



## **POLICY ON UNDERGRADUATE SUSPENSION OF STATUS**

**RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE:** Education Policy Committee

**RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:** Senior Tutor

**LINKED DOCUMENTS (College):** Undergraduate Fitness to Study Procedure, Academic Disciplinary Procedure for Undergraduate Students, College Disciplinary Code.

**LINKED DOCUMENTS (Other):** University Fitness to Study Policy and associated Statute.

**Annual Review date:** First meeting of Trinity Term

### **Purpose**

1. This document sets out the general principles and processes the College follows when making provision for undergraduate students who request permission to take a temporary break from their studies, or when an undergraduate student is required by the College to interrupt their studies
2. **Definition of terms**

#### **Suspension of status**

Suspension is sometimes colloquially referred to as 'rustication'. For clarity, the College uses the term 'suspension of status', as used by the University. Suspension of status within the University '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 student will not be considered on-course, and will not hold enrolled status.

For the avoidance of doubt within the College the term 'rustication' is used only when imposed as the result of College disciplinary proceedings. It is not used to describe undergraduates who with the agreement of the College suspend their studies on medical, welfare or personal grounds.

#### **Withdrawal**

An undergraduate may withdraw from their studies at any time and by such withdrawal leaves the University, their College, 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 Students who have withdrawn are not enrolled at the University and cannot expect to return to their course at a subsequent point. Notification of the date of an intended withdrawal must be provided by the student in writing to the Academic Administrator.

In the absence of College permission, an undergraduate ceasing their studies, going out of residence without the agreement of the College and the University, or failing to communicate with the College about a return following an agreed period of suspension<sup>1</sup> may be deemed to have withdrawn.

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<sup>1</sup> See Section 10: Returning to study

### **3. Principles of undergraduate suspension of status**

A suspension of status may arise in one of two ways. Firstly, when an undergraduate requests permission to suspend their status on medical or other personal/welfare grounds (for example, bereavement, parenthood<sup>2</sup>, 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 study<sup>3</sup> or (ii) for disciplinary reasons (academic or non-academic). Where appropriate, suspension may therefore follow action taken under the Undergraduate Fitness to Study Procedure, the Academic Disciplinary Procedure for Undergraduate Students, or the College's Disciplinary Code.

### **4. No right to suspend status**

Undergraduates do not have the right to suspend status, which can only be granted by College. College will consider sympathetically 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 College GP, in support of the request. 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 Doctors. This evidence is to be communicated directly to the College.

College will not grant suspension of status solely on the grounds that an undergraduate is, or feels, ill prepared for examinations, or that they have underperformed/ are underperforming on course. Applications on the grounds of a request for a break or gap year will not be considered, although exceptional opportunities, for example internships, or other academic opportunities supported by tutors, or representing their country in a sport, may be considered

Sometimes the nature of a situation may be such that, regrettably, the course of study cannot be completed at all. The interruption may be too prolonged or too repeated to allow for the measure of continuity that is necessary successfully to participate in the relevant course, with the result that withdrawal is the only option available. The College will seek to be as supportive as possible throughout such a process.

### **5. Consideration of cases**

A student who wishes to seek permission to suspend status should request a meeting with the Senior Tutor.

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<sup>2</sup> University guidance on [resources for 'Student parents'](#)

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the College's [Undergraduate Student Handbook](#), to the University's [Fitness to Study policy](#), and to the associated [University Statute](#).

Cases of suspension will be considered on an individual basis, taking into account all relevant information (including medical) and are always treated in the round, with the particular undergraduate in mind. The College will do everything it can to ensure that the student understands the process of applying for, being required to take, and returning from, a period of suspension from their studies and that the student receives support throughout this process.

The College expects that a request to suspend status will have been preceded by a period of discussion and on-course support. A student whose situation is or may be covered by this Policy on Suspension of Status is encouraged in the first instance to consult the relevant sources of support available to them in College. These include their Subject Tutor(s), the Senior Tutor, the Head of Student Wellbeing, the Tutor for Women, the College Medical Practice, the College Nurse, the College Counsellor, and JCR Welfare Officers. Further information is available in the College's [Undergraduate Student Handbook](#) and on the [University's website](#).

The College will do all 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.<sup>4</sup>

The College itself does not set out specific rules covering the length of time a student may take to complete their course but follows those set out in the University Examination Regulations<sup>5</sup>

## **6. Timeframe for decision making**

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

Any decision 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 time (no later than 14 days from the date of informal agreement, subject to receipt of necessary medical evidence).

Discussion regarding suspension of status will also include discussion of domestic and other arrangements, such as 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 being available on the student's return to their studies.

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<sup>4</sup> University procedures allow for the possibility of re-structuring courses as a 'reasonable adjustment' where this is the best response to an ongoing disability condition. Applications for such re-structuring, or for other major adjustments to assessment on the grounds of disability, are made through the College to the University's Education Committee.

<sup>5</sup> See University Regulation 4.11 [Maximum time for Honours](#)

## **7. Form of communication**

Where the Policy requires communication to a student in writing, the normal method is by email to the recipient's personal ox.ac.uk email address. An email will be regarded as having been delivered to the recipient at the time of sending.

The Academic Administrator is the primary contact for a suspending student in connection with any matter relating to the suspension. In the event of a period of suspension being granted, the student suspending will normally be encouraged to communicate with their subject tutor(s) to discuss academic aspects of the period of suspension and return to study.

## **8. Appeal**

If an undergraduate is dissatisfied with the College's decision, they should follow the appeals procedure as set out in the College's [Undergraduate Student Handbook](#).

## **9. Suspension of status on medical grounds**

An undergraduate whose status is suspended on medical grounds will normally be expected to follow medical advice and appropriate treatment as agreed with a medical professional (typically the College Doctor) in order to address their health problems. Students reading Medicine should be aware that they 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 undergraduate 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 undergraduate during the period of suspension. The College will be responsible for determining, in the light of the doctor's assessment and if necessary in consultation with the College Medical Practice, whether the undergraduate is fit to study and whether any other conditions of return have also been met. 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 Doctors.

Students are advised that confirmation of fitness to return should be obtained no earlier than 14 weeks and no later than 4 weeks before the first day of the full term in which the student's return is anticipated to ensure that paperwork can be submitted in good time, outstanding conditions addressed, and appropriate support or necessary reasonable adjustments put in place. 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 healthcare or welfare support on returning to studies, as agreed with the College Doctor, but be managing their medical condition sufficiently well for the College Doctor to be able to recommend to College that they are able to return to full-time study.

Undergraduates are encouraged to make 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. The College is responsible for determining, in the light of the available evidence and the medical professional's assessment, whether the student is fit to study and whether any other conditions of return have also been met.

## 10. **Returning to study**

All undergraduates who are on course, 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). Students may be asked to meet with the Senior Tutor and/or their subject Tutor(s) and/or the Head of Student Wellbeing prior to their return to discuss progress made and readiness for return.

Returning without being able to fulfil the academic requirements of the course and to maintain good academic standing within the College may be seriously detrimental to an undergraduate's health, and can limit an undergraduate's opportunities to complete their studies successfully. Where academic conditions are set for undergraduates returning from medical suspension (and where the undergraduate is not concurrently under an academic disciplinary process) this would be on pedagogical grounds and/or to support a student in their return in order to ensure that they are prepared for the proposed point of re-entry; they should not therefore be seen as a punitive measure, by either the Tutor(s) or the returning student.

If an undergraduate is 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.

Where suspension of status has been decided on academic disciplinary grounds the College will normally set academic conditions of return (which may include one or more Collections to be sat shortly before or at the point of return).

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.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst the College will make all reasonable efforts to contact students with regard to their prospective return to study, if no response is received to communications from the College, either by email or letters, about arrangements for a student's return, or if any

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<sup>6</sup> See the University's [Common Framework for support disabled students](#)

required confirmation of fitness to study is not provided in good time, the student may not be permitted to return and may be deemed to have withdrawn from their course.

## **11. Period of suspension**

Any term of study that has been completed by the time of suspension cannot normally be repeated. Circumstances that have affected study in a given term should normally already have been raised with tutors and/or relevant college officers 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 appropriate college officer, an undergraduate attempts to continue study without suspension, but this attempt is ultimately unsuccessful, or where a serious situation has not been recognized at an earlier stage. In such cases any period of 'repeat study' cannot be assumed, but might be considered<sup>7</sup>, provided supporting evidence is available.

A single period of suspension of status will not normally exceed one year. In some cases, the College will consider a request for an extension or further period of suspension, following a fresh consideration of the case. Periods of suspension in aggregate extending beyond one year will require consultation with further parties (e.g. the University's Education Committee and the relevant Department or Faculty); if a period of suspension lasts for more than two years (three in the case of students on a four-year course), a returning student would be 'Overstanding for Honours' without dispensation from the relevant University Regulation (see footnote5). It would be unusual for any undergraduate to be suspended from studies for a total of more than two years across their course.

In all cases of suspension, consideration will need to be given to the assessment of any University work already submitted, changes in Examination Regulations, and whether the suspending student will be 'Overstanding for Honours'. This should be discussed with the student prior to suspension.

## **12. Access to College facilities**

During a suspension of status, it is not expected that a student will have cause to come onto the College site frequently. Suspended students are not permitted to stay in College accommodation beyond an initial period (usually no more than seven days from the point at which suspension is agreed with the Senior Tutor) allowing for arrangements to be made to return home. Suspended students may not take any ongoing part in College organisations or activities, but they may still access the site as a guest, and should email the Senior Tutor for permission to visit. Students may also attend any meeting arranged with a tutor, and can access the College library, but cannot borrow books unless special arrangements are made with the librarian through

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<sup>7</sup> University regulations and processes allow for flexibility where there is good cause. However, assessment structures start from the basis that all undergraduates will have the same number of terms, and time, to study and prepare for examinations and colleges need to ensure that suspension does not lead to unfair advantage in relation to other undergraduates.

their tutor. The welfare provision available to students during a period of suspension is detailed below.

### 13. **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. 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 address.

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

During a period of suspension, undergraduates may not normally be included on routine mailing lists, and may need to remain in proactive contact with Tutors and administrators regarding matters such as option choices on return.

### 14. **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. An undergraduate whose status is suspended will inevitably face a certain amount of disruption to their support networks. As part of preparing to suspend, undergraduates should consider how to ensure that they will have sufficient support during the suspension of their status.

Undergraduates who plan to remain in the city of Oxford during their period of suspension should be aware that this can be a challenging option, and are asked to consider carefully how they will spend their time as an Oxford resident who is not currently on course.

Students may find it helpful to contact the College's [Head of Student Wellbeing](#) before returning to explore what support will be available to them to help re-engage with academic work and college life after their return.

Undergraduates whose status is suspended will normally have access to certain University welfare services as set out by the University<sup>8</sup>; however, this support is not a substitute for specialist support for the relevant medical condition.

The University's Counselling Service may also provide students whose status is suspended with help on the same basis as 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.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/undergraduate/status?wssl=1>

OUSU's Student Advice Service can provide both advice and support to undergraduates considering and returning from suspension<sup>9</sup>.

The University's Careers Service is also available to students whose status is suspended<sup>10</sup>.

#### 15. **Students with disabilities**

For some undergraduates, medical factors that lead to suspension of status may suggest a condition that can be supported by the University's Disability Advisory Service<sup>11</sup>. If an undergraduate thinks 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 some time and an undergraduate may put themselves at a disadvantage if appropriate support cannot be put in place by the time of their return. Students may also discuss this in the first instance with the [College Disability Coordinator](#).

#### 16. **Fees**

The University's rules state that the term's fees must normally be paid if an undergraduate is on course beyond Monday of 4th week of that term. In practice, this normally 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. A 'fee waiver' may be discussed in certain cases, where a lack of engagement in teaching/learning during a term can be verified, and may be discussed with the Academic Administrator in the first instance.

#### 17. **Financial arrangements**

While their status is suspended, an undergraduate will not be required to pay fees, nor will they normally be eligible for financial support from the College. If suspension of status is agreed, the College will inform the University's administration, which will in turn inform any UK student funding body.

Undergraduates with suspended status are recommended to contact Student Finance England (SFE), or other relevant funding body, within a month of receiving the College's formal confirmation of suspension. This should allow time for notification to have been processed. The College is only allowed to discuss an undergraduate's case directly with SFE or any other agency where a student has set up permission for this to take place, but can be asked to provide any official letters required if a student is negotiating provision.

In some circumstances of medical suspension, a student may be able to receive an additional 60 days' worth of funding from SFE and, if they have interrupted their studies for Compelling Personal Reasons (CPR) and can demonstrate financial hardship, they

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

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/>

<sup>11</sup> [www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/disability/eligibility](http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/disability/eligibility)

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<sup>12</sup>. Other UK funding agencies may have different arrangements in place to support these circumstances, which students will need to check directly.

Undergraduates returning from suspension will need to re-contact SFE, or any 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 finalized, 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.

As part of the process to release any funding from Student Finance, students will need to complete the on-line registration process via their student self-service page as soon as possible after they have resumed study.

Students are advised to contact their Local Council as soon as possible after suspension of status to inform them of their situation and clarify whether or not they will be liable for Council Tax<sup>13</sup>.

Undergraduates who are withdrawing from exams only do not normally repeat the term on return from suspension, but return to sit exams only. These undergraduates will not be liable for tuition fees for that period, 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.

## 18. **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's

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

<sup>13</sup> If a student whose status is suspended finds themselves in hardship, they can apply for a discretionary discount under section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act. The Council policy for discretionary discounts should be found on [local government websites](#). Students staying in Oxford may contact the Academic Office to request that a letter be sent to Oxford City Council asking the council to consider the student for remission from council tax if the student's status is suspended on, for example, medical grounds.

Student Registry provide details to the Council of enrolled students and their term-time address in Oxford to facilitate the Council's processing of student exemptions. A student who becomes ineligible for a student council tax exemption, as they no longer have enrolled status, will immediately become liable for payment and the Council will seek recovery of discounts, which may include interest. This liability will commence at the start of the period of suspension.

status is suspended, and students are advised to check on the [University's webpages](#) for overseas students for further information on their rights and responsibilities. Students can also access individual advice via [tier4compliance@admin.co.uk](mailto:tier4compliance@admin.co.uk).

When you are ready to return to College to resume your studies and have completed the return to studies paperwork, you will need a new CAS number [to apply for a Student visa in your home country](#). You must complete the process and obtain your Student visa before coming to the UK. It is not possible to return on a visitor visa and then switch to a student visa as the University cannot enrol students on a visitor visa. These are Home Office requirements that students and the University must follow.

## POLICY HISTORY

<b><i>Date of GB approval</i></b>	<b><i>Brief summary of changes</i></b>	<b><i>Confirmation that linked documents have updated if necessary</i></b>	<b><i>College policy register updated</i></b>
16/02/2022	Update of existing policy to reflect new Conference of Colleges template	Confirmed	05/05/2023
	Update to paragraphs 10 & 14 to reflect appointment of Head of Student Wellbeing		30/08/2023
22/05/2024	<p>Update to paragraph 10, to confirm that student may be deemed to have withdrawn from course if no response is received to communications from the College about arrangements for a student's return, or if any required confirmation of fitness to study is not provided in good time.</p> <p>Update to paragraph 18 to remind students who are required to obtain a student visa of Home Office requirements that they must obtain their visa before coming to the UK.</p>		12/08/24

