

Wadham College: Terms of Undergraduate Suspension

Students who are considering withdrawing from their course, or who might wish to investigate the possibility of suspending their studies for a specified period of time should talk to their tutors/welfare team and to the Tutor for Undergraduates and/or Senior Tutor at the first opportunity. In all cases students are welcome to be accompanied by a friend or member of the College's welfare team.¹ In many cases suspension needs to be determined relatively quickly, and convening of a panel may be both unnecessary and unhelpful if medical details are sensitive. In such cases, the Senior Tutor agrees suspension, in consultation with the student's subject tutors. The normal conditions set for suspension are often similar to those set by academic panels when suspension is agreed.

Reasons for suspension can often be complex and emotional. It is usually preceded by a period of discussion and on-course support. It can be colloquially referred to as suspension, rustication, or intermission, and in all cases it is something that must be agreed with the college rather than being an option which a student can unilaterally pursue. Suspension on academic grounds can be recommended through an academic panel as part of the college's academic monitoring procedures. Suspension on medical grounds, or because of exceptional personal circumstance, may come from a purely medical or welfare situation. In many cases, however, medical and academic factors can interplay, and suspending students can find themselves in difficulty on both fronts. This is a dynamic to which the college is sympathetic, and of which it has a depth of experience. It is part of the reason why cases of suspension are always treated individually and holistically, with the particular student in mind.

1. Medical Conditions

Students suspending from study normally do so on medical grounds (which can include mental health reasons), after very careful consideration, and in discussion with health-care providers, subject tutors, and the Senior Tutor/Tutor for Undergraduates.² Medical suspension will require a letter of support from the College GP, who can in turn be in contact with relevant specialists supporting a student. The student will be required to follow agreed medical advice and appropriate treatment in order to manage their health problems. Return is conditional upon receipt of a medical note from the College GP certifying that the student has received the appropriate and recommended support during their time in suspension, and that they are fit to resume studies.³ Suspended students are thus required to arrange an appointment with the College GP for at least 6 weeks prior to the agreed date of return. Students reading Medicine may also need to satisfy departmental requirements appropriate to the course.

¹ Contact details for the welfare team at Wadham, members of staff and students, can be found at: <http://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare>. Oxford SU's Student Advice Service is also happy to provide support and to accompany students: <http://oxfordsu.org/wellbeing/student-advice>

² Other grounds may include becoming a parent or guardian, or exceptional personal circumstances.

³ Students are encouraged to provide full disclosure to the College GP, who will then only communicate to the College what has been agreed with the student, and what is relevant for return. A student might thus still, quite sensibly, be in receipt of health-care or welfare support on returning to studies, as discussed with the GP but be coping sufficiently for the GP to be able to recommend to the College that they can return to full-time study.

2. Academic Conditions

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. Each case of suspension is unique and will be considered carefully, with appeal procedures set out below. In general, conditions will be set out 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.⁴ 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/additionally be set. Failure to meet academic conditions of return will lead to discussion with the subject tutors and Senior Tutor/ Tutor for Undergraduates as appropriate. If a decision is then made with which the student disagrees – for example, extension of suspension – an Academic panel should be called.

The College has found 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 panel, where suspension may have been preceded by a period of under-performance, and for which additional conditions may be set. Returning without being at a standard sufficient to cope on course, 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.

3. Period of suspension

Any term of study completed by the time of suspension is not normally allowed to be re-taken. 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 are exceptions, most particularly when a condition is raised early on in term and, in consultation with tutors and the Senior Tutor, a student attempts to continue study without suspension, but this proves ultimately unsuccessful. In all cases the Senior Tutor will liaise with the student and college tutors to determine whether, exceptionally, a period of 'repeat study' is justified. As a rule, the closer towards the end of a term that a suspension is requested, the less likely it will be that the term can be 're-taken', but this may depend on the level of work achieved during the term. The University rules that the term's fees must

⁴ <http://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/students/wadham-college-student-handbook/wadham-college-student-handbook/academic-matters--undergraduates>

be paid if a student is on course beyond Monday of 4th week of that term. In practice, this means that all 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.

Given that terms taken are not usually repeated, suspension usually lasts for 12 months. How this time is structured will depend on individual circumstances; on many occasions it will be advisable for a student suspending, on grounds other academic grounds, to take a complete break from their studies for the earlier part of suspension, primarily attending to those factors which have forced suspension, in the latter half of suspension turning towards re-engagement with their studies and catching up with work.

It is occasionally the case that an extension of a suspension, or further periods of suspension, are required. Periods of suspension in aggregate exceeding two years require consultation with further parties (e.g. the University's Education Committee and the relevant Department or Faculty) to ensure that appropriate exam papers can be set and the student can be considered eligible for an Honours degree.

4. Appeal of Conditions

If a student wishes to appeal against the conditions of suspension, further discussion should ensue with the subject tutors and Senior Tutor / Tutor for Undergraduates as appropriate. Again, the student is welcome to be accompanied in these discussions. Failure to agree conditions should 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.

5. Access to academic facilities

Once someone has suspended their studies, they will no longer have "student status" with the University. Nonetheless, students on medical suspension will have access to University facilities as set out by the University. This will include the provision of an active University card, which will in turn allow access to online facilities and texts, use of the University libraries, including borrowing rights from faculty and sub-faculty libraries, and an active College email address. 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. The College will provide a letter of introduction on request if students wish to use a local University library, and 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. Suspended students should contact their subject tutor(s) or the Senior Tutor if they have difficulties in accessing the materials and resources they require.

⁵ http://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/docs/AcademicMonitoringPr_1424190579.pdf

6. Tutor support

The personal tutor of an undergraduate on suspension will email at the beginning of each term. 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 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 mailing lists, and may need to remain in proactive contact with tutors and administrators regarding matters such as option choices on return.

7. Welfare support

A student suspending from their studies at Wadham 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 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 Advisor and Chaplain can assist students with planning their transition to and from suspension, and can give suspended students permission to enter College for meetings on this subject. However, the Welfare Advisor and Chaplain cannot provide ongoing welfare support for suspended students, which should instead be sought from appropriate professionals.

The Welfare Advisor can help with identifying potential sources of support during a student's period of suspension. To arrange a meeting, email welfare.advisor@wadham.ox.ac.uk

The University's Counselling Service may also provide suspended students 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 appointments on Skype to students who have already left residence.

Oxford SU's Student Advice Service (<http://oxfordsu.org/wellbeing/student-advice>) is also happy to give both advice and support to students considering and returning from suspension, and has set up an online discussion forum for students on suspension as well as arranging regular meetings for those coming back to study.

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).

8. 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.⁶ 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.

9. Domestic arrangements

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. It is expected that students will generally leave residence within one week of the agreement to take suspension. 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 College Disability Leads (the Senior Tutor and Domestic Bursar) as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements might be made.

Students suspending are advised to contact the accommodation manager (jo-ann.wheble@wadham.ox.ac.uk) at the point of their suspension, to note their interest in accommodation on return.

10. 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 from the 'Oxford bubble'. 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 a student of the University.

⁶ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/disability?wssl=1>. The college's dedicated link advisor is georgina.heywood@admin.ox.ac.uk, although any member of the service can be contacted in confidence, Further details on college support for students with disabilities can be found at: <http://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/supporting-students-and-staff-with-disabilities>

During suspension a student is required not to come into College except with the written permission or at the invitation of a College Officer or tutor (or Welfare Advisor or Chaplain, as above). If they wish to attend a specific social event, application must be made to the College Dean, who has the right to refuse. This provision applies to access to college-owned accommodation, as well as to the main College site. Students wishing to return to residence to prepare for any pre-term collections should check with the Senior Tutor: if a room is available in College this will normally be agreed. Irrespective of whether collection conditions have been set, it may also be useful for some students to return to Oxford slightly prior to the start of term to acclimatize to the new environment. Again, permission should be sought from the Senior Tutor, and College access / accommodation can be agreed as appropriate and if available.

11. Financial arrangements

While on suspension, a person will no longer have 'student' status with the University and therefore will not be required to pay fees, nor will they normally be eligible for student financial support (including support from the College, such as living out grants).⁷ We will contact the Central University team to inform them of your suspension, and they will in turn inform your student funding body. Students returning from suspension will need to re-contact Student Finance or other funding bodies on their return to remind them of their fee arrangement.

Students on suspension are recommended to make contact with SFE, or other funding body, within a month of receiving the College's formal letter of suspension (normally from the Senior Tutor). This should allow time for notification to have been processed, and give an opportunity to discuss the repayment of any loans or grants for any part-year not taken. The College is not allowed to discuss a student's case directly with SFE, but we would be happy to provide 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.⁸

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

⁷ Students who suspend during Trinity Term should be aware that they will not normally be re-enrolled until the following Michaelmas Term; in such cases SFE may consider this to be a fifteen-month suspension, and there may be a reduction in the maintenance loan to which students are entitled.

⁸ <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/fees/liability/payments/suspension>

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) simply to sit exams. 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.

12. 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. 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>

**Agreed by Governing Body
15th June 2016**