

**Student Performance and Development Policy**  
**Including Fitness to Study Policy and Guidance Notes**

**1. Purpose of this policy**

- 1.1. The RVC recognises the demands of study upon students and that an individual student at a particular time may experience difficulties. This policy sets out how we will respond when a student is experiencing difficulty which may be related to health, personal, academic, professional or other challenges with the aim of providing support and advice to assist them achieve their academic and professional goals.
- 1.2. Study at the RVC frequently involves exposure and access to animals, infection and drugs, research activity, work based placements and for some courses professional body expectations. The College has a charter detailing the expectations of our students and staff, as well as policies on Fitness to Practise, Research Integrity and Misconduct (academic and other).
- 1.3. This policy is intended to help us address issues, including behaviour, giving cause for concern and to find agreed ways for the student to continue their study, or to take a break from their studies until they are ready to return and engage with student life and study. It is intended as far as possible to work in partnership with the individual student.
- 1.4. This policy recognises the importance of seeking to balance the needs of the individual with the overall wellbeing of their colleagues and relevant professional and academic standards. It acknowledges that thresholds required by academic and professional standards cannot be compromised in any way.
- 1.5. This policy aims to
  - Support students so that they have the best opportunity to meet the required learning outcomes and complete their course
  - Encourage students to address their difficulties at the earliest possible stage
  - Employ best practice in aiding personal development and remediation, including the use of key staff who have the required training and experience
  - Recognise varying expectations at differing stages of study and development
  - Assist students to make informed choices and encourage active participation in the support process
  - Consider the best interests of the student in relation to their personal situation, their health and wellbeing and / or any disability they experience
  - Consider reasonable adjustments and where appropriate implement them
  - Ensure students receive a non-judgemental, consistent and sensitive approach to the management of issues
  - Provide a suitable and coordinated response from academic and professional service teams to deliver a consistent and fair process
  - Consider an alternative to misconduct / disciplinary procedures where appropriate.
  - Provide for emergency provisions where the student is a risk to themselves or others
  - Be suitable for all students on all types of programmes of study
  - Be risk-based and compatible with tutorial policy and procedures.

## **2. Application of this policy and associated procedure**

- 2.1. This policy will apply to students experiencing difficulty which is interfering with progress on their chosen course. This may be due to health, personal, academic, professional or other challenges.
- 2.2. Intervention may be initiated by the student, academic staff or student support services. Other stakeholders (e.g. placement providers) or other students will not be permitted to initiate action themselves however their concerns may result in intervention being initiated by academic staff or student support services.
- 2.3. The procedure has three stages which represent the degree of concern and /or perceived seriousness of the situation to both the student and others
  - Stage 1 – Lowest level of concern, for straightforward matters
  - Stage 2 – Intermediate concern, for the student and /or others
  - Stage 3 – Serious concern, for student and others and complex cases
- 2.4. The procedure may be initiated at any stage, however in most cases Stage 1 should be used before escalation to Stages 2 and 3.
- 2.5. For courses leading to / requiring professional registration this procedure may be used in conjunction with the RVC's Professional Requirements and Fitness to Practise Procedure. This procedure may be considered as Stage 4 and is not detailed in this document.
- 2.6. We may need to consult with external agencies. If we do, we will comply with our statutory Data Protection and Equality and Diversity responsibilities.
- 2.7. If a student will not engage with necessary intervention, we may 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.
- 2.8. The College will identify particular staff as 'Advisors'. These will be staff who develop particular expertise in supporting students who are considered under this policy. This term is used in this particular way in the sections below.
- 2.9. From the pool of Advisors the College will identify a limited number of Senior Advisors based on their experience and training.

## **3. Guidance on application of the policy**

- 3.1. Is broadly detailed below. Supporting documentation for the 3 stages is detailed in appendices at the end of this document
- 3.2. The term 'Senior Tutor' will encompass the Senior Clinical Tutor and all Assistant Senior Tutors.

- 4. Stage 1 – Straightforward concerns expressed or emerging about an individual student’s personal circumstances, health, academic progress, behaviour or other issue**
- 4.1. Straightforward cases of infrequent illness requiring a short term absence that does not affect any imminent assessments should be reported to the relevant administrative Programme coordinator.
  - 4.2. Straightforward cases of infrequent illness requiring a short term absence that do affect imminent assessments should be reported to the Course Director or Year Leader who can approve deferral of the assessments.
  - 4.3. All other initial or emerging concerns may be reported by the student or received from academic staff, work based placements, RVC professional and support services, the student’s family, friends or peers.
  - 4.4. Concerns should initially be reported to the relevant Tutor / Research Supervisor, Senior Tutor, Student Advice Centre.
  - 4.5. The above will decide if further dissemination is required but may include the relevant Course Director / Deputy, Head of Examinations / Deputy, Head of Academic Registry / Deputy, Head of Graduate School / Deputy, Head of EMS / Deputy, Accommodation Office, collaborative course provider, work based placement provider, other relevant personnel.
  - 4.6. The relevant Senior Tutor or Advisor / will liaise to decide the appropriate person(s) to contact and meet 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, advice and direction.
  - 4.7. The discussion with the student will occur in a supportive and understanding manner. If the student wishes, a friend or colleague from the Advice Centre may accompany them to the meeting. A record of the concern and actions agreed and where relevant a review period, should be determined.
  - 4.8. A record of the meeting, including concern and agreed actions will be sent to the student and copied to the student’s file the Advice centre and any other relevant personnel.
  - 4.9. If relevant, at the end of an agreed review period the Senior Tutor / Advisor or their nominee, will consult with relevant colleagues to determine whether there is any continuing concern. If the concerns have resolved / 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.
  - 4.10. It is hoped that in most cases concerns 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.

4.11. Should the student be unable or unwilling to respond positively at this stage, then the Senior Tutor / Advisor / nominee in liaison with the relevant personnel will decide whether to progress to Stage 2.

**5. Stage 2 – Continuing concerns or intermediate emerging concerns will initiate a Student Support and Progress Meeting**

5.1. Continued or ongoing concerns following Stage 1 or intermediate concerns regarding a student's health, wellbeing, behaviour, safety and / or ability to study and / or participate in placement will merit a direct referral to Stage 2 and initiate a Student Support and Progress meeting.

5.2. The Student Support and Progress meetings are scheduled. The panel is composed of at least two members chosen from a group of trained and experienced Advisors and a representative from the Advice Centre. The panel will be appropriate for the concerns presented and the student's programme of study. Additional advisors may be consulted / invited based on individual student scenarios and expertise required.

5.3. The student will be advised of the concern and asked to attend a Student Support and Progress meeting with at least 5 working days' notice.

5.4. The meeting with the student will occur in a supportive and understanding manner. If the student wishes, a friend or colleague from the Advice Centre may accompany them to the meeting. A record of the concern, actions agreed and review period should be determined.

5.5. A record of the meeting, including concern and agreed actions will be sent to the student and copied to the student's file, the Advice centre and any other relevant personnel.

5.6. At the end of the review period the Student Support and Progress meeting chairman, 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 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.

5.7. 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 and guidance available.

5.8. Should the student be unable or unwilling to respond positively at this stage, then the relevant Senior Tutor / Advisor / nominee in liaison with relevant personnel will decide whether to progress to Stage 3.

**6. Stage 3 – Serious or unresolved concerns will initiate a meeting with the Fitness to Study panel**

6.1. Will be applied where the distress expressed by the student, or disruption caused by their behaviour, is of a serious or potentially serious or persistent 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.

- 6.2. A Fitness to Study panel will be convened. The student will be given at least 7 days' notice of the Fitness to Study meeting and informed of its purpose.
- 6.3. The Fitness to Study meeting will be chaired by a Senior Advisor and consist of the:
  - Student;
  - Another Advisor from a Student Support and Progression meeting panel
  - A representative from the Advice centre
- 6.4. It may be appropriate to invite other members from / on behalf of the Advice centre if specific professional expertise is required.
- 6.5. The student may bring a friend (this does not include a lawyer or legal adviser but may include a representative from the Students' Union) to the meeting.
- 6.6. Before the meeting, the student may be encouraged to seek a medical assessment to enable the RVC to address the student's difficulties in the most effective manner possible, and make an accurate assessment of risk.
- 6.7. 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 the College, 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.
- 6.8. The student will be asked to authorise full disclosure of the results of any assessment. The RVC recognises that any such information disclosed will constitute "sensitive data" for the purposes statutory Data Protection regulations and will be handled, processed and stored accordingly. Should the student decline to undertake a medical examination, the RVC may either continue this procedure based on the information already in its possession, or as previously stated, reserve the right to address the current issues under the Professional Requirements Procedure.
- 6.9. The purpose of the Fitness to Study 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.
- 6.10. It should be made clear at the Fitness to Study meeting that our intention is to provide a supportive alternative to the use of disciplinary actions.
- 6.11. At the Fitness to Study meeting it is possible that that the student will be asked to suspend their studies, in order to enable the student to recuperate or remediate, for a

mutually agreed period of time. For either option, appropriate advice will be provided to the student, by the Advice centre.

- 6.12. The student will 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. Guidance given in this regard should be recorded.
- 6.13. Where the student is registered for a research degree (including MRes), the panel will have the authority to terminate the students study where there is no evidence supporting a realistic prospect of the student being able to complete their research or thesis within an appropriate period of time.
- 6.14. Where the student is undertaking study which leads to professional registration (e.g.: RCVS) or they are a Clinical Training Scholar (CTS) already registered with RCVS, the Fitness to Study Panel may issue an Advisory Notice. The student is expected to share this notice with the relevant professional body upon registration (initial and annual). An Advisory Notice will be issued where the panel believe that there are on-going concerns regarding fitness to practise (e.g.: in the management of health/wellbeing or professional behaviours) that are not sufficiently serious to warrant referral to the Professional Requirements Committee but may require monitoring by the professional body in the future.
- 6.15. The Chair of the Fitness to Study panel 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 student's file.
- 6.16. Students whose studies are suspended will be given the opportunity to talk to named staff within the Advice Centre to discuss financial, support and study implications and other issues that may arise. The student will also be informed of the 'Return to Study' process and an agreement made about how we will keep in contact with the student during their absence.

## **7. Suspension**

- 7.1. 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, or serious disruption to College or placement business. Any such suspension will be undertaken under the Emergency Powers in the Professional Requirements Procedure which can be found [here](#).

## **8. Emergency situations**

- 8.1. This policy, procedure and guidance 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.
- 8.2. In such situations the Emergency Services should be contacted by dialling 999 and College Security should also be contacted via 6258 at Hawkshead or 5121 (main reception) at Camden.

- 8.3. This should be followed up later by notifying the Advice Centre and relevant Senior Tutor / Advisor / nominee of the details of the situation and action taken. This will enable a coordinated and informed response to any current or potential future causes for concern.

## **9. Return to Study**

- 9.1. It is hoped that after whatever time is required, a student whose studies have been interrupted as a consequence of this policy, will feel ready to return and engage with study provided this is possible under College Regulations.
- 9.2. 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 professional community.
- 9.3. 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 the RVC (at our expense). Students will only be permitted to return if, after receiving medical advice, the College is satisfied that the individual is fit to study and able to comply with the RVC Charter, Regulations and Procedures for students and relevant Professional Body Requirements.
- 9.4. The decision to permit return to study will be made by the Fitness to Study Panel.
- 9.5. In any case where a student returns to study following implementation of Stages 2 or 3 of this procedure, the RVC 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 the RVC. This is likely to be with a member of the Counselling and Student Advice Service.

## **10. Appeals and Complaints**

- 10.1. A student who cannot continue with their studies as a result of any stage of this procedure shall have a right of Appeal as described in the College Appeals Procedure which can be found [{here}](#)
- 10.2. A student who believes the decisions made about their progress under this procedure are unfair or unreasonable should use the College's Complaints Procedure which can be found [{here}](#).

## **11. Review**

- 11.1. This policy will be reviewed annually with major changes approved by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee, Research Degrees Committee and Academic Board.
- 11.2. The number of cases considered in each Stage, the anonymised outcome of cases where an interruption of study has been recommended or imposed and the anonymised progress of students who have returned to study following a period of interruption will be reported to the Student Development Committee and Academic Registrar annually.

## **12. Records Retention**

- 12.1. The records of meetings will be kept for 7 years or 2 years after the student completes their study, whichever is the longer.
- 12.2. Advisory Notices will be held on record for 7 years following graduation.

Key documents:

- [RVC Charter](#)



## Acknowledgments

With thanks to the following institutions whose resources have influenced and been incorporated into this document

Birkbeck (2016) Fitness to Study [www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules/Fitness-to-Study.pdf](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules/Fitness-to-Study.pdf) [Accessed 22-10-2018]

Newcastle University (2015) Fitness to Study Procedure  
<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/assets/documents/Fitness-to-Study-Procedure.pdf>  
[Accessed 22-10-2018]

University of Exeter (2016) Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures (HWSSP) – Exeter and Penryn Campuses (Formerly Health Wellbeing and Fitness to Study Procedure)  
<https://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/otherregs/health/> [Accessed 22-10-2018]

Walkling J (2014) Fitness to Study Policy, Anglia Ruskin University  
[https://web.anglia.ac.uk/anet/student\\_services/public/fitness-to-study-policy.pdf](https://web.anglia.ac.uk/anet/student_services/public/fitness-to-study-policy.pdf) [Accessed 22-10-2018]

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