



## UNIVERSITY POLICY ON STUDENT MATERNITY, EXTENDED PATERNITY AND ADOPTION LEAVE

This policy sets out a framework for student parents' interactions with the University in relation to data collection, defining entitlement to family-related-leave, arrangements for return to study, and access to University graduate accommodation and childcare services.

Further information is available on request from Education Policy Support ([Contact | Academic Support \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)) or the Equality and Diversity Unit ([equality@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:equality@admin.ox.ac.uk)).

### 1. THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGES

This policy framework does not seek to prescribe college policies towards students, though there are several areas in which student parents' interests will best be met by cooperation between the University and the College. It is anticipated that the main areas of impact on colleges will include:

- advising students on the timing of leave and assisting them to make applications for suspension of status (in the case of graduates, in cooperation with the appropriate department or faculty);
- preparing for return to study (in the case of graduates, in cooperation with the appropriate department or faculty);
- advising students on possible adjustments to mode of study (in the case of graduates, in cooperation with the appropriate department or faculty).

Colleges may wish to draw up their own policies on maternity leave to ensure consistency of practice in relation to access to college premises, facilities and accommodation.

### 2. COLLECTING INFORMATION AT REGISTRATION

Collecting information on students' dependants helps the University to fulfil its responsibilities in relation to gathering equality data; monitoring the adequacy of its support mechanisms; and targeting student parents with relevant information and advice.

- 2.1. Students are asked to state during the annual registration process whether they have any dependants under the age of 18.
- 2.2. The University uses the information collected at registration to inform student parents and carers of the facilities and resources available to them both within the collegiate University and more widely (see: [www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/childcare](http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/childcare)).

### 3. MATERNITY LEAVE

The University's policy has been harmonised with the [Research Councils'](#) framework and clearly differentiates maternity leave from suspension of status for medical or disciplinary reasons. It aims to ensure consistent and fair treatment of pregnant students and new mothers and provides new mothers with the right to a protected period of leave after the birth. (In this section the term 'mother' refers to an individual who gives birth).

- 3.1. Students should notify their college, department, supervisor or Director of Graduate Studies of their pregnancy as soon as possible, and preferably no later than the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth<sup>1</sup>. Earlier notification may be necessary in some cases, for example where a student works in a potentially hazardous environment<sup>2</sup>. If this is the case, the department in question must ensure that it has published this information and drawn students' attention to it.
- 3.2. University safety policy requires departments to make a risk assessment for the work of new and expectant mothers<sup>3</sup>. It is recommended that health and safety queries from departments are addressed in the first instance either to their Departmental Safety Officer, or to the Area Safety Officer or to the Safety Office. The Occupational Health Service can assist with health queries about pregnancy and work, and breast-feeding and work. This may require a consultation with a doctor or nurse and a visit to the workplace (email [enquiries@uohs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@uohs.ox.ac.uk)).
- 3.3. Pregnant students are permitted leave to attend antenatal and medical appointments. In conjunction with the student, the college and department should draw up a student support plan to be reviewed at key stages during pregnancy and maternity. The support plan should accommodate for any absences due to antenatal and medical appointments. This will help coordinate support and ensure students' needs are met during pregnancy, following the birth and on the student's return to studies.

#### Same sex couples

- 3.4. In cases which do not fall under the arrangements for adoption leave set out in section 6 below, the student who gives birth to the child will be eligible to take maternity leave while their partner will be eligible to take paternity leave.

#### Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students

- 3.5. Students who give birth may choose to suspend their status before recommencing their studies. This will normally last one full year so that the student may return to study at the same point at which they suspended. Maternity leave cannot start later than the date of the child's birth and all new mothers are advised and

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<sup>1</sup> Pregnant students can obtain a maternity certificate (MATB1) from a doctor or midwife from the 20<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy.

<sup>2</sup> This could be as early as the fourth or fifth week of pregnancy in some cases, so advice should be sought at the earliest opportunity from the University Occupational Health Service.

<sup>3</sup> Work environments that involve the following are more likely to present greater risks: physical activity including lifting and carrying; the use of chemicals, including paints and pesticides; radiation; compressed air environments; exposure to infectious disease.

expected to take a minimum of two weeks' leave immediately after the birth. Maternity leave should be taken under current college arrangements for suspension of status and the policies described in 3.11 – 3.15 relating to access to university services and arrangements for return to study will apply. Postgraduate students should also submit an application for suspension of status (see section 3.8 below).

### Postgraduate research students

#### Maternity leave

- 3.6. Students who give birth during their period of registration for a postgraduate research degree are automatically entitled to suspend their status for up to 3 terms (1 year) of maternity leave. This period of leave is calculated separately from the 6 terms of ordinary suspension of status faculty or departmental boards may permit, and no special application to Education Committee is required. Terms of maternity leave do not have to be taken consecutively but do have to be taken within 12 months of the birth and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.7. Students who hold Research Council or other sponsoring body awards must align their periods of University and funding body leave. Where there is a conflict of interest between the two policies, the sponsoring body's policy will be followed in relation to the area(s) of conflict.
- 3.8. Students should apply for maternity, extended paternity or adoption leave on the [GSO.17b](#) form (Application for suspension of status for maternity, extended paternity or adoption leave)<sup>5</sup>. The timing of maternity leave will depend on a number of factors, including term dates and the nature of the student's research work, though the earliest maternity leave can commence is 11 weeks before the expected week of childbirth. The leave period will start on the day of the baby's birth at the latest and new mothers are advised and expected not to return to study earlier than two weeks after the birth.
- 3.9. The relevant Graduate Studies Assistant (GSA) will update the student record system to indicate that maternity leave will be taken and the milestones and expected completion dates will automatically adjust. The GSA will also notify the Fees Team of any necessary fee amendments.
- 3.10. Suspensions of status are recorded on the student record system as commencing at the start of the relevant term and concluding at the end of the subsequent vacation. If a student suspends mid-term the date of suspension will usually be backdated to the start of term. If there are concerns about backdating the suspension of status to the start of term advice should be sought from Education Policy Support via [edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk).

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<sup>4</sup> Students who have been granted the maximum number of terms of suspension of status by their board and who have also taken maternity leave are permitted to seek dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of status where required. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/progression>

### Access to University facilities

- 3.11. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students on maternity, extended paternity or adoption leave will retain their university cards and Single Sign-On (SSO) access to online resources, including email, and to university libraries. Suspended students are not normally expected to be studying, and are not entitled to teaching, supervision and other academic provision, or access to laboratories<sup>6</sup>.

### Planning for return to study

- 3.12. Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students on maternity leave should be encouraged by their college and/or department to maintain occasional contact with their tutor and/or supervisor so that arrangements may be made for their return to study. This is likely to involve a level of academic guidance and preparation, as deemed necessary in each case.
- 3.13. Postgraduate research students on maternity leave are permitted a maximum of 10 'Keeping in Touch' (KIT) days across the maternity leave period to participate in activities related to their research project. Such instances should be agreed in advance with the student's supervisor.
- 3.14. Timely arrangements should be made to facilitate students' return to study after maternity leave, including a full assessment of their requirements in relation to e.g. training, updating, monitoring and additional learning support. Typically, this assessment would be carried out by a college tutor, supervisor or other relevant academic staff.
- 3.15. Should the new parent wish to continue to breastfeed on return to studies, the department should be informed in writing so that the Risk Assessment for Expectant and Nursing Individuals can be reviewed (see section 3.2 above). A suitable private space and opportunity to express breast milk can then be planned. A secure, clean fridge, in which to store milk, work breaks at appropriate times or flexibility of start and/or finish times whilst breastfeeding will be considered.
- 3.16. If ill-health prevents a student from returning to work after completing their maximum period of maternity leave, this should be treated as sickness absence and further suspension of status should be sought in the usual way for sickness and notifications made accordingly (i.e. to the funding body). If a student is unable to return to work due to the illness of their child, they should seek a further suspension of status in the usual way, if necessary by application to the Education Committee.

### Overseas students

- 3.17. Under the terms of the student visa, overseas students who suspend their status may be required to return to their home countries while suspended depending on

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/status>  
<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/undergraduate/status>

the length of the suspension. They would then need a new Confirmation for Acceptance for Studies (CAS) and visa to resume their studies. Students should consult the Student Immigration team for advice on immigration and visas (email [student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk)).

#### Funded maternity leave (postgraduate students)

- 3.18. The University aims to provide a limited period of funded maternity leave for holders of all studentships funded or co-funded by the University where the expected week of childbirth falls within the period of the award. Students should contact the Student Fees and Funding Team ([student.funding@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.funding@admin.ox.ac.uk)) and the relevant departmental Graduate Studies Assistant to discuss their options.
- 3.19. Prior to receiving funded maternity leave from the University, students are required to state their intention to return to their studies after taking the leave. Students who do not return to their studies for at least one term after taking funded leave may be required to pay back in full all monies received during the period of leave.
- 3.20. Research Council funded students are entitled to receive funded maternity leave. The first 26 weeks would normally be paid at full stipend, the following 13 weeks at a level commensurate with statutory maternity pay and the final 13 weeks unpaid; more details are available from the relevant Graduate Studies Assistant. Prior to receiving such funding, students are required to state their intention to return to their studies after taking maternity leave. Students who do not return to their studies for at least one term after taking funded maternity leave may be required to pay back in full all monies received during the period of leave.

## 4. ADJUSTMENTS TO MODE OF STUDY

Where the option of transferring to part-time study does not already exist, this policy provides an opportunity for student parents to stage their return from maternity, paternity or adoption leave to full-time study by applying for permission to alter their mode of study, usually for a limited period.

#### Undergraduate students

- 4.1. Some undergraduate students returning to study after the birth of a child may find it difficult to pursue their course at the normal pace. Under such circumstances it may be possible to extend the duration of their studies, typically by studying the Final Honour School over one additional year. Such a proposal requires endorsement from both the college and the faculty or department. The student's college can then apply to Education Committee to request a dispensation to allow appropriate arrangements to be made e.g. splitting exams over multiple sessions. Approval for the extension of study will also have to be obtained from Student Finance England or the relevant regional body. Applications for remission of the additional year's university fees will be considered by the Joint Panel on Remission of Fees on a case-by-case basis.

### Postgraduate taught students

- 4.2. It is not usually possible to study for a full-time postgraduate taught course on a part-time basis unless the programme is offered on both a full-time and part-time basis. If postgraduate students returning to study after the birth of a child encounter difficulties, faculties and departments should consider what alternative measures of support might be appropriate, e.g. extensions to submission deadlines. If a student cannot continue with their studies on a full-time basis and more substantive adjustments are required, a student whose programme of study is available on both a full-time and part-time basis may apply to change their mode of study to part-time. If a student's programme of study is not normally available part-time, but it is agreed that outstanding elements of the course can successfully be studied on a part-time basis, and the proposal is endorsed by both the college and the faculty or department (and it can be demonstrated that the student's educational and pastoral needs will be met appropriately), an application can be made to Education Committee, via Educational Policy support at [edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk), for approval (see <https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/dispensations> for guidance and a form for applying for dispensation from Education Committee). Where necessary, approval must also be granted by the student's funding body, and visa requirements must be met.

### Postgraduate research students

- 4.3. A student whose programme of study is available on both a full-time and a part-time basis may apply to change their mode of study to part-time. Applications require the support of the student's supervisor or course director and college and must be made on the online [GSO.4 form](#) (Application for change to mode of study)<sup>7</sup>. Approval of the application will be the responsibility of the relevant board.
- 4.4. If a student's programme of study is not normally available part-time, but it is agreed that the course can successfully be studied on a part-time basis, and the proposal is endorsed by both the college and the faculty or department, the student's faculty or department may apply to Education Committee (via [edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk)) for dispensation from the relevant examination regulations (see <https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/> dispensations for guidance and a form for applying for dispensation from Education Committee). Dispensation from the regulations to transfer from full-time to part-time status will be considered provided that the student's faculty or department can demonstrate that their educational and pastoral needs will be met appropriately. In the first instance, permission will be granted to transfer to part-time status usually for a limited period of up to three terms to ensure timely review of the student's progress. Where necessary, approval must also be granted by the student's funding body, and visa requirements must be met. Where permission has been granted, students will be charged fees at the part-time rate and their submission deadlines will be recalculated. The faculty or department should review the student's progress no later than three terms after their return to study. (N.B. Some Research Council funded students are not allowed to alter their mode of study more than once

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/progression>

without consultation with the Research Council). If a student is able to study at greater than part-time (i.e. 50%) rate but is unable to study full-time, the student's faculty or department may make an application to Education Committee (via [edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk)) for dispensation to reset deadlines for transfer of status, confirmation of status and submission of the thesis in advance, rather than when the normal limits have already been reached (see section 2.5 of the [Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees](#)).

## 5. PATERNITY LEAVE

### Same sex couples

- 5.1. In cases which do not fall under the arrangements for adoption leave set out in section 6 below, the student who gives birth to the child will be eligible to take maternity leave while their partner will be eligible to take paternity or extended paternity leave. (In this section, the term 'father' refers to the member of the couple who takes paternity leave).

### Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students

- 5.2. Student fathers are permitted leave from teaching to attend antenatal and medical appointments. Departments and colleges should try to assist students to make up for time off from teaching. If the leave for a medical appointment affects a student's assessment, students should refer to <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/problems-completing-your-assessment> for further information on the options available.
- 5.3. Student fathers may take up to 2 weeks' (10 working days) ordinary paternity leave. Ordinary paternity leave cannot start before the birth and must end within 56 days of the birth. If ordinary paternity leave coincides with an examination period students should apply for exam excusal or other appropriate changes to assessment expectations in the usual way (see <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/problems-completing-your-assessment> for further information). Students will also be eligible for a longer period of suspension, in line with the arrangements made for student mothers. This will normally last one full year so that the student may recommence their studies at the same point at which they suspended (extended paternity leave). The possibility of additional fee liability should be taken into account should a student suspend their status part way through a term. Applications for remission of the additional term's university fees will be considered by the Joint Panel on Remission of Fees on a case-by-case basis. If students wish to take up to 2 weeks of paternity leave during term time, departments and colleges should try to assist them to make up lost time.

### Postgraduate research students

- 5.4. Student fathers are permitted leave to attend antenatal and medical appointments with their pregnant partners. Students who hold Research Council funding are permitted to attend a minimum of two antenatal appointments for a maximum of 6.5 hours per appointment. Students who hold other sponsoring body awards must consult their funding terms and conditions on permitted absences from study.

Where there is a conflict of interest between the two policies, the sponsoring body's policy will be followed in relation to the area(s) of conflict.

- 5.5. Postgraduate research student fathers may take up to 2 weeks' (10 working days) ordinary paternity leave. Research Council funded students are entitled to 2 weeks (10 working days) paid ordinary paternity leave on full stipend ordinary paternity leave cannot start before the birth and must end within 56 days of the birth. In line with the policy adopted by the Research Councils, this leave is not taken as a suspension of status and the submission date is not adjusted.
- 5.6. Students who are eligible for a further period of paternity leave from their Research Council or sponsor may request a matching period of leave from the University. The University will support student fathers' requests for a period of suspension where permitted by their funding body, up to a usual maximum of 3 terms (1 year) (extended paternity leave). Terms of extended paternity leave do not have to be taken consecutively, but do have to be taken within 12 months of the birth and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date. Where there is a conflict of interest between the two policies, the sponsoring body's policy will be followed in relation to the area(s) of conflict. Extended paternity leave will be awarded as a suspension of status over and above the 6 terms faculty or departmental boards may permit. No special application to Education Committee is required and the student's submission date will be adjusted accordingly<sup>8</sup>.
- 5.7. Self-funded student fathers may take up to 2 weeks' (10 working days) ordinary paternity leave. Ordinary paternity leave cannot start before the birth and must end within 56 days of the birth. This is not taken as a suspension of status and the submission date is not adjusted. In addition to this, the University will support student fathers' requests for a further period of leave of up to 3 terms (1 year) (extended paternity leave). Terms of extended paternity leave do not have to be taken consecutively but do have to be taken within 12 months of the birth and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date. Extended paternity leave will be awarded as a suspension of status over and above the 6 terms faculty or departmental boards may permit. No special application to Education Committee is required and the student's submission date will be adjusted accordingly<sup>8</sup>.
- 5.8. The timing of extended paternity leave will depend on a number of factors, including term dates and the nature of the student's research work. Suspensions of status are recorded on the student record system as commencing at the start of the relevant term and concluding at the end of the subsequent vacation. If there are concerns about backdating the suspension of status to the start of a term advice should be sought from Education Policy Support via [edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:edcapplications@admin.ox.ac.uk). Applications for extended paternity leave should be made on the [GSO.17b](#) form (Application for suspension of status for maternity,

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<sup>8</sup> Fathers who have been granted the maximum number of terms of suspension of status by their board and who have also taken paternity leave are permitted to seek dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of status where required. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.



extended paternity or adoption leave<sup>9</sup>). The relevant Graduate Studies Assistant will update the student record system to indicate that extended paternity leave will be taken and the milestones and expected completion dates will automatically adjust. The GSA will also notify the Fees Team of any necessary fee amendments.

### Overseas students

5.9. Under the terms of the student visa, overseas students who suspend their status may be required to return to their home countries while suspended depending on the length of suspension. They would then need a new CAS and visa to resume their studies. Students should consult the Student Immigration team for advice on immigration and visas (email [student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk)).

## 6. ADOPTION LEAVE

Arrangements for adoption leave usually parallel those made for maternity and paternity leave, in that the main carer takes 'maternity leave', regardless of sex, and the carer's partner takes 'paternity' leave.

- 6.1. The child's main carer will be eligible to suspend their status in line with maternity leave provisions (see section 3 above). Terms of adoption leave do not have to be taken consecutively, but do have to be taken within 12 months of the placement of the child and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date<sup>10</sup>. Adoption leave may commence at any point after the student has been notified that they have been matched with a child.
- 6.2. A student who is the partner of an adopting parent will be eligible for leave in line with the relevant model for paternity leave (see section 5 above). Terms of adoption leave do not have to be taken consecutively, but do have to be taken within 12 months of the placement of the child and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date<sup>10</sup>.
- 6.3. Postgraduate research students who are eligible for a period of adoption leave from their research council or sponsor may request a matching period of leave from the University, up to a usual maximum of 3 terms (1 year). Where there is a conflict of interest between the two policies, the sponsoring body's policy will be followed in relation to the area(s) of conflict. This period of leave is calculated separately from the 6 terms of ordinary suspension of status faculty or departmental boards may permit. No special application to Education Committee is required and the student's submission date will be adjusted accordingly. Terms of adoption leave do not have to be taken consecutively, but do have to be taken within 12 months of the placement of the child and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/progression>

<sup>10</sup> Adoptive parents who have been granted the maximum number of terms of suspension of status by their board and who have also taken parental leave are permitted to seek dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of status where required. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

## **7. IVF AND SURROGACY**

In cases which do not fall under the arrangements for adoption leave set out in section 6 above, or standard arrangements for maternity or paternity leave, student parents are advised to contact their college or department for advice. The options available should be equivalent to those available for the other forms of leave set out in this policy.

## **8. GRADUATE ACCOMMODATION**

All full-time matriculated postgraduate students are eligible to live in University graduate accommodation, subject to availability. Two-bed accommodation is allocated according to the applicant's position on the waiting list. Due to the shortage of single accommodation, this is allocated via a tiered waiting list which prioritises freshers. Students are allowed to retain their tenancies while suspended. A current tenant who indicates that they will be suspending status to take maternity, extended paternity or adoption leave during the upcoming tenancy period may still be offered a further tenancy agreement. A tenant who ceases to be a student should inform the Graduate Accommodation Office.

This policy permits students who have suspended status to take maternity, extended paternity or adoption leave to be offered University graduate accommodation – should it become available – up to three months before they re-enrol<sup>11</sup>. Usual tenancy regulations will apply. Students studying in the UK under a Student/Tier 4 or other visa should check their visa regulations to establish when they are permitted to re-enter the UK (email [student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk)).

- 8.1. The Graduate Accommodation Office will log the requirements of students who have suspended status in order to take maternity leave, and register them on the waiting list. If the student becomes eligible for family accommodation by virtue of their position on the waiting list, no earlier than 3 months before their scheduled return to study, the Office shall offer them the tenancy.
- 8.2. This policy shall also apply to adoptive parents who have taken leave as the child's main carer (see section 6 above) and students who have suspended status for at least one term in order to take extended paternity leave (see section 5 above).
- 8.3. Student visa holders who have suspended status may not be permitted to remain in the UK so should not commence their tenancy prior to their return to study. However, some students may be able to remain in the UK (or reapply to enter the UK) as the dependant of their partner, provided they have an appropriate immigration status (e.g. British national, overseas student, indefinite leave to remain, work visa etc.). They could therefore be eligible to move into family accommodation earlier than one month before they resume their studies.

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<sup>11</sup> Under normal circumstances, a student who has suspended their status may apply for University accommodation but cannot be offered it until they have re-enrolled.

- 8.4. This provision may be extended with good cause to students with children under 18 who have suspended for other reasons (e.g. illness), for example where new arrangements need to be made for the child's education or childcare.
- 8.5. If the student fails to return to study on the scheduled date, the student should inform the Graduate Accommodation Office. The Graduate Accommodation Office may, though is not obliged to, serve notice in accordance with the terms of the tenancy agreement. In some circumstances it may be possible for the student to remain in the accommodation for the remainder of their tenancy, though students studying in the UK under a Student/Tier4 or other visa should check their visa regulations to establish when they are permitted to do so. The Graduate Accommodation Office cannot offer a further tenancy agreement until the student has re-enrolled.

## **9. Access to childcare during suspension.**

This policy formally codifies and safeguards suspended students' access to university childcare.

- 9.1. Student parents whose child(ren) already attend(s) a university nursery, or occupy(ies) a university place in a private nursery, may retain their nursery place(s) during suspension of status for maternity or paternity leave for a period of usually no longer than 12 months (while continuing to pay fees).
- 9.2. Students who have suspended status for maternity or paternity leave may apply for a university nursery place and be placed on the waiting list. They do not need to wait until they are reinstated to take up a place.

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Contact: Education Policy Support ([Contact | Academic Support \(ox.ac.uk\)](#))