

Fitness to Study Policy

Agreed by Senate November 2014

1. Purpose of this policy

- 1.1. We have a responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of all of our students and staff. This policy sets out how we will respond when a student is either in significant distress or causing significant concern to those around them as a result of possible mental health difficulties. In such circumstances a student might be in breach of our Student Code of Conduct and we want to take a supportive approach, rather than invoke disciplinary procedures.
- 1.2. The procedures under this policy are intended to help us address the issues, including behaviour, giving cause for concern and to either find agreed ways for the student to continue their study, with appropriate support, or to take a break from their studies without academic consequences until they are fit to return and engage with student life and study.
- 1.3. This policy and procedure should be used in reference to our Student Charter, and our Rules, Regulations and Procedures for Students.
- 1.4. This policy applies only to core Anglia Ruskin students, and not those at Associate Colleges.

2. Use of this policy and procedure

- 2.1. This policy and procedures will be applied only where the distress expressed by the student, or disruption caused by their behaviour, is of a serious or potentially serious nature. This will include where a student appears unaware of the consequences of their behaviour on others e.g. causing disruption and distress, and/or where concerns about the student and others safety exist.
- 2.2. Our response will be intended to protect the interests of the student and balance these with the needs of other students and staff, ensuring that we continue to provide an appropriate environment for the purposes of higher education.
- 2.3. Wherever possible the usual support services available to students will be used before any response is made in line with this policy.
- 2.4. Ultimately we have a duty to all of our students and staff. We reserve the right to invoke Disciplinary Procedures where the student does not cooperate with any response made in line with this policy.

3. The procedure

- 3.1. The procedure has three stages, based on the level of concern as to the disruption or risk caused by the student's behaviour, the student's awareness of the impact of their behaviour and the student's level of cooperation to our response. We will invoke the policy at either Stage 1 or 3 as deemed appropriate.

3.2. The three stages are summarised below;

- Stage 1 – Emerging concerns emerging about an individual student's health, safety, behaviour or mental wellbeing.
- Stage 2 – Continuing concerns will initiate a Case Review Meeting.
- Stage 3 – Persistent and/or Significant Concerns will initiate a Fitness to Study Review

3.3. We may need to consult with external agencies. If we do, we will comply with our [University Data Protection Policy](#)

3.4. If a student will not engage with the procedure, we may deem it necessary to continue the process in their absence. In such circumstances we will always seek to protect the interests of the student and balance these with the needs of other students and staff.

4. Suspension

4.1. At any point we may need to consider suspending a student where there are serious concerns about the safety and wellbeing of either the student, of those around them, of serious disruption to our university business. If a student is suspended we will implement this policy at Stage 3 to determine the next steps.

5. Fitness to Study – Procedure

Note - Emergency situations

5.1. This procedure should not distract from the emergency actions required in acute or dangerous situations where it is believed that a student's behaviour presents an immediate risk to themselves or others.

5.2. In such situations the Emergency Services should be contacted by dialling 999 and University Security should also be contacted on 6666.

5.3. This should be followed up later by notifying the Assistant Director of Student Services and relevant Dean of the details of the incident and action taken. This will enable us to ensure a more coordinated and informed response to any current or potential future causes for concern.

6. Stage 1- Emerging concerns emerging about an individual student's health, safety, behaviour or mental wellbeing.

- 6.1. If serious concerns develop within an academic environment they should initially be reported to the relevant Deputy Dean/Director of Studies/Course Group Leader and to the Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing¹.
- 6.2. Serious concerns within our university managed residences should be reported to the Residential Services Manager and to the Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing².
- 6.3. Where serious concerns are initially identified within the Counselling and Wellbeing Service, the Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing will liaise with the relevant Deputy Dean/Director of Studies and or the Residential Services Manager prior to requesting a formal meeting with the student.
- 6.4. The relevant Deputy Dean/Director of Studies and or the Residential Services Manager and the Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing, will liaise to decide the appropriate person to contact the student. They may also consult with relevant colleagues to determine the full scope and nature of the concerns. The intention will be to raise and discuss the specific issues and concerns with the student and to offer support.
- 6.5. The discussion with the student will be done in a supportive and understanding manner. If the student wishes, an Adviser from the Students' Union Advice Service may accompany them to the meeting. A record of the concerns and actions agreed and a review period, should be determined as part of this initial process.
- 6.6. A letter recording the meeting, issues and agreed actions will be sent to the student by the Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing and copied to the relevant Deputy Dean/Director of Studies and/or the Residential Services Manager.
- 6.7. At the end of the review period, normally between a 2 - 6 week period, the Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing, will consult with relevant colleagues to determine whether there is any continuing concern. If the concerns have been addressed satisfactorily, this will be noted and no further action taken at this stage (unless a further concern is raised at which point Stage 2 or 3 of the procedure may be invoked). If, however, the concerns have not been addressed, a meeting will be held with the student and a further review period may be agreed, or the case will move to the next stage of the procedure.
- 6.8. It is hoped that in most cases issues can be resolved at this level and that students will respond positively, co-operate fully with the process and take advantage of the support available.
- 6.9. Should the student be unable or unwilling to respond positively at this stage, then the Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing in liaison with the relevant Deputy Dean/Director of Studies and/or the Residential Services Manager will decide whether to progress to Stage 2.

¹ If named staff are not available a suitable nominee should be determined to act on their behalf. This should be assumed in all references to postholders throughout this document

7. Stage 2 - Continuing concerns will initiate a Case Review Meeting.

7.1. At Stage 2 the relevant Deputy Dean/Director of Studies will be informed if not already involved.

8. Case Review Meeting

8.1. The Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing, in liaison with the relevant Deputy Dean/Director of Studies and/or the Residential Services Manager, will inform the student that Stage 2 of the policy is being invoked. The student will be given at least 7 days' notice of the Case Review Meeting and informed of the purpose of the meeting.

8.2. The Case Review Meeting will be chaired by the Head of Study Support and Wellbeing and consist of the:

- Student;
- Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing;
- Deputy Dean/Director of Studies;
- Residential Services Manager (if appropriate).

8.3. The student may bring a friend (this does not include a lawyer or legal adviser but may include an Adviser from the Students' Union Advice Service or SU Officer) to the meeting.

8.4. It may be appropriate to have another staff member from the Study Support Service or Counselling and Wellbeing Service if their specific professional expertise is required.

8.5. Before the meeting, the student may be encouraged to seek a medical assessment to enable our University to address the student's difficulties in the most effective manner possible, and make an accurate assessment of risk.

8.6. The medical assessment may be used to determine:

- The nature and extent of any medical condition from which the student may be suffering;
- Their prognosis;
- The extent to which it may affect his/her fitness to study and manage the demands of student life;
- Any impact it may have or risk it may pose to others;
- Whether any additional steps should be taken by our University, in light of the medical condition, to enable the student to study effectively;
- Whether the student will be receiving any on-going medical treatment or support.

8.7. The student will be asked to authorise full disclosure to our University of the results of any assessment. Our University recognises that any such information disclosed will constitute "sensitive data" for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998 and will be handled, processed and stored accordingly. Should the student decline to undertake a medical examination, our University may either continue this policy based on the information already in its possession, or as previously stated, reserve the right to address the current issues under our Disciplinary Procedures.

8.8. The purpose of the Case Review 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;
- An Action Plan is drawn up with a suitable review period;
- The student is informed of the possible outcomes if serious concerns remain.

8.9. It should be made clear at the Case Review Meeting that our intention is to provide a supportive alternative to the use of disciplinary actions.

8.10. At the Case Review Meeting it may also be helpful to explore Intermission, in order to enable the student to recuperate, for a mutually agreed period of time. The student must be given formal guidance on any financial or Academic Regulatory implications of this option, as well as clear guidance about the known return to study and success outcomes of Intermission. Any guidance given in this regard should be recorded.

8.11. The Chair of the Case Review Meeting will write to the student with a record of the meeting including the Action Plan agreed. This will be done within 7 working days from the date of the meeting, and a copy kept on the students' file.

9. Action Plan

9.1. The Action Plan will set out expectations regarding use of support and student conduct. A date to formally review the success of the Action Plan will take place as agreed at the Case Review Meeting, by members of the Case Review Meeting. This will not be longer than 6 teaching weeks and may be shorter. All parties may agree to an appropriate 'check-in' arrangement in the interim, as appropriate to the circumstances.

9.2. The decision of the Case Review Meeting, together with any resulting Action Plan, should be sent to the student by the Head of Study Support within 7 days. They will also inform the Deputy Dean/Director of Studies/Course (Group) Leader and Assistant Director of Student Services of the outcome, if they were not present at the Case Review Meeting.

9.3. The Action Plan review will be no more than 6 weeks from its initiation, and the consequences of the student not adhering to the Action Plan will be that the students' fitness to study will be considered at Stage 3.

9.4. If partial achievement of the Action Plan has been achieved, sufficient to reduce any risk to the student or others, and/or remove disruption to the learning of others, an extended Action Plan may be considered for a further 6 weeks.

10. Stage 3 – Persistent and/or Significant Concerns will initiate Fitness to Study Review

10.1. This stage of the procedure will only be implemented once Stages 1 and Stages 2 have been followed or if concerns are deemed to be sufficiently serious to warrant starting the procedure at Stage 3. If a student has been suspended, the procedure will start at Stage 3.

- 10.2. The initiation of Stage 3 will be the decision of the Director of Student Services, in consultation with the relevant Deputy Dean or Director of Studies. The Director of Student Services will also discuss with relevant professional staff within Student Services.
- 10.3. Once it has been agreed to go to Stage 3, the Assistant Director of Student Services and/or the Director of Student Services will call the Fitness to Study Review to determine more definitive action.
- 10.4. Those present at the Fitness to Study Case Conference will include:
- The Director /Assistant Director of Student Services
 - Head of Study Support/ Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing
 - Deputy Dean or Head of Department
 - The Student, who may be accompanied by a friend or an appropriate member of the Students' Union.
- 10.5. At Stage 3 it is possible that further actions may be agreed but at this point it is most likely that a student will be asked to intermit or a recommendation made to the Vice Chancellor/Secretary and Clerk to the Board to suspend the student. Appropriate advice will be provided to the student, by Student Services, for either option.
- 10.6. If the Vice Chancellor/Secretary and Clerk to the Board agree to the recommendation to suspend, a letter will be sent to the student in accordance with the Rules, Regulations and Procedures. A student wishing to appeal may do so after three weeks.
- 10.7. Students who intermit or who are suspended will be given the opportunity to talk to named staff within Student Services to discuss financial, support and study implications and other issues that may arise. The student will also be informed of the 'Return to Study' procedure and process and an agreement made about how we will keep in contact with the student during their absence.

11. Return to Study

- 11.1. It is hoped that after whatever time is required, a student covered by this policy will feel ready to return and engage with study at our university.
- 11.2. Each case will depend upon the specific circumstances and context out of which concern arose but in all cases return to study will be dependent upon a) satisfactory medical evidence of fitness to study and b) an assessment of need to determine what support would be necessary or of benefit, and whether this can be reasonably provided. Evidence submitted should be from a recognised health professional who has sufficient knowledge of the nature and extent of the student's medical situation and the concerns that led to intermission/suspension, to be able to make an informed statement of the student's fitness to study at university level and in a university community.
- 11.3. In cases where we have any continuing concerns about the student's fitness to study, we may require a second medical opinion. In this case a student may be asked to submit themselves for medical examinations by doctors/specialists nominated by our University (at our expense). Students will only be permitted to return if, after receiving medical advice, our University is satisfied that the individual is fit to study and able to

comply with any conditions or expectations stated by our university and in keeping with our Rules, Regulations and Procedures for students.

- 11.4. The decision to permit return to study will be made by the Director of Student Services and the relevant Deputy Dean/Director of Studies, in consultation with the Course (Group) Leader, taking into account medical evidence provided and a statement from the student. Depending on the circumstances that led to study being interrupted we may also require agreement from a member of the Vice-Chancellors Group.
- 11.5. In accordance with the Rules, Regulations and Procedures, a student may appeal to the Board of Governors against a decision made under 11.4. An appeal must be made in writing within 10 working days of the decision, and sent to the Secretary and Clerk to the Board of Governors, clearly stating the reasons for the appeal.
- 11.6. In any case where a student returns to study following the implementation of the Fitness to Study Policy, our University may decide that there should be regular review meetings with the student that can be used to support and monitor a return to study plan and on-going support. If so, the student must provide their continued co-operation in this respect and such review meetings may continue for part or all of their remaining time at our University. This is likely to be with a member of the Counselling and Wellbeing Service.

12. Review

12.1 This policy will be reviewed annually.

Key documents;

Rules, Regulations and Procedures for Students

Student Charter

Available at <http://web.anglia.ac.uk/onet/students/documents.phtml>

University Data Protection Policy

http://web.anglia.ac.uk/onet/staff/sec_clerk/dpa_policies.phtml

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