

Fitness to Study Policy

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Policy control

Approved by	Academic Board October 2017	
Contact/s	Ruki Heritage, Director of Student Experience	
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Audience	Internal (Intranet only)	x
	External (Internet)	x

1. Purpose

The University has a responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of all students and recognises the importance of a student's health and wellbeing in relation to their academic progression and overall experience.

The purpose of this document is to provide a co-ordinated response by academic and professional support staff in circumstances where it is considered that the health or wellbeing of a student may have an impact on their capacity to continue with their studies. Its purpose is to be supportive and not punitive.

The document acknowledges the importance of providing staff training to support the effective and appropriate implementation of this policy.

2. Scope

This policy should be used when a student's fitness to study causes concern and all other procedures or options have been considered or exhausted. For example, where the University becomes aware that:

- A student poses a risk to their own health, safety or wellbeing (and/ or that of others)
- A student's behaviour is (or is at risk of) adversely affecting the teaching, learning or experience of other students; or the day to day activities of the University
- A student's support needs fall outside the scope of the professional support and other services which the University can reasonably be expected to provide, directly or indirectly
- A student appears to be unable to engage with academic study

This policy does not relate to fitness to practise. There are certain professional courses with fitness to practise procedures which operate outside the scope of this policy.

The process is not disciplinary in nature and is concerned with the wellbeing of the student and the University community. Disruptive behaviour which does not relate to an underlying physical or mental health issue should be dealt with under the University's Code of Conduct.

A student may be referred to this process during or after the conclusion of a disciplinary process.

3. Policy

Use of this policy and procedure

The University recognises that concerns may be raised by a variety of individuals, for example University staff, other students, external partners and third parties (such as health professionals or placement providers). This Policy seeks to promote early intervention, active collaboration between staff, students and third parties, where appropriate, and consistency of approach. This Policy applies to all students throughout their period of enrolment with the University, whatever their registration status, and includes students on campus; engaged in University related activities away from campus (such as placements, field trips and study abroad); and students in University accommodation.

If a concern regarding a student's fitness to study arises whilst on placement, the University may discuss alternative arrangements with the placement provider. If alternative arrangements are not possible, the placement may be withdrawn and deferral or other adjustments considered.

Students should be involved in the management of their own wellbeing wherever possible. However, should a student be unwilling or unable to participate, the University may nonetheless follow this procedure where it is reasonable to do so.

Significant concerns and intervention

Significant concerns about a student's fitness to study may present in a number of different ways. The following are some of the more common indicators that may warrant further investigation:

- Rapid deterioration in academic performance
- Poor attendance and/ or lack of engagement with tutors
- Failure to respond to University communications
- Failure to submit work or comply with other requirements of the programme of study
- An unusually high number of applications for mitigating circumstances
- The sudden on-set of a physical or mental health illness
- Significant change in mood or behaviour (i.e. social withdrawal)
- Poor personal hygiene
- Signs of self-harming,
- Drug or alcohol problems
- A pattern of unreasonable demands or communications, which appear irrational, inappropriate or inconsistent
- Referred by Student Cause for Concern protocol

This is not an exhaustive list and, whilst in isolation the evidence of a single indicator may not be considered a cause for concern, action may be required under this procedure if there is a sustained pattern, a combination of indicators, or a particularly significant single incident.

Fitness to study - Procedure

This procedure has three stages, which represent the degree of concern and/ or the perceived seriousness of the situation.

Stage one: Initial and/or emerging concerns

Stage two: Continuing and/or serious concerns

Stage three: Persistent and/or critical concerns

All university staff should be mindful to the various ways in which a serious concern about a student's fitness to study might come to light. They may directly observe patterns of behaviour or symptoms which cause concern to themselves or others.

Alternatively a third party, such as other students, accommodation providers, or even members of the public may report concerns to a member of staff. Information may also be discovered as part of an academic appeal or claim for mitigating circumstances. In some cases a student may raise an issue directly with a member of staff.

Any third party can raise a concern about a student through 'Support & Report', by sending an email to supportandreport@beds.ac.uk.

Stage one: Initial and/or emerging concerns

Informal Intervention

Initial concerns regarding a student's fitness to study will normally be dealt with informally by the academic department in the first instance. An appropriate member of staff, such as the Personal Academic Tutor (or nominated other), will contact the student to arrange a meeting as soon as is practically possible after the concern has been identified.

The aim of the meeting is to discuss the concern, any support needs the student may have, and will seek to identify the student's perception of the concern. It is intended to be supportive in nature, fact finding and non-confrontational to encourage open discussion and address the concerns of whether the student is fit to study.

The Personal Academic Tutor (or nominated other) will consult with the Head of Department and may seek advice from Student Support. A Student Support representative, such as a Student Engagement or Health & Wellbeing Advisor, may be invited to attend the meeting and the student may request that a Student Union representative or friend to attend with them.

The content of the discussion will determine the possible outcomes and the Personal Academic Tutor (or nominated other) should propose an appropriate plan of action, which may include:

- To monitor the student's engagement formally for a specific period of time, which could be through regular meetings with the Personal Academic Tutor
- To recommend that specific support arrangements are put in place for the student
- To agree that the student will access the University Support Services (counselling, disability, professional academic development, mitigation), or external support services

The student will receive a written communication by email and letter within 5 working days of the meeting, recording the concerns, any actions to be taken, and an agreed review period.

The Student Services Operations Manager should be notified when a Stage one Fitness to Study meeting is/ or has taken place so this can be logged centrally.

If the informal intervention at stage one is unsuccessful or the student fails to attend or comply with the action plan, a stage two intervention may be appropriate.

Stage two: Continuing and/or serious concerns

Stage two of the procedure will apply where there is continued and on-going concern following stage one, or the actions agreed under stage one have not been successful.

Alternatively a student may be referred straight to stage two when there is significant concern about their health, mental well-being and/ or behaviour and the impact this has on their ability to engage, or where they have failed to attend a meeting at stage one.

Formal Intervention

At stage two, the student will be invited to a case review meeting with the Head of Department, who will seek support and/ or advice from the Student Services Operations Manager (or other member of Student Support) and Head of International Compliance, if an overseas student.

A representative from Student Support will usually be present at the meeting, as well as other members of staff where relevant (for example, an Accommodation Manager). A member of Administrative staff will attend to act as clerk and take notes during the meeting.

The student will be given at least 5 days written notice of the meeting, and may be asked to provide information and documentation including medical evidence (if appropriate). The letter or email will explain the purpose of the meeting, who will be present and the reason they are there. The student may ask a Student Union representative or friend to attend with them.

The notes of any previous meeting and any prior action plan should be available at the meeting. It should be made clear that the purpose of the meeting is to support the student, ensuring they are aware of the precise nature of the concern (including examples if appropriate). The student will be given an opportunity to ask questions and respond to the concern.

The meeting should endeavour to establish the student's perception of the situation and how this is impacting on their well-being and studies, or other students and staff. The conclusions drawn from the content and nature of the discussion at the case review meeting will determine the possible outcomes.

The outcome at stage two will normally lead to an agreed action plan setting out how the concern will be managed, with clear guidance of any steps the student needs to take and the provision of any appropriate support available. The student will be provided with a copy and made aware of the consequences of not adhering to the agreed action plan.

A date will be arranged for another meeting where the action plan will be reviewed by the Head of Department, who will make a decision which may include one of the following:

- Continue the action plan and agree a further review date
- Amend the action plan if, for example, the serious concern has been reduced
- Consider whether requirements have been complied with, and if not, should the case be escalated to stage three

If a student is invited and does not attend the meetings at stage two, the case may be reviewed in their absence. If appropriate, agreed expectations, support options and action plan will be communicated to the student both by email and a letter sent to their local address with a timetable for completion and date for review.

A copy of the meeting notes and action plan should be sent to the Student Services Operations Manager to be stored centrally.

Stage three: Persistent and/or critical concerns

Stage three is a formal intervention initiated by the Student Services Operations Manager (or nominated deputy) with advice/ following consultation from relevant academic staff. The Student Services Operations Manager (or nominated Deputy) will also speak to professional staff within Student Support, as appropriate.

Stage three may be initiated if any one or more of the following applied:

- a student fails to address the concerns of fitness to study raised at stage two
- where there is significant concern about a student's health, mental well-being, behaviour, safety and/ or ability to study, beyond that at stage two
- the student failed to attend a stage two meeting and the situation is complex or unclear
- where there is evidence of significant adverse impact or risk to others

Fitness to Study Review Panel

The Fitness to Study Review Panel will be arranged consisting of at least three members, who will be determined by the circumstances of the concern, but may include:

- The Student Services Operations Manager
- Associate Dean (Student Experience) or Head of Department
- A Senior member of academic staff or
- A Health & Wellbeing/ Mental Health Advisor
- Head of International Compliance (or representative), if an overseas student

The Student Services Operations Manager or Associate Dean (Student Experience) will normally Chair the meeting. A member of the panel, or an additional member of staff, will also be appointed as clerk and take notes during the meeting.

The student will be given reasonable notice of the meeting and informed the purpose is to assess evidence of their fitness to study and determine an appropriate course of action. The student will be informed of their right to be accompanied by a representative from the Student Union or friend, and asked to confirm attendance in advance.

The details of the concern, including evidence and any previous action plan(s) will be provided to both the student and members of the panel prior to the meeting. The student may be asked to provide further documents and/ or given an opportunity to submit a short statement. A medical assessment may be requested to enable an accurate assessment of risk.

The Fitness to Study Review Panel will normally proceed if the student does not attend or engage in the process, or fails to provide any requested information or evidence.

After the meeting, the panel will determine if it is reasonably considered that the student's fitness to study is significantly impaired/ may become significantly impaired and will agree one or more of the following outcomes:

- The student will be formally monitored for a specific period of time at regular review meetings with a nominated member of staff and agree an action plan detailing any steps the student needs to take and any support for the student, academic or other
- The concerns about the student should be considered under another University process for action, such as the Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure (where appropriate)
- That it is appropriate and in the student's best interests to recommend a voluntary period of interruption from their studies, with advice given to the student by Student Support
- That it is necessary to require a period of interruption of studies of up to twelve months, with or without conditions on return to studies
- That the student is required to withdraw, or it is necessary to recommend a permanent termination of the student's studies at the University.

If the Fitness to Study Review Panel requires an interruption, or termination of studies, the case will be referred to the Registrar for a final decision. This would only apply in the most serious cases where there is no reasonable prospect of re-engagement.

Any financial or accommodation consequences to the action taken by the University to interrupt or terminate a student's studies will be discussed with the student, and appropriate advice will be sought from the International Office for overseas students.

The panel will inform the student of the outcome by email and in writing within 5 working days and provide a copy of the notes from the meeting and any action plan, as appropriate.

Right to appeal

The student may appeal against a decision of required interruption or termination of studies only if one or more of the following grounds are specified:

- The University has failed to follow its own procedure adequately
- The decision is unreasonable and/ or a disproportionate sanction has been imposed
- The student has new information and/ or evidence which was not reasonably available at the time of the original meeting

The Appeal must be submitted in writing, with any supporting documentation, to the Adjudication Office within 21 days of receiving the decision letter from the Fitness to Study Review Panel and the student is encouraged to seek assistance from the Student Union Advice Service.

The Assistant Secretary (Adjudication) will appoint an independent investigator who has not been previously associated with the concern and will provide them with all documentation relevant to the earlier considerations of the Fitness to Study Review Panel.

The investigator will examine how the process was carried out and review the decision with any additional information and/ or evidence. This may involve interviewing the members of staff involved in the Fitness to Study Review Panel and/ or the student.

The investigator will submit a report for the consideration of the Registrar who, in consultation with the Vice Chancellor, will determine one of the following outcomes:

- To dismiss the appeal and the student will be sent a “Completion of Procedures” letter
- To uphold the appeal and refer the case to a new Fitness to Study Review Panel for reconsideration because –
 - a) A procedural irregularity has been identified
 - b) New information and/ or evidence is available and relevant
- To impose an alternative action/ outcome

The student will receive the outcome of the appeal by email and in writing within 7 days and informed this decision is final.

Return to Study

The student’s return to University following a voluntary or involuntary interruption of studies at stage three is not automatic, and the student should be informed of the procedure for considering a return to study at the point of interruption.

The student will need to request to return to study in writing to the Student Services Operations Manager. Each case will vary depending on the context and specific circumstances of the concern, however the student will need to satisfy the University that they are fit to study and they have complied with any conditions placed upon their return.

In some cases, medical evidence of a student’s capacity to return to study will be required. Medical evidence should be from a recognised professional (GP, psychiatrist, mental health

professional), who has sufficient knowledge of the student and the demands of higher education in order to make an informed recommendation regarding the student's capacity to return to study.

The Student Services Operations Manager will consult with the Director of Student Experience and the Head of Department and/ or Personal Academic tutor/ Course Co-ordinator to determine whether to permit a student to return to study. It may be necessary to impose conditions upon return to study and consider any support and/ or reasonable adjustments which should be put in place. The decision will be notified to the student in writing within 10 days, with reasons.

4. Forms/Instructions

5. Links/Dependencies

This policy should be read and its use considered with reference to:

- Fitness to Practise Procedure
- Mental Health Support for Students Policy
- Crisis Intervention Policy
- Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy
- Student Cause for Concern Process

6. Appendices

Templates: Fitness to Study Referral Proforma

FITNESS TO STUDY

REFERRAL PROFORMA FOR STAFF CONCERNED ABOUT STUDENT

Please send the completed form to the Student Services Operations Manager

Student Details	
Student name	
Student number	
Course	
Level of study	
Referral Details	
Referral to	
Referral made by	
Reason for referral	
Any additional background information	

Signature of referrer

Date

Referral logged on central record

Yes/ No

FITNESS TO STUDY

Record of Fitness to Study Meeting

Stage: _____

(Please indicate if this is a stage one: informal intervention, stage two: case review meeting or stage three: review panel)

Please use this form to record a meeting with any student under Fitness to Study. A copy of the form must be kept on the student's record, and should be given to the student with any agreed action plan.

Student Details	
Student name	
Student number	
Course	
Level of study	
Meeting Details	
Date of meeting	
Purpose of meeting	
Names of attendees	
Summary of meeting	

Signature

(To be signed by Chair of meeting)

Date

FITNESS TO STUDY

Invite letter 1

Invite student to a Stage one informal intervention (can be sent by email)

Dear **name of student**

As your Personal Academic Tutor **or nominated other**, I am contacting you to arrange a meeting to discuss concerns about your current fitness to study.

It has been noted that **Outline the main concerns, for example:**

- **You have not attended classes since**
- **You have made five applications for mitigating circumstances ...**
- **There have been a number of concerns raised about your health and wellbeing**

A meeting has been scheduled for **date and time** in room **location**. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the concerns that have been raised and if there is any need for further supportive action from the University that can help you in your studies.

In accordance with stage one of the Fitness to Study procedure; further action may include regular meetings to monitor engagement or an agreement to seek advice from specialist services. In some cases, it may be necessary to proceed to stage two of the Fitness to Study procedure. I will write to you following the meeting to confirm any further action to be taken.

I would like to highlight the important of this meeting and if there is a good reason why you are unable to attend at this time, please contact me immediately. Please also let me know in advance if you will be accompanied by a friend or Students' Union representative.

You can find a copy of the Fitness to Study Policy at **XXX**

Yours sincerely

FITNESS TO STUDY

Invite letter 2

Invite student to a Stage two formal intervention/ case review meeting (should be prepared as a formal letter but can also be sent by email)

Dear **name of student**

As/ On behalf of your Head of Department, I am writing to you regarding concerns about your current fitness to study.

It has been noted that **Outline the main concerns, for example:**

- **You have not attended classes since**
- **You have made five applications for mitigating circumstances ...**
- **There have been a number of concerns raised about your health and wellbeing**
- **You have had a meeting with your Personal Academic Tutor under stage one of the Fitness to Study procedure, but concerns remain**

A meeting has been scheduled for **date and time** in room **location**. You can be accompanied by a friend or Students' Union representative. This meeting will also be attended by **names/ titles of any other attendees, i.e. a member of student support (if appropriate)**.

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the concerns and consider any action required by the University that can help you in your studies. In accordance with stage two of the Fitness to Study procedure; further action may be to agree an action plan or consider whether the case should be escalated to stage three of the Fitness to Study procedure. I will write to you following the meeting to confirm any further action to be taken.

I would like to highlight the important of this meeting and if there is a good reason why you are unable to attend at this time, you should contact me immediately. Please be aware that if you do not attend, the meeting will proceed in your absence.

You can find a copy of the Fitness to Study Policy at **XXX**

Yours sincerely

FITNESS TO STUDY

Invite letter 3

Invite student to a Stage three Fitness to Study Review Panel (should be prepared as a formal letter and sent by post and email)

Dear **name of student**

I am writing to you regarding concerns about your fitness to study under Stage 3 of the University's Fitness to Study Policy.

Provide the details of the concern(s), including reference to evidence and any prior meetings under stage one or two of the Fitness to Study procedure. Copies of any previous letters with meeting outcomes and actions plans should be provided with this invitation letter.

A meeting has been scheduled for **date and time** in room **location**. You can be accompanied by a friend or Students' Union representative. This meeting will also be attended by **names/ titles of any other attendees, i.e. a member of student support (if appropriate)**. You are invited to submit a short statement or any additional documentation prior to the meeting. This should be sent to **name of clerk** by **an agreed date** to be reviewed by the panel in advance.

The purpose of the meeting is to determine if it is reasonably considered that your fitness to study is significantly impaired/ may become significantly impaired, and to agree any formal action required under stage three of the fitness to study procedure. This may include an amended action plan or an agreement of a leave of absence/ interruption of studies.

I would like to highlight the important of this meeting and your attendance. If there is a good reason why you are unable to attend at this time, you should contact me immediately. If you do not attend, the meeting will proceed in your absence and you will be notified of the outcome in writing within 5 working days.

You can find a copy of the Fitness to Study Policy at **XXX**

Yours sincerely

FITNESS TO STUDY

ACTION PLAN

Student Details	
Student name	
Student number	
Course	
Level of study	
Action Plan Details	
Action required	By whom/ when
Review	
Date of review	
To be completed by	

Agreed by	Signature	Date
Member of staff		
Student		

