STUDENT REQUESTS FOR SUSPENSION OF STUDIES

Introduction
This document describes the process for the approval of suspension of studies from the MBChB course. Students should refer to Senate Regulation 2 which describes the University Regulations regarding Suspension of Studies. Requirements relevant to the MBChB programme are outlined below. It should be noted that suspension of studies in order to undertake an Intercalated BSc degree is governed by separate guidance.

Principles
The approval of suspension of studies is linked to the principles of providing student support and the need to provide assurance that students are fit to practise as safe future doctors.

With regard to student support:
- The aim of the School is to ensure that all students feel supported in order that they can progress to become caring, competent, effective and safe future doctors. In particular, any student who experiences difficulties with the course, whether of a personal, academic or professional nature should receive advice and guidance and have access to additional support services. The goal is for students to be equipped to take responsibility for their own welfare and personal and professional development by the time of graduation. We aim to teach students that it is only by taking responsibility for their own welfare that they can take responsibility for the welfare of patients.

With regard to future practice:
- The aim of the School is to ensure that graduates have achieved all of the competences specified by the General Medical Council and are fit to practise as effective and safe future doctors.

Period of suspension of studies:
The period of suspension of studies must fit in with the academic calendar or clinical year calendar.
There are only two set points for re-joining the course:
- Start of academic year - Aug/Sept
- Start of clinical year - February

Time out from the course will depend on circumstances and options for re-joining the course. It is likely to be between 6 months and 12 months. The maximum time away from the course is 12 months. A period of suspension that does not permit the completion of the programme within the maximum period of registration will not normally be allowed. Only one period of suspension of studies, up to a maximum of 12 months, will normally be approved over the duration of the medical course.

Suspension of study indicates that a student is not actively studying but remains registered with the University. This means that students will continue to have access to many services of the University and that the suspension time remains part of the student’s overall period of registration.

Suspending your studies may affect your immigration status and we are legally bound to report suspending Tier 4 students to the UKBA. If this is likely to affect you, you should get advice from the Student Welfare Service before submitting your application.
Conditions for approving suspension of studies:

Maternity leave:
This will follow the maternity leave guidelines

Health-related:
A student request for suspension of studies may be considered for health-related reasons if it fulfils the following:
- Must be a defined and significant medical problem
- Must be a defined treatment plan
- Medical care must be appropriately supervised by named clinician
- Must be supported by a medical letter
- Must be reviewed and supported by Occupational Health
- The normal expectation is that the student will have sought help and guidance from the University and Medical School Student Support structures
- There must be an expectation that the student will improve and be able to return to the course. By the time of return to the course the student must be able to attend and engage with the course on a full-time basis such that they are able to progress in a satisfactory manner in order to work as an effective and safe future doctor.

Personal reasons:
A student request for suspension of studies may be considered for personal reasons if it fulfils the following:
- Must be carefully and clearly articulated with a written application
- Must be an identified reason
- Must be at a level of significance equivalent to that required for health reasons
- Student must demonstrate that he/she has taken all possible steps to address the problem within the course structure. In the majority of cases the normal expectation is that issues should be appropriately dealt with using the Medical School and University support structures.
- A request for suspension of studies for personal reasons must have been discussed with a member of staff from Student Pastoral Support and have their approval.
- Must be an identified plan of action to address the personal problem
- Must be a clear time-line to deal with the personal problems to ensure they are resolved
- Must be discussed with a senior member of staff or School tutor

NOTE:
Students cannot take suspension of studies because they are uncertain of their career intentions. Students cannot suspend their studies shortly before a summative examination. This would not be granted if the period was less than four weeks before a summative examination. If an acute problem occurs it will be considered via the Mitigating Circumstances route.

Only one period of suspension of studies, up to a maximum of 12 months, will normally be approved over the duration of the medical course.
PROCESS

Suspension of Studies Request:
All students must complete a ‘Suspension of Studies Request Form’. Students are advised to discuss completion of the form with a member of the Pastoral Support Unit or senior member of staff before submitting the form. If urgent advice is required, it should be discussed with the Director of Undergraduate Medical Education (or a deputy Director of Undergraduate Medical Education if the Director is not available). The form must be submitted to the Director of Undergraduate Education.

Suspension of Studies Approval:
The Medical School will review the application and apply the principles governing suspension of studies. If Suspension of Studies is approved the student will need to acknowledge and sign the approval letter including the conditions for return to the course.

Reintegration:
Each student will receive a reintegration plan prior to his or her return to the course. This plan outlines the requirements for return, and should be signed by the student and returned to the Medical School. This will normally be required at least a month prior to the agreed return date. Every student will be seen by a member of staff to discuss their reintegration plan.

Students who have not met the conditions of their return will be referred to the Health and Conduct Committee for formal review.

Maternity / Paternity leave:
The Medical School understands that some students, or their partners, will have a pregnancy during the course, and will need a period of leave. The first principle is that all students must meet the standards set by the Medical School and General Medical Council in order to graduate. Within that requirement, we will facilitate, as a minimum the provision of maternity leave on broadly the same term as if the student were in employment. It must be accepted, however, that this will in most cases, delay the date of graduation.

All women who become pregnant during the course will be entitled to take a minimum period of leave preceding and following the expected date of delivery. The nature of the medical course means that depending on the timing of the due date a student may need to take a much longer period than this minimum leave in order to return to the course at an educationally appropriate point.

Students are strongly advised to delay adoption of young children until after they graduate, but in the unlikely event of the adoption of a baby one partner will be entitled to the same period of post adoption leave as a student who has given birth to a baby.

A woman who becomes pregnant whilst a medical student will normally suspend completely her studies before the expected date of delivery. The usual time for suspension will be at 34-36 weeks gestation. This should be discussed with the Occupational Health Service who will provide appropriate advice.

The suspension will normally continue for a period of 6 to 8 weeks post-delivery, though the precise time of return will depend upon circumstances, so the period is likely to be considerably longer. The exact period of suspension will depend on where the student is within the course. The normal expectation is that a student will take a period of up to 12 months of temporary withdrawal. The reason for this length of suspension is because all elements of the course have to be satisfactorily completed and the fact that year examinations are at set times.

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In Phase 1 of the course the nature of the Unit teaching and the Semester Assessments means that any period of absence of greater than 2 weeks makes it extremely difficult to catch up.

In Phase 2 of the course students are required to satisfactorily complete all clinical placements. It is likely that a student will miss at least two blocks as a minimum while on maternity leave. In all such cases the student will be required to take a year of suspension.

There may be a limited number of students where the timing of the delivery adjacent to a holiday period might result in missing only one clinical block. In such circumstances it may be possible to review the return date. This will depend on the absence being early in the rotation, the student’s prior academic record, the recommendation of Occupational Health and taking the re-sit examination rather than the main examination in order to catch up missed work.

In Phase 2 every effort will be made to organise reasonably family-friendly placements for the first block after return, but it must be recognised that any further concessions will, in an overstretched system, inevitably disadvantage other students and will not normally be allowed. Students may apply for ‘special circumstances’ and any request will be considered. Some students may request a longer period of maternity leave. This will be discussed at an individual level.

Taking a longer break, or more than one pregnancy will delay graduation, and put a student at risk of not completing the course within 7 years (or 6 years for students on the Graduate course), which is a regulatory requirement.

All students whose partner becomes pregnant will be entitled to a short period of leave (normally 5 working days) following the delivery of the child, provided that this does not coincide with major assessments (unless the student accepts that their graduation may be delayed as a result).