

Support to Study Policy and Procedure

Policy

1. What is support to study?

- 1.1 The support to study policy aims to help individuals to participate fully and satisfactorily as students when they might be struggling because of health-related issues. It is not just about academic studies; it is also about the ability of a student to live independently and safely whilst at University and to interact appropriately with others. There will be times when a student's physical or mental health may mean that they pose a risk to themselves, to other students or to the activities of the University and that risk needs to be understood across the University.
- 1.2 The University is committed to supporting student wellbeing and recognises that a positive approach to the management of physical and mental health is crucial to student learning and academic achievement.

2. How to use this policy

- 2.1 University staff with concerns about a student's wellbeing should:
 - a) Complete a [Serious Concerns form](#); or
 - b) Contact the relevant Student Wellbeing (SWS) or Residential Wellbeing (RWS) Manager to discuss whether informal or formal processes would be the most appropriate action.
- 2.2 If it is agreed to progress to Support to Study stage 1 or Fitness to Study stage 2, staff members should complete a [referral form](#) and send it to the relevant SWS or RWS Manager who can add any relevant additional information.

3. Informal Support and Action Planning

- 3.1 Staff from Schools and advisers from SWS and RWS will often engage in informal support and action planning with students as part of their regular interactions. Support and action planning should be used in most cases where the risk to the student's health and wellbeing is low; their academic position is vulnerable but recoverable; and the impact of their behaviour on others is limited.
- 3.2 This should include consideration of the following:
 - Referring the student to their Senior or Personal Tutor for academic support;
 - A target to improve attendance or engagement;
 - Signposting to specialist support internally and externally;
 - Agreed actions for the student to complete;
 - A follow-up date to review progress.

4. Stage 1 Support to Study

- 4.1 There may be times when efforts to improve a student's situation through informal support and action planning have not been successful or where there is potential for escalation in the level of risk.

- 4.2 If a student would benefit from a more structured intervention, they may be referred to Stage 1 of the Policy and a Support to Study Case Meeting may be arranged. More information or advice may be needed such as supporting medical documentation, advice from the Office of the General Counselor Disability Services before the Case Meeting can be arranged.

Support to Study Case Meeting Procedure

- 4.3 The Student Resolution Service (SRS) will convene a meeting as soon as possible and within 21 days after the original referral and will clerk the meeting.
- 4.4 Members of the Panel:
- A Manager of Residential Wellbeing or Student Wellbeing as Chair;
 - An academic member of staff e.g. Senior Tutor;
 - A representative from the Faculty.
- 4.5 The student will be invited to the Case Meeting and will usually be expected to attend. The student may be accompanied by an Adviser from the Students' Union Academic Advice, someone involved in their care or support or a friend or family member. Scheduling of any meeting should consider the student's outstanding exams, assessment submissions or other academic commitments.
- 4.6 The meeting is intended to be a positive, supportive and timely process; it should focus on the current issues and future steps. The meeting should always consider risk to the student, their studies and to others. The purpose of the meeting is to identify issues, clarify the academic situation and agree an Action Plan that will support the student to improve their engagement with their course, their self-management of their health and wellbeing and potential outcomes.
- 4.7 The Action Plan may include:
- Referral to appropriate internal and external specialist services;
 - Liaison with the student's emergency contact;
 - Involvement of Partner Institution if they have one;
 - Recommend specific academic arrangements for example submitting extenuating circumstances, suspending studies, changes of mode of study;
 - A timeframe for actions to have taken place or for improvements to have been made.
- 4.8 The Action Plan should be agreed by the Panel and normally will be shared with the student by email as a password-protected letter within seven days of the meeting.
- 4.9 There may be times when an agreement cannot be reached, where students do not engage, where the issues cannot be addressed by a Support to Study Case Meeting or where the Action Plan is not improving the situation. In these cases, the following actions may need to be considered:
- a) Referral to Fitness to Study Stage 2;
 - b) Referral to alternative University Procedures e.g. the Student Disciplinary Regulations, Fitness to Practise.

5. Stage 2 – Fitness to Study Panel

5.1 This stage will only be invoked in the following circumstances:

- a) If the student does not respond to an invitation to attend a Support to Study Meeting on more than one occasion or does not engage with the action plan agreed and there is potentially high risk to the student or others;
- b) Following a referral from a Support to Study Case Meeting;
- c) Where a risk assessment has found high or urgent risk but emergency suspension is not required;
- d) Prior to returning to studies following a suspension made by a Fitness to Study Panel under Stage 2, under the emergency provision in section 6, or following a voluntary suspension where serious welfare or mental health concerns were identified;
- e) As a recommendation from a Pro Vice-Chancellor as a condition of granting an exceptional supplementary year or suspension;
- f) As an outcome of an academic appeal;
- g) If in the opinion of the Director of Student Support and Wellbeing or the Assistant Director of Complex Student Casework and Safeguarding the most appropriate response to the student's situation is to warrant an immediate referral without consideration of stage 1.

5.2 It is not necessary to have been through stage 1 of this Policy before commencing stage 2.

Fitness to Study Panel procedure

5.3 The General Counsel (or their nominee) will convene a Fitness to Study Panel to consider the case and will appoint a clerk to the Panel from the Office of the General Counsel.

5.4 The Members of the Panel will usually be:

- The Director of Student Support and Wellbeing or Assistant Director of Complex Student Casework and Safeguarding, or their nominee, who will act as Chair;
- An academic representative of the student's school (usually the Senior Tutor or supervisor);
- A representative of the student's Faculty;
- A senior representative of Residential Wellbeing or Student Wellbeing.

5.5 In addition, the following may be invited to advise the Panel:

- A representative from Disability Services, if appropriate;
- A representative from the Student Visas team if the student holds a student visa;
- A representative from the Global Opportunities team if the student is a Study Abroad student.

5.6 In most cases the student will be required to attend a psychiatric and/or occupational health or other professional assessment within a reasonable

timeframe prescribed by the Office of the General Counsel, and a report will be produced for the Panel to provide an opinion on the student's fitness to study and ability to live independently. The clinician will be provided with all relevant background information that the University holds in order to assist with the medical assessment. Alternatively, the student may be able to provide their own supporting medical documentation, on the condition that it is sufficiently detailed and in a format reasonably acceptable to the University, and available within the timeframe prescribed by the Office of the General Counsel, otherwise the University may arrange and pay for its own medical report to avoid unnecessary delay. The student may present their own medical report as supplementary information (as per section 5.7) if it is available in time for the Panel. The final decision as to whether the student is fit to study will be made by the Panel.

- 5.7 The student will have the opportunity to submit documents for the Panel to consider and will be sent a copy of any documents seen by the Panel, unless it is considered that receiving the documents will be detrimental to the student's health.
- 5.8 The student will be invited to the Panel meeting and will usually be expected to attend. The student may be accompanied by an Adviser from the Students' Union Academic Advice, someone involved in their care or support, or a friend or family member. Students are expected to give the details in advance of anyone attending the Panel meeting with them. The Panel may still meet and decide outcomes in the student's absence.
- 5.9 Exceptionally the Chair may consider that attending the meeting would be detrimental to the student's health and the student may ask for a representative to attend on their behalf, such as a Student Adviser from the Academic Advice team in the Students' Union.
- 5.10 The Panel may order the proceedings at its discretion and may ask for additional information before making a decision, such as further medical documentation.
- 5.11 Possible outcomes of the meeting include, but are not limited to:
 - 5.11.a Approval to continue with studies or return to studies, which may be granted subject to recommendations or conditions;
 - 5.11.b A short-term suspension to allow the student to be assessed by a medical professional, access support services both within and outside of the University or for the University to obtain further information.;
 - 5.11.c Suspension with conditions. A student who is suspended from the University may be prohibited from participating in University activities and may also be prohibited from entering the University premises or have restricted rights to enter the premises, for their own safety or the safety of others. The specific terms of the suspension will be notified to the student in writing, depending on the circumstances of the case. Extensions to a period of suspension beyond 24 months from the end of the initial suspension period, will not normally be permitted, and may result in the student being required to withdraw as outlined in section 5.11.d below;
 - 5.11.d Requirement to withdraw - if the Panel concludes, taking into account the individual circumstances of the case and any supporting medical documentation, that there is no reasonable prospect of the student re-engaging with their programme, the student may be required

to withdraw. This outcome should only be considered in the most serious cases. A student who has been withdrawn under the Policy shall not normally be admitted and permitted to register for any programme of study within a three-year period.

- 5.11.e Any other action considered to be appropriate and proportionate.
- 5.12 In relation to paragraphs 5.11.b and 5.11.c, the suspension may be reviewed at the request of the student as set out below in sections 6.4 and 6.5.
- 5.13 The Chair has the power to make the final decision if the Panel is unable to make a unanimous decision. The decision will be detailed in a letter which will normally be sent to the student within 14 days of the Panel Meeting. The Panel can use its discretion in how best to inform the student of the outcome and the contents of the letter and may opt to communicate the decision informally, via email, in the first instance (where appropriate).

6. Emergency Temporary Suspension

- 6.1 If it is considered that the risk to the student or to others is very high and an immediate emergency suspension is the most appropriate course of action, the Executive Director for Education and Student Success may make the decision to suspend the student immediately. Examples may include where:
- A risk assessment has found urgent risk to self or others;
 - A student has been admitted to hospital under a section of the Mental Health Act 1983 or as a voluntary in-patient for psychiatric treatment;
 - A student has been admitted to hospital for any other reason, where they are likely to be unable to study for a protracted period of time.
- 6.2 A student who is subject to an emergency suspension order is prohibited from entering university premises and from participating in university activities. The emergency suspension may, exceptionally, include specific allowances, such as permission to take an examination or to enter university premises to attend a meeting with a support service, such as the Student Counselling Service.
- 6.3 The terms of the suspension will be individual to each case and will be notified to the student in writing. The decision will be delivered to the student, in a meeting wherever possible, by a senior member of staff. A student will be marked as 'suspended' or 'temporarily withdrawn' on their student record during the period of suspension so that accommodation and tuition fees do not continue to accrue.
- 6.4 The decision to suspend may be reviewed at the request of the student, usually no earlier than four weeks after the student has received notification of the suspension.
- 6.5 A review will only take place if the student can provide appropriate supporting medical documentation that demonstrates that they are fit to return to their studies, meet the requirements of their programme and live independently in residences or the community. A student may request an immediate review if they can provide the necessary supporting medical documentation at that time. The review will take place as soon as possible and normally within 21 days of the receipt of the request. Once this information has been received, a Fitness to Study

Panel will be convened under stage 2 of this Policy to review the suspension. The Panel will consider whether the student is fit to return and if so any support that the student may require. Even if a student is fit to return to their studies, it may not be academically viable for them to return at that point in the term. Any return to study may be conditional.

7. Right of appeal

- 7.1 The student may appeal against a decision to suspend or requirement to withdraw made under stage 2 of this Policy. The student must complete a [Fitness to Study Appeal Form](#) and email it to the University Secretary at university-secretary@bristol.ac.uk. The appeal should be received within 21 days from the date of the letter setting out the decision to suspend or the requirement to withdraw. The student is encouraged to seek assistance from the [Academic Advice Service](#) in the Students' Union when completing the form. The appeal will be heard by a committee of the Board of Trustees. The membership and procedure of an appeal committee will be the same as that set out under the [Student Complaints Procedure](#).
- 7.2 The grounds of appeal are:
- a) That the decision was not reasonable;
 - b) That the procedure was not correctly followed when making the decision;
 - c) That new evidence has come to light that was not available to the Stage 2 Panel which may have materially affected the decision.

8. Nominees

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

9. Days

Any reference to a 'day' within this Policy refers to a calendar day that the University is generally open and so includes weekends but does not include UK public holidays or university closure days, unless otherwise stated.

10. Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)

If the student is still dissatisfied, they may take the case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, which provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. The OIA will consider cases only when the University's own internal complaints procedure has been exhausted. It will not intervene on matters which turn purely on academic judgment. Further information about this scheme is available at www.oia.org.uk.

Review / Contacts / References

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Lead contact / author:	Associate Director of Legal Services/Director of Student Support and Wellbeing