



SECRETARIAT

ACADEMIC POLICY SUMMARY SHEET

NAME OF ACADEMIC POLICY:	Fitness to Study Policy
PURPOSE OF POLICY AND WHOM IT APPLIES TO:	The policy ensures that the University provides a coherent institutional approach when responding to students who are unfit to study.
RESPONSIBLE BOARD/ COMMITTEE WITH ROUTE OF APPROVAL:	Academic Affairs Committee and Academic Board
LEAD STAFF MEMBER RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS UPDATE:	Director of Student Affairs
PERSONS CONSULTED IN DEVELOPING POLICY:	The policy was considered by members of Academic Affairs Committee
POLICY APPROVED BY:	Academic Board approved the policy on 15 June 2016.
DETAIL OF DISSEMINATION:	The policy was circulated to relevant staff in June 2016 and is available on the Secretariat's portal site.
PROPOSED DATE OF REVIEW	June 2017
SECRETARIAT OFFICER – MAIN CONTACT:	Officer to Academic Affairs Committee
DATE:	27 June 2016



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

Fitness to Study Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University aims to provide a supportive environment that allows all students to realise their full academic potential and successfully complete their programme of study. The purpose of the Fitness to Study Policy is to ensure that the University provides a coherent institutional approach when responding to students who are unfit to study.
- 1.2 This document should be read in conjunction with the University of Lincoln's Mental Health Policy, the University of Lincoln's General Regulations and the Student Charter.

2. Purpose and Scope

- 2.1 The University of Lincoln is committed to the wellbeing of its students. Students who present with difficulties due to their physical or mental wellbeing should, wherever possible, be considered from a supportive perspective rather than a disciplinary one.
- 2.2 Decisions concerning a student's fitness to study should be reached through a collective process which considers the student's ability to study, learn and graduate. This Policy complements the procedure for requests for the consideration of extenuating circumstances
- 2.3 Through this Policy and others, the University has set out clearly both its expectations of students' behaviour and the responsibilities of students regarding their commitment to study and life within the University community.
- 2.4 In order to maintain and enhance the University community, students need to uphold certain standards of behaviour, and the University has disciplinary mechanisms in place to deal with students whose behaviour falls outside these standards (see the Student Conduct and Disciplinary Regulations, located within Part C of the University General Regulations).
- 2.5 The University has a duty of care to respond appropriately to concerns relating to a student's health and wellbeing, and the impact of this upon the individual and/or other members of the University community.
- 2.6 Should a concern arise, this Policy ensures that any steps taken will be limited to those necessary to protect the best interests of the student by providing a consistent and sensitive approach to managing the situation.
- 2.7 Depending on the individual circumstances of the case, the University reserves the right to use the Student Conduct and Disciplinary procedures to deal with behaviour which is the result of physical or mental health difficulties and which cannot be managed through a supportive process.
- 2.8 Academic and Professional Support staff can initiate use of this Policy where they have significant concerns for the health or wellbeing of a student. Shared concerns about an individual student in the University community can be formally collated by the use of this Policy, including concerns raised by other students. Students and staff who raise concerns will not be expected to manage these situations alone, and should always approach a member of Student Services Professional Support staff for advice and help.

- 2.9 This Policy recognises that where concerns are raised about a student's health or behaviour that early intervention and the provision of support can normally avoid a crisis developing.
- 2.10 This Policy may be invoked at any of its three levels based on the perceived level of risk to the health, safety and mental wellbeing of the student or others.
- 2.11 This process will be led by the Head of Student Wellbeing (or designated person) in close collaboration with academic and relevant professional support staff, who will play a key role in identifying the specific evidence which underpin any concerns.
- 2.12 Wherever possible, students should be involved in the management of their own wellbeing. However, there may be times where a student is unwilling or unable to work within these procedures. Lack of engagement with this Policy may result in the University invoking formal disciplinary procedures against a student where no other support system or process can be used to resolve very significant difficulties (See 2.4 above).

3. Crisis Situations

- 3.1 This Policy should not detract from an urgent intervention during an acute or dangerous situation where it is believed that a student's behaviour presents an immediate risk to themselves or others.
- 3.2 If a student presents such an extreme risk to themselves and/or others and, as a result, requires emergency assistance outside of this Policy then the relevant emergency service should be contacted by dialling 999. Campus Security should also be informed by dialling 6062. (See the University of Lincoln's Mental Health Policy for further information).

4. Possible Indicators for Concern Regarding Fitness to Study

- 4.1 A student's fitness to study may be questioned as a result of a wide range of circumstances. These include (but are not restricted to) the following:
- serious concerns about the student which have been reported via a third party (e.g. friend, colleague, placement provider, member of the public, medical professional) which indicate that there is a need to address their fitness to study;
 - the student has disclosed to a member of the University that they have a problem and/or has provided information which indicates that there is a need to address their fitness to study;
 - the student's presentation indicates that there may be a need to address an underlying mental health issue (e.g. if they have demonstrated mood swings or unusual behaviour, shown signs of depression, become withdrawn, aggressive, distressed, abusive or irritable);
 - the student's academic performance, attendance, verbal or physical behaviour has significantly deteriorated and this is thought to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem.

- 4.2 In all cases, any concerns regarding a student's fitness to study must be reported to the student's Personal Tutor and/or Senior Personal Tutor as soon as possible so that the necessary academic support can be provided.

5. Informal Initial Support for Students

- 5.1 Should staff feel that they are not confident about dealing with a situation, they are encouraged to seek advice from the Student Wellbeing Centre, or the Head of Student Wellbeing. To ensure appropriate levels of confidentiality, this advice may initially be sought without disclosing details of the student(s) concerned.
- 5.2 In advance of this Policy being invoked and where the emerging concerns about the student's behaviour and/or health warrants it, an informal discussion between the student, the programme leader and a member of the Student Wellbeing Centre may be initiated, either by the student or member of staff. This informal discussion should give the student an opportunity to explain their understanding and perception of the concerns raised.
- 5.3 If the student is studying on a programme that leads directly to a professional qualification, statutory registration and/or eligibility to practise and their conduct or circumstances indicate that they may potentially be unfit to practise professionally then the student must be made fully aware of the Fitness to Practise procedures and the relevant School must be involved in the above discussions to advise and support the student appropriately.
- 5.4 The student should be encouraged to use the support services offered by the University. It should be made clear to the student that where any concerns relating to their mental and/or physical health and its impact upon the individual and/or other members of the University community exceed the pastoral role of Personal Tutors or Professional Support staff, that they will need to be referred to a more specialist external service.
- 5.5 It is hoped that most issues can be resolved at this informal stage, and that students will respond positively, taking advantage of the support available.
- 5.6 Where it is suspected that a student's behaviour may be related to an ongoing or emerging mental health problem, the Student Wellbeing Centre should always be consulted. If the situation is deemed to be urgent, the procedure outlined in Section 3 of this Policy must be followed to avoid any unnecessary delay.
- 5.7 If the initial informal action, as outlined in Section 5, is unsuccessful and there are continuing and/or further concerns about an individual student's health, safety, mental wellbeing, and/or ability to study, these should be noted by the Head of Student Wellbeing or designated person.

6. Formal: Step 1

- 6.1 The Head of Student Wellbeing should inform the Head of Student Services or designated person that the Policy has been invoked at Step 1.
- 6.2 A Step 1 Formal meeting should take place within 2 working days of this notification. This meeting should include the member of staff who raised the

concern, appropriate colleagues in the University who can provide specialist and expert advice, and their Personal Tutor.

- 6.3 This Step 1 Formal meeting will advise or make recommendations on how to support the student and also identify a 'case manager' (normally a member of staff from the Student Wellbeing Centre) who will have primary responsibility for managing the case going forward.
- 6.4 The student should be informed that Step 1 has been invoked and sent a copy of the Fitness to Study Policy prior to any meetings taking place with an outline of the concerns which have been raised.
- 6.5 A discussion should then take place between the case manager and the student. The student may bring another currently enrolled student, an SU representative or a family member to the discussion if necessary. During this discussion it should be explained to the student that concerns about their fitness to study have emerged which are going to be managed through the Fitness to Study Policy.
- 6.6 The discussion will consider the full range of options open to the University and the student which may include but will not be limited to: recommending additional support strategies, accommodation changes, revised Learning Support Plans or interruption.
- 6.7 It should be clearly explained to the student that it is their responsibility to be fit to study, and that there is a recognised concern about this within the University. The nature of the concern should be clearly identified to the student including, if appropriate, reference to the level of perceived risk presented by the student.
- 6.8 The student and the case manager should agree a plan to address the concerns with a review period of no more than 3 working days. At the end of this period they should meet again to review the situation and to discuss any steps taken to address the concerns. If the concerns have been addressed satisfactorily this will be noted and the process stopped.
- 6.9 The review discussion(s) should be documented and communicated to the student. A record of the discussion(s) should be sent to the student no more than 5 working days post review. Copies should be sent to the student's Personal Tutor.
- 6.10 Further discussions with the student may be scheduled to continue to monitor the situation/progress, and to help ensure that continued support is provided to the student to enable them to study effectively.

7. Formal: Step 2

- 7.1 Continuing or significant concerns that could not be satisfactorily resolved at Step 1 about an individual due to a significant deterioration in health, appearance, attitude and/or behaviour may require a further response from the University, and will be referred to Step 2 under this Policy. The concerns should be recorded by the Head of Student Wellbeing and notified to the Head of Student Services.

- 7.2 Following this notification, a Step 2 Formal meeting will be convened within 5 working days and should include those who were involved at the initial meetings at Step 1 (where this has taken place) or those directly involved in raising the concern. The meeting will advise or make recommendations on how to support the student concerned.
- 7.3 As one of its recommendations, the Step 2 Formal meeting may seek a medical assessment for the student. The student will be encouraged to consent to this as it will enable the University to address the student's difficulties as effectively as possible and to make an accurate assessment of risk. The medical assessment will be used to determine the following:
- The nature and extent of any medical condition from which the student may be suffering, including their prognosis if applicable;
 - The extent to which it may affect the student's fitness to study and manage the demands of student life;
 - Any impact or risk it may pose, to others;
 - Whether any additional steps should be taken by the University in light of the medical condition to enable the student to study effectively;
 - Whether the student will be receiving any ongoing medical treatment or support.
- 7.4 The student will be asked to authorise full disclosure of the results of any medical assessment to the University. The University recognises that any such information disclosed will constitute 'Sensitive Data' for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998 and it will be handled, processed, and stored accordingly.
- 7.5 The University will cover all costs associated with a student agreeing to undertake a medical assessment.
- 7.6 If the student refuses to undertake a medical assessment, the University reserves the right to either continue the process detailed in this policy based on the information already in its possession, or use another appropriate means to address the issue.
- 7.7 It is expected that following the Step 2 Formal meeting, the student will attend a discussion with the case manager and others as deemed appropriate (e.g. Personal Tutor, Student Wellbeing Centre staff, etc.).
- 7.8 The student will usually be given at least 5 working days written notice of the discussion and informed of its intended purpose. They will also be provided prior to the discussion with any documents which will be considered, and asked to provide any documentation they may wish to be considered.
- 7.9 The student may be accompanied to the discussion by a currently enrolled student of the University, an SU representative or a member of the student's family. The student may also be accompanied by a support worker if necessary (e.g. SU Officer, Advisor, etc.)
- 7.10 The purpose of the discussion 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 into account;
- the best way to proceed is agreed upon;
- the student is fully aware of the possible outcomes.

7.11 An Action Plan should be negotiated and agreed to include:

- support for the student;
- agreed academic/conduct related expectations for the student to follow;
- agreed actions with review dates;
- consequences of not adhering to the agreed actions;
- consequences of continuation of the causes for concern.

7.12 A record of the discussion and its outcomes, including the agreed Action Plan, must be made and distributed to all present no more than 5 working days after the discussion has taken place, with a copy kept on file. A copy should also be sent to the Head of Student Services or designated person.

7.13 Lack of engagement by the student concerned with any part of the Step 2 procedure may lead to immediate escalation to Step 3 of this Policy, or to formal disciplinary measures being invoked under the University General Regulations.

8. Formal: Step 3

8.1 Step 3 may be initiated on the grounds of:

- persistent and/or serious and significant concerns raised about a student's actions, behaviour, health, safety or mental wellbeing that are putting the health, safety, wellbeing and/or academic progress of themselves or other members of the University community at a significant and immediate risk;
- exceptionally, such concerns may cause Step 3 to be initiated without reference to Steps 1 and 2;
- an urgent/emergency call relating to significant concerns about a student's actions, behaviour, health, safety or mental wellbeing to Student Wellbeing or Student Support.

8.2 A Step 3 Formal meeting will be convened to include the Director of Student Affairs or designated person, the case manager, any individuals who can provide expert and specialist advice and those who need to be there because of their relationship with the student concerned (e.g. their Personal Tutor). A member of Secretariat should also be in attendance to provide advice regarding the University's academic regulations. The student will be invited to attend and may be accompanied by a currently enrolled student of the University, an SU representative or a member of the student's family.

8.3 Other than in the event of an emergency case meeting (see 8.4), notification that a Step 3 Formal meeting will be convened, together with an explanation of its purpose, should be provided in writing to the student at least 2 working days in advance, including a request that the student should confirm if they are able and/or willing to attend.

- 8.4 Exceptionally, where it is felt that a student's behaviour is deteriorating rapidly, an immediate emergency case meeting may be convened without the usual minimum 2 working days' notice. Any decision arrived at by the emergency case meeting must be agreed by all parties.
- 8.5 The Step 3 Formal meeting (including emergency case meetings) will consider holistically all the concerns raised, including the student's perception of these concerns, and will seek to ensure that immediate and appropriate support is put in place for the student.
- 8.6 The student may be accompanied by a currently enrolled student or a member of the student's family. The student may also be accompanied by a support worker (e.g. SU Officer).
- 8.7 In the event that the student is unable or unwilling to attend the meeting, the student may ask the panel to consider the case in their absence on the basis of written reports which may include a written statement from the student or the student's representative.
- 8.8 In cases where support for an individual student's needs are beyond the resources available to the University and the limits of reasonableness have been reached, a decision will be made that the student should be required to interrupt their studies for a specified period, subject to a review on a specified date.
- 8.9 The interruption and the review period will be determined by reference to medical opinion (where this is available) on possible recovery, treatment or rest times. The student must be given an opportunity to make representation to the panel before a decision is taken and appropriate consideration will be given to any prejudice or distress the student may suffer by reason of being required to interrupt their studies.
- 8.10 The Step 3 Formal meeting will balance any concerns with the University's duty of care to students in general, and if there is any possibility of achieving any progress by other means with the student in question. In reaching a decision, the panel must be satisfied it has obtained and reviewed all possible relevant medical and other professional guidance about the student's condition.
- 8.11 The Director of Student Affairs will inform relevant parties, including the Governance Manager, of any decision reached by the Step 3 meeting.
- 8.12 The outcomes and actions from the Step 3 Formal meeting will be documented and circulated to all in attendance and to the student. All actions should have specific timeframes where appropriate with adherence to such timeframes being a condition of any re-enrolment on the programme of study.
- 8.13 The University recognises that in a small number of cases this Policy may result in a student's complete withdrawal. Should this occur, it must be reported to the University Registrar.

9. Returning to Study

- 9.1 A return to study plan will be different for each student; however, in all cases, return to study will be dependent upon the student being able to provide

satisfactory medical evidence of their fitness to study and recommendations about their continuing support needs.

- 9.2 Evidence submitted should be obtained from a recognised health professional who has sufficient knowledge of the nature and extent of the student's previous problems and who is able to make an informed judgement of the student's renewed ability to manage the demands of studying at the University.
- 9.3 The decision to permit return to study will be made by the Head of School in conjunction with the Director of Student Affairs. These colleagues must be satisfied of the student's fitness to study alongside compliance with any conditions imposed, compliance with academic regulations and the support for the student upon their return.

10. Appeals

- 10.1 Students may request an appeal at any step of this Policy up to 10 working days from the date the decision was communicated to them. The appeal must be made in writing to the Governance Manager. The University Registrar will consider each appeal and their decision will be final and will be communicated to the student within 5 working days of receipt of the appeal.

11. Interface with Fitness to Practise

- 11.1 Students studying on programmes that lead directly to a professional qualification, statutory registration and/or eligibility to practise who have been referred to the Fitness to Study Policy should also be referred for consideration under the relevant Fitness to Practise procedures.
- 11.2 Fitness to Practise procedures will normally take precedence over the Fitness to Study Policy.
- 11.3 A discussion between the Head of Student Wellbeing (or appropriate senior colleague) and the relevant Head of School must take place prior to the Fitness to Study policy being invoked in order to establish which policy should be followed.

12. Other Relevant Policies and Regulations

- 12.1 Extenuating Circumstances
- 12.2 Mental Health Policy
- 12.3 Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults
- 12.4 Alcohol and Substance Misuse
- 12.5 Fitness to Practise Regulations
- 12.6 Student Conduct and Disciplinary Regulations

Student Services

May 2016