



Oakswood College

Empowering Through Education



Interruption of Studies

Policy

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QUALITY



COMPLIANCE



EXCELLENCE



Oakwood College

Empowering Through Education

(Trading name of Oakwood Group Ltd)

Interruption of Studies Policy

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1. Purpose and Definition

Oakwood College recognises that students may occasionally need to pause their studies for personal, medical, financial, caring, wellbeing, or other significant reasons. This policy sets out the process for requesting, approving, monitoring, and returning from an interruption of studies across both franchise and validated provision, while protecting academic standards, student welfare, and regulatory compliance.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all students studying on Oakwood College provision, including franchise and validated programmes delivered in partnership with an awarding or lead provider. It applies to students registered with Oakwood College as well as any additional partner-specific processes required by the awarding body, validating partner, or lead provider, provided these do not conflict with this policy or applicable regulations.

For students at Oakwood College studying on a programme leading to a Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) award, the BNU Policy on Interruption and Withdrawal and its provisions will apply, in lieu of this Policy. However, this does not prevent Oakwood College from providing the initial supported dialogue with the student under Stage 2 of Support Through Studies, to ensure the student is adequately equipped with all relevant information ahead of making their formal request for interruption to BNU.

3. Principles

- a) An interruption of studies is normally a temporary break from study for an agreed period, after which the student is expected to return to the same or a comparable stage of the programme, subject to programme structure and partner regulations. The permitted length of any period of interruption of studies will be determined by the academic regulations that apply to the student's programme of study. Where these are the academic regulations of an awarding body, the College has no jurisdiction to vary or suspend any of these regulations.

Equitable, fair treatment and reasonable adjustments

- b) Oakwood College will seek to apply this policy fairly, consistently, and with due regard to equality, student wellbeing, and the requirements of partner institutions. The College will also seek to minimise academic disadvantage and support a successful return to study wherever possible. Accordingly, the College will make reasonable adjustments to the Interruption of Studies request process set out in this policy where these are required. Reasonable adjustments will also form part of the consideration of the student's initial request to interrupt studies, in case these are not currently in place and implementing them may impact or negate the perceived need to interrupt studies.

Limitations

- c) The College is not obliged to grant an Interruption of Studies request. The decision will be based on each individual situation and the programme the student is studying. Until receiving confirmation of a granted request to interrupt their studies, students are advised they must continue on the programme as though it will be rejected. The decision as to whether an Interruption of Studies request has been formally granted will be communicated in writing in as short a period as possible, usually within 5 working days.

What 'Interrupted Status' means

- d) The College recognises that during a period of Interruption of Studies it is important that students maintain contact with the College and being able access pastoral and academic support is vital to a successful return to study. The status of a student who has had a request for Interruption of Studies formally approved is 'Interrupted Status' once the approval has been actioned, which means that for the period of Interruption, a student will normally remain 'registered' but not 'enrolled'. Though not attending classes whilst a student has interrupted their studies, the student is counted as a registered student of the College for official purposes as they remain on a programme of study.

Return to Study

- e) The College will also seek to minimise academic disadvantage and support a successful return to study wherever possible. This will be managed via the Stage 2 Support Through Studies Action Plan put in place in Step 2 of the Interruption of Studies Request Procedure set out in Section 7 of this Policy. A Stage 2 Meeting will normally be held prior to a student's return (see Step 6 of the procedure), to anticipate any reasonable adjustments and/or other needs to support a smooth return to studies.

4. Relationship to Support Through Studies

Before an interruption is approved, the student's request should normally be considered through Stage 2 of Support Through Studies (see Support Through Studies Policy and Procedures), so that a supported conversation can take place covering engagement, attendance, academic progression, wellbeing, and (where relevant) fitness to continue, can be considered. Stage 2 should be used to assess whether the student can be supported to continue, whether adjustments or support measures could resolve the difficulty, or whether interruption is the most appropriate next step. Where an interruption is agreed, the Stage 2 support plan should also identify actions required before return to study, including any academic, pastoral, financial, or practical support.

5. Grounds for interruption

An interruption of studies may be appropriate where a student is temporarily unable to continue due to:

- physical or mental illness.
- pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption, or caring responsibilities.
- bereavement or serious family circumstances.
- financial hardship.
- significant personal or domestic difficulties.
- military service or other exceptional commitments.
- a supported interruption recommended through Stage 2 of Support Through Studies.

6. Effects of interruption

During an interruption, the student will normally not attend teaching, submit assessments, or progress academically during the interruption period. The interruption may affect tuition fees, student finance, maintenance support, accommodation, visa status, and access to certain services, depending on the student's circumstances and the rules of the lead or validating provider. Students will be advised to seek guidance before the interruption takes effect so that the implications are understood.

When a student interrupts their studies, they will remain liable for any tuition fees in that fee period, which will normally equate to a term. Where programme fees are part of a contract with a third party (eg an awarding body), the terms of the contract will determine the liability for fees.

7. Interruption of Studies Request procedure

Where an awarding body requires a different process to be followed to facilitate Interruption of Studies requests, the process and relevant policy of the awarding body will be followed in lieu of this one. However, this will not necessarily prevent the College from following Steps 1, 2 and 3 of the procedure to manage the Initial Request and ensure students are appropriately supported in their decision-making before raising a formal request.

Step 1: Initial request

- Student raises initial request to potentially interrupt their studies, with personal tutor, programme lead, or student support team.
- Support team or tutor refers matter into Support Through Studies Stage 2; the relevant member of staff with whom the request was raised may, if the student prefers, be involved in the Stage 2 Meeting. This is recommended for particularly sensitive circumstances where the student may not want to repeat distressing information already disclosed.

Step 2: Stage 2 Support Through Studies meeting

- A Stage 2 meeting is convened, involving the student and at least 2 of the following staff: the staff member who received the initial request; personal tutor; student support member of staff; programme lead (or equivalent).
- The College determines the Head of Student Services as Lead Contact for the matter, who will lead the Stage 2 Support Through Studies meeting.

- The purpose of the meeting is to holistically review the student's circumstances and explore all viable alternatives to interruption, such as adjustments, extensions, reduced study load, or other support measures.
- The student is fully informed of the implications of interruption, including academic, financial, visa, partner, and student finance consequences.
- The student is advised about any relevant supporting evidence they may need in order for a formal request to be granted.

If interruption is the most appropriate option, the Lead Contact produces a Stage 2 support plan including:

- recommended interruption period (normally up to 1 academic year)
 - conditions for return
 - ongoing support needs
 - any academic catch-up or progression requirements
 - any actions the student must take before a formal request can be considered (eg gathering/supplying supporting evidence)
- ◆ The Lead Contact forwards the Stage 2 Support Plan to the student for agreement. The student can request adjustments to the Plan, and the College will accommodate requested adjustments where appropriate and feasible; a further meeting may be held to agree a final version of the Stage 2 Support Plan.
 - ◆ On confirmation of the agreed Stage 2 Support Plan, the Lead Contact refers the request to Oakswood College SMT for monitoring and approval.
 - ◆ The student will then be required to submit a formal Interruption of Studies Request.

Step 3: Formal request and awarding body referral (where applicable)

- Following conclusion of Step 2 above, the student submits a formal interruption request, including supporting evidence and the Stage 2 plan, to the Head of Academic Affairs or their nominee.
- For franchise or validated provision where awarding body/lead provider approval is required, the College refers the request to the partner.
- The referral includes the full Stage 2 rationale, alternatives considered, and evidence that the student was fully informed of all options.
- Approval may be subject to conditions, including partner requirements, medical clearance, or completion of Stage 2 actions. The decision as to whether the request has been approved will be issued to the student in writing, normally within 5 working days.

Step 4: Reminder to student of required action by them, and what Interrupted Status means

- Where a formal Interruption of Studies request has been approved and granted, the College will send a reminder to the student about actions they may need to take. This may include issues such as council tax liability, for which students

should take advice from student support services or public bodies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

- The written reminder will also clarify any rules or provisions relating to the student's Interrupted Status. This will normally include notification of when their access to the College's VLE will cease as a result of the interruption, and an identified key College contact for any queries that arise during the period of interruption.

Retention of Student Card

- Students who have interrupted their studies under this policy will be entitled to retain their student ID as this is required to access College buildings, and students are encouraged to maintain contact with the College whilst interrupted, to facilitate a smooth return to studies at the end of the Interruption period.

Step 5: Notification and records

- Approved interruptions are recorded on the student's academic record and notified to relevant parties, including student finance, partner institutions, and visa sponsors as applicable.
- The student is advised of implications (e.g. fees, finance, access to services) and provided with a copy of the Return to Study plan (see below).

Step 6: Return to study

- 6–8 weeks before the agreed return date, the College contacts the student to confirm arrangements, and to invite them to a Return to Study Meeting under Stage 2 of Support Through Studies.
- The student notifies the College of their readiness to return and provides any required evidence (e.g. medical fitness).
- A return-to-study meeting, held under Stage 2 of Support Through Studies, reviews the Stage 2 plan, updates any support needs, and confirms specific academic arrangements for the student's return.
- If the student is unable to return, a further interruption or referral into Stage 3 of Support Through Studies may be considered. The College will liaise with the relevant awarding body to determine the preferred way forward.

8. Franchise and validated provision

Where students are taught through franchise or validated provision, Oakswood College will follow the applicable lead provider or awarding body requirements in addition to this policy. In any case of conflict, the requirements of the awarding or validating body and any applicable contract or partnership agreement will take precedence for that provision, provided that student welfare and fairness remain protected. The College will maintain clear records of interruption decisions and communications to ensure partner reporting, student finance reporting, and academic records are accurate.

9. Responsibilities

Students:

- must engage with their tutor or support team as soon as possible when difficulties arise;
- must engage with the Stage 2 Support Through Studies meeting in order for a request for Interruption of Studies to be considered. Where a student declines or fails to engage with the Stage 2 meeting, a further Stage 2 meeting will be offered. Subsequent failure to engage with this further meeting means their case will normally be escalated to Stage 3 (Case Conference) of Support Through Studies.

Personal tutors / programme teams:

- must follow the procedure set out in this policy;
- must identify students who may benefit from any stage of Support Through Studies and refer them appropriately.

Programme leaders:

- must ensure academic implications are understood and that return arrangements are feasible.

Student support / registry / partner liaison staff:

- must manage interruption requests, records, and partner notifications.

The College:

- must ensure fairness and consistency for students, as well as relevant information, advice and guidance on receipt of initial/formal requests;
- compliance across franchise and validated provision.

10. Monitoring and review

Interruption trends, reasons, outcomes, and return rates should be monitored by the College, sharing data with awarding bodies appropriately, to identify patterns and areas for improvement. The College will use this data to inform student support, retention work, and quality assurance, including the effectiveness of Support Through Studies. This policy will be reviewed annually, or earlier if regulatory, partner, or operational changes require it. Data will be monitored by Academic Board, and the outcomes of this monitoring will be reported annually as part of the Academic Board's annual assurances to the Board of Governors.

Academic Board is responsible for approving this Policy, which will be reviewed annually to ensure continued alignment with regulatory requirements and sector expectations, and partner agreements and requirements.