

VOLUNTARY SUSPENSION GUIDELINES

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1 What is voluntary suspension?

- 1.1 Students needing to interrupt their studies may apply to go into voluntary suspension. Voluntary suspension differs from academic suspension in that it represents an interruption of studies for an individual who is otherwise qualified for continued study.
- 1.2 In allowing any student to enter voluntary suspension the guiding principle is that the student must, on exiting voluntary suspension, be able to resume studies and complete their course as if their studies had been uninterrupted.
- 1.3 Students in voluntary suspension are not permitted to attend any classes. They are not normally eligible to take any assessments and all examination attempts due during a period of voluntary suspension are automatically discounted. However, in exceptional circumstances, it may be helpful to permit a student to attempt assessments whilst in suspension (see 4.7 below).
- 1.5 The maximum period of voluntary suspension approved at any one time will be one complete academic session. Under exceptional circumstances, voluntary suspension may be renewed for one further session. Students unable to resume studies after two consecutive academic sessions in voluntary suspension will normally be withdrawn from their course.
- 1.6 Where a period of voluntary suspension is granted on the ground of personal circumstances that adversely affect studies, on completion of the period of voluntary suspension the student will be expected to provide evidence of their fitness to resume studies before being readmitted to their course of study.

2 Who is eligible to go into voluntary suspension?

- 2.1 Any student who is registered within the normal duration of an undergraduate instructional or postgraduate instructional or research programme of a minimum of 12 months duration in total may seek voluntary suspension from their studies. This applies to all full-time and part-time courses and courses taken through attendance or by distance learning.

- 2.2 Postgraduate students who have completed their normal duration of study and are registered as “writing up” are not eligible to seek voluntary suspension. If necessary, any personal circumstances that might delay completion should be managed through a request for an extension to the maximum duration of study.
- 2.3 Students in academic suspension are not normally eligible for voluntary suspension. Students seeking voluntary suspension for a whole academic session may only do so if they have been awarded a pass, proceed or re-attend progress decision by the Board of Examiners on completion of the previous session.
- 2.4 Any undergraduate student whose academic performance within a semester is pending a decision of a Board of Examiners may not seek voluntary suspension for that semester (i.e. a student who has results pending from the January diet of examinations cannot seek voluntary suspension for semester 1).

3 Application and approval

- 3.1 Students needing to interrupt their studies for part or whole of a session should initially contact their Adviser of Studies/Personal Development Advisor/Course Leader as appropriate. Requests for voluntary suspension should be completed by the student at the earliest opportunity on the form available from Student Business (<http://www.strath.ac.uk/sees/studentpolicies/policies/attendance/absenceandvoluntaryuspension/>).
- 3.2 Any student wishing to take voluntary suspension must provide appropriate grounds for seeking this status. Acceptable grounds are typically either to allow the student to take advantage of one-off career and life enhancing activities or to allow the student to address personal circumstances that are adversely affecting their studies. Examples of acceptable grounds include:
- To allow engagement in national or international sporting or other competitive opportunities.
 - To allow engagement in fixed-term employment or volunteering that directly relates to the student’s studies and that will enhance their overall educational experience.
 - To allow resolution of short-term financial, medical, social or environmental difficulties that adversely affect studies.

- 3.3 Requests for voluntary suspension should contain details of the grounds for the request, including appropriate evidence and the actual, or anticipated, last date of study and the expected date of return to study. Personal circumstances that constitute acceptable grounds for granting voluntary suspension are the same as those detailed as acceptable within the University's Personal Circumstances and Academic Appeals Procedure.
- 3.4 Voluntary suspension will not be granted to allow an unengaged student, without valid personal circumstances, the opportunity to re-attend. The progress of such students will be determined by the appropriate Board of Examiners.
- 3.5 Any completed application for voluntary suspension should be endorsed by the student's Head of Department/Course Leader/Advisor of Studies and submitted to Student Business. All requests will require approval by the Vice-Dean (Academic) of the relevant Faculty acting on behalf of the Faculty Board of Study.
- 3.6 Students who have a request for voluntary suspension approved will be notified by Student Business. This notification will include the exact dates that the period of suspension commences and is completed.
- 3.7 If a period of voluntary suspension is approved, the student's registration will be amended to show a student in voluntary suspension and some tuition fees may be refunded. Students are required to inform their Local Education Authority or grant awarding body of this change to their academic status. In the summer, the student's record is validated to the appropriate course and year of study.
- 3.8 Once voluntary suspension is approved, any tuition fee is refunded to the payer (typically SAAS, a local education authority or the student). If it is not taken back by the payer, it is held in a suspense account and used to meet tuition fees the following session. Any difference in fees between the two academic years may need to be paid by the student.
- 3.9 A student in voluntary suspension is not eligible to receive any bursary or scholarship support. Postgraduate research students entering voluntary suspension will have payment of any stipend suspended for the duration of the suspension.

3.10 An undergraduate student who is unsuccessful in an application for voluntary suspension will have their progress determined by the appropriate Board of Examiners.

4 When can voluntary suspension be sought?

4.1 Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students can normally only seek voluntary suspension for a duration that equates to one complete academic session. Exceptions to this are:

- If the student has already been given permission to transfer to a different course in the subsequent academic session.
- If the student has already been given permission to re-attend the same year of the course in the subsequent academic session. Agreement of such re-attend decisions, in advance of a meeting of the Board of Examiners, will require the approval of either the convenor of the Board of Examiners or the Vice-Dean (Academic) as appropriate.

Under such circumstances, voluntary suspension can be sought at any time during the academic session and will commence at the date of application and run to the end of the session. All performances up to the start of the period the voluntary suspension will stand on the student record. Additionally, instructional students on part-time, flexible or modular courses may be able to take voluntary suspension for short periods, as dictated by their course structure.

4.2 Requests for voluntary suspension for the entire subsequent session can only be made once the student has received a pass, proceed or re-attend decision from the Board of Examiners for the present session.

4.3 Outwith the conditions of 4.1 above, a student can seek voluntary suspension for the entire duration of their current session at any point in the seven weeks following registration in a standard academic year (ie for undergraduate students, this would be by the end of week seven of the first semester of a standard pattern of teaching). Students entering voluntary suspension up to this point will be recorded as in suspension for the entire session and will normally be expected to return to studies at the start of the subsequent academic session.

4.4 Outwith the conditions of 4.1 above, a student can seek voluntary suspension at any point in the first seven weeks of semester 2 of their current session. Under such circumstances the suspension will commence on the first day of semester 2 and run for one complete academic cycle to the last day of semester 1 of the subsequent session. All semester 1 performances from the present session will remain unapproved on the student's record until the final

completion of the academic session.

- 4.5 In exceptional circumstances, a student in voluntary suspension may be permitted to attempt re-sit examinations, in particular for a class they fully attended, were assessed in, and failed before the period of suspension commenced. This could be to minimise the workload on their return, or because the class is being withdrawn. However, students taking examinations under such circumstances must be advised that they are re-sitting on an unapproved result that has yet to be validated by a Board of Examiners. On completion of the session, the Board of Examiners will apply its usual rules with respect to marks approval, compensation and progress irrespective of any pre-emptive re-sit that has been taken.
- 4.6 Research students within their normal duration of study can seek voluntary suspension at any time and for any duration within the time limits imposed in section 1.
- 4.7 A student on a Tier 4 study visa who is placed in voluntary suspension is no longer eligible, under the terms of their visa, to remain in the UK. Therefore, for such students, no part of their period of voluntary suspension can be retrospective. For all other students, the maximum extent to which voluntary suspension may be applied retrospectively is eight weeks as detailed in 4.3 and 4.4 above, noting that postgraduate research students are not eligible to receive stipend payments whilst in voluntary suspension (see 3.9 above).

QAC 18th December 2013

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Title: Voluntary Suspension Flowchart

