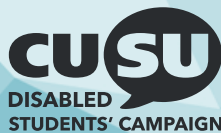


Disabled Students' Campaign

GUIDE TO UNDERGRADUATE INTERMISSION



CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Disclaimer	2
3.	Intermission 101	3
4.	'Reasonable adjustments': Support while studying	4
5.	Intermission, exam allowances and 'DDH': Understanding the difference	7
6.	Deciding to intermit: Factors to consider	9
7.	Applying to intermit	12
8.	Medical Evidence	13
9.	While you're out	14
10.	Returning to Cambridge	16
11.	References and Resources	17

INTRODUCTION

Intermission (known as “disregarding terms” to the University) is a mechanism whereby students take time out from their studies, usually for medical reasons or other grave cause.

While for some it’s a supportive and positive experience, some students run into complications and issues along the way. However you might feel about the rules that are often put in place - e.g. passing exams as a condition for return, or being disallowed from college grounds - **it’s really important to know exactly what’s happening every step of the way**, and to understand the process as fully as possible so that you are able to make the most of your period of intermission.

This guide has been produced by the Disabled Students’ Campaign in the spirit of information sharing, for all students who are considering intermission, currently intermitting themselves, or who just want to know more about the process from a student perspective. It is in its first iteration, and will likely be updated in the future. If you have any suggestions to make, please email the Disabled Students’ Officer (disabled@cusu.cam.ac.uk).

If you’d like to talk to someone in light of reading this guide, the Students’ Unions’ Advice Service provides free, confidential, and impartial advice to Cambridge students, and will be able to help you explore your options. Their contact details are in the Resources section at the back of this guide.

DISCLAIMER

This is not an official guide in the sense that it has not been written or endorsed by the University. We intend to present intermission in a way that is accessible to the students who are experiencing it, as students who have experienced it ourselves. The information we provide is not presented neutrally, but all information on the process itself comes directly from University policy and guidance. Certain wording has been taken directly from that policy in order to maintain this accuracy - but if you are in doubt about anything raised in the guide, you should absolutely refer to University policy as the superior source.

If you are a graduate student, the intermission process will look very different to that of undergraduate intermission. For this reason, we have elected to keep the two issues separate, and focus this guide on undergraduate intermission.

INTERMISSION 101

DEFINITION:

Taking time out of your studies (usually for a year) for medical reasons, or for 'other grave cause'. This process is usually referred to in University policy as 'disregarding terms'.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REASONS PEOPLE MIGHT INTERMIT?

- Mental health issues
- Flare-up of a medical condition
- As a result of stage 3 of Fitness to Study
 - Reasonable adjustments not being met sufficiently
- Harassment or sexual assault
- Bereavement
- Financial issues

WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT INTERMISSION?

- Tutor
- College nurse
- Senior tutor
- GP
- Students' Unions' Advice Service
- Disability Resource Centre
- University Counselling Service
- CUSU Disabled Students' Campaign

WHO INITIATES AND HANDLES THE PROCESS?

Your tutor will usually be your main contact, and the one who will oversee the process. The tutor must apply for intermission on the student's behalf to the Applications Committee.

WHO ARE THE APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE?

This is a University committee that deals with certain issues relating to undergraduate students and exams, including intermission, exam allowances, and appealing exam results. All applications to intermit go to them, but students cannot apply directly, with their tutor applying for them on their behalf.

WHAT CAN CUSU DO?

CUSU can provide support and insight into University and College policy and decision-making as well as representation in meetings via the **Students' Unions' Advice Service**.

The Disabled Students' Campaign also run an **Intermission Facebook support group**: www.facebook.com/groups/1547925268789968

'REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS': SUPPORT WHILE STUDYING

When considering intermission, it's important to be aware of what support might be available to you that could, in many cases, enable you to continue your studies. This support is known as having reasonable adjustments, and it's a legal requirement for the University to provide these for any disabled students and students with long term health conditions who require them.

Examples of support available at Cambridge:

Weekly mentoring sessions

Permission to record lectures and supervisions

Extended library loans

Extra time or rest breaks in exams

Permission to hand in essay plans instead of full essays

You might well be entitled to this kind of help if you have an official diagnosis (or are able to get one). If you have any questions about your eligibility for this kind of support, your first port of call should be the Disability Resource Centre (DRC). The DRC are the University service that are responsible for recommending reasonable adjustments for students, which they do by creating a tailor-made 'student support document' (SSD) for every student they advise.

This isn't the limit of their remit, however. In the case of conditions such as ADHD, autism spectrum conditions, and specific learning disabilities (including dyslexia and dyspraxia), the DRC can provide screenings and referrals. Get in touch with them to set up a meeting with an advisor. Your college will also have a designated Disability Liaison Officer (usually within your tutorial office) who will be able to advise you on getting support for exam access arrangements and other reasonable adjustments.

Reasonable adjustments are integral to many disabled students' ability to access their education more fully, but it should be acknowledged that they may not solve every problem. Your particular situation may be such that reasonable adjustments would not be enough to remove the barriers that you're experiencing in trying to access your education. In these cases, you may of course still need to intermit.

'REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS': SUPPORT WHILE STUDYING

For example, you might already have adjustments in place but your illness has significantly worsened, or you might be considering intermission for reasons unrelated to illness or disability. You might also just wish to contact the DRC to make sure this support is in place for when you return from intermission.

In cases involving conditions such as CFS/ME or other long-term health issues, **intermitting may not always be the appropriate route**, as it will not necessarily lead to a student returning in better health. As the condition is chronic, a break from studying may not necessarily be able to 'fix' the issue, and the student should instead seek to effectively manage their condition alongside their degree.



If you are in this situation, you may require increased support while studying, in the form of reasonable adjustments. If, in very rare cases, a student's disadvantage arising from their disability will not be alleviated by the reasonable adjustments offered, 'alternative modes of assessment' may be considered. This avenue can be explored in a 'case conference' setting involving yourself as well as your college, department, the DRC, and any representative, should you wish to have one.

Adjustments arising from a case conference are specifically tailored to a student's individual needs, but have in the past included allowing a student to sit their examinations at home, or allowing a student to study over longer than the standard 3 years for an undergraduate degree.

More information on alternative modes of assessment can be found in the Applications Committee's Notes for Guidance.

'REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS': SUPPORT WHILE STUDYING

Useful links:

- **Disability Resource Centre**

www.disability.admin.cam.ac.uk

- **Code of Practice: Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Students**

This is the University's central policy on reasonable adjustments and student support documents. It also contains some information on the provision of 'alternative modes of assessment'.

www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/codeofpractice_reasonableadjustmentsfordisabledstudents.pdf

- **Applications Committee: Notes for Guidance for Staff and Students 16-17**

www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/about-us/applications-committee



<https://unsplash.com/search/cambridge?photo=Z2OtkWTT7hM>

INTERMISSION, EXAM ALLOWANCES AND 'DDH': UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

Examination allowances and 'DDH' are two kinds of allowances or matters that are also handled by the applications committee, along with intermission. While different to intermission, they're often used in the same discussions, and what each one means and how it can affect you can be very confusing - even to some University and College staff. Understanding the difference between an exam allowance and intermission can be very useful while considering your options for support with regards to your exams.

As has been mentioned, **intermission** is referred to in the University's statutes and ordinances as 'disregarding terms'. **This means that if you intermit, you are given leave not to sit your exams at all** (usually for a period of one year) - i.e. terms spent at Cambridge for this academic year are disregarded, because you have been unable to properly engage in your studies during them.

Examination allowances differ slightly. The main idea behind an examination allowance is to allow a student to proceed into the next year of study, based on the fact that they would have passed their exams had they not been unwell during them. A student may wish to apply for an examination allowance if they have been achieving academically throughout the year but have had something happen in exam term that may have affected their ability to sit their exams or impacted upon their results, such as a period of illness or a bereavement. Intermission may be more appropriate if a student has been having issues over a longer period, with their learning significantly disrupted for this reason - but it may also be appropriate if the incident occurring close to exams requires a longer period of recovery.



<https://static.pexels.com/photos/6384/woman-hand-desk-office.jpg>

INTERMISSION, EXAM ALLOWANCES AND 'DDH': UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

'DDH' or '**Declared to have Deserved Honours**', is another kind of application that can be considered by the applications committee. This is something reserved for final year students who miss or fail all or part of their exams, but it is deemed by the applications committee that their performance was unrepresentative of their abilities. The committee deems that had it not been for illness or other grave cause, they would have graduated with an honours degree.

Intermission can still very occasionally be an option for final year students in Easter term; however, the applications committee take every application on a case by case basis, and are less likely to award intermission in this circumstance, especially if a student has already intermitted for the same reason earlier on in their degree. As an example, if a student has intermitted once already for mental health reasons, but was involved in a traffic accident just before their final year exams (or diagnosed with a completely unrelated severe illness), this would likely be treated more favourably by the committee.



N.B.

The applications committee handle several other kinds of applications for undergraduate students - not just the three discussed here. These three are simply the ones that come up in conversation most frequently. If you are in any confusion, the committee provides a very handy Notes for Guidance document, which can be found here:

www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/about-us/applications-committee

DECIDING TO INTERMIT: FACTORS TO CONSIDER

This section provides a summary of the factors to consider when deciding whether or not to intermit, or when working out the logistics of your time out. It might be helpful to discuss these with a friend, your tutor, or the Students' Unions' Advice Service. A lot of the support colleges provide to their intermitting students varies on a case-by-case and college-by-college basis, so be sure to check with your college.

Conditions for return

Before your application is sent off to the Committee, your college should discuss with you the conditions you will need to satisfy (and provide evidence that you have satisfied) in order to be allowed to return to study. This will usually be a sign-off from your GP saying that you are fit to return, but it might include consenting to an approved plan of medical support, or being required to sit exams.

- You should be aware of these conditions before the application is sent off. Make sure to have them in writing.
- It may be helpful to talk to the Students' Union's Advice Service and/or the DRC before consenting to your proposed conditions for return, especially if you are concerned about your ability to satisfy them.
- Make sure you keep all correspondence and don't delete emails so that, even if you're too stressed to read it now, you will have it on hand at a later date to review.

Access to college grounds and events

Will you have access to college grounds and events, e.g. bops or may balls? Your college may only allow you to come back for the may ball, or it may not mind as much where you go in college.

Be aware that there is a distinction between college and University property. Your college may disallow you from entering college grounds, but this is not the same as being banned from the centre of Cambridge. In spite of this distinction, students are still reporting that they are not allowed to enter or reside within the city of Cambridge at all during their period of intermission - not just the college grounds. This is not legally enforceable. If you have had this communicated to you, be sure to get in touch with the Students' Unions' Advice Service (see link on page 17).

DECIDING TO INTERMIT: FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Access to academic resources

Will you have access to online and offline academic resources? This may include department and college libraries, institutional logins, the college's intranet, and Hermes.

This is especially important if one of the conditions to return is sitting an exam or submitting written work.

Make sure to have it in writing what academic support (e.g. supervisions) you will be given if this is a condition. Ideally your college would draw up a plan of work with you that you also consent to.

Access to pastoral support

Establish what kind of contact you will be able to have with your tutor, nurse, and if you have one, your college counsellor. Having this in-college support network while you're out of Cambridge might be very useful for your recovery, and it's good to know where you stand. The Students' Union's Advice Service also continue to provide support to intermitting students.

Fee status, financial concerns, and accommodation

The normal system of intermission assumes that you can leave Cambridge and have somewhere to stay, funds to support yourself, and a family that will be supportive of your situation. This is sadly not always the case.

- Regarding tuition fees, it is possible to apply for 'fee remission' provided you have been out of residence for fewer than 21 days of the term (see Applications Committee guidance for further information).
- This means that if you intermit soon enough after starting term, you may be eligible for having your tuition fees refunded. You can do this via your tutor.
- Some colleges may be able to help you find accommodation if you can't return home, if you feel comfortable disclosing your personal circumstances. Needing to access medical support in Cambridge may support an appeal to college for aid with accommodation.

DECIDING TO INTERMIT: FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- Be sure to also check the University Accommodation Service for private house shares in University-approved accommodation.
www.accommodation.cam.ac.uk
- **If you need to apply for benefits, the Citizens Advice Bureau is available:**
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits
- Some students may be eligible for financial help from **Student Finance England**. See pp. 16-17: www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/7847/sfe-1617-change-of-circumstances-final-13.pdf

Access to medical or psychiatric support

If you're no longer staying in Cambridge, consider what access you may have to medical and/or psychiatric support.

- It may be useful to register as a temporary patient at your home GP surgery, if you are unable to attend appointments with your GP in Cambridge.
- If you are seeking counselling, consider the waiting times where you will be staying.
- If you need to travel to Cambridge for a medical appointment, it may be worth asking if you will be able to use accommodation in college. This is especially important if your conditions for returning from intermission include an agreed course of medical or psychiatric action. Your College may be able to facilitate you to attend these appointments if they are requiring you have them in order to return.
- If you have been attending counselling sessions at the University Counselling Service before intermitting, there is a funding pot available for these sessions to be extended even though you are out of residence. This is known as the Madeleine Davis Fund, and is accessible via your counsellor at the UCS.

APPLYING TO INTERMIT

To begin the intermission process, talk to your tutor about it. They are usually the one who will oversee your case, and who will make an application on your behalf to the Applications Committee. You can also speak to an advisor in the Students' Unions' Advice Service if you would like to find out more about intermission and to explore your options independently of the College.

Your college will then provide information about your case to the Committee, including your supervision reports, a statement from the college, and evidence of medical circumstances or other grave cause. You will also be able to submit a personal statement to the Applications Committee if you would like. This can be especially helpful if your college does not support your application, and the Advice Service can help you with writing it.



<https://static.pexels.com/photos/7079/people-woman-girl-writing.jpg>

Among all these documents is one that you will need to sign, called the 'student declaration form', which allows the Applications Committee to review your medical evidence. **Only the medical members of the committee will be able to consider your medical evidence.** The only other person who will see it will be the assistant secretary of the committee, and it will be for office purposes only.

During this period make sure that you keep records of your correspondence with college and any emails you get from the Applications Committee. You will then receive an email containing the Committee's decision, and if permission to intermit is granted, you will be provided with information regarding any conditions that have been set that you need to fulfil in order to return to study, as well as the date of your return.

MEDICAL EVIDENCE

Gathering medical evidence can be notoriously difficult when you've little idea what the evidence needs to contain. We recommend that you frequently check in with your Cambridge GP, so that your illness is always on record. That way, if you don't end up needing to intermit, there's no harm done - but if you do need to intermit, evidence will be on record that you have been struggling.

Who should write the letter?

A medically qualified practitioner, preferably based in Cambridge. They will also consider accompanying statements from an accredited counsellor, or your College nurse. These statements can only be 'accompanying', however, and will not constitute a replacement for a letter from a GP or consultant.

What should the letter contain?

A clear diagnosis including the nature and severity of the illness. If a diagnosis is not possible or appropriate, symptoms of the issue and their severity should be given. The letter should also state how the condition is likely to have affected your preparation for or performance in exams. The more information that can be provided by the GP about how your condition adversely affects you, the better supported your application may be.

Some GPs can find guidance on what to write particularly helpful, as they receive no formal cross-collegiate guidance. Others may be more resistant. Remember that you are requesting for them to give specific details about the nature of your illness and how it affects your ability to study, rather than asking them to change how they portray their medical opinion.

Need more guidance?

The Application Committee's Notes for Guidance can be found here, and contain more information on medical evidence.

www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/about-us/applications-committee

WHILE YOU'RE OUT

Because the majority of students who are intermitting will be doing so for medical or adverse personal reasons, **intermission is most usually seen as a period of recovery and rest.** Your peers, tutor, and DoS will all have various opinions on what is and isn't normal or acceptable to do while you're out recovering - and most commonly, what you choose to do may be objected to on the grounds that you're "supposed to be getting better." This can lead to intermitting students feeling like they're not allowed to work or visit Cambridge during intermission, as they need to be "performing" their illness, and any sign that they are recovering might be taken as them not having been ill in the first place.

The truth is, **having a job and socialising can be indispensable for any person recovering from a period of illness: even and especially mental illness.** For some, work can introduce a routine and a sense of purpose. For others, a period of not having to work is precisely what they need. You might also need to work to support yourself financially. Whether you choose to work or not, it can be difficult to feel justified in making the decision that you feel would most positively affect you.

Socialising and visiting Cambridge can be a similarly difficult issue. As you will normally be expected to leave Cambridge during intermission, you will likely be leaving your support network of friends behind. Any friends you have from home might also be at University or have left for another reason. Loneliness can affect students who are intermitting, and some may feel that it would be helpful for them to visit Cambridge and engage in social activities. While your college will hopefully support you in how you wish to spend your intermission period, it is important to be aware that some colleges may actively discourage this.

If you feel that there is some resistance in college to your plans for how you wish to spend your intermission period, it might be helpful to chat to the Students Union's Advice Service, who are experienced in facilitating conversations between students and their colleges.

WHILE YOU'RE OUT

While this may be the last thing on your mind once you're away from Cambridge, think about what your living situation will be for the following year. Most colleges do a room ballot some time in Lent term. If you have a physical or mental health condition you may be eligible to bypass this ballot, and request a certain kind of room as a reasonable adjustment. Examples include a disabled access room, a ground floor room, a room with an ensuite, or a room on a quiet corridor or next to an exit. While you're intermitting, however, the period for requesting these adjustments - or filling in the room ballot at all - may pass you by, so make sure to check. This way you will be able to ensure that you are living with people you know (if this is what you want!) and in a room that is suitable for you.



<http://wolfishfang.deviantart.com/art/Cambridge-III-144871911>

We are aware that some students are being told by members of college staff that they are not allowed to visit Cambridge city centre while they are on intermission. This is not legally enforceable and you should let us know if this is being communicated to you. While your college may still decide on a case by case basis that intermitting students are not allowed to use certain college facilities or visit the college, you are perfectly within your right to be in the city centre. Students can feel pressured to follow this rule anyway so as not to be seen to be disrespecting the conditions of their intermission - if you have any concerns about this, contact the **Students' Unions' Advice Service** (advice@studentadvice.cam.ac.uk).

RETURNING TO CAMBRIDGE

Medical Evidence

Before being able to resume your studies, you will need to provide evidence that you are fit to return, usually in the form of a medical sign off. You will need to supply this to your college so that they can send it on to the Applications Committee before their own deadline. The Applications Committee prefer that the medical evidence you provide is written by the same person who made the original diagnosis, or from your Cambridge GP.

Deadlines to apply for return in Michaelmas term

The applications committee guidance states that deadline for a college to apply for a student to return is 24 August; for the calendar year is 24 November; in Lent term is 24 March. These dates stay fixed each year, and it's absolutely vital that you provide your medical evidence to college before these dates, so that they are able to send it off to the applications committee before they next meet. It is written very clearly that meeting these deadlines is the student's responsibility, but if you miss the deadline for reasons beyond your control, you are encouraged to make this clear.

Colleges generally send out reminders to students a few weeks in advance of the Application Committee's deadline - but with waits for GP appointments regularly reaching 2-3 weeks, this may not give you enough time to organise a medical appointment and get a letter prepared. With this in mind, don't necessarily wait for your college's reminder email before starting to get your medical evidence in order.

Adjusting to return

- The University Counselling Service run various group sessions for returners from intermission (see link on page 17). Examples include workshops on time management, self-compassion, and managing anxiety.
- It might also be useful to check in with your college nurse. Most of them are trained in issues such as mental health, sexual assault and eating disorders, and will often be able to see you much quicker than a counsellor would.
- The Disabled Students' Campaign also run a Facebook group for students on intermission and who are adjusting to return, with people frequently posting questions and seeking advice and support from the community (see link on page 17).

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Applications Committee: Notes for Guidance for Staff and Students 16-17

www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/about-us/applications-committee

Code of Practice: Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Students

www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/codeofpractice_reasonableadjustmentsfordisabledstudents.pdf

University Counselling Service Group/Workshop Timetable

www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/studentcouns/studentgroups

Students Unions' Advice Service

Provided by CUSU and the GU, this service provides free, confidential, and impartial information and advice on all aspects of life as a Cambridge student.

They also are able to provide representation in meetings.

<http://www.studentadvice.cam.ac.uk/>

CUSU Disabled Students' Campaign website

Provides resources on rights, welfare, funding, and more.

See the 'support' and 'resources' tabs for more.

www.disabled.cusu.cam.ac.uk

Disability Resource Centre

www.disability.admin.cam.ac.uk

Keynes House, 24a Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1QA

01223 332301 | disability@admin.cam.ac.uk

Intermission Solidarity & Support Facebook Group

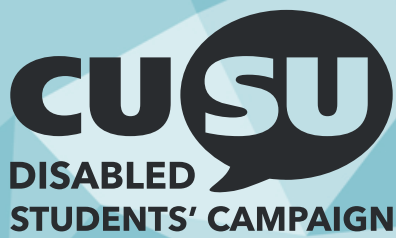
A student-run group for discussing all aspects of intermission.

www.facebook.com/groups/1547925268789968/

Cambridge Students' Disability Community

A student-run group for disabled students at Cambridge, inclusive of students with mental health issues and other illnesses.

www.facebook.com/groups/101125766899899



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