



Worcester College Policy and Procedures on Suspension of Status

Approved by Governing Body on 15 May 2019.

1. Definitions

1.1 Suspension of status

Suspension of status is sometimes colloquially referred to as 'suspension', 'rustication', or 'intermission', but it is recommended, for clarity, that 'suspension of status' is the term to be used, as it is by the University. During this period an undergraduate will not be considered to be on course, and will not hold enrolled status.

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absence of College permission, an undergraduate ceasing their studies or going out of residence will be deemed to have withdrawn.

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 Students who have withdrawn are not enrolled at the University and cannot expect to return to their studies at a subsequent point.

2. Principles of undergraduate suspension of status

2.1. 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).

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.

¹ For practical information from the University on 'Student parents', see <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/childcare?wssl=1>.

² Please refer to the Student Handbook <https://www.worc.ox.ac.uk/intranet/students/handbook>, and to the University's Fitness to Study policy: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/fitness-to-study?wssl=1>, and the associated University statute: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/787-121.shtml>.

³ Please refer to the Student Handbook section 'Non-academic discipline' <https://www.worc.ox.ac.uk/intranet/students/handbook>

2.2 Right to suspend status

Undergraduates do not have an automatic 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.

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 the country in a sport, may be considered.

2.3 Consideration of cases

Cases of suspension will be considered on an individual basis, taking into account all relevant information (including medical) and are always treated holistically, with the particular undergraduate in mind.

College expects that a request to suspend status is preceded by a period of discussion with the Welfare team and Tutors. The Academic Administrator is the main point of contact for administration of the suspension of status and return. The Senior Tutor, in consultation with the Dean and Welfare Officer, will review the evidence presented, determine whether a period of suspension is appropriate in the given case, and if so agree the conditions of return. Students may be asked to attend a meeting for further discussion.

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 will not⁴.

2.4 Communication with tutors

In the event of a period of suspension being granted, the undergraduate suspending should normally meet with their subject tutor(s) before leaving College to discuss academic aspects of the period of suspension and return to study.

2.5 Decision and appeal

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 (within 28 working 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, and the possibility of college accommodation on return to studies.

⁴ 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, should be made through College to Education Committee.

If an undergraduate is dissatisfied with the college's decision, they should follow the complaints procedures as set out in the Student Handbook⁵.

2.6 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 GP) in order to address their health problems.

After suspension on medical grounds, and before an undergraduate is permitted to resume study, the college must receive a medical assessment from a medical professional stating whether or not the undergraduate is medically fit to resume study. Cases may also be assessed by the College GP, whose assessment will, as appropriate, take into account reports provided by other clinicians involved in the care of the undergraduate during the period of suspension. Undergraduates are encouraged to make full disclosure to the GP, who will then only communicate to the college what has been agreed with the undergraduate, and what is relevant for return. The college is responsible for determining, in the light of the GP's assessment, whether the undergraduate is fit to study and whether any other conditions of return have also been met (see footnote 2).

Undergraduates whose status is suspended are advised to start this process two months prior to their expected return date in liaison with the Academic office 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 GP, but be managing their medical condition sufficiently well for the GP to be able to recommend to College that they can return to full-time study.

2.7 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 Dean and/or Welfare Officer prior to 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 may be seriously detrimental to an undergraduate's health, and can limit an undergraduate's opportunities to complete their studies successfully. It may be appropriate to set academic as well as medical conditions of return. 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 undergraduates in their return, and to ensure that they are prepared for the proposed point of re-entry, rather than as a punitive measure.

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

⁵ <https://www.worc.ox.ac.uk/intranet/students/handbook>

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, colleges will follow the collegiate University's common framework, noting the requirement to make reasonable adjustments insofar as they do not compromise academic competence standards⁶

2.8 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 already have been raised with tutors and/or relevant college officers as and when they arose 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 considered⁷.

A single period of suspension of status will not normally exceed one year. In some cases colleges will consider 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. Education Committee and the relevant Department or Faculty); if a period of suspension lasts for two years, a returning student would be 'Overstanding for Honours' without dispensation. 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 exam regulations, and whether that undergraduate will be 'Overstanding for Honours'. This should be discussed with the Academic Administrator prior to suspension.

2.9 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.

2.10 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 nonpayment of library fines), and an active University email address.

⁶ http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/aad/documents/disability/A_common_framework_for_supporting_disabled_students.pdf

⁷ 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

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.

2.11 Communication during a period of suspension

In the letter from the Senior Tutor confirming the granting of a period of suspension, a primary contact person will be designated whom the suspending undergraduate should in the first instance contact in connection with any matter relating to the suspension. Suspended students can also contact their subject tutor(s).

2.12 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 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 contact person identified in the confirmation letter 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 their tutor. The welfare provision available to students during a period of suspension is detailed below.

2.13 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 are staying in the city of Oxford 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 contact the college's Student Welfare Officer during the period of suspension for queries relating to support available in College, arrangements for return, organising disability support, etc. The Student Welfare Officer will make contact prior to a student's return to liaise regarding any arrangements for return.

Undergraduates whose status is suspended will normally have access to certain University welfare services as set out by the University⁸; 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 appointments on Skype 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.

⁸ <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 suspension⁹.

The University's Careers Service is also available to students whose status is suspended¹⁰.

2.14 Disability

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 Service¹¹. If an undergraduate 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 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's Student Welfare Officer.

2.15 Financial arrangements

While their status is suspended, an undergraduate will not be required to pay fees, nor will they normally be eligible for student financial support. If suspension of status is agreed, the college will inform the University administration, which will in turn inform any UK student funding body. Undergraduates with suspended status are recommended to make contact with Student Finance England (SFE), or other 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 an undergraduate is negotiating provision.

In some circumstances of medical suspension an undergraduate is able to receive an additional 60 days' worth of funding from SFE and, if an undergraduate 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 advise¹². Each of the other UK funding agencies has 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, undergraduates will need to complete the on-line registration process via their student self-service page once their return to study has been confirmed.

⁹ <http://ousu.org/advice/student-advice-service/>

¹⁰ <http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/>

¹¹ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/disability>

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

Undergraduates 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 Tax¹³.

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.

2.16 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's 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: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/visa/during/changes>. Students can also access individual advice via tier4compliance@admin.co.uk.

¹³ As of August 2017, following a review of local policy, Oxford City Council will no longer offer an exemption from Council Tax for students whose status is suspended. 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 can be found on the local government website. 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