered by the Senior Tutor would either be for academic purposes that can only be provided in College, or for time-limited occasions near resumption of study to assist students in reorientating themselves into college life.

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.

15. 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. 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 maintenance support while their status is suspended. Students are encouraged to make contact with their funding body within a month of receiving the College's formal letter confirming suspension to discuss the repayment of any loans or grants for any part-year not taken and to seek its advice on what, if any, funding may be available. The College is not able to discuss a student's case directly with SFE, but is happy to provide any official letters required if a student is negotiating provision.

In some circumstances of medical suspension, a student is able to receive an additional 60 days' worth of funding from SFE, and if a student has interrupted for Compelling Personal Reasons (CPR) and can demonstrate financial hardship, they may be eligible for a limited amount of maintenance funding during suspension. Requests are considered by SFE on a case-by-case basis, and in some circumstances the University's fees and funding team may be able to advise.¹² Each of the other UK

¹² <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/fees/liability/payments/suspension>

funding agencies has different arrangements in place to respond to these circumstances, which students will need to check directly.

Undergraduates returning from suspension will need to re-contact SFE, or other funding body, prior to their return to confirm their funding arrangements directly. Where an undergraduate is returning from suspension in a subsequent academic year, they are advised to reapply for their Student Finance as early as possible after the new application cycle opens (usually from January onwards) to allow sufficient time for their application to be assessed and their entitlement to be finalised, even if not returning until Hilary or Trinity term of the next academic year. Following a re-assessment, undergraduates will receive an updated Student Finance letter from their funding agency which confirms their revised entitlement.

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.

Students who are withdrawing from exams only do not normally repeat the term on return from suspension, but return (usually in early May) to sit exams only. These students will not be liable for tuition fees for that period, but nor will they be entitled to access to tutorials, revision classes etc. SFE will not provide maintenance funding for a return to sit exams only.

16. 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 the UK Border Agency 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 tier4compliance@admin.co.uk.

Checklist for Undergraduates Returning from Suspension

Please find below a list of actions you should consider in advance of your return to studies; note that these provide general guidance for cases of suspension, and any of them may be superseded by the specific conditions noted in the formal letter of suspension from the Senior Tutor. Overseas students who need to apply for a new visa should allow additional time for this, and should therefore aim to provide evidence that they have met the academic and medical conditions of their return from suspension a month earlier than indicated below.

- Fitness to Study (10 weeks prior to return):** The College will normally require evidence of your fitness to study six weeks prior to your return; please note that it can take up to four weeks to arrange a non-urgent appointment with the College GP, so aim to contact them and schedule an appointment about ten weeks prior to your anticipated return.
- Academic Conditions:** The deadline for meeting the academic conditions of return differ in each case and are specified in the suspension letter you received from the Senior Tutor.
- Accommodation (8 weeks prior to return):** If you would like to request college-owned accommodation on your return from suspension and have not already done so, please contact the Accommodation Manager (accommodation@wadham.ox.ac.uk) to make them aware of your request.
- Disability Advisory Service (8 weeks prior to return):** If you anticipate it would be helpful to have ongoing support from the University's Disability Advisory Service on your return to studies, it is worth registering with them and scheduling a study-needs assessment well before your return, as this process can take 4-6 weeks; if you have any questions regarding the DAS please contact the Academic Administrator (michael.froggatt@wadham.ox.ac.uk)
- Student Visa (6 weeks prior to return – overseas students only):** Once you have met all the medical and academic conditions of your return from suspension, the Academic Office will be able to issue you with the CAS number you will need to apply for a new visa.
- Student Finance (4 weeks prior to return):** If you have not already done so, you should ensure that you have finance in place for the academic year by submitting an application to your normal funding body. Please note that you will not be able to access finance from Student Finance England or equivalent bodies until approximately two weeks after the College formally confirms to the University your return to studies, which we can only do after you have met the academic and medical conditions of your return from suspension.