

Applications for Examination Allowances

Notes for Guidance for Staff and Students

These guidance notes are intended to complement the relevant University Ordinances. They do not themselves constitute a set of regulations. Nor should they be taken to imply that, given a particular set of circumstances, the Board of Graduate Studies will automatically reach a particular decision. The relevant Ordinances are:

- Regulation 12 of the General Regulations for Admission as a Graduate Student
- Regulation 16 of the General Regulations for the MSt Degree as published in *Statutes and Ordinances, 2012*, p. 542
- Regulation 15 of the General Regulations for the MSt Degree as amended by Notice by the General Board, *Reporter, 2012-13*, p. 322 (*applicable to students admitted from 1 October 2012 onwards*).

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1. Introduction

Eligibility

- 1.1 The Board of Graduate Studies considers applications for examination allowances from the Colleges on behalf of graduate students registered for the MPhil, MRes or MSt degrees, the Diploma in Economics, the Postgraduate Diplomas in Legal Studies and in International Law, or the Certificates of Postgraduate Study (CPGS).

It does not consider applications from undergraduates or from students on the following postgraduate courses: LLM; MAST; MBA; MCL; MEng; MFin; MMath; MMus; MSci; PGCE; for information about these qualifications, please refer to the [Standing Committee on Applications](#)¹.

Students registered for the PhD, MLitt or MSc degrees may not apply for examination allowances and in case of difficulty in the examination should consult their Supervisor or College Tutor for advice.

Purpose of an examination allowance

- 1.2 The primary purpose of the Board of Graduate Studies is to consider the cases of students who, due to medical or other grave cause, have been prevented from taking examinations, have missed part of an examination or have failed or underperformed in an examination. An allowance for a graduate examination normally comes into effect if a candidate has been, or is likely to be, unable to undertake part or all of their examination, or has failed or underperformed part or all of it because of serious and unforeseen urgent cause. The Board will consider cases based on medical, personal, cultural (including religious observance) and compassionate grounds, provided that the circumstances are unanticipated and beyond the student's control. An examination may constitute a thesis, other assessed work such as an essay in addition to a formal examination paper.
- 1.3 In its policies and decisions the Board of Graduate Studies has the following overarching aims:
- To endeavour to ensure parity of treatment between applicants who share similar circumstances, whilst recognising that each case is individual;
 - To balance the merits of the individual case with ensuring that no student gains an unfair advantage over others taking the same course;
 - To support the College and Faculty in achieving an appropriate and equitable outcome for its student(s).

¹ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/studentregistry/staff/exams/college/>

- 1.4 An examination allowance does not affect the marks received. Its purpose is to allow candidates a chance to obtain the qualification they have been registered for, if the Board of Graduate Studies accepts that their performance in the examination has been affected by serious mitigating circumstances.
- 1.5 A student may not apply direct to the Board of Graduate Studies for an examination allowance. The Board of Graduate Studies may only consider applications made by the College Tutor on the student's behalf.
- 1.6 The Board of Graduate Studies will normally grant only one examination allowance to a candidate during their graduate career.

Forms of examination allowances

- 1.7 If the application is upheld by the Board of Graduate Studies, the examination allowance may take one of two forms:
 - a) the candidate is approved for the degree or other qualification for which the student is registered, provided that the Faculty Degree Committee judge the student to have performed with credit in a substantial part of the examination. The student will be awarded the degree and the transcript will show all the marks (including any fail marks) obtained in the examinations;
 - b) the candidate is examined or re-examined under such conditions and at such time as determined following consultation by the Board of Graduate Studies with the Faculty Degree Committee. In practice, this normally means that the student returns for part or all of the next academic year to repeat the examination(s) or assessment in question.

2. How to make an application

General

- 2.1 Applications must be submitted not later than three months after the date on which the Faculty Degree Committee or the Board of Graduate Studies (for the CPGS) communicated formally the outcome of the examination to the candidate. Applications received after the deadline will not be considered.
- 2.2 Applications are submitted by the student's Tutor and require counter-signature by the Senior Tutor (or equivalent authority). Students may not apply direct to the Board of Graduate Studies. On the application form, the College is required explicitly to confirm whether it supports the student's case and believes it to be deserving of consideration by the Board of Graduate Studies and if it does not, to confirm this has been made known to the student. The declaration form asks students to give permission for any medical evidence to be disclosed to members of the Board of Graduate

Studies and its medical advisers and also asks for the student's consent for the College to contact their doctor to discuss their case, if necessary.

- 2.3 A College's application must include all of the following:
- a completed [application form](#),²
 - a statement from the College Tutor;
 - a completed [declaration form](#)³ from the student;
 - original and contemporary evidence of medical circumstances or other grave cause.
- 2.4 The application may also include any additional information which the College wishes to submit.
- 2.5 Completed applications should be sent to the Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies at The Student Registry, 4 Mill Lane (Dr Kate Maxwell, email: kate.maxwell@admin.cam.ac.uk). The application will be acknowledged and the Secretary will inform the Tutor of the date of the meeting at which the application will be considered. Please note that applications are usually considered by circulation during the long vacation but may be deferred to the October meeting.
- 2.6 Applications may be submitted by email or in the post, but original copies of any medical evidence are required.
- 2.7 The application must be complete i.e. it must include all the required documentation and tutorial signatures. If an application is not complete when it is submitted, it will not be considered by the Board of Graduate Studies.

The Forms

- 2.8 It is important that every application is completed on the forms provided and is accompanied by a complete set of all the evidence required. The forms are available at:
- <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/studentregistry/exams/after/allowances.html>

Medical Evidence

Separate [guidance notes](#)⁴ are available for medical practitioners:

It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that their medical practitioner has read and understood these guidelines.

² http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/studentregistry/exams/pdf/exam_allowance_form.docx

³ http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/studentregistry/exams/pdf/declaration_form.docx

⁴ http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/studentregistry/exams/pdf/guidelines_for_medical_practitioners.pdf

- 2.9 Strict confidentiality is observed regarding medical evidence. Medical evidence is disclosed only to the members of the Board of Graduate Studies and its medical advisers. The student is required to submit a form giving permission for his/her medical evidence to be disclosed. The student is asked to confirm that the College may also contact their Medical Practitioner for further information (for instance to confirm that he or she has read the Board's Guidelines for Medical Practitioners or to help ensure the continuation of any medical care or other support on their return to Cambridge.
- 2.10 Medical evidence must be normally be contemporary and must be submitted by the deadline of the Board of Graduate Studies meeting at which the College would like the application to be considered.
- 2.11 The Board of Graduate Studies expect to receive evidence from a medically qualified practitioner, for example a doctor's report, preferably from a doctor based in Cambridge. Where appropriate, it will additionally consider evidence from an accredited counsellor. In the case of short term debilitation, the Board may consider evidence from a College nurse. Supporting letters from relatives or friends, irrespective of whether they are medically qualified, or anecdotal sources of information do not constitute medical evidence and are not acceptable to the Board of Graduate Studies.
- 2.12 The medical evidence should be a clear diagnosis which includes the nature and severity of the illness; it should state how the condition is likely to have affected the candidate's examination preparation and/or performance or academic progress. The evidence should be precise and self-explanatory. The amount of evidence required will vary from case to case. For example, hospital admission will need a shorter explanation than will a less obvious or less serious condition where background information and details of the candidate's medical history may be required.

Evidence of Other Grave Cause

- 2.13 Very occasionally, mitigating circumstances which are not medical may be considered. A grave cause may have a variety of characteristics, but in all cases, the College should explain how it is (i) unanticipated and (ii) entirely beyond the student's control.
- 2.14 In cases relating to grave cause, the Board of Graduate Studies expect to receive evidence from an appropriate professional; the evidence should be independent and should corroborate the college's application. The Board of Graduate Studies is not able to consider evidence from a relative, friend or anyone with a close personal connection to the student or family.

Academic Evidence

- 2.15 In every case, the Board of Graduate Studies will consult the Faculty Degree Committee regarding the student's academic progress to date and to obtain a profile of their marks for the examination in question and any other formally assessed work completed throughout the year.

College Statement

- 2.16 The College Tutor should submit a statement which outlines the details of the case. The College may also wish to draw attention to any matters which it should like the Board of Graduate Studies to take into consideration. The statement may be submitted by the student's Graduate Tutor or Senior Tutor.

3. How the Board of Graduate Studies considers applications for examination allowances**General**

- 3.1 The Secretary circulates applications to members of the Board of Graduate Studies. Medical evidence is sent to the Board's independent medical advisors who provide a confidential report to the Board of Graduate Studies
- 3.2 In considering the application, the Board of Graduate Studies takes into account the evidence submitted, the student's academic performance throughout the year and any points raised in the College statement.
- 3.3 Where the medical evidence is considered by the medical advisers to be weak or unconvincing, the Board may defer a decision until further appropriate evidence is obtained or it may propose an allowance other than the one requested or it may decline the application.
- 3.4 Where the academic evidence is considered to be insufficient to support the allowance requested, the Board of Graduate Studies may propose an allowance other than the one requested or it may decline the application.
- 3.5 Where the regulations refer to "substantial" parts of an examination, the Board of Graduate Studies does not have formulaic definitions of these terms and it will refer to marking rubrics and the Faculty Degree Committee as appropriate.
- 3.6 If the Board of Graduate Studies agree there are grounds to uphold the examination allowance, it will, without exception consult the Faculty Degree Committee to determine whether the student should be approved for the degree or to determine the conditions for the student to be examined or re-

examined. The Board of Graduate Studies will not share medical evidence or other confidential material with the Faculty Degree Committee.

- 3.7 The Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies will email the College Tutor to communicate the Board's decision and the details of the form of allowance, if applicable. The tutor will be asked to forward the offer to the student who is given a period of one month to confirm to the Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies whether they wish to accept or reject the offer.

Return to study

- 3.8 When considering a request to return to study in the next academic year to re-sit the examinations in question, the Board of Graduate Studies is mindful that it should not bestow an advantage on the student. In exceptional circumstances and following consultation with the Faculty Degree Committee, the Board of Graduate Studies may grant permission for a student to repeat the entire year of study. In this case the student is normally required to complete all forms of assessment and examinations again. Exceptional circumstances would involve significant and sustained mitigating circumstances throughout a student's final year or a significant change to the course.
- 3.9 If a student is offered the opportunity to return to the course for all or part of the following academic year, no further University Composition Fee will be charged provided that the student has already met the Fee liability for his/her course in the current academic year. However, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that they have sufficient finance to cover any living costs and where applicable, to ensure that they obtain a visa in good time for their return to study. Further information on entry clearance to the UK can be obtained from the International Student Team:

- <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/internationalstudents/studentvisas/>

The student should liaise with his/her College and the Course Director regarding the details of their return to Cambridge.

Evidence of fitness to return to study

- 3.10 When the Board of Graduate Studies grants, on medical grounds, permission to return in the following academic year to re-sit an examination or examinations, it will normally attach a condition of fitness to return to study. Evidence of this condition having been met is required prior to the student returning to the course. A student with this condition may not resume residence without the permission of the College, the Board of Graduate Studies and the Faculty Degree Committee.

- 3.11 Wherever possible, medical evidence confirming fitness to return should be provided by the same person who made the original diagnosis. Where this is not possible, the student should arrange for the current practitioner, for example GP or consultant, to see the medical evidence from the time of the original diagnosis to inform their judgment on the student's fitness to return. The student is asked to confirm that the College may contact their Medical Practitioner for further information for instance, to help ensure the continuation of any medical care or other support on their return to Cambridge. The College and the Board of Graduate Studies may reserve the right to seek a further independent assessment.
- 3.12 It is the student's responsibility to obtain this evidence and to submit it to their College Tutor. The College is asked to submit a copy of the medical evidence together with the Application Form for students wishing to [resume study](#)⁵ directly to the Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies at least eight weeks prior to their return to study (although please note it may take longer than eight weeks to obtain entry clearance to the UK) and not normally more than 12 weeks prior to their return to study. The request will be considered by the Board of Graduate Studies and its medical advisers. The Faculty Degree Committee will be consulted but medical evidence and any other confidential material will not be shared. The Board of Graduate Studies will confirm to the College Tutor and the Department that the student has permission to return to study.
- 3.13 In cases where continued medical treatment is required, the Board of Graduate Studies needs to be satisfied that such treatment can satisfactorily be delivered in Cambridge and that the student's condition will not have an adverse effect on their performance in the examinations.

4. Religious Observance

- 4.1 If a student feels unable to attend an examination paper(s) on a specific day(s) due to religious observance, it is the student's responsibility to bring this to the college's attention at the earliest opportunity and in advance of the examination. For examinations in the Easter Term, this will normally be in Lent Term when the student's examination timetable is published.
- 4.2 The College should contact the Board of Graduate Studies, identifying the examination paper(s) affected:

- <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/gradstud/exams/before/special.html>

Where possible, arrangements will be made for the student to sit the examination paper after the main sitting; the college is responsible for ensuring that the student is isolated appropriately and does not gain any

⁵ http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/studentregistry/exams/pdf/return_to_study_form.docx

unfair advantage over other students, for example by having access to revision materials for the affected examination paper(s).

- 4.3 If a later sitting is not possible, for example isolation would exceed 24 hours, and the student misses an examination paper(s), the College may apply to the Board of Graduate Studies for an examination allowance in the usual way.
- 4.4 Where a student is able to attend all examination papers but anticipates being affected by religious observance while attempting them, the college should contact the Board of Graduate Studies to discuss any request for special examination arrangements in the usual way.
- 4.5 Religious observance may also be grounds for seeking an extension to the deadline for the submission of coursework or thesis.
- 4.6 A calendar of religious and festival dates and relevant information can be found on the Human Resource Division's web page:

- http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/equality/documents/calendar_2011-12.pdf

The Board takes seriously the requirements of UK Equality legislation and the University's policies in this area (for further information <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/equality/>).

5. Extensions to deadlines

- 5.1 It is often possible for a student or College to negotiate an extension to the deadline for submission of coursework with the Department or Faculty without recourse to a formal request for examination allowance. All parties should be satisfied that the circumstances leading to the request and the evidence supporting it provide good reason. The extension should be for a specified period i.e. an alternative date should be agreed.

6. Review Procedure - reviewing a decision of the Board of Graduate Studies

The procedure for the review of decisions taken by the Board in respect of individuals in exercise of its powers under the regulations for allowances to candidates for examinations is contained in [Regulation 12](#) of the General Regulations for admission as a Graduate Student, in [Regulation 16](#) of the General Regulations for the MSt Degree (*Statutes and Ordinances*, 2012, p. 542), and in Regulation 15 of the General Regulations for the MSt Degree as amended by Notice by the General Board, [Reporter, 2012-13, p. 322](#) (*applicable to students admitted from 1 October 2012 onwards*). No person who applies for review under the procedure so established shall be entitled to apply also for review of the same matter under the procedure for determining complaints by members of the University *in statu pupillari* established under the regulation for complaints by students ([Student Complaints Procedure](#)).

- 6.1 A student, or her or his Tutor with the student's consent, may seek review of a decision in relation to that student made by the Board of Graduate Studies. A request for review must be made in writing stating the grounds of review within one month of written notification of the Board's decision. Applications for a decision to be reviewed should be sent in the first instance to Mr A. Bennett (Andrew.Bennett@admin.cam.ac.uk) or Ms S. Reed (Susan.Reed@admin.cam.ac.uk), Student Complaints & Appeals Office, Academic Division, 17 Mill Lane.
- 6.2 The Registry or a deputy will appoint a reviewer who will consider the request, will obtain an opinion if necessary from the Board of Graduate Studies and/or its medical advisers, at her or his discretion will hold a hearing (but there is no obligation to hold a hearing). The reviewer will issue an adjudication in writing as soon as possible, stating findings of fact, conclusions, and, if any, recommendations, for consideration by the Board of Graduate Studies.
- 6.3 The Board of Graduate Studies will normally accept the recommendation of the reviewer. If, exceptionally, the reviewer's recommendation is not accepted a written explanation shall be provided to the reviewer, the student, and her or his Tutor.
- 6.4 The conclusion of the Board's consideration of any recommendation of a review is the normal final point of decision within the University. Any subsequent review would normally be by the national Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).
- 6.5 A reviewer may summarily dismiss an application which seems to him/her to be vexatious or frivolous.

7. Key Contacts

General queries and advice: Sarah Pickard
(Sarah.Pickard@admin.cam.ac.uk)

Special arrangements during an examination: Lyn Davis
(Lyn.Davis@admin.cam.ac.uk)

Making an application to the Board of Graduate Studies: Kate Maxwell
(Kate.Maxwell@admin.cam.ac.uk)

8. Sources of Advice and Support

Disability Resource Centre: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/disability>
University Counselling Service: <http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/>