

Support to Study Policy and Procedure 2021 - 2022

Policy

1. What is support to study?

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 their ability to interact appropriately with others.

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. When to use this policy

University staff with concerns about a student's wellbeing should speak to an adviser from Student Wellbeing or Residential Life Services ("SWS or RLS"), who will advise on the Support to Study Procedure, what might be helpful for the student and what steps to take next.

Informal Support and Action Planning

Staff from Schools and advisers from SWS and RLS 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.

This should include consideration of the following:

- Involving the Senior or Personal Tutor for academic support
- Involving the appropriate staff from Student Services
- 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.

2.1 Stage 1 Support to Study

There may be times when efforts to improve a student's situation through informal support and action planning have not been successful or where the risks are too high to be managed informally.

If a student would benefit from a more structured intervention, they may be referred by the SWS or RLS adviser or staff in schools to Stage 1 of the Policy and a Support to Study Case Meeting may be arranged. More evidence or advice may be needed such as medical evidence, advice from the Secretary's Office or Disability Services before the Case Meeting can be arranged.

Support to Study Case Meeting procedure

The meeting should normally take place within 15 working days of the original referral.

A Deputy Head of Student Wellbeing, Head or Deputy Head of Residential Life should convene a meeting as soon as possible, usually with the student and the following staff:

- Deputy Head of Student Wellbeing, Head or Deputy Head of Residential Life as Chair
- An academic member of staff e.g. Senior Tutor
- Faculty Education Manager
- A member of the Student Wellbeing Service or Residential Life Service who has not been supporting the student
- Administration support.

The member of Student Services who has been supporting the student may be invited to attend the meeting to give information and provide support but will not be part of the decision-making process.

In most cases the student should be invited and offered the opportunity to be accompanied by a friend or companion. If the student is unable or unwilling to attend, they may send a written statement, but the meeting can go ahead in their absence. Timing of any meeting should consider the student's outstanding exams, assessment submissions or other academic commitments; meetings may need to be slightly delayed to accommodate deadlines.

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 agree a set of actions and strategies that will support the student to improve their engagement with their course and potential outcomes.

Examples may include:

- Referral to appropriate internal and external specialist services
- Use of 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 for example, an improvement in attendance to be monitored by the School for next 8 weeks
- A framework to monitor adherence and progress, for example checking-in with specific staff at regular periods.

The Action Plan should be agreed by the Panel and shared with the student within 5 working days of the meeting and be sent by email.

There may be times when an agreement cannot be reached or where the issues cannot be addressed by a Support to Study Case Meeting. In these cases, the following actions may need to be considered:

1. Referral to Fitness to Study Stage 2

2. Referral to alternative University Procedures e.g. Student Discipline, Fitness to Practise.

2.2 Stage 2 – Fitness to Study Panel

This stage will only be invoked in the following circumstances:

- Following an emergency suspension under section 3 of this policy; or
- Following a referral from a Support to Study Case Meeting; or
- If the student does not agree or is not engaging with the action plan agreed at a Support to Study Case Meeting; or
- As an outcome of an academic appeal; or
- As a recommendation from a Pro-Vice Chancellor as a condition of granting an exceptional supplementary year or suspension; or
- If in the opinion of the Director of Student Health and Inclusion or Director of Student Life and Wellbeing the case is sufficiently serious to warrant an immediate referral without consideration of stage 1.

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

Fitness to Study Panel procedure

The Deputy University Secretary (or their nominee) will convene a Fitness to Study Panel to consider the case and will act as clerk to the Panel.

The Members of the Panel will usually be:

- The Director of Student Health and Inclusion or Director of Student Life and Wellbeing 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 (usually the Faculty Education Director or the Faculty Education Manager)
- An appropriate senior representative from Student Services who has not been involved in supporting the student or
- The Head of Residential Student Life or relevant Head of Residential Life if, at the point of referral, the student lived in student residences.

In addition, the following may be invited to sit on the Panel:

- A representative from Disability Services if appropriate
- A representative from the Visa Team if the student is a Tier 4 student
- A representative from the Global Opportunities team if the student is a Study Abroad student.

The member of Student Services who has been supporting the student may be invited to attend the meeting to give information but will not be part of the decision-making process.

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.

The student may request to attend the Panel meeting or may ask for a representative to attend on their behalf, such as a Student Adviser from the Just Ask team in the Students' Union. The Chair will decide whether a student should attend, which may not be appropriate in all cases. The student does not have to attend; the meeting can go ahead in their absence.

The Panel may order the proceedings at its discretion and may call witnesses if required. The Panel may request further medical evidence. If a Panel is convened following an emergency suspension under section 6, medical evidence will be required regarding the student's fitness to study before the Panel meets.

Possible outcomes of the meeting include, but are not limited to:-

- Approval to continue with studies or return to studies, which may be granted subject to conditions
- 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. The suspension may be reviewed at the request of the student as set out below in relation to emergency suspension.
- 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 terms of the suspension will be notified to the student in writing, depending on the circumstances of the case. The decision to suspend a student shall be reviewed as necessary by the Panel.
- Requirement to withdraw - if the Panel concludes, taking into account the individual circumstances of the case and any supporting medical evidence, 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.
- Any other action considered to be appropriate and proportionate.

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 and conveyed, in person wherever possible, to the student by a member of Student Services.

3 Emergency Suspension

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 Experience and Academic Registrar may make the decision to suspend the student immediately. Any student who has been detained under the Mental Health Act will be referred for an immediate emergency suspension.

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 the permission to take an examination or to enter university premises to attend a meeting with a support service, such as the Student Counselling Service or the Students' Health Service. 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 person wherever possible, by a member of Student Services. A student will be marked as 'suspended' on their student record during the period of suspension so that accommodation and tuition fees do not continue to accrue.

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.

A review will only take place if the student can provide appropriate medical evidence that states 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 evidence at that time. The review will take place as soon as possible after the receipt of the request. Once this evidence 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. Any return to study may be conditional.

4 Return to study after a suspension decision under stage 1 or stage 2

If a student agreed to suspend studies under stage 1, the Case Meeting panel that originally considered the matter can make the decision regarding a return to studies without referral to a Fitness to Study Panel if it is satisfied that the student is fit to return.

If the decision to suspend was made under stage 2 by a Fitness to Study Panel, the Panel should reconvene to consider and determine whether the student is fit to return to study.

Further medical evidence will be requested from the student regarding their ability to engage fully with their studies, meet the requirements of the programme and live independently in residences or in the community. A student will only be permitted to return if, after receiving the medical evidence, the Panel is satisfied that the individual is fit to study.

5 Right of appeal

The student may appeal against a decision to suspend or requirement to withdraw made under stage 2 of this Policy. A letter setting out the grounds of appeal should be addressed to the University Secretary and emailed to university-secretary@bristol.ac.uk. The appeal should be received within 15 working 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 Students' Union Advice Service, "Just Ask", when preparing the letter of appeal.

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.

6 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.

Approved July 2020

Year of entry: 2021-2022