

C8. Academic Discipline

The purpose of all procedures of academic discipline is to identify as early as possible when a student is not working to the best of his or her ability, to help the student to do so and to conclude his or her course successfully. Matters of academic discipline will be kept separate from disciplinary action for other forms of misbehaviour, which will not be referred to in any document or discussion dealing with academic discipline. The steps of the academic disciplinary procedures are explained below and are designed to be transparent and to give every opportunity for students to explain any special circumstances that should be taken into account in reviewing their situation. All tutors wish to ensure that their students make the best use of their time at Somerville; so long as students do this and work to the best of their ability, they will not be affected by the terms of the academic discipline procedure.

a) Step 1

If a student is not meeting the conditions of good academic standing described in section C1 (for example, if they perform poorly in exams/Collections or tutorials, or if attendance is poor), their Personal or Organising Tutor will report his or her concerns to Education Committee, a college committee that meets at least twice a term that is chaired by the Principal. The committee members will discuss the student's case and decide whether the student should be put '**on report**' and any conditions that should be attached to this status.

Being on report is a warning about academic progress and is intended both to demonstrate the College's concerns that the student may not be working as well as they could, and to help the student improve their academic performance. The student will be sent a letter clearly explaining what improvements or changes are expected, either in terms of rules to be observed or of levels of performance and/or targets to be achieved. This letter will also be kept on their file. They will be given a timeframe to make these changes/improvements and will also be expected to see the Principal in order to discuss their general situation.

Following receipt of the letter, a student should immediately arrange to discuss the case with their Personal Tutor to make sure they are clear about the circumstances. If any mitigating circumstances have not been revealed at this point, they should tell their tutor or the Senior Tutor. If any come to light, they will be placed on record and the requirements of their status may be modified. Tutors will be able to offer the student advice, and may refer them to the College Doctor or the Counselling Service for further help.

Their progress will be closely monitored and reported to each meeting of Education Committee. If the standard of their work improves sufficiently and they meet the conditions they have been set, they will be taken off report and a letter confirming this will be sent to them and placed on their file. If they show some improvement but not all conditions have been met, their tutors may request that they remain on report, either with the same or different conditions. If they do not meet the conditions set within the specified timeframe, it is likely that they would be moved to step two of the academic disciplinary process.

b) Step 2

If a student on report does not meet the conditions set for them, Education Committee is likely to decide to issue a formal warning by placing a student '**on probation**' for their place: that is, the question of whether they should remain on course now comes into consideration. An undergraduate who has been given a verbal warning by his or her tutors without yet having been placed on report by Education Committee may also be placed directly on probation by the Committee, if circumstances warrant: for example, if the student's default is sufficiently serious, or if considerations of timing make it desirable to hasten a final decision about a student's future.

To be placed on probation signals that there are serious problems with a student's performance, but it should be noted that there are examples of students who spend a period on probation, and yet improve their performance and successfully complete their degrees. The conditions of probation will be conveyed to the student in a letter. The student will be told clearly what is expected of him or her in the future, and given a timetable for achieving these expectations.

The letter will also explain that if the conditions of probation are not met, then it is likely that Education Committee would recommend referring the student to an Academic Disciplinary Hearing, the third and final step in the College's academic disciplinary process (see below). If the conditions set in the probation letter are met, Education Committee may decide either to take the student off probation and require no further report on their progress, or to place the student on 'report' status (see step 1 above). If they show some improvement but not all conditions have been met, their tutors may request that they remain on probation, either with the same or different conditions. Where the conditions of probation include achieving a set mark in 'special collections' this will be double blind-marked by external assessors, and in cases where they disagree, the more favourable mark will be used. The Principal will see the student and make sure that he or she understands the situation and has the opportunity to make all material circumstances known.

If a student has been on probation for at least four weeks before the start of their First Public Examinations and a condition of the probation is that some or all of these exams are passed at the first attempt, and that condition is not met, the student's course of study will be terminated. This is also explained in the University's Examination Regulations, point 3.15 ([www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/09- 23 Part 3 First Public Examination.shtml](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/09-23%20Part%203%20First%20Public%20Examination.shtml)).

c) Step 3

If a student on probation does not meet the conditions set for him or her, Education Committee is likely to agree that an **Academic Disciplinary Hearing** should be convened. Given that the student will only reach this stage if they have failed to meet conditions set to retain their place, if nothing emerges from the hearing that sets the matter in a different light, the outcome will be that a student is sent down but, in the light of evidence presented at the hearing, the panel may make a different set of recommendations.

The panel is chaired by the Vice-Principal, unless she is unavailable, or has a close connection with the student that is likely to, or likely to be perceived to, impair in any way her ability to reach a judgment unaffected by matters extraneous to the case (such as if she

is the student's Personal Tutor). In this case the next most senior Fellow available and without a close connection to the student will act as Chair. The panel also consists of two Fellows, neither of whom should be the student's tutor, nor have any close connection with the student. The student's Personal Tutor and the Senior Tutor will also be in attendance. The student may choose to be accompanied to the hearing by one or two supporters (if two, one must be a JCR officer).

The student will be given prior written notice setting out the grounds for convening an academic disciplinary hearing and will be given a copy of supporting evidence, such as tutors' reports or collection results. At the hearing, the Chair will explain how the hearing will be organised and will then summarise the case for sending down as presented in the supporting evidence. The Chair will ensure that all parties are given full opportunities to say everything they wish to present, including any material considerations and mitigating circumstances the student may wish to raise. The panel may ask questions of the student, his or her Personal Tutor and the Senior Tutor. At the end of the hearing, the student and his other supporter(s), the Senior Tutor and the student's Personal Tutor will withdraw and the panel will then decide on its recommendations. The student, his or her Personal Tutor and the Senior Tutor will be informed of the panel's recommendations as soon as they are agreed (this may not be immediately after the hearing), and the recommendations shall be reported to the College's next Governing Body meeting by the Principal. Governing Body will make a final decision about the case and this represents the College's final decision.

Appeals

a) College appeal process

Students given a penalty in relation to non-academic matters may appeal against the penalty in writing to the Dean and the Principal, the latter having overall responsibility for the discipline of students. Those dissatisfied with the Principal's ruling may make a further appeal to the Conference of Colleges' Appeal Tribunal.

The outcome of an Academic or Behaviour-Related Disciplinary Panel is a final decision of the Principal and Governing Body, and therefore a student wishing to appeal should approach the Conference of Colleges Appeal Tribunal.

b) Conference of Colleges Appeal Tribunal (CCAT)

A student may appeal a decision of Governing Body to send him or her down by filing a written application to the Conference of Colleges Appeal Tribunal (CCAT) not more than five days after being notified of the decision. The application should include a copy of the decision being challenged, a brief statement of the facts and of the arguments on which the application is based, your request for a remedy, where applicable an application for a stay of the effects of the decision being challenged or for any other preliminary relief of an urgent nature, and your contact details. This will be acknowledged by the CCAT Secretariat.

CCAT will then organise a Panel to review the case; no members of the Panel will have any direct connection with the College. The Panel will normally convene a hearing within 14 days from receipt of the application but this will depend on the circumstances of each case. The student and the College may be represented by a third party (including, at the Panel's discretion, by Counsel and/or a solicitor). The hearing will be normally be in public and a decision will normally be made within seven days of the hearing of the appeal. Full procedures can be obtained from <http://is.gd/QgpAcJ>.

c) Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

Under the Higher Education Act 2004, certain complaints which the student concerned considers have not been properly dealt with by the College and the CCAT may be pursued with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education. Please see www.oiahe.org.uk for full details.