Wadham College: Terms of Undergraduate Suspension

August 2014

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 and to the Tutor for Undergraduates and/or Senior Tutor at the first opportunity. 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 medical suspension is agreed.

1. Medical Conditions

Students suspending from study normally do so on medical grounds, after very careful consideration, and in discussion with health-care providers, subject tutors, and the Senior Tutor/Tutor for Undergraduates. Medical suspension will require a letter of support from the College GP. The student will then be required to follow this medical advice and appropriate treatment in order to deal with 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. Suspended students are thus required to arrange an appointment with the College GP at least 6 weeks prior to the agreed date of return.

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. This may often take the form of one or more invigilated collections one month prior to the anticipated date of return, with the expectation that a mark of 60 or more be gained. Essays, with a similar expectation of academic achievement, may alternatively/additionally be set.

Students do sometimes enquire as to the logic of requiring a predetermined academic standard on return. In practice we have found this to be a good 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. 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.

Tutors need to 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. 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.

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1 Other grounds may include becoming a parent or guardian, or exceptional personal circumstances.
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 is 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 be paid if a student is on course beyond Monday of 4th week of that term.

4. Appeal of Conditions
If a student wishes to appeal against the conditions of suspension, further discussion should ensue with the subject tutors, Senior Tutor / Tutor for Undergraduates as appropriate. Failure to agree conditions should lead to the calling of an academic panel.

5. Access to academic facilities
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, 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.

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 light 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 regards to any communications relating to course and/or examination entries.

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 (which includes students suspending for mental health reasons) 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 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 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@wadh.ox.ac.uk

The University’s Counselling service may also provide suspended students 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 to students who have already left residence on Skype.

8. Domestic arrangements
The College will attempt to re-let 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 and in cases of medical suspension no further accommodation charge is usually made (with any rent paid in advance refunded). Students leaving shared sets will need to notify their sharing partner as other students may be offered use of that room.

The College does not guarantee accommodation on return; entitlement to a college room is for the first attempt at a year of studies only. However, special arrangements will be made where possible for students with disabilities. In the vast majority of cases returning students are in fact offered college accommodation, though sometimes in Merifield, as others students leave residence. By the very nature of these cases such vacancies cannot be guaranteed in advance, but are likely.

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

9. Access to College
During suspension a student is normally required not to come into College except with the written permission or at the invitation of a College Officer or tutor (or Welfare Advisor, 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 Merifield, as well as to the main College site. Although students on suspension may well find further contact with their on-course friends helpful, such contact may be made off-site and students remaining on-course need to be able to prioritize their academic commitments.
As noted above, 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.

10. 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 be eligible for student financial support. 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 body SLC on their return to remind them of their fee arrangement.

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.

11. 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.