

Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure

Policy

1. What is fitness to study?

Fitness to study relates to an individual's capacity to participate fully and satisfactorily as a student, in relation to life generally at the University of Bristol. It does not just relate to academic studies, it also relates to the ability to live independently and safely whilst at University.

The University is committed to supporting student wellbeing and recognises that a positive approach to the management of physical and mental health is crucial to student learning and academic achievement.

2. The purpose and scope of this policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide a suitable and co-ordinated response by academic and professional support staff in circumstances where:

- the situation is deemed to be urgent; and
- other internal procedures such as the progress rules or the Student Disciplinary Regulations are not appropriate; and
- all other avenues within schools and faculties have been exhausted.

This policy does not relate to fitness to practise – certain professional programmes have fitness to practise procedures which operate outside the scope of this policy.

3. When to use this policy

This policy should be used when a student's fitness to study is a cause for concern and all other procedures or options have been considered or exhausted. It is to be used as a last resort. A student's fitness to study may be a cause for concern as a result of a wide range of circumstances, including (but not restricted to) the following:

- Behaviour which would usually be dealt with as a disciplinary matter, which may be known to be or suspected to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health difficulty.
- A student's health difficulties are adversely affecting the health, safety or wellbeing of themselves or others.
- A student's academic performance is unsatisfactory and may be known to be or suspected to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem.
- A student's behaviour where they live is adversely affecting the student and the people around them and calls into question the student's ability to live independently in residences or in the community.

4. Informal action

It is expected that schools, faculties and residences staff will approach students once concerns regarding fitness to study have been raised and attempt to resolve the matter by informal discussions with the student. The student should be encouraged to use one or more of the support services offered by the University.

Good communication between staff in residences and in faculties and schools may be key to achieving informal resolution of concerns regarding fitness to study.

Specific academic arrangements should be considered by faculties and schools and action plans agreed with the student, which are regularly reviewed.

The majority of cases can be resolved this way.

5. Procedure

The Fitness to Study policy may be invoked when all informal avenues have been unsuccessful, the other procedures available such as the progress rules and the Student Disciplinary Regulations have been considered and deemed to be inappropriate, the student may not be engaging and action plans have not been met.

5.1. Stage 1 – Case Review

The purpose of the stage 1 Case Review is to ensure early intervention and that positive, informal action is taken with the student's co-operation and involvement.

A meeting of a Case Review Panel can be convened by the Head of Student Wellbeing or Head of Student Residential Life or their nominee, who will act as clerk to the Panel, and will usually be made up of the following:

- The Head of Student Wellbeing or Head of Student Residential Life (or nominee) who has not convened the Case Review. They will act as Chair of the Panel
- An academic representative from the student's school, usually the Senior Tutor, Personal Tutor, supervisor or appropriate academic
- the Faculty Education Manager
- a representative from the Student Wellbeing Service or Residential Life Service who is supporting the student

The Panel may seek advice from the Secretary's Office and the Head of Student Inclusion.

Before the Case Review Panel meeting medical assessment may be sought, usually from the student's GP or medical practitioner. The student will be able to submit documents for the Panel to consider and will be given a copy of any documents seen by the Panel. The student may request to attend all or part of the Case Review Panel meeting. The Chair will decide whether the student should attend. If the student does attend, they will have the right to bring a friend or representative to the meeting.

A letter will be sent to the student after the meeting setting out any decision made and the reasons for the decision.

The Panel will order its proceedings as it sees fit and may call witnesses if necessary.

The outcome agreed by the Panel will normally be an outcome not already attempted as part of the informal action taken by the school or faculty. The outcomes available to the Panel are:

- No further action required
- To monitor the student formally for a specific period of time. An action plan will be agreed with the student detailing any steps the student will need to take and the support to be provided to the student. This action plan will normally detail different actions to any plan previously agreed as part of the informal action taken by the school or faculty. Regular review meetings will be arranged with the student and a nominated member of staff. The student should be made aware of what will happen if the action plan is breached, which will normally involve their case moving to stage 2.
- To recommend a specific academic arrangement be put in place which may include a suspension of studies. Such recommendations should be agreed by the student and by the student's school and faculty where appropriate (normally the representatives on the Panel). If the student does not agree, the case will move on to stage 2.
- To refer the case to a Fitness to Study Panel, under stage 2 of this procedure. This will be appropriate in serious cases, for example where all previous attempts to support the student have been unsuccessful, where the student has little insight regarding their fitness to study or where there is evidence of a serious risk to the health and safety of the student or others in the university community. This course of action would be used when it is considered that suspension, or requirement to withdraw may be the appropriate course of action or if the student has not agreed to a recommendation or action plan made under stage 1.

5.2. Stage 2 – Fitness to Study Panel

This stage will only be invoked in the following circumstances:

- Following an emergency suspension under section 6 of this policy; or
- following a referral from a Case Review Panel; or
- if the student does not agree or is not engaging with a recommendation of a Case Review Panel; or
- if in the opinion of the Deputy University Secretary, Deputy Registrar or Director of Student Services the case is sufficiently serious and urgent to warrant an immediate referral without consideration of stage 1.

The Deputy University Secretary (or their nominee) will convene a Fitness to Study Panel to consider the case and will act as clerk to the Panel.

The Members of the Panel will usually be:

- The Deputy Registrar (Academic Services) or the Director of Student Services (or nominee), who will act as Chair
- An academic representative of the student's school (usually the Senior Tutor or supervisor)

- A representative of the student's faculty (usually the Faculty Education Director or the Faculty Education Manager)
- An appropriate senior representative from Student Services who has not been involved in supporting the student
- The Head of Student Inclusion
- The Head of Residential Student Life or Village Head of Residential Life (where concerns have been raised regarding behaviour in residences or in the community).

The member of Student Services who has been supporting the student may be invited to attend the meeting to give information but will not be part of the decision-making process.

As with the Case Review Panel the student will have the opportunity to submit documents for the Panel to consider and will be sent a copy of any documents seen by the Panel.

The student may request to attend all or part of the Panel meeting or may ask for a Student Adviser from the Just Ask unit of the Students' Union to attend the meeting on their behalf. The Chair will decide whether a student should attend, which may not be appropriate in all cases.

The Panel may order the proceedings at its discretion and may call witnesses if required. The Panel may request further medical evidence. If a Panel is convened following an emergency suspension under section 6, medical evidence will be required regarding the student's fitness to study before the Panel meets.

Possible outcomes of the meeting include, but are not limited to:-

- A short-term suspension to allow the student to be assessed by a medical professional, access support services both within and outside of the University or for the University to obtain further information. The suspension will be reviewed within four weeks as set out below in relation to emergency suspension.
- suspension with conditions. A student who is suspended from the University may be prohibited from participating in University activities and may also be prohibited from entering the University premises or have restricted rights to enter the premises. The terms of the suspension will be notified to the student in writing, depending on the circumstances of the case. The decision to suspend a student shall be reviewed as necessary by the Panel.
- requirement to withdraw - if the Panel concludes, taking into account the individual circumstances of the case and any supporting medical evidence, that there is no reasonable prospect of the student re-engaging with their programme, the student may be required to withdraw. This outcome should only be considered in the most serious cases.
- Any other action considered to be appropriate and proportionate.

The Chair has the power to make the final decision if the Panel is unable to make a unanimous decision. The decision will be detailed in a letter and conveyed, in person wherever possible, to the student by a member of Student Services.

6. Emergency Suspension

The Deputy University Secretary may refer the case straight to the Deputy Registrar (Academic Services) or the Director of Student Services if it is considered that the risk to the student or the University is very high and an immediate emergency suspension is the most appropriate course of action. Any student who has been detained under the Mental Health Act will also be referred for an immediate emergency suspension.

The Deputy Registrar or Director of Student Services may impose an emergency suspension with immediate effect pending the invoking of this policy. A student who is subject to an emergency suspension order is prohibited from entering university premises and from participating in university activities. The emergency suspension may, exceptionally, be subject to qualification, such as the permission to take an examination or to enter university premises to attend a meeting with a support service, such as the Student Counselling Service or the Students' Health Service. The terms of the suspension will be individual to each case and will be notified to the student in writing. The decision will be conveyed to the student, in person wherever possible, by a member of Student Services. A student will be marked as 'suspended' on their student record during the period of suspension so that accommodation and tuition fees do not continue to accrue.

The decision to suspend may be reviewed after four weeks at the request of the student. The review may include a recommendation that a Fitness to Study Panel be convened to consider the case.

A stage 2 Fitness to Study Panel will be convened to consider the return to study of any student suspended under this section.

7. Return to study

The Case Review Panel or Fitness to Study Panel that made the recommendation regarding a suspension, or as many members of the original Panel as possible, will be reconvened to consider whether the student is fit to return to study.

Further medical evidence will be requested from the student regarding their ability to fully engage with their studies, meet the requirements of the programme and live independently in residences or in the community. A student will only be permitted to return if, after receiving the medical evidence, the Panel is satisfied that the individual is fit to study.

If a student agreed to suspend studies under stage 1, the Case Review Panel that originally considered the matter can make the decision regarding a return to studies without referral to a Fitness to Study Panel if it is satisfied that the student is fit to return.

If the decision to suspend was made under stage 2 by a Fitness to Study Panel, the Panel should reconvene to consider and determine whether the student is fit to return to study.

Where a student returns to study after an emergency suspension under this policy a Fitness to Study Panel will be convened under stage 2 to consider whether the student is fit to return and if so to consider any support that the student may require to support a return to studies, such as regular review meetings or a return to study action plan. The general expectation is that the student will take personal responsibility for fully engaging with this support.

8. Right of appeal

The student may appeal against a suspension or requirement to withdraw. A letter setting out the grounds of appeal should be addressed to the University Secretary and emailed to university-secretary@bristol.ac.uk, to be received within 21 days of the date on which the order for suspension or the requirement to withdraw was made. The student is encouraged to seek assistance from the Students' Union Advice Service, "Just Ask", when preparing the letter of appeal.

The appeal will be heard by a committee of the Board of Trustees. The membership and procedure of an appeal committee will be the same as that set out under the Student Complaints Procedure.

9. Nominees

References in these Regulations to the holders of any office shall be construed to refer either to the office holder or to their respective nominee.

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