The Advice Centre
OPEN
Monday-Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm

Contacting: The Advice Centre:
Telephone: 023 8059 2085
Fax: 023 8059 5235
Email: advice@susu.org
Website: www.susu.org/life/
Address: Students’ Union Building 40
Southampton University
University Road
Highfield
Southampton
SO17 1BJ

- We are an appointments based service, however occasionally quick queries can be dealt with immediately. All other enquiries will need an appointment.
- The advice and information service is provided by a team of trained and experienced staff who deal with matters of particular relevance to students.

The Advice Centre Mission Statement:
The Advice Centre aims to provide all students at the University of Southampton with free, independent, confidential advice and representation in a friendly, relaxed environment.
CHANGING, SUSPENDING OR LEAVING YOUR COURSE

Introduction
This is a general guide as the financial impact of withdrawing or suspending is based on individual circumstances. Those withdrawing or suspending for health related reasons, or to care for someone are strongly advised to seek guidance from The Advice Centre.

Students considering changing, suspending or leaving a course need to consider all relevant information before making a final decision. Time limits and financial considerations may restrict available options.

This booklet contains information on the main financial implications of changing, suspending or leaving a course and the procedures involved. There is a small section for Post Graduate, International and NHS students who may have different situations to consider.

Previous Study and Future Funding
For most students support will be available for the length of your course, plus one extra year if needed, less any years of previously supported higher-education study.

With the exception of supplementary grants, further support will not generally be available to students who have used up their entitlement to funding. However, maintenance loans will continue to be available to students who do not already have a degree, and to students who are on a course leading to a professional qualification in a number of areas; medical doctor, dentist, veterinary science, architecture, social work and Initial Teacher Training.
Even if your income prevented you from getting help with tuition fees for previous courses, or you chose to self-fund, you would have benefited from public funding.

The personal contribution to tuition fees represents only about a quarter of the average cost of a course and even if you paid in full, the rest would have been paid for by public funds and could prevent you from receiving any more support.

**Equivalent Level Qualifications (ELQs)**

From 2009/10, most students who already have an HE qualification from an institution in the UK or elsewhere will not be eligible for further student support (except targeted support) under the Regulations for a second equivalent or lower level HE qualification.

*This rule applies whether the previous qualification was:*
- studied in the UK or elsewhere
- self-funded or publicly-funded
- studied on a full-time, full-time distance learning, compressed or part-time basis

*The rules are very complex. If you are unsure about how time out may affect funding for future study then please speak to The Advice Centre.*

**Transferring Courses**

It is important to remember the rules about previous courses if you are thinking about leaving your course before it ends or transferring to a new course, as this could affect how much financial help you can get if you take another course in the future.
It is very important if you want to transfer courses or withdraw from your course that you talk to your school and Student Finance England as soon as possible.

If you do decide to change course, you must inform Student Finance England.

If the fees are higher than those you have to pay on your current course, you may be able to apply for an additional loan for tuition fees, but should be aware that you cannot get a loan that is higher than the maximum available, for 2011/12 this is £3375.

It is important to remember the above rules if you are thinking about leaving. Make an appointment with a Student Adviser in The Advice Centre before you decide to withdraw from your course.

Making Arrangements to Transfer

If you change from a full year of a course to a final year of a course, your loan will be reassessed at the final year rate. This rate is lower because the summer period is not counted.

If you change university you should inform Student Finance England and they will reassess your entitlement.

At Southampton University, first year students wishing to change course within the University are required to do so within the first 2 weeks of the first semester in order to continue in the first year; after this point, students would usually be required to wait until the following autumn to start a new course. (Other Universities may operate different time limits.)
Students wishing to transfer must:

- Obtain the approval of the department to which they wish to transfer.
- Obtain a transfer form from their Faculty/School Office, to be approved by their personal tutor and returned to the Faculty/School Office.
- Write to Student Finance England informing them of the change of course, giving the date of change, etc.

Suspending Registration - taking time out from your studies

Students who need to take time out of their course on health grounds must submit medical evidence to their department and Student Finance England.

Student Finance England will normally suspend the support and reinstate it when the student is able to return to study. However, in some circumstances suspended students, with evidence of medical need, can continue to get their student support entitlement. For help with this make an appointment with a Student Adviser in The Advice Centre.

In addition, support should continue to be paid for the first 60 days of absence due to ill health, and help may be available through the Access to Learning Fund (ALF) – contact details are in the back of this booklet.
Students may be funded to repeat a period of study, dependent on individual circumstances.

Students who fail examinations may be given the option of repeating a year as ‘external students’ which means their registration is suspended and they will have to re-sit semester examinations. This is also called ‘intercalating’.

**Students wishing to suspend must:**
- Obtain the approval of their school
- Discuss other options such as support that could be put in place to help
- Write to their Student Finance England providing medical evidence if appropriate
- Consider their housing situation – see the accommodation section of this leaflet.

**NB.** You won’t normally be able to stay in halls as a suspended student.

Students intending to suspend registration are advised to contact The Advice Centre before their registration is suspended to discuss their financial situation fully.

**Date of Suspension**

The date at which your school records your suspension will have an impact on your funding for the future.

If there have been discussions about backdating your suspension then you need to understand how this will affect your future studies and also your Council Tax liability. Depending on the date of suspension you may find that you receive an overpayment on your student support (loans, grants etc). In the case of grants this may mean that the money has to be repaid immediately or it may be taken from future funding. Loans won’t normally need to be repaid immediately, but there are some circumstances under which this may happen.
If you are concerned about this then please contact The Advice Centre for advice. The Tuition Fee Loan is not payable for students suspending before 1st December and you will be liable to pay these fees yourself to date.

**Bursaries and Scholarships**

Any bursaries paid to you by the University of Southampton will not need to be repaid if you suspend. However, you should check with your individual school about their arrangements for any scholarship or studentship that you may have received. Often the school will require repayment if you do not complete the academic year, but this may depend on your circumstances.

You must be aware of funding deadlines and of deadlines imposed by the University, who may require you to complete your research within a specified time limit.

**NHS Funded Students**

If your course is funded by the NHS then your bursary will be suspended whilst you take time out from your studies. The NHS funding is time-limited and therefore you must complete your course within a specific time frame or funding may no longer be provided to you or to the University. You should discuss this issue with your school who will be able to advise you of the implications of any time out.

**Welfare Benefits & Grants**

Generally, full-time students are not entitled to most benefits for the duration of their course.
Students who suspend their registration are not normally eligible for benefits. You are treated as a student until either the last day of your course, or until you abandon it or are dismissed from it.

More information can be accessed through our booklet: *Students and Benefits 2011-2012*. You can pick up a copy from The Advice Centre or download from: www.susu.org/life/

For all students thinking of suspending it is important to seek advice regarding your financial position from The Advice Centre.

When a student suspends because they are ill or engaged in caring for another person, they may be able to claim certain benefits once they have stopped caring, or recovered from the illness.

**Student Loans**

Students whose graduation date will be put back because of suspending from a course should inform Student Finance England of the new graduation date.

Failure to do this could result in loan repayments being deducted in the April after the original course would have ended.

**Council Tax**

Students who suspend registration will usually become liable for Council Tax. In certain circumstances they can appeal for exemption or apply for Council Tax Benefit. Contact The Advice Centre for further guidance.
Making Arrangements to Leave University

*Students withdrawing from University should follow these steps:*

- Inform their personal tutor and Head of Department.
- Notify Student Finance England in writing.
- Write to the Faculty / School Manager, giving a date of departure.
- If you live in a hall of residence contact The Advice Centre / University Accommodation Service for advice regarding your period of notice (normally 7 days).
- Students in private rented accommodation may have difficulty getting out of their tenancy if it is for a fixed period of time. They should contact The Advice Centre or the Accommodation Service for advice.
- If you are going to be unemployed on leaving university, make a claim for Jobseekers Allowance at your local Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) office.

*The Tuition Fee Loan is not payable for students withdrawing before 1st December and you will be liable to pay these fees yourself to date.*

Termination of your Course

A student whose course is terminated by the University should be notified in writing of the right to request a review of the decision. Appeals are dealt with at Faculty/School level initially, with a further right of appeal in certain circumstances. Appeals must be requested in writing by the student, normally within 20 working days of being notified of the course termination or within 5 working days of the publication of the results of supplementary examinations.
Students have the right to advice and representation; this can be provided by a personal tutor, a Student Adviser from The Advice Centre, or another appropriate member of the University. The appeals regulations can be found at: www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/sectionIV/student-appeals.html

You can find help and advice in our booklet, How to Deal with Problems Affecting your Studies (Complaints and Appeals) 2011-12. Pick one up from The Advice Centre or download from: www.susu.org/life/

Full-time or Part-time?

Some students need to change their mode of study from full-time to part-time or vice versa. This is usually for health or financial reasons. It is usually best to make the change at the start of a new academic year rather than part way through. Make an appointment with The Advice Centre to discuss how any change will affect your funding and/or benefits.

Postgraduate Students

The regulations governing transfer of awards for postgraduate students will vary between award bodies. Research Councils will generally only allow transfers between institutions if essential to the student’s training; for example, if the student’s supervisor moves.

Absence through illness will be treated similarly as for undergraduate students, in that the grant may continue to be paid for a limited time, after which it may be suspended until the student is able to return to study. Absence for other reasons, such as family reasons, may also be considered and, in some cases, there will be specific arrangements for maternity leave. Further details about specific funding policies should be sought from the relevant department or funding agency.
The situation regarding entitlement to benefits and liability for Council Tax is much the same as for undergraduate students; PhD students who go into nominal registration may be entitled to claim benefits and should contact The Advice Centre for important information regarding the implications of claiming particular benefits, and to discuss liability for Council Tax.

Postgraduate students also have the right of appeal against the termination of their course on certain grounds. Further advice and representation is available from The Advice Centre.

Help in Making a Decision

*Students who are unsure about their course of action may find it helpful to talk things through with some of the following people:*

- Personal tutor, or other member of the department.
- Other students on the same course, including second and third years.
- The University Counselling Service can help students think through future plans.
- Career Destinations can help students look at their decision in the context of future career plans.
- A Student Adviser will be happy to talk through the practical implications of changing, leaving or suspending a course.
- Nightline is a confidential, student-run listening service for students.
- The Mentor Service – if you have a Mentor you should talk to them.

**E.U. Students**

Students from the EU or the EEA should contact the European Team at the Student Loan Company to discuss their student finance entitlement.
Tel: 0141 245 3570
E-mail: EU_Team@slc.co.uk
International Students

International Students from outside the EU are required to obtain Entry Clearance (a visa) if coming to the UK for longer than 6 months. In the case of students the amount of time they are given is usually the duration of the course + 4 months.

*If they suspend the implications may be as follows:*

- **Financial** – they will need to pay the cost of extending the visa until the revised end date of the course (or alternatively that of applying for fresh entry clearance, should they return home for the period of the suspension).

- **Potential Hardship** – Many international students are sponsored for the period of their studies and if they suspend their sponsorship may cease. As such students have ‘no recourse to public funds’ they cannot claim any benefits and as a consequence are more vulnerable to serious financial hardship.

- **Immigration Record** – When an international student makes an application to extend his/her visa (see point above) they are required to produce evidence of progress. In general, if the suspension is for a valid medical reason, there is no problem if evidence is provided. Where there is no medical evidence, or the suspension was for other reasons, there is the potential for a visa extension to be refused. Any refusal is likely to damage such a student’s immigration record with the UK.

When the Points-Based System (PBS) Tier 4 Students replaced the old immigration system in February 2009 the University became responsible for reporting to the UK Border Agency (Home Office) any international students who fail to attend for more than 10 days.

In the case of vulnerable students who for whatever valid reason have not attended and subsequently suspend, it is imperative that the University considers retrospective suspension where possible to avoid the possibility of such individuals damaging their immigration record as a result of non-attendance.
Accommodation – Halls or Private Rented

University Halls
The University Halls regulations state that suspended students are no longer eligible for accommodation. They will normally allow 7 days’ notice for you to leave and you will only pay until the end of the notice period.

Private Rented
If you have a contract in a private rented house then your situation will be more complex. You will have an obligation to pay rent until the end of your contract unless a suitable replacement can be found to take over your liability. If you are in this situation then you should discuss your situation with your other housemates (especially if you have a joint tenancy) and also your landlord. We strongly recommend that you bring your contract to The Advice Centre who can give you further guidance on your rights and responsibilities.

If you wish to remain in your shared house then you can do so but you will need to be aware that you may become liable for the Council Tax of the whole property.

See our booklet: Students and Council Tax www.susu.org/life/ or seek advice from The Advice Centre.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS IN THIS SERIES
USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS TO HELP YOU MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION:

Student Finance England
http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/educationandlearning/universityandhighereducation/studentfinance

Financial Information and Assistance
For applications to the Access to Learning Fund
Tel: 02380 593287
Email: stufunds@soton.ac.uk

Northern Ireland Education & Library Board -
http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/further-and-higher-education.htm

Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)
Tel: 0131 476 8212
Email: saas.geu@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
http://www.saas.gov.uk/

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Students’ Union Building 40
Highfield, Southampton, SO17 1BJ
Tel: 023 8059 2085
Email: advice@susu.org
www.susu.org/life/

Student Finance Wales
http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=616,6200699&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTALL

Research Councils and other postgraduate funding bodies -
www.prospects.ac.uk

University Counselling Service
Tel: 023 8059 3719
www.soton.ac.uk/edusupport/counselling/index.html

Career Destinations
Student Services Building 37
Tel: 023 8059 3501
www.soton.ac.uk/careers/

Nightline
Confidential Listening Service run by students for students.
8pm to 8am (term-time)
Tel: 02380 595236 / Internal 25236
http://nline.susu.org/
Please note that at time of publication every effort was made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this booklet. The Advice Centre and University of Southampton Students’ Union cannot accept responsibility for errors, omissions, or subsequent changes in legal requirements. The Information and figures quoted in this publication were believed to be accurate at the time of going to print, but may be subject to change.

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Alternative Formats of this leaflet are available on request.
The Advice Centre  www.susu.org/life/