Guidance on Undergraduate Suspension of Status on Medical Grounds

Definition of terms

Suspension of status

Suspension of status is sometimes colloquially referred to as ‘rustication’, or ‘intermission’. ‘Suspension of status’, or ‘suspension’ are the terms used in this policy. During this period an undergraduate will not be considered on-course, and will not hold enrolled status, though they will remain a member of the college and university.

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 Students who have withdrawn are not enrolled at the University and cannot expect to return to their studies at a subsequent point.

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absence of College permission, an undergraduate ceasing their studies or going out of residence will be deemed to have withdrawn.

This policy covers the situation when an undergraduate wishes to suspend status on medical or other personal/welfare grounds (for example, bereavement, parenthood, need to care for others, etc). The aim of suspension of status is to enable the student to have time out to recover, or to focus on their personal issues, and then to return successfully to their course.

Policy on undergraduate suspension of status for health or welfare reasons

1. Pembroke will consider requests for suspension of status on medical, or other personal or welfare grounds, sympathetically. Cases will be considered on an individual basis, taking into account all relevant information (including medical) and are always treated holistically. A request to suspend status will normally be preceded by a period of discussion and on-course support. The Academic Director will make the decision as to whether a student may suspend, in consultation with the student’s tutors and, where relevant, with other college officers and medical professionals.

2. Suspension of status on medical grounds normally requires medical certification, from the doctor with whom a student is registered in Oxford, or another medical practitioner who is familiar with the student, in support of the request.

3. Any decision made by a college regarding suspension of status, and the conditions attached to that suspension and return, will be confirmed in writing by the college within 28 working days from the date of informal agreement (NB in practice, often the confirmation will be sent within 7-10 working days). This letter will include information about the process of suspension, the support available to suspended students, and a plan for the student’s return. If an undergraduate is dissatisfied with the college’s decision, they may make a complaint to the Master under section 5 of the college regulations.

4. An undergraduate whose status is suspended on medical grounds will be expected to follow medical advice and appropriate treatment as agreed with a doctor (typically the GP with whom a student is registered in Oxford, but this may be a home doctor by agreement) in order to address their health problems.

5. Before an undergraduate is permitted to resume study, the college must receive a medical assessment from a doctor, stating whether or not the undergraduate is medically fit to resume study. The Academic Director will be responsible for determining, in the light of the doctor’s assessment and, if necessary, in consultation with the student, the student’s tutors, relevant college officers and medical professionals, whether the undergraduate is fit to study and whether any other conditions of return have also been met.

6. 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.

7. On their return from suspension of status, undergraduates are expected to be in good academic standing. 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. The college will wish to be assured that returning undergraduates are ready to reintegrate into their course at an appropriate level.

8. Undergraduates who are suspended are encouraged, when medically fit to do so, to engage with their studies. By agreement with the student and their tutors, college may arrange for them to have academic support during their absence and may also require them to undertake academic work, including sitting collections on their return. Such collections would not be ‘penal’ collections, but would be diagnostic, aimed at supporting the student’s re-integration into the course.

9. If an undergraduate was on a disciplinary process at the point of suspension, this would be reviewed to determine whether their medical condition provided sufficient mitigation for them to be removed from that process, or for that process to be adjusted. If that is not the case, the student will return at the same point in the disciplinary process.

10. Students will normally return at the same point in the academic year where they suspended. However, in exceptional circumstances where study has been severely disrupted and it is considered to be in the interests of the student, one or more terms of study may be repeated by agreement with the student’s tutors and the Academic Director.

11. A single period of suspension of status will not normally exceed one year. The college may consider an extension, or further period of suspension, following a fresh consideration of the case.

12. 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 undergraduate prior to suspension.

13. 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., other than by individual agreement.

**Finance**

14. 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.

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

16. 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 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.

17. 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 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.

18. 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 Tax.

Access to university and college facilities while suspended and return to study

19. 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 and an active University email address.

20. 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.

21. The college will provide a letter of introduction on request if undergraduates wish to use a local University library.

22. During suspension of status, an undergraduate may enter the college to use the library, subject to the agreement of the librarian; may be required to visit the college for meetings with tutors and/or the academic office, and may visit for other purposes only with the prior agreement of the Academic Director. Requests will be treated sympathetically where possible.

23. Undergraduates whose status is suspended will have access to University welfare services; however, this support is generally not a substitute for specialist support for the relevant medical condition. The University’s Counselling Service provides 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 other professional healthcare) 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.

24. OUSU’s Student Advice Service and Suscam (an OUSU-run group for suspended students) can provide advice and support to undergraduates considering and returning from suspension. The University’s Careers Service is also available to students whose status is suspended.

25. For some undergraduates, medical factors that led to suspension of status may suggest a condition that can be supported by the University’s Disability Advisory Service. If an undergraduate suspects that support from the service might be helpful, they should make contact as early as possible prior to their return so that appropriate assessment can be scheduled and support put in place.

Overseas students

26. Students who have been studying at Oxford on a student visa may 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.