Introduction

1. The purpose of this document is to outline the appropriate procedures that staff should take when concerns are raised regarding a student’s academic engagement and/or fitness to study at the University and/or within a placement. It should be read alongside the Policy on and procedures for students returning to or repeating study and the Policy and procedures for suspensions.

2. In order to maintain the standards of scholarship, personal integrity and communal life essential to the existence and good name of the University, students are expected to take responsibility for organising their academic work, their personal lives and their participation in the University community in line with the University’s Regulations for Student Conduct (see Section G of the University Calendar http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/Calendar/).

3. There are times when it is not in the best interests of a student, or the University and its community, to allow the student to continue studying because he/she is not fit to do so. It is appropriate for the University in these circumstances to recommend course suspension or permanent withdrawal from studies.

4. In cases where students are undertaking courses which lead to a professional qualification in one of the regulated health or social professions, the University’s Fitness to Practise procedures (http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/qualitysupport/FitnessToPractise.pdf) should be followed where there is a cause for concern.

5. Where the conduct, or one element of the conduct, which has caused concern falls in to a category of misconduct dealt with through other disciplinary processes within the University, it is important that those processes are concluded prior to the determination of academic engagement and fitness to study via the process outlined below. However, a student may be suspended from his/her programme and/or a placement pending an investigation where deemed necessary. Prior to the disciplinary processes being concluded, the allegations remain undetermined and therefore cannot be taken into account with regard to academic engagement and fitness to study. However, where academic engagement and fitness to study are a concern, every reasonable effort will be made to expedite the process(es).
6. In following the procedures outlined in this document, staff should at all times ensure that they use the appropriate level of confidentiality.

7. The procedures relating to academic engagement and fitness to study comprise three stages. Should a student be unwilling to play a part in these stages, or should the situation be sufficiently serious, then progress through the stages may still continue in the student’s absence.

8. Schools will be responsible for facilitating alternative arrangements for students who cannot reasonably be expected to attend relevant meetings in person, e.g. students on distance learning programmes.

What is meant by “academic engagement” and “fitness to study”?

9. A student is academically engaged if he/she complies with the academic requirements stated in the University’s Statement of learner responsibilities (http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/qualitysupport/learnerresponsibilities.pdf), in particular those requirements relating to engagement with the Personal Tutor system, attendance and participation in academic classes and submission of coursework.

10. A student is fit to study if he/she can consistently and effectively undertake his/her studies in a way that does not endanger him/herself or other members of the University.

11. Students may present themselves as not fit to study through submission of an Extenuating Circumstances or Change of Status Request form. Alternatively, a cause for concern may be raised by any third party, such as other students, academic or administrative staff.

12. Cause for concern as to a student’s academic engagement or fitness to study can be raised relating to a wide range of behaviours, including, but not limited to:
   - Non-engagement with study;
   - Not being fit to study,
     which may or may not be related to any of the following:
     - Substance misuse;
     - Health issues (mental or physical)
     - Aggressive, violent or threatening behaviour;
     - Inappropriate attitude or behaviour;
     - Health concerns and lack of insight or management of these concerns;
     - Circumstances putting staff or student safety or wellbeing at risk;
     - Failure to meet conditions placed on their fitness to return (where applicable), and
     - Multiple/serial Extenuating Circumstances claims or requests for suspension of studies.

13. Concerns should be acted upon as quickly as possible in order to provide appropriate support and avoid crisis situations. In crisis or emergency situations staff should consult the University’s Staff Guide to supporting Students with Mental Health difficulties. http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/personaltutor/Supporting _Mental_Health_Difficulties.pdf.

Processes: fast-track process and standard process

14. Where there is a need for urgent action, normally where a student’s health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others, the School should refer the case through the fast-track process. The fast-track process is consistent with the principles which underpin the standard process, but enables the completion of all stages within a shorter period of time, where necessary.
15. A case can be transferred from the fast-track process to the standard process at any stage in the event that there appears no longer to be a risk to the student or others; or, conversely, can be transferred from standard to fast-track process at any stage in the event that such a risk has emerged. The final stage of the process determines which appeal process applies: a decision taken at the final stage of the fast-track process shall be considered by the appeal specified under the fast-track process; and a decision taken at the final stage of the standard process shall be considered by the appeal specified under the standard process.

Fast-track process

16. Where there is a need for urgent action, normally where a student’s health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others, the School should refer the case through the fast-track process. The fast-track process is consistent with the principles which underpin the standard process, but enables the completion of all stages within a shorter period of time, where necessary.

17. If the School Director of Teaching and Learning or the Senior Tutor is concerned that a student’s health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others, he or she should consult the Mental Health Advisor, the Head of Counselling and Well-being, and/or the Head of the University Medical Practice, as appropriate. If, in the light of these consultations, the School Director of Teaching and Learning or the Senior Tutor believes that there is a risk to the student or others and, in consequence, urgent action is required, he or she shall submit the case, including appropriate evidence, to the Chair of Standing Committee on Academic Engagements and Fitness To Study and the Secretary to SCAEFTS.

18. The Chair of SCAEFTS (or, in their absence, another Pro-Vice-Chancellor) shall consider the case and consult as reasonable and appropriate in the circumstances with relevant colleagues, including the School Director of Teaching and Learning, and the Head of the University Medical Practice and/or the Head of Counselling and Wellbeing, before determining the student’s fitness to study as indicated in clause 34. In such a case, the Chair’s action will normally be limited to suspending the student pending fuller consideration of the case when the student is capable of engaging with the process.

19. If the decision has been taken by Chair’s action, the Secretary will write to the student notifying him/her of the decision and providing a copy of the Case Review. The student will also be provided with information on his/her right to appeal the decision within 20 working days of the date the decision was sent to the student (as specified in clause 41).

20. A student whose fitness to study has been decided by Chair’s Action in accordance with clause 28 will have the right to appeal the decision within 20 working days of the date the decision was sent to the student. The review will be conducted by the Standing Disciplinary Committee. In the event a student is incapable of submitting an appeal or request a review of the decision within 20 working days, a student will need to provide evidence that they were incapable of meeting the required deadline as stated in the letter from the Secretary. If good reason is established, the appeal will be considered in the normal way by the Standing Disciplinary Committee.

21.

Stage 1 – School Review

Initial concern

22. When a cause for concern has been raised by the student or others, the normal expectation is that the following will take place at School level. Where there is a need for urgent action, for example, where a students’ health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others, the School should refer the case through the fast-track process (see section 16).
23. The student should be encouraged to speak to their Personal Tutor or any other appropriate member of staff in their academic department about their circumstances or conduct. The student may be unaware that there is an issue, and the details of the concerns should be made clear.

- Options should be discussed in relation to the needs of the student and any support that the University can provide. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments that can be put in place should be considered in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

- The student should be encouraged to consult any relevant support services, in particular Counselling and Wellbeing, the Disability Advisory Service, the University Study Advisers and the RUSU Student Advisers. The student may also be encouraged to consult a medical practitioner.

- A written record of the discussion and any agreed actions should be drawn up and shared with the student and a review date set. This should reinforce the student’s responsibility to take positive action to resolve the concerns raised. A copy of the written record should be placed on the student’s file.

- The student and member of staff involved should meet on the agreed date to review the situation. The majority of issues would normally be resolved at this stage.

Continuing concern

24. If, following these initial actions at School level, there are continuing concerns, the student will be invited to attend a meeting with the School Director of Teaching and Learning or Senior Tutor to discuss these concerns and possible solutions. Schools are advised to arrange such meetings in a timely manner, in order to avoid any delays in addressing the concerns raised. The invitation to the meeting must be sent by email and letter at least 5 working days before the meeting is due to take place and should outline what needs to be discussed. Disabled students may be accompanied by a support worker as appropriate to their needs.

25. If appropriate, the possibility of suspension, the submission of an Extenuating Circumstances request or the possibility of withdrawal from the University should be discussed with the student at the meeting. The student should be informed of the relevant policies and procedures. For further details of the procedure relating to suspensions, please refer to the Policy and procedures for suspensions.

26. An action plan will be drawn up between the student and the SDTL or Senior Tutor, where appropriate, to formally agree the University’s expectations of the student, actions required of the student, and details of any support to be provided by the University. The action plan will have a review date.

27. A record of the meeting and agreed outcomes should be drawn up and a copy sent to the student within 5 working days of the meeting taking place. This correspondence should state that failure to take positive action to adhere to the action plan and/or to attend the arranged review will result in further action which would normally be referral to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study. A copy should be placed on the student’s file.

Stage 2 – Case Review

28. If the student has not achieved the agreed actions or if it is inappropriate for stage 1 to take place, the procedure should move to stage 2 and a Case Review will be necessary.

29. A review of the case, led by the SDTL will be undertaken by relevant concerned parties, examples of which might include one or more of the following:

- The Mental Health Advisor
- The Head of Counselling and Wellbeing
- The Head of the University Medical Practice
- The Senior Tutor
• The Director of Student and Applicant Services
• The Hall Warden
• The Disability Advisory Team Leader
• The student’s Personal Tutor

Where the SDTL is the student’s Personal Tutor, the case review will be led by the Senior Tutor.

30. The SDTL, in consultation with the relevant parties, will discuss the steps taken so far and consider whether an enhanced action plan is likely to be of benefit to the student or whether the case should be referred to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study. The Head of the University Medical Practice and/or the Head of Counselling and Wellbeing may be consulted as appropriate in order to evaluate any evidence presented by the student regarding his/ her physical or mental health. They will not be asked to provide a second opinion relating to the specific circumstances of the case.

31. Following the SDTL’s consultation with relevant parties, the student will be invited to meet with the SDTL and the Senior Tutor/another member of School staff, as appropriate, to receive and discuss the recommended actions from the Case Review. The student has the right to be accompanied by a ‘friend’ who should normally be a currently registered student of the University, a member of staff of the University, a sabbatical officer or student adviser of the Students’ Union. Disabled Students may also be accompanied by a support worker as appropriate to their needs.

32. In some cases, a student is unable to meet with the SDTL due to the severity of their mental or physical health condition. In such cases, the SDTL will make a decision to refer the case to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study. In reaching the decision, the SDTL will consider all relevant information that is reasonably available to the University. The student will be informed in writing of the decision and the reasons for it. A Case Review report will be written and submitted to the Secretary of the Committee. In such cases, the Head of the University Medical Practice and/or the Head of Counselling and Wellbeing will be asked to provide a statement.

33. If the recommended action is that of an enhanced action plan, this will be drawn up by the School in consultation with the student to formally agree the University’s expectations of the student and support that will be provided by the University. The action plan will have a review date and it will be made clear to the student that the consequences of not adhering to the plan will be referral to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study. A copy should be placed on the student’s file. The School will be responsible for monitoring compliance with the action plan and for reporting any failure to adhere to the plan to the SDTL.

34. If the recommendation of the Case Review is a referral to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study, a Case Review report will be written and submitted to the Secretary of the Committee.

Stage 3 – Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study

35. If the recommendation following the Case Review is referral to the Standing Committee, then the procedure will move to stage 3. Stage 2 will always be necessary in order to provide the Committee with adequate information on the case.

36. The membership of the Committee will comprise:
• a Pro-Vice-Chancellor or the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor;
• two School Directors of Teaching and Learning or Senior Tutor from another School;
• a Sabbatical Officer from the Student’s Union;
• a Secretary nominated by the University Secretary.
37. On receipt of the Case Review report, the Secretary will write to the student enclosing the Case Review report and any other supporting documents that will be considered by the Committee.

38. The date for the meeting of the Committee will be set in a timely fashion. The student will be informed of the procedure to be followed and the date and time of the meeting. The student shall have the right to attend the hearing of the case on the specified date. In the case of students registered at a branch campus, teleconferencing facilities will be provided.

39. The Committee will be provided with a copy of the Case Review report. The Secretary will keep a record of the proceedings and of evidence given to the Committee. The Committee’s meetings shall be held in private.

40. The Committee may choose to consult others as appropriate.

41. The detailed procedures of the Standing Committee will be available on request from the Secretary.

42. The Committee may determine that:
   a) the student’s fitness to study is not substantially impaired, that he/she has demonstrated a sufficient level of academic engagement and that he/she may continue his/her studies;
   b) the student’s fitness to study is impaired and/or he/she has not demonstrated a sufficient level of academic engagement.

43. In the case of 42 a) the School will be responsible for ensuring that all reasonable efforts are made to enable the student to continue on his/her programme. The ongoing fitness to study and academic engagement of the student should be monitored as normal.

44. In the case of 42 b) the Committee will determine an appropriate and proportionate action: the extent to which fitness to study is impaired or academic engagement has not been demonstrated; the extent to and means by which that impairment or lack might be addressed and, if applicable, any mitigating circumstances accepted. Actions may include any of following alone or in combination:
   - formal notification to the student that his/her conduct has caused concern and that he/she must comply with any imposed conditions, which may include, but are not limited to:
     - close supervision by the School; and,
     - engagement with an appropriate medical or mental health professional; and/or,
     - engagement with a University Study Adviser to improve the student’s academic practice;
   - suspension for a specific period of time with or without further conditions;
   - requirement to re-sit or retake part of the programme, with or without further conditions;
   - termination of current course of study but transfer of University registration to an alternative programme if available;
   - termination of current course and removal from membership of the University, but retaining eligibility to receive any lesser award if applicable; and/or,
   - termination of current course and removal from membership of the University.

45. If conditions have been applied alongside the specified action(s), the School is responsible for monitoring compliance with academic conditions. Failure to comply with conditions will result in automatic referral back to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study.

46. The decision of the Committee will be communicated in writing to the student along with information on his/her right to request a review of the decision within five working days. The decision will also be communicated to the School Senior Tutor, School Director of Teaching and Learning and the Teaching and Learning Dean.

47. The Secretary will record the decision of the Committee on the student’s record where it will remain as long as the record is kept in accordance with the University’s data retention schedule.
Appeal

48. Appeals against decisions of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study are to the Student Appeals Committee. The Student Appeals Committee shall have the authority either to quash or uphold the decision of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study.

49. Admissible grounds for review shall be one or more of the following:
   - new evidence that was not available at the time of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study has become available that could materially affect the Committee’s decision;
   - the decision was based on a demonstrable error of fact;
   - the decision was not reached in accordance with these procedures or that there was prejudice or bias in the conduct of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study; and/or,
   - the decision of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study is not one which any reasonable panel would have reached based on the evidence presented.

50. The student should notify the University Secretary of his/her request for a review and the basis for that request in writing within five working days of the date of issue of the notification of the decision of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study.

51. The Student Appeals Committee is in no position to make a professional determination on fitness to study and, subsequently, in its review it shall determine only whether the grounds presented are valid and sufficient for the decision of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study to be quashed.

52. Where this is the case the Student Appeals Committee shall refer the case back to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study, notifying it of the grounds on which it believes the case should be re-considered. The Secretary of the Student Appeals Committee will notify the student, School Director of Teaching and Learning or their delegate, Teaching and Learning Dean, or, in a case relating to a student at a branch campus, the Provost (or their delegate), of the decision.

53. The Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study will reconvene to hear the case for a second time in the light of the decision of the Student Appeals Committee. The normal appeals process will apply with the exclusion that the basis for the appeal must not be the same substantive matter as in the first appeal.

54. If the Student Appeals Committee decides to uphold the decision of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study its decision shall be final. The Secretary of the Student Appeals Committee will notify the student, School Director of Teaching and Learning or their delegate, Teaching and Learning Dean, or, in a case relating to a student at a branch campus, the Provost (or their delegate) of the decision. The student will be notified in writing that this decision constitutes the completion of procedures.

Support services available to students

55. The student should be encouraged by their School to consult relevant support services while their case is being dealt with under the academic engagement and fitness to study procedures. These support services may include, as appropriate, Counselling and Wellbeing, the Disability Advisory Service, the University Study Advisers and the RUSU Student Advisers. The student may also be encouraged to consult a medical practitioner.

56. Following the conclusion of the procedures, should the Standing Committee determine that the student’s membership of the University should be terminated, the student will retain the right to consult Counselling and Wellbeing for a period of six months from the date of termination.
57. For details of the entitlement of suspended students to access support services, please refer to the *Policy and procedures for suspensions*. 