Policy on and procedures relating to student academic engagement and fitness to study

[This document applies to foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research students.

For postgraduate research students supervisors act in the capacity of academic tutors.

[For the purposes of the processes described in this document, in international branch campuses, the Academic Director of Teaching and Learning (ADTL) will be fulfilling the functions of the School Director of Teaching and Learning or School Director of Academic Tutoring and the Campus Director for Academic Tutoring (CDAT) will be fulfilling the role of the School Director for Academic Tutoring.]

Introduction

1. The purpose of this document is to outline the procedures that will be taken when there are substantive concerns 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 Attendance Management and Engagement Policy, the Policy on and procedures for students returning to or repeating study and the Policy on and procedures for suspensions or Guidance on research students' suspensions and extensions (as applicable).

2. The University is committed to supporting students to be successful in their studies and to achieve outcomes commensurate with their ability and potential. The University recognises that there is a strong correlation between a student's attendance and engagement and the student achieving successful outcomes. Therefore, students are generally 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.

3. However, it is also recognised that students can experience genuine challenges requiring them to prioritise their time and resources in a way that may make consistent attendance and/or engagement difficult. Therefore, this policy sets out the University's approach that is intended to be supportive and proportionate, aiming to help students succeed.

4. Student visa holders are required by Immigration authorities (e.g. UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI)) to academically engage with their programme of study, and the University, as the Student Sponsor, is also required to monitor and review their engagement according to those requirements.

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

6. Where a student is undertaking a course that leads to a professional qualification in one of the regulated health or social professions, concerns about fitness to study may lead to concerns about fitness to practise; these will be considered following the University's Policy on and procedures for the determination of Fitness to Practise. In such cases, it may be appropriate for the fitness to study procedure to be paused, whilst the fitness to practise investigation is being undertaken. However, early provision of support for academic and wellbeing concerns may help to identify issues and prevent them from becoming fitness to practise concerns.

The purpose of the academic engagement and fitness to study procedure

The academic engagement and fitness to study process is a supportive and proportionate framework that aims to help students stay on track and succeed, while ensuring that staff resource is carefully targeted towards those with clear and evidenced need.

It focuses on early dialogue, understanding individual circumstances, and connecting students with appropriate support. It recognises that students have complex lives sometimes requiring compromise and that attendance alone does not define engagement. The focus is on working with the student to identify a practical way to succeed.

At the same time, prompt action is required where there is no evidence of engagement and where students are simply not present, so that student wellbeing and, where applicable, UKVI compliance considerations can be addressed quickly. This procedure provides a structured route to consider whether ongoing study/enrolment is in the student's and the University's best interests, including, where necessary, bringing a student's studies to an end.

What is meant by "academic engagement" and "fitness to study"?

Academic engagement takes a variety of forms. While the University's Statement of Learner Responsibilities articulates an expectation that students engage fully with their programme, including attendance at scheduled teaching sessions, academic tutor meetings, etc. this is set within a broader, context-sensitive understanding of academic engagement. In practice, patterns of engagement will vary due to legitimate academic, personal, or wellbeing considerations, and effective engagement can be demonstrated through a range of activities beyond physical attendance alone. Staff should therefore adopt a holistic and proportionate approach when considering student engagement, focusing on connection with learning and factors such as submission of coursework and pro-active management of their studies through assessment adjustment requests (rather than purely attendance at all timetabled teaching). Staff should, however, also be cognisant of programme specific requirements, especially where these relate to

PRSB requirements for professional recognition and requirements for student visa holders, where attendance is mandatory (see para 7).

7. All University of Reading student visa holders (regardless of location of study) are required to adhere to the conditions of their study visa with regard to attendance and engagement in learning. In the UK student visa holders are subject to the University's Student Visa Academic Engagement Policy, which outlines the specific engagement requirements that apply to students sponsored under the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Student Route. In line with UKVI expectations, sponsored students must actively and consistently pursue their course of study throughout their period of sponsorship. This includes attending and participating with all required teaching, learning and assessment activities from within the UK, maintaining regular contact with the University, and complying with the conditions of their visa. As a Student sponsor, the University is required to monitor, record, and review the academic engagement of sponsored students. Students who fail to meet the required standards of engagement may have their Student visa sponsorship withdrawn.

8. PGR students should be engaging in accordance with the Code of Practice on Research Students.

9. The expectations of students engaged in apprenticeship programmes are stated in their Learner Commitment Statement and students must ensure that they engage with their on-the-job training opportunities in addition to the academic programme.

10. A student is fit to study if they can consistently and effectively undertake their studies in a way that does not endanger themselves or other members of the University.

11. Cause for concern as to a student's academic engagement or fitness to study is raised relating to a wide range of behaviours, including, but not limited to:
    1. Significant non-engagement with study;
    2. 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),

Implementation of the Procedure

12. Engagement concerns should be acted upon as quickly as possible in order to provide appropriate support and avoid deterioration. However, in the event of a serious concern about student's general welfare the guidance on what to do when you have a concern about a student should be followed.

13. Where the cause for concern falls into a category of misconduct it should be dealt with through the university's disciplinary processes. It is important that those processes are concluded prior to any final determination of fitness to study via the process outlined below. Prior to the disciplinary processes being concluded, the allegations remain undetermined and therefore cannot be taken into account with regard to fitness to study. However, where fitness to study is a concern, every reasonable effort will be made to

expedite the process(es) and a student may be suspended from their programme and/or a placement pending a disciplinary investigation where deemed necessary. This does not preclude starting conversations with the student about how their academic engagement could be improved and supported under the 'Early Support' and School Review stages in particular.

14. In following the procedures outlined in this document, staff should at all times ensure that they use the appropriate level of both confidentiality on the one hand and disclosure on the other (see the policy on Sharing student Health and Disability Information).

15. Should a student be unwilling to play a part in the support interventions or should the situation be sufficiently serious, escalation may take place in the student's absence.

16. Much of the procedure is implemented through meetings with the student to discuss their circumstances. A student may be accompanied to any meeting by a 'friend'. A 'friend' for this purpose, is defined as: an adviser from Reading Students' Union (RSU) Advice Service team, a current member of staff of the University of Reading, a currently registered student of the University of Reading, or a RSU Student Officer. A person who does not fall within these categories will not be able to act as a 'friend' unless otherwise agreed in advance. Disabled students may also be accompanied by a Support Worker in addition to a 'friend', as appropriate to their needs.

17. Having discussed concerns with students, (through informal conversation, Early Support or Stage 1 interventions) provided advice or referrals and explored all support options, the University respects the right of students to determine their own level of engagement in study, with the caveat of UKVI attendance requirements for student visa holders and PSRB requirements for specific professionally accredited programme. Further intervention beyond Stage 1 will not take place unless the circumstances set out in para 24 exist.

18. This policy and procedure is implemented in a consistent manner across Foundation, Undergraduate and Postgraduate taught programmes, albeit that the underpinning engagement datasets used to identify concerns may vary. Further guidance on the detail of how this procedure is operationalised is made available to staff on an annual basis and is held by Student Support Co-ordinator Team in the Support Centres.

Early Support

19. When a cause for concern has been identified, the normal expectation is that the following will take place at School level:

    1. Contact will be made with the student (usually via the Academic Tutor) to identify barriers to engagement and discuss how their engagement could be improved. The student may be unaware that there is an issue, and the details of the concerns will be made clear.

    2. The focus of the discussion is on identifying realistic actions (on the part of the University as well as the student) and helping students to understand the various means of accessing their learning. Options will be discussed in relation to the needs of the student and any support that the University can provide.

3. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments will be considered in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. The Academic Tutor will assist the student to make their needs known to module convenors, notify the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) of the student's needs and refer the student to register with DAS as appropriate.

4. Where the student is engaged in an apprenticeship programme, consideration will be given to consultation with the employer, in accordance with the Service Agreement, Learner Commitment Statement and Operational Handbook.

5. The student will be supported to consult any relevant support services, in particular the Student Welfare team, Counselling and Wellbeing, the Disability Advisory Service, the University Study Advisers and the RSU Student Advisers. The student may also be encouraged to consult a medical practitioner.

6. A brief record of the discussion and any agreed actions will be drawn up and shared with the student. This will focus on briefly recording the barriers that the student is facing and the advice and support provided/recommended. A copy of the written record will be held centrally.

7. The majority of issues would normally be resolved at this stage.

Stage 1 – School Review

20. If, following Early Support by the Academic Tutor, there are significant continuing concerns (as specified in the annual operational guidance) , the student will be asked to meet with the School/Departmental Director of Teaching and Learning or School/Departmental Director of Academic Tutoring for UG students, or the School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies and Head of School in the case of PGR students, 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, but with sufficient advance notice for the student to make appropriate arrangements.

21. The purpose of the meeting is to understand the barriers being experienced by the student and to identify what support the student would benefit from in order to get their studies back on track, where possible.

- The focus is on identifying realistic actions (on the part of the University as well as the student) and, helping students to understand the various means of accessing their learning that will assist the student to engage with their studies.

- Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments will be considered in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the student will be assisted to make their needs known to module convenors and encouraged to register with the Disability Advisory Service. The staff member conducting the meeting will notify the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) of the student's needs.

- If appropriate, the submission of Assessment Adjustment requests (Foundation, UG and PGT only), the possibility of suspension or withdrawal from the University will be discussed with the student at the meeting. The student will be informed of the relevant policies and procedures. For further details of the procedure relating to

suspensions, please refer to the Policy on and procedures for suspensions and the Policy and procedures on Research Students' Suspensions and Extensions.

22. An action plan will be drawn up, where appropriate, to record the advice and support provided and the agreed way forward.

23. The main points of the discussion will be recorded and a copy sent to the student along with any agreed action plan. This correspondence will note that should further significant concerns arise about a student's academic engagement or fitness to study, further conversations may need to take place. A record of this intervention will be held centrally.

Stage 2 – Case Review by an Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor

24. The following cases should be escalated to the Stage 2 for a Case Review:
    1. Where there has been no or almost no evident engagement in learning from the start of the year, AND there has been no engagement with the stage 1 School level review OR no engagement following it.
    2. Where the student is a visa holder and falling below the required expectations (e.g., those set by UKVI for students studying in the UK)
    3. Where the student's health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others
    4. Where there is a known serious welfare concern that appears unmanaged and is having a substantive impact of the student's ability to engage with their learning
    5. Where engagement is of significant concern AND it is clear that the student's likely outcomes have already been severely impacted such that they are unlikely to complete the year successfully.

25. The purpose of the stage 2 intervention is to understand further the barriers or circumstances being experienced by the student and to identify suitable remedial actions that will facilitate the most appropriate outcome for the student. These actions are likely to be substantive, given the seriousness of the situation.

26. The University reserves the right to move straight to a Stage 2 case review where:
    1. The student's health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others,
    2. There has been no or almost no engagement for a sustained period, particularly when the pattern has developed early in the academic year; or
    3. There is a continuation/reoccurrence of issues from previous years

27. A review of the case is undertaken by a relevant Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor, who will draw information from various parties within the University e.g. from the Academic School and/or from Student Support Services. Input from parties outside the university may also be relevant e.g. an employer or medical professional.

28. The review will include consideration of the steps taken so far and whether all appropriate support has been provided, an enhanced action plan is likely to be of benefit to the student, or whether the case should be referred directly to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study. Student Wellbeing

colleagues may be consulted as appropriate in order to evaluate any evidence presented by the student regarding his/her physical or mental health, and whether all appropriate support has been explored. They will not be asked to provide a second opinion relating to the specific circumstances of the case.

29. Following the consultation with relevant parties, the student will be invited to meet with the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor and the School/Department, to receive and discuss the recommended actions from the Case Review.

30. The Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor may decide that a meeting with the student should not be held, but only in exceptional circumstances, such as evidenced mental or physical health conditions which make the meetings inappropriate to carry out. In such cases, the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor will make a decision whether to refer the case to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study. In reaching the decision, they will consider all relevant information that is reasonably available to the University. The student will be promptly informed in writing of the decision and receive a copy of the summary record of the meeting thereafter .

31. The outcomes of a stage 2 intervention are likely to be recommendations for substantive actions, such as a suite of assessment adjustments, potentially including extension of registration, or a repeat year request. It may be recommended that students suspend their studies for the year, change degree programmes or withdraw from study entirely at this time. **Pro-active support should be provided to ensure the necessary processes are completed to enable any of these actions that have been agreed.**

    a. If it is considered that other forms of support would be beneficial and the recommended action is that of an enhanced action plan, this will be drawn up by the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor and the School in consultation with the student to agree the support that will be provided by the University and the steps the student will take. The action plan will have a review date. A copy will be shared with the student and should be placed on the student's file. The School will be responsible for monitoring effectiveness of the action plan and further amending as needed.

    b. Where a student does not engage with the Stage 2 level intervention AND there has been no engagement in either the stage 1 intervention or in learning from the start of the year, the student's programme of study will be withdrawn/suspended.

    c. Where the Case Review determines that a student visa holder has breached the terms of their visa in relation to attendance and engagement, and as advised by the Head of Home Office Compliance (or appropriate equivalent), the student may be withdrawn/suspended and visa sponsorship withdrawn.

    d. In the case of students who have had a concern raised due to their health or behaviour posing a risk of harm to either themselves or others, it will be made clear that should concerns continue, their case will be referred to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study.

    e. Where a student does not engage with the Stage 2 level intervention AND the students' health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others cases will be escalated immediately to the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study

32. 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

33. The role of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study is primarily focussed on cases where the students' health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others and the situation appears unmanaged and/or unmanageable within the constraints of what the University can provide.

34. There may occasionally be other exceptional cases that are escalated for the attention of the Standing committee

35. A case Review at 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:
    1. A Pro-Vice-Chancellor or the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor;
    2. An Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor not already involved in the case;
    3. A School/Department Director of Teaching and Learning or School/Department Director of Academic Tutoring from another School, or in the case of PGR students a School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies from another School;
    4. A Student Officer from Reading Students' Union (RSU);
    5. A Secretary nominated by the University Secretary will be present to take the minutes of the meeting and is not part of the decision making panel.

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 meeting may take place in person or online via Microsoft Teams or other web-based video call approved by the University. Where the student wishes to be accompanied by a 'friend', the 'friend' is normally expected to attend in the same capacity as the student, online or in-person.

39. The Committee will be provided with a copy of the Case Review report. The Committee's meeting shall be held in private. The Secretary will take minutes from the hearing, keep a record of the proceedings and of evidence given to the Committee.

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

41. The detailed Procedures of the Standing Committee are available in the Guide to Policies and Procedures for Teaching and Learning.

42. The Committee may determine that:

a) The student's fitness to study is not substantially impaired, that they may continue their studies, or;
b) The student's fitness to study is impaired.

In determining (b), the burden of proof rests with the University. The student is assumed to be sufficiently fit to study unless it can be proved otherwise. Particular attention will be paid to whether all reasonable support has been made available to the student and whether the student has engaged with support provided or recommended. The decision will be based on the balance of probabilities, i.e. whether, on the basis of the evidence before the Committee, it is more likely than not that the student's fitness to study is impaired.

In determining a) the School will be responsible for ensuring that all reasonable efforts are made to enable the student to continue on their programme. The ongoing fitness to study of the student should be monitored as normal.

43. In the case of 42. b) the Committee will determine an appropriate and proportionate action considering the extent to which fitness to study is impaired; the extent to and means by which that impairment might be addressed and, if applicable, any mitigating circumstances accepted. Actions may include any of the following alone or in combination:
    a) Formal notification to the student that their conduct has caused concern and that they must comply with any imposed conditions, which may include, but are not limited to:
        i) Close supervision by the School;
        ii) Engagement with an appropriate medical or mental health professional;
        iii) Engagement with a University Study Advice Team to improve the student's academic practice;
    b) Suspension for a specific period of time with or without further conditions;
    c) Requirement to re-sit or retake part of the programme, with or without further conditions;
    d) Termination of current course of study but offer of a transfer of University registration to an alternative programme as determined by the University, if deemed suitable in the circumstances and agreed with the student;
    e) Termination of current course and removal from membership of the University, but retaining eligibility to receive any lesser award if applicable;
    f) Termination of current course and removal from membership of the University.

44. The outcome letter and a copy of the minutes of the meeting will normally be sent to the student within ten working days. This will also include information on how to make an appeal, which in this case will be to the Student Appeals Committee within the University. The outcome will also be communicated to the School/Department Director of Academic Tutoring or the School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies, the Student Advice and Support Manager or the Doctoral Research Office, and the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor who referred the case to Stage 3.

45. The decision of the Committee will be recorded on the student's record.

46. If conditions have been applied alongside the specified action(s), the School is responsible for monitoring compliance with any academic conditions. Should concerns about fitness to study arise subsequently the case will be referred back to the Standing

Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study and the case may be considered by Chairs Action rather than convening a further full Stage 3 meeting with the student.

47. Failure to accept the conditions or submit an appeal within five working days will result in the case being referred back to Committee for further consideration and a decision made, usually by Chair's Action.

Appeals process

48. Appeals against decisions of the Stage 2 Case Review will be heard by the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study. Appeals against decisions of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study are to the Student Appeals Committee. Full details can be found in the Student Appeals Committee (SAC) Policy. The Committee hearing the appeal shall have the authority either to overturn or uphold the original decision.

49. The student should submit to the Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations team at studentappeals@reading.ac.uk their request for a review and the basis for that request within ten working days of the date of issue of the formal notification of the decision of the Stage 2 Case Review or the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study.

50. The student must identify and demonstrate with evidence one or more of the following admissible grounds for appeal :
    1. There has been a procedural error; or
    2. New and relevant evidence is available that was not known at the time; or
    3. The decision-making Committee/Review acted unreasonably, or the impact of the sanction imposed was unreasonably disproportionate.

51. Upon submission of an appeal, a member of the Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations Team will acknowledge receipt within five working days and will refer the request to the Director of Student Experience and Education (or their nominee) for eligibility review.

52. The Director of Student Experience and Education (or their nominee) will carry out a review to ensure the appeal request has been submitted on time and that the student has adequately demonstrated that they meet one of the grounds for an appeal. The Director of Student Experience and Education (or their nominee) will make one of two decisions:
    - That the appeal request meets the eligibility criteria and shall be passed on to the Student Appeals Committee for consideration; or
    - That the appeal does not meet the eligibility criteria and a Completion of Procedures Letter will be issued, thereby ending the University's internal procedures.

53. Following an eligibility review, a member of the Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations Team will notify the student of the outcome within ten working days and either pass the case on for consideration or issue a Completion of Procedures Letter.

54. All decisions made at the eligibility review are final and cannot be appealed.

55. If the request for appeal is accepted by the Director of Student Experience and Education, a member of the Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations Team will notify the student of its referral to the relevant Committee and will provide a timeline as to when the appeal will be heard.

56. In the case of fitness to study concerns, the Student Appeals Committee will not make a professional determination on fitness to study and, consequently, 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 overturned.

57. Where the appeal is upheld the case shall referred back to the original decision makers, with notification of the grounds on which the case should be re-considered. The Secretary of the Student Appeals Committee will notify the student, School Director of Academic Tutoring or School/Department Director of Teaching and Learning or their delegate, and the relevant Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor of the decision.

58. The Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor or Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study will reconvene to review the case for a second time, or a decision will be made by Chairs Action of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study, in light of the decision of the hearing of the appeal. 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.

59. If the outcome of this re-consideration is to uphold the original decision this shall be final. The Secretary of the Student Appeals Committee will notify the student, School/Department Director of Academic Tutoring or School/Department Director of Teaching and Learning or their delegate/the School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies, and the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor of the decision. The student will be notified in writing, normally within ten working days, that this decision constitutes the completion of procedures.

Support services available to students

60. Although the approach to Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study is intended to be supportive for students, the University does recognise that the conversations needed may be uncomfortable or difficult at times. In addition to the ability to bring a ‘’friend’ to any meetings students are encouraged to draw on relevant support services to provide supplementary advice, guidance and wellbeing support. These support services may include, as appropriate, the Student Welfare team, Counselling and Wellbeing, the Disability Advisory Service, the University Study Advisers and the RSU Student Advice Service. The student may also be encouraged to consult a medical practitioner.

61. For details of the entitlement of suspended students to access support services, please refer to the Policy on and procedures for suspensions or the Policy and procedures on Research Students’ Suspensions and Extensions as appropriate.

Version	Keeper	Reviewed	Approved by	Approval date	Effective date
1	CQSD	Annually	UBTL	30 April 2012	2012/13

2	CQSD	Annually	UBTL	13 December 2016	Immediately
3	CQSD	Annually	UBTL	11 July 2017	2017/18
4	CQSD	Annually	UBTLSE	15 September 2020	Immediately
5	CQSD	Annually	UBTLSE	30 November 2020	Spring Term
6	CQSD	Annually	UBTLSE	22 January 2021	Immediately (links embedded)
7	CQSD	Annually	UBTLSE	20 January 2025	September 2025
7.1	CQSD	Annually	UBTLSE	13 March 2026	Immediately (minor amendments)
8	CQSD	Annually	ESEC	September 2026	September 2026