

FITNESS TO STUDY GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

1. Nuffield College is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive environment within which all students can realise their academic potential and successfully complete their courses of study. The purpose of this document is to set out procedures and policies within College in respect Fitness to Study matters. It is divided into three parts:

Part A describes in general terms the sources of support which are available to students who are experiencing medical, psychological, or emotional problems.

Part B outlines the framework which will be used by the College when managing interruptions to courses of study (including delays to the start of a course).

Part C describes the procedures which will be followed in the event that either the student or his or her¹ department does not accept the intermission arrangements being proposed by the College.

2. For the purposes of this policy, and in line with the definition employed by the University, 'Fitness to Study' refers to a student's fitness:
 - to commence a distinct course of academic study; or
 - to continue with his/her current course of academic study; or
 - to return to his/her current or another course of academic study

and his or her ability to meet:

- the reasonable academic requirements of the course or programme; and
 - the reasonable social and behavioural requirements of a student member (whether resident in college or not) without his or her physical, mental, emotional or psychological health or state having an unacceptably deleterious impact upon the health, safety and/or welfare of the student and/or other students and/or University or college staff.
3. This document should be read in conjunction with the College's *Guidelines on Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare*, which note that in certain circumstances the College may owe a duty of care to individuals that cannot be discharged unless action is taken on the basis of information which has been provided in confidence. Such circumstances may include some elements of the Fitness to Study processes described below. In particular, in order to fulfil its responsibilities under these procedures, the College may need to disclose relevant information to the individual's department or faculty, in order for a decision about his or her fitness to study to be taken. Information will normally only be disclosed with the individual's consent, and the transmission of any information will always be undertaken with the utmost discretion and on a need-to-know basis.
 4. Queries or concerns about the information provided in this document should be sent to the [Senior Tutor](#) in the first instance.

¹ Although this document uses "his/her" and "he/she" the College and the University acknowledge that some people do not identify with binary genders and prefer to use other pronouns.

A. SOURCES OF SUPPORT

1. Nuffield College recognises that many students will encounter medical, psychological, or emotional challenges of some kind during the course of their studies, and that both the causes of such challenges and their impact can vary significantly from individual to individual. The College aims to ensure that all of its students are fully aware of the sources of support and advice which are available both within the College and outside it, and is committed to fostering a supportive environment within which students feel able to seek help as appropriate, and which enables difficulties to be addressed and where possible resolved at the earliest opportunity.
2. Outlined below are the sources of support and advice within the collegiate University to which students experiencing challenges can turn. Such challenges might include: anxiety, depression or other mental health difficulties (academic-related or otherwise); disability; medical issues; harassment, bullying, or inappropriate conduct; and equality and diversity. There is no obligation to approach any of the sources listed below in any particular order, but the following points are worth emphasising:
 - i. Students experiencing challenges will almost always find it helpful to talk to *someone* about their situation, and are encouraged to do so at the earliest possible opportunity. Many personal problems experienced at University can be resolved quickly by talking to a family member or a friend or by seeking help from one of the sources described below.
 - ii. The College contains a particularly useful set of people who are in a position to provide support and advice of one kind or another, and students may find it helpful to start here in the first instance.
 - iii. Students are encouraged to engage as much as possible with the support process, both by seeking advice as early as possible, and by responding constructively to advice given.
 - iv. Students can be reassured that whatever matters they discuss will be treated in line with the University's and the College's guidelines on confidentiality.
3. Within College, students may find it helpful to contact the Senior Tutor (Eleni Kechagia-Ovseiko), who also acts as the College's Disability Lead; the College Counsellor (Victoria Plant); the Equality and Diversity Officer (Gwen Sasse); the President of the JCR (currently Chris Jacobi) or the JCR's Welfare Officer (currently Matthias Dilling); the Junior Dean (currently Henning Tamm); their College Supervisor or one of the three subject group chairs. Contact details for each of these people is available from the [Phone List](#) on the College Intranet.
4. Across the University more widely, students can consult the University [Counselling Service](#) (which also runs a series of workshops designed to provide practical advice and skills on, for example, examination stress, insomnia, and generalised anxiety); and can seek advice from the University [Disability Advisory Service](#) as appropriate (the Senior Tutor or other College officer can also liaise with the Disability Office on the student's behalf). They may also find it helpful to approach their University Supervisor, Head of Department, or Departmental Administrator. Student Advisors at the Oxford University Student Union provide a free, confidential and impartial [advice service](#), and Oxford Nightline (oxfordnightline.org) is a listening, information and support service run by students, for students.
5. Beyond the collegiate University, students are able to seek professional medical advice from their GP, and Nuffield students are encouraged (but not obliged) to register with the College Doctor, [19 Beaumont Street](#). The Samaritans offers a listening and support service, while [TalkingSpace Oxford](#) provides a range of therapies that have been

approved by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) for the treatment of common problems such as depression and anxiety.

6. As noted earlier, while many challenges experienced by students are not trivial, the majority can be resolved quickly by seeking advice from one of the sources above. Even in those cases where a problem cannot be resolved quickly, approaching one of the sources above will form an important first step in the support process.

B. INTERRUPTIONS TO STUDY

1. Nuffield is committed to protecting and promoting the welfare of all members of the College, and to enabling its students to fulfil their academic potential. Students admitted to the College are normally expected to commence and complete their course of study within the specified duration of the relevant programme. However, the College recognizes that a delay or an intermission to study will sometimes be necessary and in the interests of the student's health or welfare, and that in some cases reasonable adjustments will be required in order to enable a student to commence or return to study. This section sets out a broad framework within which such cases will be managed, though it is important to note that each case will be managed on an individual basis, taking account of the specific circumstances of the student involved.
2. Where the College is informed (by the student or a representative acting on his or her behalf) **in advance of the start of a course of study** that a student is experiencing medical, psychological, or emotional challenges which are likely to compromise his or her ability to commence the course, the Senior Tutor (or another appropriate College Officer acting on his or her behalf) will normally take the following actions:
 - Make contact with the student, and where possible request medical certification which describes the nature of the student's condition and provides a prognosis for his or her recovery.
 - Seek the student's consent to discuss (in a discreet manner and on a need-to-know basis) his or her circumstances with other relevant College or University officers.
 - Consider – on the basis of any medical documentation, on advice sought from the University Disability Office as appropriate, and in conjunction with the relevant College or University officers – whether reasonable adjustments could be made by the College or the University which would enable the student to commence and make appropriate progress on his or her course of study.
 - Facilitate – in consultation with the relevant subject group chair in College, with the Director of Graduate Studies or other appropriate departmental officer, and with the student's supervisor(s) – the arrangements for the student in question to be granted an appropriate period of intermission from his or her studies. For doctoral students, this would normally take the form of deferring entry or suspending status for one or more terms. Given the nature of postgraduate taught courses, students on those programmes who are likely to miss a substantial part of the first year of study (e.g., more than half a term) will normally be expected to defer their entry by one year. The exact nature of any intermission will depend on the details of each case and the advice provided in any available medical certificates.
 - Make contact with the student at appropriate intervals during the intermission or period of deferral.
 - At the end of the intermission or period of deferral, follow the process governing arrangements for resuming a course of study described below, in paragraph 4 of this section.
 - Maintain (securely and confidentially) comprehensive written records throughout the process. Follow the principles set out in the College's *Guidance on Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare*.

3. Where the College is informed or becomes aware that a student **enrolled on a course of study** is experiencing medical, psychological, or emotional challenges which appear to be compromising his or her ability to continue with his or her current course of academic study, the Senior Tutor (or another appropriate College Officer acting on his or her behalf) will normally take the following actions:
 - Make contact with the student, and where possible request medical certification which describes the nature of the student's condition and provides a prognosis for his or her recovery.
 - Seek the student's consent to discuss (in a discreet manner and on a need-to-know basis) his or her circumstances with other relevant College or University officers.
 - Consider – on the basis of any medical documentation, on advice sought from the University Disability Office as appropriate, and in conjunction with the relevant College or University officers – whether reasonable adjustments could be made by the College or the University which would enable the student to commence and make appropriate progress on his or her course of study.
 - Facilitate – in consultation with the relevant subject group chair in College, with the Director of Graduate Studies or other appropriate departmental officer, and with the student's supervisor(s) – the arrangements for the student in question to be granted an appropriate period of intermission from his or her studies. The exact nature of any intermission will depend on the details of each case (in particular the type of course and the point at which the intermission is sought), and on advice provided in any available medical certificates.
 - Make contact with the student at appropriate intervals during the intermission.
 - At the end of the intermission, follow the process governing arrangements for resuming a course of study described below, in paragraph 4 of this section.
 - Maintain (securely and confidentially) comprehensive written records throughout the process. Follow the principles set out in the College's *Guidance on Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare*.

4. Towards the end of any period of intermission or deferral, the Senior Tutor (or another appropriate College Officer acting on his or her behalf) will normally take the following actions in order to confirm that the student in question is fit to **return to study**:
 - Make contact with the student to establish his or her plans in respect of a possible return to (or commencement of) study.
 - Where appropriate, request medical certification which confirms in principle that the student is fit to resume or commence his or her course of study.
 - Update and consult as appropriate (and with the consent of the student concerned) other relevant College and departmental officers, and facilitate arrangements for the student to formally return to study.
 - Consider – on the basis of any medical documentation and advice sought from the University Disability Office as appropriate and in conjunction with the relevant departmental officer – whether any reasonable adjustments need to be made in respect of the student's return to study.
 - Ensure that a plan of study / progress is agreed between the student and his or her supervisor or other appropriate departmental officer.
 - Initiate appropriate levels of regular contact with the student following his or her return to study.
 - Maintain (securely and confidentially) comprehensive written records throughout the process. Follow the principles set out in the College's *Guidance on Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare*.

C. COLLEGE APPEAL PROCEDURES AND THE UNIVERSITY'S FITNESS TO STUDY PANEL

1. In following the processes set out in section B above, the College's overall approach will be consensual. To that end, its aim will be to discuss and agree the details of any intermission arrangements with the student and the relevant department in advance of an intermission being sought or granted. This section describes the procedures which will be followed in the event that either the student or the department does not accept the intermission arrangements being proposed by the College.
2. Any student granted an intermission, or who has an intermission imposed upon him or her, may appeal against the decision on the grounds that it is not appropriate to his or her case. The student must give notice of appeal in writing (by email will suffice) to the Warden within seven days of being notified that an intermission has been imposed or granted. This period may be extended at the discretion of the Warden. The student's appeal shall be considered by a panel consisting of the Senior Fellow, the Dean, and the Equality and Diversity Officer. The Senior Fellow shall act as chair of the panel. If anyone who would otherwise have served on the panel has been involved with the case, has a supervisory relationship with the student in question, or is for some other reason unable to serve, the Warden will appoint a Fellow who has not hitherto been involved to serve in his or her place. The student will be invited to submit supporting evidence or to present such evidence in person, and may be accompanied by a representative of his or her choice. The panel shall have the authority to seek professional medical advice (in the first instance from the College Doctor) and to invite relevant College and University officers to attend as appropriate. The result of the appeal shall be communicated to the student in writing within seven days of the Panel's decision being made.
3. In the event that the student is unsatisfied with the outcome of the appeal, or in the event that the student's department does not accept the intermission that has been granted or imposed, the matter may be referred by the College to the University's Fitness to Study Panel. The Panel has power to consider medical and any other appropriate evidence, to take expert advice, and to consider submissions made by or on behalf of the student concerned. At the end of the process, the Fitness to Study Panel will decide (in the case of referrals by University authorities) or recommend (in the case of referrals by colleges) whether or not the student is fit to study. Further details about the Panel are available on the [relevant pages](#) of the University website.