

Board of Graduate Studies: Applications for Examination Allowances

Notes of Guidance for Medical Practitioners

These guidance notes are intended to assist medical practitioners who have been asked to:

1. Provide a letter to support a student's application for an examination allowance on medical grounds,
2. Provide a letter which confirms that the student is fit to resume their study or sit an examination following a period of ill-health;

Background

The Board of Graduate Studies considers applications for examination allowances from colleges on behalf of graduate students. 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.

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 be mindful of the situation of the student body as a whole and the interests of students who are not applicants to the Board of Graduate Studies;
- To ensure that, particularly in relation to repeating a period of study, an applicant is not advantaged in comparison with other students;
- To support the College and Faculty in achieving an appropriate and equitable outcome for its student(s).

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 student's College on the student's behalf and you should be aware that under circumstances, the College may, with the student's consent, contact you to discuss the student's case in more detail. If the request for an examination allowance is accepted by the Board of Graduate Studies, the student may exceptionally be approved for the qualification for which they are registered. More commonly, the student is invited to re-take the examinations which they have failed in the next academic year which may also involve returning to the course for part or all of the year. Students who have been granted an examination allowance on medical grounds are not permitted to return to study or re-take an examination until they have submitted medical evidence to confirm that they are medically fit to return to study.

Medical Evidence in support of an application allowance

The Board of Graduate Studies expect to receive contemporary 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.

Strict confidentiality is observed regarding medical evidence. You should be aware that the evidence you provide will be made available to the student, the student's College, members of the Board of Graduate Studies and independent medical advisers to the Board of Graduate Studies. The Board of Graduate Studies and its medical advisers will use the evidence provided to determine whether or not there are grounds to approve the request for an examination allowance. The College may, with the student's consent, contact you to discuss the student's case in more detail

The evidence should be contemporary and provide a clear diagnosis which includes the nature and severity of the illness; it should state when and 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. Where a student is making a request return to study in the following academic year, the medical evidence should also (i) indicate when the student is likely to be able to resume study and (ii) include a clear medical plan identifying any necessary treatment to be undertaken during the period prior to the student's return to study.

Medical Evidence in support of return to study following an examination allowance or intermission on medical grounds

When the Board of Graduate Studies grants an examination allowance which permits the student to return to study in the following academic year or intermission of terms on medical grounds, it normally attaches a condition of proof of medical fitness to return to study. Evidence of this condition having been met is required before the student intends to return. Medical evidence is submitted to the Board of Graduate Studies by the College on the student's behalf. A student may not resume study without the permission of the Board of Graduate Studies.

Strict confidentiality is observed regarding medical evidence. You should be aware that the evidence you provide will be made available to the student, the student's College, members of the Board of Graduate Studies and independent medical advisers to the Board of Graduate Studies. The Board of Graduate Studies and its medical advisers will use the evidence provided to determine whether or not there is sufficient evidence to grant permission to return to study. The College may, with the student's consent, contact you to discuss the student's case in more detail.

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 a GP or consultant, to see the medical evidence from the time of the original diagnosis to inform their judgement on the student's fitness to return. In cases where continued medical treatment, including psychiatric treatment, is required, the Committee needs to be satisfied that such treatment can satisfactorily be delivered in Cambridge.

Courses at the University of Cambridge are particularly demanding and it is important that you are satisfied that the students is medically fit and able to cope with rigours of academic study.