UCL Academic Manual 2023-24

Chapter 2: Student Support Framework

Interruptions Guidance for Departments

Guidance

1 About

The [Interrupting or Withdrawing from your Studies](#) Students' webpages include important information about fees, funding, visas, Portico access etc. which staff may also find useful. This guidance provides additional support for departmental staff.

2 Support

Questions about the new procedures should be directed to UCL Academic Services via academicregulations@ucl.ac.uk. Specialist advice about different aspects of the process is available from:

Student Support and Wellbeing	ssw-disabilitymentalhealth@ucl.ac.uk
Fees	fees.staffquery@ucl.ac.uk
Funding	sfostaffenquiries@ucl.ac.uk
Visas	visacompliance.staffquery@ucl.ac.uk
Accommodation	accommodation@ucl.ac.uk
Student Records	examboards@ucl.ac.uk
Workplace Health	ohsadmin@ucl.ac.uk
Access to Portico and UCL email	itservices@ucl.ac.uk

3 New online form and workflow

Students can now apply for an interruption through a new online form and approval process:

1) The student should complete the online Interruption Application in Portico and upload any supporting evidence, if needed.
2) The system will alert the department that there is a new application, and the department should then arrange to meet with the student.

3) The meeting should be with a member of staff who is permitted to approve the application on behalf of the department i.e. the Programme Leader, Departmental Tutor, or Departmental Graduate Tutor. You can also invite other members of staff to join the meeting if the student would find this helpful e.g. their Personal Tutor or a departmental administrator.
4) The meeting can take place in person, online or on the phone. Departments should aim to meet with the student as soon as they can so that the application is not delayed.
5) In the meeting, the Departmental Approver should log in to the online application and go through the onscreen Return to Study Plan prompts with the student.
6) The Department should approve or reject the application, or forward it for Faculty approval.
7) The online workflow manages the approval process and sends notifications to the student and any UCL services that need to take action.
8) The online workflow alerts the student, department and relevant UCL services three months before the student is due to return, triggering the Return to Study process.

4   Departmental approval

A 'Category 1' first interruption of up to twelve months for a Full Time or Part Time student can now be approved at Department level and does not need to be escalated to the Faculty Tutor. The Programme Leader, Departmental Tutor, or Departmental Graduate Tutor are all permitted to approve applications on behalf of the Department.

'Category 2' includes more complex interruptions which still require approval by the Faculty Tutor:
2A   An interruption of more than one year
2B   A second interruption
2C   Interruptions for Flexible/Modular students in their final year
2D   If the student needs to repeat some classes for academic reasons

5   Return to study planning

The new procedures aim to provide students with more support before, during and after interruption. As part of this, departments are being asked to work with the student on a Return to Study Plan.

The first part of the online form asks you to confirm what will happen to each of the student's modules when they return. This includes whether they have completed the assessment or will need to take it when they return; whether they need to repeat a module for academic reasons, and whether they intend to submit an accompanying claim for Extenuating Circumstances to re-do an assessment and/ or re-attend classes if they were affected in the period leading up to the interruption (this will need to be confirmed separately by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel before the student interrupts).

The second part of the online Return to Study Plan includes a series of questions for you to discuss with the student covering topics such as fees, funding, visas, maternity and parental leave, accommodation etc. Further information about the topics covered by the Return to Study Plan is available on the Interruptions for Taught Students webpage.

You should check whether each applies to the student concerned and note down any important or useful information. You do not need to fill in sections if they do not apply.

6   Setting the Return Date

The new procedures include a 'Default Return Date', which is one academic year after the student interrupted, at the start of term e.g. if the student interrupts in December they will return at the start

of Term 1 in September the following year. This will help the student to reintegrate with their programme and they won't be charged additional fees for doing so.

The Default Return Date means that a student can repeat classes but it does not mean they can repeat an assessment that they have already completed. Students need to submit Extenuating Circumstances if they want to re-do any assessment.

In some cases it may be in the best interests of the student for this date to be amended – this can be done by the Faculty Tutor. For example:

- It may be better for the student to return at the start of the <u>half</u> term in which they originally interrupted e.g. if they don't want to re-attend classes for modules which they have already completed
- A module start date might have changed
- A module might have moved from one term to another
- A module includes group work or other elements which the student cannot join part-way through
- The student may need to return earlier than the Default Return Date to complete a Deferral with or without Tuition (see 'Backdating and Extenuating Circumstances' below)

Changing the Return Date can affect the student's fees and funding so it is important that you discuss this with the Faculty Tutor before making a decision. The Student Fees and Funding Teams can also give advice and support. Further information is available from:
- [Fee liability for interrupting and withdrawing students](#)
- [Funding information for interrupting and withdrawing students](#)

In some cases, it may be better to use other options rather than changing the return date. For example, if the student could be offered an alternative method of assessment, this might enable them to return at the Default Return Date. This would need to be agreed with the External Examiner, the Programme Leader and the Faculty Tutor.

7   Backdating and Extenuating Circumstances

In the past, Departments sometimes tried to help students by backdating an interruption if their performance or attendance had been affected in the weeks and months beforehand. However this sometimes caused difficulties with the student's fees and funding. We are now asking students to submit an Extenuating Circumstances Form in order to access a deferral if they want to retake an assessment or return earlier to repeat classes:

- A **Deferral without Tuition** may be needed to cover any assessments affected by Extenuating Circumstances in the period leading up to the interruption (e.g. the assessment was missed, or performance in the assessment was affected). Students can apply to defer the assessment without additional tuition, and take it again when they return from interruption, without penalty or additional fees.
- A **Deferral with Tuition** may be needed to cover any lectures, seminars, tutorials, supervision, laboratory sessions or other teaching events affected by Extenuating Circumstances in the period leading up to the interruption (e.g. missed classes, low attendance). Students can apply to defer the affected module with tuition, which means that they can attend the classes again and take the assessment when they return from interruption, without penalty or additional fees.

Departments should bear in mind that repeat tuition may already be available due to the new Default Return Date i.e. the student will be coming back at the start of a term anyway. The student would only need to submit ECs if this is not adequate, or if they want to re-do an assessment that they have already completed.

UCL is in the process of updating the EC regulations and workflows so, for the time being, students will need to submit a [separate Extenuating Circumstances Form and supporting evidence](). The form now includes a section for interrupting students to outline their needs. This will alert the EC Panel to the associated interruption application, help to join up the two processes and ensure that the student receives a co-ordinated response.

8   Supporting the student during interruption

Students interrupt for a wide range of reasons, but often because they are having personal difficulties. It is therefore important that UCL supports the student while they are away.

As part of the return to study planning, departments should make sure there is a named person, email address and phone number for the student to contact while they are away. They should also make sure the student knows how to contact Student Support and Wellbeing, and how to access the Student Centre.

Departments should ask the student about the level of contact they are comfortable with while they are away. Some students may not want to be contacted at all, while others might benefit from regular keeping-in-touch points (e.g. once a month, once every three months). Departments should try to establish the level of support that the student wants and put plans in place.

For most of the period of interruption, the student will have very limited access to UCL facilities. However under the new regulations, students will have their access re-instated three months before they return to help them to re-engage with their programme and other students. During this three-month period students will not attend formal taught sessions, but they can seek advice on academic matters, attend staff office hours and their ID card will allow them automatic access to the Library.

9   Preparing for the student's return

The Return to Study process will begin three months before the student is due to return. The system will notify:

- The student
- UCL services, so that they can start putting in place SSW Welfare Reviews and instructions on fees, visa information etc.
- The department, so that they can start contacting the student and making sure they have everything they need

Returning to study can be a daunting experience. The new Return to Study Plan aims to support departments in planning the student's reintegration. Different students will want different levels of support, but examples of how you might help them include:

1) Contacting the student to find out how they have been and whether they need any help

2) Arranging keeping-in-touch days

3) Going through the Return to Study Plan with the student to make sure it is still appropriate

4) Checking that the student is aware of any assessments which might be due soon after they return

5) Checking whether there have been any changes to the programme or to individual modules while the student has been away, and making sure the student understands any changes

6)   Introducing the student to their new cohort, if they give their consent to this

7)   Thinking about any start of term or induction events that the student could be invited to

8)   For first year students, arranging a [Transition Mentor](#). For students in later years, setting up a mentor or buddy

9)   Making sure the student is aware of important tasks such as re-enrolment or module selection

10) Reminding the student to put arrangements in place for fees, funding, scholarships etc.

11) Reminding the student to make arrangements for a new visa, if applicable

12) Checking whether the student requires a Return to Study Welfare Review and, if so, supporting the student through this process

13) Talking to the student about whether they would benefit from ongoing Reasonable Adjustments, and directing them to Student Support and Wellbeing and the SORA application process

14) Reminding the student about the support services available to them, such as the Student Centre and AskUCL

15) Reminding the student to register with a GP, and apply for accommodation, council tax and 18+ Oyster photocards

16) Arranging an informal catch-up one month after their return to see how they are getting on and trouble shoot any issues that might have arisen.

Students need to confirm that they are returning to UCL no later than one month before their return date.