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FITNESS TO STUDY POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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# Introduction

Whilst at University all students should be able to study and perform to the best of their ability in a safe and comfortable environment. In most circumstances it is also expected that students take sufficient responsibility to maintain their own fitness to study. The reality of University life means that students not only study, but also often live, in close proximity to each other, and whilst many students find studying and living in such an environment easy and enjoyable, others can find it more challenging. Furthermore, students need to conform to certain standards of behaviour in order to maintain and enhance the University community, and the University has disciplinary mechanisms in place to deal with students whose behaviour falls outside these standards.

However, it is recognised that the cause of misconduct may include issues relating to a student’s health and general wellbeing, where disciplinary action may not be appropriate or it only forms part of a package of support. Similarly, a student’s fitness to study may be questioned if health problems are disrupting their own studies or the studies of others, or result in unreasonable demands being placed on staff or other students.

At the heart of the Fitness to Study Policy is recognition of the University’s duty of care to all students and to offer an alternative to the more punitive disciplinary process. The Policy should be seen as a positive and supportive process that recognises the individual needs of a student. The intention is to seek common ground and work with individual students that are displaying concerning behavioural traits that may be directly or partially attributed to an illness, concern, or psychological condition that is challenging to themselves, other students or staff.

The main purpose of this document is to set out the procedure which the University follows when concerns are raised about a student’s fitness to study. As a general rule this policy is only intended for use in cases in which the behaviour, disruption or risk presented by the student is perceived to be of a serious or potentially serious nature. Where possible the academic advisor/tutor or the Student Support and Wellbeing services available to students should be used as the first port of call prior to taking any formal action.

# Purpose and scope

The purpose of this document is to fulfil a number of objectives:

1. For applicants:
	* 1. help clarify and shape their expectations of study at University of Chichester.
2. For staff:
3. provide clear guidelines and fair and proportionate procedures to follow when significant concerns arise regarding registered students’ fitness to study that need to be addressed;
	* 1. define a clear process to follow to ensure the safe and suitable return to University for students after a break in study under fitness to study grounds.
4. For enrolled students:
	* 1. help understand and appreciate the Fitness to Study Policy concept and its necessity;
		2. identify the opportunities provided within the procedural framework to respond or appeal if concerns are raised by staff about a student’s fitness to study under the policy.

The procedures outlined below indicate the steps to be taken - as an alternative to disciplinary procedures - where there is concern that a student’s behaviour or health threatens academic progress or has the potential to result in a possible disciplinary response. Decisions made concerning a student’s fitness to study are made through a collective process, considering the ability to study, learn and graduate.

Having this procedure written down enables students to have a document to which they can refer, providing them with a clear understanding of their full responsibilities and expectations related to their commitment to study and life within the University community.

If and when a problem arises, steps taken are seen to be limited to those necessary to protect the best interests of the student, ensuring a consistent, sensitive and non-discriminatory approach to managing situations.

Tutorial, academic or support staff can initiate the use of the procedure if concern for the student is sufficient, allowing for early detection of issues. Shared concerns in other sections of the University community can be formally collated by the use of this process.

The problem-solving approach adopted is objective-oriented, allowing a student to focus on agreed actions to achievable aims which are clearly documented and come from a supportive perspective rather than a disciplinary one.

This policy is not designed to be used to address academic performance issues (which should be dealt with under the normal assessment procedures) or with issues relating to attendance or mitigating circumstances, except where these are the result of an ongoing mental or physical health condition which is not being addressed by standard University support measures such as a Student Additional Requirements Agreement (SARA).

The level of risk posed by a student will be measured by a risk assessment process such as the ‘risk assessment grid’ (see Appendix 2). The same process will be used throughout the procedure to provide a consistent means of assessing the risk to the student, other individuals and the institution. This process will be led by the Director of Students, Support and Information Services (or nominee) in close collaboration with department staff, who will play a key role in identifying the specific evidence to underpin any concerns.

The University reserves the right to use the disciplinary procedure to address behaviour which is the result of physical or mental health issues, depending on the individual circumstances of the case. However, once this Fitness to Study Policy has been used (at any of the three stages) the behaviour observed will normally be considered under this policy rather than under the disciplinary procedure.

The Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure detailed below has three stages. Depending upon the perceived severity of the situation and the seriousness of any perceived risks, action may be initiated at any of the three levels.

If concerns are raised whilst a student is on placement, the University will follow the ‘Professional Suitability and Fitness to Practise Policy and Procedure’ as primary guidance, supported by the Fitness to Study Policy.

# Fitness to study and expected student commitments

The term ‘fitness to study’ as used in this policy relates to the entire student experience and not just a student’s ability to engage with their studies. For example, unless it is informed otherwise, the University expects its students to be able to live independently and in harmony with others, and not conduct themselves in a way which has an adverse impact on those around them, including both other students and members of staff.

Concerns regarding a particular student’s fitness to study may be gauged or clarified by comparing their particular problematic thoughts, beliefs or behaviours against the criteria of expected student commitments, found within the University Community Commitment Charter (<https://www.chi.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/student-contract/>), acting as a ‘fitness to study’ template.

# Circumstances under which a student’s fitness to study may be brought into question

The issue of a student’s fitness to study may be brought into question as a result of a wide range of circumstances. These include (but are not restricted to) the following:

* Referral from a member of University staff where a student has disclosed a problem and/or provided information which indicates that there is a need to address their fitness to study.
* The student is perceived to be, or potentially has, an eating disorder, which they may, or may not acknowledge, even though their physical state, functioning, and or psychological wellbeing is being severely compromised. (This is in line with [Higher Education Occupational Physicians/Practitioners’ Society (HEOPS) Guidance: ‘Fitness to Study for Students with Severe Eating Disorders’](http://www.heops.org.uk/HEOPS_Guidance_Fitness_to_Study_with_Severe_Eating_Disorders_v2.pdf) hereafter referred to as the HEOPS Guidance)[[1]](#footnote-1).
* The student’s disposition is such that it indicates that there may be a need to address an underlying mental health problem, for example if they have demonstrated moods swings, shown signs of depression or become withdrawn.
* Behaviour, which would otherwise be dealt with as a disciplinary matter, which it is considered may be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem, or a developmental issue such as autism spectrum disorder.
* The student’s academic performance or physical behaviour is not acceptable and this is thought to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem.
* The student’s behaviour is severely disrupting their own studies or the studies of others, or results in unreasonable demands being placed on staff or other students.
* Serious concerns about the student emerge from a third party (i.e. house-mate, friend, colleague, placement provider, member of the public, medical professional etc.) which indicate that there is a need to address their fitness to study.

The areas of concern will include:

* The safety of the student, whether as a result of intentional or unintentional self-harm.
* Whether the student is at risk from others or poses a risk to others.
* The needs and disabilities of the student including:
	+ their ability to look after themselves
	+ their ability to progress with their academic studies
	+ any disabling or distressing problems with thinking, feeling or behaviour
	+ disabling problems with activities or in relationships with other people.

In all cases, the student’s academic advisor/tutor or Director of Institute, Head of Academic Department/Year (as appropriate) should be notified so that the Department is aware of the situation and can provide any necessary support.

# Fitness to Study stages

## Initial support and guidance for students – preliminary action

Students with a mental or physical health difficulty or struggling with issues affecting their general fitness to study are encouraged to consult relevant support services available at the University, in particular the Student Support and Wellbeing services, to discuss issues and seek solutions to support their fitness to study:

* + Wellbeing Services
	+ Student Health Service
	+ Disability and Dyslexia Service
	+ International Student Advisory Service
	+ Chaplain
	+ Director of Students, Support and Information Services

Further information on these services can be found by visiting the Student Support webpages (<https://www.chi.ac.uk/student-life/support-health-wellbeing/>).

Such students are also expected to speak to their academic advisor/tutor, Director of Institute, Head of Academic Department/Year (or equivalent) or another appropriate member of staff in their academic department about the difficulty and any related problems that they may be experiencing.

Staff with further or unresolved concerns about a student’s fitness to study should address them by invoking the use of this policy. Tutorial, Academic, Accommodation or Student Support and Wellbeing staff can initiate the use of the following procedures if concern for the student is sufficient. Depending upon the perceived severity of the situation and seriousness of any perceived risks, action may be initiated at any of the three stages.

See Appendix 1 for the process flow diagram.

## Crisis situations

It is possible that a student may pose such an extreme risk to themselves and / or to others that they require emergency assistance outside of these procedures. If immediate action is required:

* If the student is at high risk of harm to themselves or others call 999 for the ambulance service or the Police (as appropriate); also call the University emergency number (01243 81)6363 to notify what actions have been taken
* If emergency services are not appropriate but immediate action is still required, call the University emergency number (01243 81)6363 for the Duty Manager, Security, a First Aider or Student Support and Wellbeing Services (during office hours) as appropriate.

In such cases staff should refer to the following crisis guidelines:

* Positive Mental Health Policy
* Campus Acute Risk Policy

If immediate action is not required, but there is potentially ongoing high risk or concern, a senior manager (for example the student’s Director of Institute, Head of Academic Department or the Student Wellbeing and Disability and Dyslexia Service Manager or Director of Students, Support and Information Services) should be consulted. It may be advisable to invoke the Fitness to Study procedure at stage three (Senior Manager’s Review Panel). See section 5.5 below.

## Stage one – informal action

Should preliminary action be unsuccessful, a member of staff should approach the student and explain to them, in a supportive and understanding manner, that concerns about their fitness to study have emerged which have been registered by invoking the use of this policy. This would ordinarily be a member of Student Support and Wellbeing or a member of staff within the academic department with primary responsibility and/or knowledge of the student concerned (e.g. their academic advisor/tutor or programme lead). However, if concerns arise within University student residences, the Accommodation Office should take the lead in consultation with the student’s department. Should a member of staff require advice or guidance on this they should contact Student Support and Wellbeing staff.

The student should be made aware of the precise nature of the behaviour that has caused these concerns to be raised (they may not have realised the impact of their actions), and that it is their responsibility to maintain their fitness to study. If appropriate, reference should be made to the level of perceived risk presented by the student as measured by the risk assessment process.

The member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter by informal discussions with the student. The student should be given the opportunity to explain their own views on the matter, and be encouraged to think about using one or more of the support services offered by the University. It may also be appropriate to look into the possibility of applying reasonable adjustments/special academic arrangements to enable the student to study effectively. The student may be accompanied by a friend at these discussions if they wish.

It is hoped that in most cases issues can be resolved at this level, and that students will respond positively, cooperating fully with the process and taking advantage of the support available.

A review period should be determined (if possible by agreement between the member of staff and the student) to allow the student to consider their own behaviour and seek advice from the support services available. At the end of this period a meeting should be held to discuss any steps taken by the student to address the concerns. If the concerns have been addressed satisfactorily, this will be noted. Further meetings may be scheduled to continue to monitor the situation/progress and help ensure that continued support is provided to the student to enable them to study effectively. If, however, the concerns have not been addressed, a further review period may be agreed, or the case will move to the next stage of the policy.

The informal discussions, advice and any undertakings made by a department and / or the student should be documented by means of a ‘Fitness to Study record sheet’ (see Appendix 3) for the benefit of both the department and the student.

If a student is unable to cooperate with the above process or modify their behaviour, they should be informed that more formal action under Stage 2 of this policy may be considered appropriate.

See Appendix 1 for the process flow diagram.

## Stage two – student case review meeting

If the action taken under Stage One has not been successful, or it is felt that the case is too serious to be dealt with informally, Stage Two of the policy can be invoked. A Student Case Review Meeting shall be convened by the Director of Institute or Head of Academic Department or Director of Students, Support and Information Services (or nominee) or the Head of Campus and Residential Services or the Director of Estate and Facilities Management. The Meeting shall be made up of appropriate representatives of the student’s academic department, representatives from Student Support and Wellbeing and, when appropriate, other professional services such as the Accommodation Office.

### Documentary evidence

Before the meeting, documentary evidence from a relevant objective third party e.g. medical (including mental health) assessment, or Occupational Health assessment, may be sought. The student will be encouraged to consent to this, as it will ultimately enable the University to address the student’s difficulties in the most effective manner possible, and make an accurate assessment of risk.

A third-party assessment will be used to determine the following matters:

* the nature and extent of any medical condition from which the student may be suffering and the prognosis;
* the extent to which the student may be able to maintain satisfactory progress and manage the demands of student life;
* any impact the student’s condition may have or risk it may pose to others;
* whether any additional steps should be taken by the University in light of the assessment to enable the student to study effectively;
* whether the student will be receiving any ongoing medical treatment or other appropriate support.

The student will be asked to give explicit consent to disclose to the University the full results of any assessment. The University recognises that any such disclosed information will constitute “special category data” under current data protection legislation and will be handled, processed and stored accordingly.

Should the student refuse to undertake a medical examination or other appropriate assessment, the University may either continue this policy based on the information already in its possession, or use another appropriate means to address the issue.

Further information to be provided may include:

* a report of previous actions
* a risk assessment carried out by delegated staff
* other reasonable documentation that aids decision making.

### Meeting arrangements

The student will be given at least 3 days’ notice of the Student Case Review Meeting and informed of the purpose of the meeting. They will also be provided with copies of any documents which will be considered in the meeting, and asked to provide in good time for the meeting any documentation they may wish to be considered.

In exceptional circumstances, where there is a risk to the student or others, a senior manager may arrange a Case Review Meeting with less than 3 days’ notice if this is agreed with the student. In crisis situations follow the guidance in Section 5.2.

The student may be accompanied at the meeting by a Students’ Union representative, a fellow student, or family member. Disabled students may also be accompanied by a support worker if required.

The Meeting will be chaired by the senior manager who called the Case Review Meeting. The purpose of the Meeting will be to ensure that:

* The student is made fully aware of the nature of the concerns which have been raised;
* The student’s views are heard and taken account of;
* The best way to proceed is agreed upon;
* The student is fully aware of the possible outcomes if difficulties remain.

The Student Case Review Meeting will order its proceedings at its own discretion and may call witnesses, including Student Support and Wellbeing staff working with the student, and institute enquiries to assist its deliberations. It will also consider an updated risk assessment where appropriate.

The decision of the Student Case Review Meeting, together with a concise record of the meeting, should be sent to the student within 7 working days from the date of the meeting, and a copy kept on the student’s personal file.

The discussions, advice and any undertakings made by the department and the student should be documented by means of a ‘Fitness to Study record sheet’ (see Appendix 3) for the benefit of both the department and the student.

### Recommendations

The Student Case Review Meeting may recommend:

* That no further action is required and the student continues their course of study.
* To formally monitor the student’s progress for a specified period of time. In this case an objective-oriented action plan will be agreed with the student, clearly outlining any steps which the student will need to take in an agreed timespan and/or any support to be provided to the student to address the concerns identified. Regular review meetings with the student will need to be arranged with a nominated member of staff to ensure that the action plan is being appropriately followed and/or that reasonable support to enable the student to study effectively is being provided. The student will also need to be informed of the consequences of any breaches of the action plan, which will normally involve their maintaining satisfactory progress being considered at Stage 2 and /or involve action under Stage 3 procedures, including monitoring to ensure the student maintains satisfactory progress.
* To recommend part-time study (where appropriate and available) or that special academic arrangements be put in place. Such recommendations would need to be agreed by the student’s department and by the student through a change in registration (see the relevant section in the Student Handbook). The student should also be advised to seek guidance from the Wellbeing Services, the Student Money Advice Service and the International Student Advisory Service (where appropriate) before agreeing to a change in circumstance. The student will be informed that, unless these arrangements remedy the concerns to the University’s satisfaction, their fitness to study may be considered at Stage Three.
* Where there are concerns about the student’s ongoing residence in University accommodation, a recommendation that the student moves out of University accommodation and either moves home (and commutes to study) or moves into other suitable private accommodation.
* Where the student is on placement, or their professional programme of study is compromised, the ‘Professional Suitability and Fitness to Practise Policy and Procedure’ should be followed.
* With the consent of the student, to agree a period of ‘intermission’ from their studies for a mutually agreed period of time. By intermitting, undergraduate students in effect ‘stop the clock’ of their period of registration. A student may only intermit from a complete block of study (i.e. a semester or year – or a term, where the programme is organised on a trimester basis). Any later resumption of studies will be at the start of this block of study. Students (full-time and part-time) may intermit from their programme of study on more than one occasion provided the overall period of intermission on the programme does not exceed two years in total.

More details on Intermissions can be found in the relevant section of the Student Handbook.

* To refer the case to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) (or nominee) or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, to be considered under Stage Three of this policy. This will only be appropriate in the most serious of cases where, for example, evidence of a serious risk to either the health and safety of the student or others has been identified, and it is thought that suspension, exclusion or expulsion of the student may be the appropriate course of action, or where a particular course of action has been recommended such as part-time study or ‘intermission’ but the student does not agree. In these circumstances a compulsory period of intermission may be invoked by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) (or nominee) and a letter sent to the student informing them of this decision. (See 5.4.4. and 5.5)
* To refer the case to be considered wholly or partially under the University disciplinary processes at stage 2.

See Appendix 1 for the process flow diagram.

### Intermission plan and conditions

Where a period of intermission is agreed it may be advisable to draw up appropriate and relevant conditions for a return to study. These should be arranged with the student with support from appropriate Student Support and Wellbeing staff, and should be agreed with the Director of Institute or Head of Academic Department. These could include:

* An expected minimum term for intermission and/or a provisional date of return to study.
* Acceptable arrangements for the student to study from home and/or commute rather than live in University accommodation (where the immediate needs and the safety of others are better met by the student living at home).
* A full mental health assessment by specialist Mental Health services as a priority.
* Acceptable and suitable medical evidence that the student is fit and safe to return to University accommodation and to resume studies.
* An agreement that the student should contact and arrange to meet with the appropriate Student Support and Wellbeing Service (such as the Wellbeing Service) on return to University, so any condition and on-going study needs may be assessed / evaluated.

See also Appendix 4 for a list of issues and considerations which should be accounted for when intermission is being proposed.

## Stage three – Senior Manager’s Review Panel

This stage of the procedure will only be implemented following a referral from a Stage Two Student Case Review Meeting or if, in the opinion of a University senior manager (for example the student’s Director of Institute or the Student Wellbeing and Disability and Dyslexia Service Manager or Director of Students, Support and Information Services having consulted as appropriate), initial concerns are raised which are sufficiently serious as to warrant the consideration of the student’s suspension, exclusion, expulsion or to invoke a period of compulsory ‘intermission’ (e.g. if they pose a potential threat to the health and safety of themselves or others, on therapeutic[[2]](#footnote-2) health grounds, or disruption to the working of the University).

### Convening the Hearing

As a first step the Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) shall consider whether interim suspension of the student pending further action is appropriate, including from University accommodation.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience), in consultation with the Vice-Chancellor or alternate Deputy Vice-Chancellor if required, shall then convene a Senior Manager’s Review Panel which shall be chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) as appropriate. This will normally comprise the Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience), the Director of Institute or Head of Academic Department and the Director of Students, Support and Information Services.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) leading the review will fix a date for a formal meeting of the Senior Manager’s Review Panel to hear the case and invite the student to attend to discuss the concerns and all relevant issues. A member of the University will act as Secretary to the Panel.

Wherever possible the student will be given at least 7 days’ notice of the meeting of the Senior Manager’s Review Panel. The student will be informed of the purpose of the hearing. The student will also be provided with any documents to be considered at the meeting and asked to provide any documentation they may wish the Review Panel to consider at least two days in advance of the meeting.

### Meeting arrangements

The purpose of the meeting will be to consider the evidence available, including the student’s perception of these concerns, and to reach an appropriate decision, action plan or other outcome.

The student may be accompanied at the meeting by a Students’ Union representative, a fellow student or family member. Disabled students may also be accompanied by a support worker where required.

The Senior Manager’s Review Panel will order its proceedings at its discretion and may call witnesses and institute enquiries to assist its deliberations, including Student Support and Wellbeing staff working with the student, and which may include requesting further medical or other appropriate assessments. It will also consider an updated risk assessment where appropriate.

The decision it arrives at shall be reported to the Vice-Chancellor, by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) leading the review, having considered the advice of other members of the panel. The student shall be notified of the decision within 7 days of the meeting. The outcome of the hearing shall also be reported to relevant University bodies.

The discussions, advice and any undertakings made by Student Support and Wellbeing services, the academic department and the student should be documented by means of a ‘Fitness to Study record sheet’ (see Appendix 3) for the benefit of all parties to the meeting.

### Hearing decision

The decision of the Senior Manager’s Review Panel may include one or more of the following:

* To formally monitor the student’s progress for a specified period of time. In this case the Panel will provide the student with an agreed action plan, outlining any steps which the student will need to take within a specified timespan and/or any support to be provided to the student to address the concerns identified. This will be a new action plan over a period of a maximum of four weeks. Regular review meetings with the student will need to be arranged with a nominated member of staff (to ensure that the action plan is being appropriately met and/or that reasonable support to enable the student to study effectively is being provided). The student will also need to be informed of the consequences of any breaches of the action plan.
* That, following consultation with the academic department, the student should convert from full-time to part-time study with support and/or special academic arrangements are put in place or an intermission of their studies occurs. The student should be advised to seek guidance from Wellbeing Services, the Student Money Service and the International Student Advisory Service (where appropriate) on the implications of such a measure. The student will be informed of the consequences should these arrangements fail to remedy the concerns identified to the University’s satisfaction.
* To recommend that the Vice-Chancellor exercise their statutory power to suspend or exclude the student or to invoke a period of compulsory intermission (in this latter case an intermission plan and appropriate and relevant conditions for a return to study should be drawn up as specified in section 5.4.4 above).
* Any other action considered to be appropriate and proportionate.

See Appendix 1 for the process flow diagram.

# Appeals

## University appeals process

A student may appeal against the decision of the Panel only on the basis of material irregularity.

The appeal must be made in writing to the Director of Quality and Standards within fourteen working days of the student receiving written notification of the Panel’s decision. The Director of Quality and Standards will decide if the criteria for appeal have been met. If the case for appeal is considered proven, the Director of Quality and Standards shall be empowered to set aside the Panel’s decision, and convene an Appeals Panel to re-consider the evidence in accordance with the University of Chichester Appeals Process.

If the Director of Quality and Standards decides there are no grounds to grant the appeal, their decision will be final and will conclude the University’s procedures. A “completion of procedures letter” will then be issued to the student.

See Appendix 1 for the process flow diagram.

## Office of the Independent Adjudicator

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for students in higher education (OIA) operates an independent student complaints scheme pursuant to the Higher Education Act 2004 (as amended by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017). Students or former students may take their request for an appeal, relating to a final decision reached under the Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure, to the OIA once all internal processes have been exhausted. A “Completion of Procedures” letter will be issued automatically at the same time as the letter notifying the student of the outcome of their request for an appeal when it has been determined that all internal processes have been completed. The OIA must receive a completed Scheme Application Form within twelve months of the date of Completion of Procedures Letter.

If the OIA decides that a case is eligible to be considered under the Scheme and reaches a decision which includes recommendations to the University, such recommendations are not binding. The Vice-Chancellor shall consider the recommendations and, following consultation where appropriate, shall determine an appropriate course of action which may involve further investigation by a person not involved in the original investigation.

# Return to study

## Grounds for return

After a period of suspension or intermission on physical and/or mental health grounds, the decision as to whether to permit the student to return to study will be made by the Director of Institute or Head of Academic Department. In taking such a decision, the Director of Institute or Head of Academic Department will seek advice from the Director of Students, Support and Information Services (or nominee). If the student intermitted as a result of a stage 3 Fitness to Study process, the Director of Institute or Head of Academic Department will also seek advice from the Chair of the Senior Manager’s Review Panel. The student is informed of their responsibilities as well as those the University will strive to take to facilitate an effective return to study.

To this end, the Director of Students, Support and Information Services (or nominee), in consultation with the Academic Department will identify the issues of concern the University has in respect of the student maintaining satisfactory progress. Where relevant and appropriate the Director of Students, Support and Information Services (or nominee) will require the student to provide an assessment from a relevant medical professional. This assessment should address the student’s ability to manage the demands of studying at University, drawing attention to the nature and extent of the student’s previous challenges and the University’s concerns about them. The University may require the student to agree to a representative of the University engaging with the medical professional in order to reach a suitable judgement as to whether the student is well enough to return to study at this time. The University also reserves the right to seek independent specialist professional advice which may be at the student’s expense with their agreement.

Where conditions for return to study were agreed at the time of intermission (see section 5.4.4), evidence that these conditions have been met must be provided to the Director of Institute or Head of Academic Department and the Director of Students, Support and Information Services (or nominee) at least one month before the proposed date of return.

A student will only be permitted to return if, after receiving medical advice or other acceptable professional opinion, the University is satisfied that the individual is able to maintain satisfactory progress and comply with any conditions imposed on their return.

## Intermission on mental health grounds

In the case of a student who has intermitted on grounds of mental health, the Wellbeing Service will be available to provide assistance and will draw up a ‘return to study’ plan in consultation with the student and their academic department in order to ensure that support is in place to try to prevent a reoccurrence of the events which led the student to intermit. This will address:

* the specific study-related support needs of the student in returning to education
* the support which is reasonably required in the short term
* involvement and liaison with external agencies
* any longer-term support or adjustments that are reasonably required.

If necessary, the plan will incorporate a risk management plan which acknowledges the experiences which led to the student needing to intermit and any other information which is known to be relevant. Any return to study plan will be subject to cooperation with this process and adherence to any agreements made.

## Intermission as a result of an eating disorder

In cases where a student is perceived to have, or to potentially have, an eating disorder, and has taken a reasonable intermission from their studies to overcome an eating disorder, they will be required in line with [HEOPS Guidance](https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521730766HEOPS_Guidance_Fitness_to_Study_with_Severe_Eating_Disorders_v2.pdf)[[3]](#footnote-3) to be assessed by an Occupational Health Practitioner at least one month prior to their return to study to determine whether they are fit to resume their studies.

HEOPS Guidance recommend that a student is fit enough to return to their course when they demonstrate:

1. A stable and uncompromised physical state
2. Sufficient psychological and social functioning to be able to cope with the demands of student life (e.g. no suicide risk, little if any cognitive impairment, able to function socially)
3. Willingness to engage in whatever management programme is recommended by a specialist in eating disorders. This may include regular monitoring of weight and physical state.

## Intermission on therapeutic health grounds and other health grounds

In the case of a student who has intermitted on health grounds or on therapeutic health grounds it may be advisable for the Student Health Service or Wellbeing Services to draw up a Health Support Plan (or update any existing plan) to ensure both the student and all relevant University staff are aware of any ongoing condition and related support requirements.

## Student Additional Requirements Agreement (SARA)

In cases where a student is returning from intermission and has ongoing, diagnosed health or mental health condition which requires reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, these should be drawn up (or any existing SARA revised as required) by the appropriate support service.

## Continuing concerns

In cases where the University has any continuing concerns about the individual’s ability to maintain satisfactory progress, it may require a second medical (or other appropriate professional) opinion. In this case a student may be asked to submit themselves for examinations / assessments by doctors / specialists nominated by the University, potentially at the student’s cost, to allow the situation to be properly evaluated.

## Ongoing review meetings

In any case where a student returns to study following the implementation of the Fitness to Study procedure the University may decide that there should be regular review meetings with the student which can be used to monitor and support a return to study plan. If so, the student must provide their continued cooperation in this respect and such review meetings may continue for part or all of their remaining time at University.

# Mitigating Circumstances

The Fitness to Study Policy is independent of the Mitigating Circumstances process and as such will not be considered as an alternative to that established process.

# Data protection and confidentiality

The University will take account of relevant legislation such as current data protection legislation, the Mental Health Act, the Human Rights Act, the Equality Act and also of the general rights and expectations of a student regarding confidentiality. In cases where Stages 2 or 3 of the Fitness to Study Procedure have been invoked, the Chair will make a decision about whether the student’s emergency contact should be informed if necessary (for example where this had not been done by the student), and discuss with the student whether any external third parties should be contacted.

The University acknowledges that as a result of implementing this policy it will receive sensitive personal data and other data of a confidential nature pertaining to the student and other third parties. Such data is classified as “special category data” and is given special protection under current data protection legislation. The University will ensure that all such data is handled, processed and stored in compliance with the University’s Privacy Standard and with current data protection legislation. To this end, individual Fitness to Study records of students who are the subject of this procedure will be stored in electronic form with access granted on a need to know basis only.

# Appendix 1: Fitness to Study - Process Flow Diagram



# Appendix 2: Example Risk Assessment

**SCORE SHEET** - Assesses the fitness to study concerns in an individual

**Student Name Student Number Date**

For each domain (numbered 1 to 7), tick ONE statement that best applies to the person being assessed. There should be a total of 7 ticks on the completed grid (one for each domain). Then for each level of severity (e.g. ‘None’, ‘Moderate’) add the number of ticks and record in the box at the bottom of the column. ‘Very Severe’ is only available for domains where life-saving emergency action by specialist mental health teams may be required. The checklists overleaf provide some guidance on the issues to consider when assessing each domain - they are not intended to be prescriptive.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **NONE** | **MILD** | **MODERATE** | **SEVERE** | **VERY SEVERE** | **COMMENT** |
| SAFETY | **Domain 1** Intentional self-harm | No concerns about risk of deliberate self-harm or suicide attempt [ ]  | Minor concerns about risk of deliberate self-harm or suicide attempt  [ ]  | Definite indicators of risk of deliberate self-harm or suicide attempt  [ ]  | High risk to physical safety as a result of deliberate self-harm or suicide attempt  [ ]  | Immediate risk to physical safety as a result of deliberate self-harm or suicide attempt  [ ]  |  |
| **Domain 2** Unintentional self-harm | No concerns about unintentional risk to physical safety  [ ]  | Minor concerns about unintentional risk to physical safety  [ ]  | Definite indicators of unintentional risk to physical safety  [ ]  | High risk to physical safety as a result of self-neglect, unsafe behaviour or inability to maintain a safe environment [ ]  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| RISK | **Domain 3** Risk from others | No concerns about risk of abuse or exploitation from other individuals or society  [ ]  | Minor concerns about risk of abuse or exploitation from other individuals or society  [ ]  | Definite risk of abuse or exploitation from other individuals or society  [ ]  | Positive evidence of abuse or exploitation from other individuals or society  [ ]  |  |  |
| **Domain 4** Risk to others | No concerns about risk to physical safety or property of others  [ ]  | Antisocial behaviour  [ ]  | Risk to property and/or minor risk to physical safety of others  [ ]  | High risk to physical safety of others as a result of dangerous behaviour  [ ]  | Immediate risk to physical safety of others as a result of dangerous behaviour  [ ]  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NEEDS AND DISABILITIES | **Domain 5** Survival | No concerns about basic amenities, resources or living skills  [ ]  | Minor concerns about basic amenities, resources or living skills  [ ]  | Marked lack of basic amenities, resources or living skills  [ ]  | Serious lack of basic amenities, resources or living skills  [ ]  | Life-threatening lack of basic amenities, resources or living skills  [ ]  |  |
| **Domain 6** Psychological | No disabling or distressing problems with thinking, feeling or behaviour  [ ]  | Minor disabling or distressing problems with thinking, feeling or behaviour  [ ]  | Disabling or distressing problems with thinking, feeling or behaviour  [ ]  | Very disabling or distressing problems with thinking, feeling or behaviour  [ ]  |  |  |
| **Domain 7** Social | No disabling problems with activities or in relationships with other people  [ ]  | Minor disabling problems with activities or in relationships with other people  [ ]  | Disabling problems with activities or in relationships with other people  [ ]  | Very disabling problems with activities or in relationships with other people  [ ]  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **No of ticks** |  |  |  |  |  | **Total score** |
|  | **RAG score** | 0 points for each None0 | 1 point for each Mild | 2 points for each Moderate | 3 points for each Severe | 4 points for each V. Severe | NOTE: this is an indicator for further discussion |

**CHECKLISTS FOR GUIDANCE**

Also consider other aspects which are relevant. The tick-boxes are provided for optional use to identify concerns, but the RAG rating is made on the score sheet.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Intentional Self-Harm**  | **2. Unintentional Self-Harm** | **3. Risk From Others** | **4. Risk To Others** | **5. Survival** | ***6. Psychological***  | **7. Social** |
| ***Individual factors:*** * expressing suicidal intent
* clear plan
* available means
* preparations
* hopelessness
* no confidant, e.g. partner, friends, professionals
* poor coping resources
* lack of blocks to self-harm

***Consider risk factors:*** * past history of deliberate self-harm
* (i) alcohol/drug abuse OR (ii) diagnosis (e.g. depression, schizophrenia, personality disorder)
* (i) AND (ii) = increased risk
* physical illness/disability
* eating disorder
* recent GP contact
* recent psychiatric hospitalisation
* recent loss
* no friends/family
* living alone
* unskilled worker
* unemployment
* older people
* male (especially young males)
 | ***Consider self-neglect:*** * lack of self-care
* not eating or drinking appropriately
* eating disorder

***Consider unsafe behaviour:*** * not seeking help for problems posing risk
* refusing appropriate help e.g. not taking medication
* not claiming benefits
* lack of awareness of own safety in home e.g. fire risk
* risky sexual behaviour
* substance misuse
* wandering

***Consider the inability to maintain a safe environment:*** * unable to manage accommodation
* not paying rent
* running up debts
 | ***Consider different types of abuse or exploitation:*** * physical
* sexual
* emotional
* racial
* financial
* neglect

***Consider risk from:*** * students
* staff
* relatives
* friends
* neighbours
* strangers
* treatments

***Consider risk of abuse by carer:*** * severe stress
* mental illness/alcohol /drug abuse in carer
* carer refusing help
* history of abuse by or to carer

***Consider risk from society:*** * history of abusive/ exploitative relationships
* harassment from public
* use of home by unwanted others
* inadequate home security
* fear of retaliation for reporting abuse
 | ***Consider risk to:*** * students
* children & other dependents
* partners
* carers
* staff
* neighbours
* strangers

***Consider risk factors:*** * current threats, especially to a named person
* history of violence to people/property
* carer’s concern
* access to weapons
* no blocks to violence e.g. fear of consequences
* history of arson
* unemployment
* drug/alcohol abuse
* stress
* voices telling person to harm someone
* paranoia
* risky sexual behaviour
* anti-social behaviour e.g. unsafe driving
* lack of information about person’s history
* no trusting relationship with professionals
* general or specific threats based upon extreme political or religious position
 | ***Consider whether the person has problems with:**** a home
* heating for the home
* essential amenities (e.g. washing facilities, toilet, cooker, bed)
* the ability to look after their home
* the ability to keep adequately clean and tidy
* enough food & fluids
* clothing
* enough money to live on
* mobility
* the ability to use public transport
* the ability to cope with physical health problems
 | ***Consider:*** * overactive, aggressive, disruptive or agitated behaviour
* problems with hallucinations & delusions
* cognitive problems with memory, orientation & understanding
* mood problems e.g. depressed, manic, anxious
* problems with reading or writing
* a lack of coping strategies
* attitude to problems
* help seeking behaviour
* spiritual problems
* feelings of alienation
 | ***Consider problems in relationships with others:**** lack of ability to make or maintain friendships
* lack of supportive relationships
* lack of intimate relationship
* sexual problems
* communication problems
* unable to handle daily hassles

***Consider problems in activities:*** * education
* home/domestic
* leisure
* unpaid work
* paid work
* travel
* lack of personally meaningful life
 |

This assessment grid is based on the ‘Threshold Assessment Grid (TAG)’ developed by the Institute of Psychiatry at King’s College London (Slade et al, 2000).

# Appendix 3: Example Fitness to Study Record Sheet

**Stage**:

1: Informal 2: Student Case Review

3: Senior Manager’s Review Panel 4. Post Appeal

**Student**

Name: Student Number:

**Lead member of staff**

Name: Position & Department

**Date:** **Time:**

**In Attendance:**

**Pertinent Points of Concern**

**Agreed Action Plan/Expected Outcomes**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Action by student and/or staff | Who by | Review date |
| Comment | C / I / P |
| Action by student and/or staff | Who by | Review date |
| Comment | C / I / P |
| Action by student and/or staff | Who by | Review date |
| Comment | C / I / P |
| Action by student and/or staff | Who by | Review date |
| Comment | C / I / P |

C - complete, I - incomplete, P - partial

**Further Comment**

**Staff Signature:** **Date:**

**Student Signature:** **Date:**

# Appendix 4: Considerations for intermission

Absence from and return to study issues/considerations:

* Invoke Fitness to Study Policy
* Location of student
* Safety needs
* Confidentiality and consent issues
* Rationale for absence
* Need to intermit (student request)
* Health grounds
* Compulsory intermission on therapeutic health grounds (See 5.5.)
* Need to claim mitigation
* Liaison with Academic Department
* Liaison with external health professionals
* Liaison with parents if necessary
* Options to study from home, maintain course progression
* Financial considerations - fees rent, bills
* Planned return
* Planned date of return
* Need for further assessment / treatment / therapy during absence
* Evidence (eg medical letter) required of fitness and safety to return and resume studies
* Accommodation requirements or changes
* Meeting with the Wellbeing Service (or Student Health Service or other appropriate Student Support and Wellbeing service) to discuss progress, conditions and preparations prior to return
* Assess impact of return on others (eg hall mates / house mates / class mates)
* Follow-up support plan post return
* Need for reasonable adjustments
* Post return review
1. <http://www.heops.org.uk/HEOPS_Guidance_Fitness_to_Study_with_Severe_Eating_Disorders_v2.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Therapeutic treatment is designed to treat an illness or to improve a person's health, rather than to prevent an illness. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [HEOPS Guidance Fitness to Study with Severe Eating Disorders](https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521730766HEOPS_Guidance_Fitness_to_Study_with_Severe_Eating_Disorders_v2.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)