

FITNESS TO STUDY POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

1.1 The University is committed to supporting students, and seeks to develop a positive and safe environment that enables them to engage with their studies and achieve to the best of their ability. The Fitness to Study policy is intended to inform and guide the University's response to situations where there are concerns that a student is not well enough to study, including situations where a student is unaware that they are not well enough to study.

1.2 Fitness to Study is concerned with an individual's capacity to participate fully and satisfactorily as a student in relation to their academic studies, and to the University community in general. It applies to student activities on University premises, in University accommodation, during study/ research activities off it (for example, field work or placements); and to any other situation where conduct is brought to the attention of the University, which suggests a reasonably foreseeable risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of the student or others.

1.3 The policy is intended to be supportive but recognises that there will be a small number of cases where students do not engage with, or are unable to agree with, the support/reasonable adjustments that are offered, and where consequently it may no longer be feasible for them to continue their studies.

1.4 At the point where the University considers a student may need to be suspended or required to withdraw from study the case will no longer be covered by 'Fitness to Study' policy and should be considered under the 'Procedure for Students at Risk of Academic Failure'; or the 'Student Code of Conduct', as judged appropriate.

2. Purpose and Scope of this Policy

- i. To provide an appropriate and co-ordinated response by academic and support staff in circumstances where it is deemed a student may benefit from extra support due to ill health, and where it is not considered appropriate to apply other internal procedures such as the 'Student Code of Conduct' and the 'Procedure for Students who are at Risk of Academic Failure'.
- ii. To encourage early intervention and active collaboration between all staff in implementing reasonable adjustments and managing situations where there are concerns regarding fitness to study.

Please Note. This Policy does not relate to fitness to practise. There is a separate 'Procedure for the Suspension and Expulsion of Students from Programmes on the Grounds of Professional Unsuitability', which certain professional programmes of study use, and which operates outside of the scope of this Policy. The policy does apply to students on placements on those courses that are not professionally accredited.

3. When to use this Policy

Advice can be sought from Student Services at any point there is a concern about a student but generally a student's fitness to study may be a cause for concern as a result of a wide range of circumstances, including (but not restricted to) the following:

- a student's academic performance or personal conduct is causing concern, and is thought to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem;
- a student is routinely making applications through the Exceptional Factors process stating health issues, or what is thought could be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem;
- behaviour is exhibited which although usually dealt with as a disciplinary matter, may be known to be, or suspected to be, the result of an underlying physical or mental health difficulty;
- a student's health issues are adversely affecting the health, safety or wellbeing of others;*
- a student's health issues are adversely affecting the ability of others to engage successfully in learning, teaching or assessment;
- a student has told a member of staff that they have concerns about their fitness to study;
- concerns about the student's fitness to study are raised from a third party, for example a friend, housemate, a parent or other family member, or medical professional, either whilst the student is at university or engaged in University organised activities, such as placement or field trips.

4. Emergency Situations*

4.1 In situations where a student is displaying extreme distress, immediate action should be taken to contact the Counselling, Health & Wellbeing Service in office hours; or the University's Security Team on the 24-hour number 0161 247 2222.

4.2 If a student is posing an extreme risk of harming themselves or others that emergency assistance is required the Emergency Services should be contacted by dialling 999 and the University's Security Team may also be contacted on the 24/7 number 0161 247 2222. Security will then notify the Counselling, Health & Wellbeing Service the following day to ensure that follow-up contact is made with the student/

hospital, as appropriate.

5. Links to the University's procedure for the consideration of Exceptional Factors

5.1 High volume of students submits claims through the University's Exceptional Factors process each year. See <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/exfacts-students.php> for details of the process. There is particular concern about those students who make multiple applications and appear to be struggling to progress satisfactorily with their studies.

5.2 The Student Case Management Team within Academic Services who support the Exceptional Factors process keep a record of claims and will flag up to Programme Leaders those students who are submitting multiple claims in any given year. Checks will also be made to see if these students have disclosed a disability to the Disability Service, and/or whether they have a Personal Learning Plan (PLP).

5.3 The Programme Leader will meet with the student to identify any action which may need to be taken to reduce the student's dependency on Exceptional Factors. Further advice may be sought from other colleagues, including the Deputy Director of Student Services or Head of Counselling, Health and Wellbeing, about the types of support that could be put in place for the student. At this point, it may be decided to enter the student into stage one of the fitness to study process.

6. Procedure

The procedure has two stages, based on the degree of concern and/or the perceived seriousness of the situation. The procedure can be entered at either level, however in most cases students will enter at stage one before escalation to stage two.

6.1 Stage One – Informal Stage

6.1.1 The majority of emerging concerns can be dealt with in an informal manner through the usual University support mechanisms. At this stage the focus should be on ensuring that the student is aware of the support available to them, and how to access this support.

6.1.2 Concerns that develop within an academic environment should be reported to the relevant Programme Leader. Concerns that develop within University managed residences should be reported to the Residential Life Manager.

6.1.3 The relevant Programme Leader (or Residential Life Manager if the issue has arisen in University Halls) will contact the student with the intention of raising and discussing specific issues and concerns and offer appropriate support.

6.1.4 The Programme Leader may check any relevant documents pertaining to the student such as exceptional factor claims, and personal learning plan, and consult with relevant colleagues such as the Academic and Personal Tutor

and Departmental Disability Coordinator to determine the full scope and nature of the concerns.

6.1.5 The student will be invited in for a discussion, which will be conducted in a supportive and understanding manner by the Programme Leader. A record of the concerns, the actions agreed, and a review period should be determined as part of this initial process. The review period will normally be between 2 and 6 weeks, but will be determined by the Programme Leader and student concerned.

6.1.6 The student may be asked to moderate their behaviour and/or to seek help with presenting issues by making an appointment for support, for example at the Disability Service; Counselling, Health and Wellbeing Service; Learner Development for help with study skills; Student Financial Support etc.

6.1.7 The student will be invited to another meeting at the end of the review period. It is expected that in most cases students will have responded positively and taken advantage of the support available, and no further action will be required. If, however, concerns remain, the student can remain in stage one, and be invited to another review meeting at a mutually agreed time.

6.1.8 The student can remain in stage one, with regular review meetings planned in, as long as the Programme Leader feels this approach is working. If, however, the Programme Leader feels further action is required, the student can be moved into stage two.

6.2 Stage Two – Continuing concerns initiate a Case Review Panel

6.2.1 If in the view of the Programme Leader there is enough concern to warrant moving the student into stage 2 of the process, he or she will consult with the Head of Counselling, Health & Wellbeing or Deputy Director of Student Services to discuss whether the cause for concern meets the threshold for a Case Review Panel meeting. If it does, the student will be given at least 7 days' notice of the Case Review Panel, and informed of the purpose of the meeting.

6.2.2 The Case Review Panel (CRP) will comprise:

- Programme Leader (chair);
- Academic & personal tutor;
Senior manager from Student & Programme Management;
- Departmental Disability Coordinator or Student Experience Tutor (if appropriate);
- Residential Life Manager (if the student is in University accommodation).

6.2.3 A member of Student & Programme Management team will be in attendance to take notes of the meeting.

6.2.4 The Deputy Director of Student Services or Head of Counselling, Health &

Wellbeing, may be consulted prior to or after this meeting, and may attend the meeting to provide expert advice to the Panel.

6.2.5 It should be made clear at the start of the CRP that the intention is to provide support to the student. The student should be informed that they may bring a friend or an adviser from the SU Advice Centre to accompany them to the meeting.

6.2.6 The student will also be informed they can submit any medical evidence or (other documents they think relevant) to the panel in advance of the meeting.

6.2.7 The purpose of the CRP 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. This may include the student being referred for a medical assessment, either to their GP (or consultant in the NHS) or by the University's Mental Health Adviser or visiting Psychiatrist;
- the action plan is sent to the student within 7 days of the CRP and a record kept on the student's file;
- the student is informed of the possible outcomes if serious concerns remain.

6.2.8 The outcomes available to the CRP are:

- to agree that no further action is required if the situation has been resolved.;
- to monitor the student formally for a specific period of time (normally between 2-6 weeks), In this case, an action plan will be agreed with the student detailing any steps the student will need to take; and the support to be provided to the student, and further CRP panel meeting (s) will be arranged to review progress, as agreed by the chair of the panel;
- to recommend a specific academic arrangement be put in place which may include a suspension of studies or a view that the student should be required to withdraw . The panel will endeavour in the first instance to reach agreement with the student on such arrangements.
- If agreement cannot be reached the case will be considered under the 'Procedure for Students at Risk of Academic Failure'; <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casge/regulations/assessment/docs/withdrawal-suspension.pdf>
- or the 'Student Code of Conduct' if it is decided the actions of the student has potentially constitute misconduct. <https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/media/mmuacuk/content/documents/student-case-management/Student-Code-of-Conduct.pdf>