

Guide to policy and procedures for teaching and learning

Section 6: Programme-related Matters

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

[For the purposes of the processes described in this document, in Henley Business School the Programme Area Director will be fulfilling the functions of the School Director of Teaching and Learning or School Director of Academic Tutoring. 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.]

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

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 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. This policy follows on from the University's [Attendance Management and Engagement Policy](#).
3. 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](#).
4. 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 they are not fit to do so. It is appropriate for the University in these circumstances to recommend

course suspension or permanent withdrawal from studies.

5. 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](#) should be followed where there is a cause for concern.
6. 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, student may be suspended from their 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).
7. In following the procedures outlined in this document, staff should at all times ensure that they use the appropriate level of confidentiality.
8. 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.
9. A student has the right to 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 by the Chair. Disabled students may also be accompanied by a Support Worker in addition to a 'friend', as appropriate to their needs.

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

10. A student is academically engaged if they comply with the academic requirements stated in the University's [Statement of learner responsibilities \(Foundation, UG and PGT\)](#), in particular those requirements relating to engagement with the Academic Tutor System, attendance and participation in academic classes, and submission of coursework, or for PGR students, if they comply with the [Code of Practice on Research Students](#)
11. Those students engaged in apprenticeship programmes should refer to the responsibilities as stated in their Learner Commitment Statement and must ensure that they engage with their on-the-job training opportunities in addition to the academic programme.

12. 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.
13. Foundation, UG and PGT students may present themselves as not fit to study through submission of an Exceptional Circumstances or Programme Suspension Request form, and PGR students may present themselves as not fit to study through submission to the Doctoral Research Office (via their School/Department) of a completed *Request for Suspension* form. Alternatively, a cause for concern may be raised by any third party, such as other students, academic or administrative staff, to the School Director of Academic Tutoring or the School Director of Teaching and Learning, or the School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies in the case of a PGR student.
14. 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 Exceptional Circumstances claims or requests for suspension of studies.
15. 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 [Referral Flowchart](#).

Stage 1 – School Review

16. 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:
- The student should be encouraged to speak to their Academic Tutor, Supervisor, 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 and the student be referred to DAS.

- Where the student is engaged in an apprenticeship programme, consideration should be given to consultation with the employer, in accordance with the Service Agreement, Learner Commitment Statement and Operational Handbook.
 - The student should be encouraged 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.
 - 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.
17. If, following these initial actions at School level, there are continuing concerns, the student will be invited to attend a meeting with the School/Department Director of Teaching and Learning or School/Department Director of Academic Tutoring, 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. The invitation to the meeting must be sent by email normally five working days before the meeting is due to take place and should outline what needs to be discussed. The student has the right to be accompanied to the meeting by a 'friend' and disabled students may be accompanied by a support worker as appropriate to their needs.
18. An action plan will be drawn up between the student and the School/Department, 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.
19. The meeting is to be minuted and agreed outcomes should be drawn up and a copy sent to the student normally within ten 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 referred to the appropriate Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor at Stage 2. A copy should be placed on the student's file.
20. If appropriate, the submission of an Exceptional Circumstances request (Foundation, UG and PGT only), the possibility of suspension, 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 on and procedures for](#)

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

21. 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. The University reserves the right to move straight to Stage 2 where the students' health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others.
22. A review of the case, led by a relevant Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor, will be undertaken by relevant concerned parties, examples of which might include one or more of the following:
 - A member of the Counselling and Wellbeing service
 - A student welfare officer
 - The School/Department Director of Academic Tutoring, or the School/Department Director of Postgraduate Research Studies and Head of School in the case of PGR students
 - The Director of Student Services
 - The Hall Warden
 - The Disability Advisory Service
 - The student's Academic Tutor, or Supervisor in the case of PGR students
 - A Student Advice and Support Manager, or the Head of the Doctoral Research Office in the case of PGR students
 - An employer representative in the case of apprenticeship students
23. The Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor 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 Counselling and Wellbeing Services and/or the Head of the Disability Advisory Service 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.
24. 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. The student has the right to be accompanied by a 'friend' to the meeting and disabled students may also be accompanied by a support worker as appropriate to their needs.
25. 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 informed in writing of the decision and

receive a copy of the minutes of the meeting. A Case Review report will be written and submitted to the Secretary of the Committee.

26. 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 Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor.
27. 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

28. 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.
29. The membership of the Committee will comprise:
 - A Pro-Vice-Chancellor or the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor;
 - An Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor not already involved in the case;
 - 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;
 - A Student Officer from Reading Students' Union (RSU);
 - 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.
30. 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.
31. 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.

32. 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 of the hearing, keep a record of the proceedings and of evidence given to the Committee.
33. The Committee may choose to consult others as appropriate.
34. The detailed [Procedures of the Standing Committee](#) are available in the Guide to Policies and Procedures for Teaching and Learning.
35. The Committee may determine that:
- a) The student's fitness to study is not substantially impaired, that they have demonstrated a sufficient level of academic engagement and that they may continue their studies, or;
 - b) The student's fitness to study is impaired and/or their level of academic engagement has not been sufficient.

In determining (b), the burden of proof rests with the University. The student is assumed to be sufficiently academically engaged and fit to study unless it can be proved otherwise.

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 and/or they have not demonstrated a sufficient level of academic engagement.

36. In the case of 35. 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 and academic engagement of the student should be monitored as normal.
37. In the case of 35. b) the Committee will determine an appropriate and proportionate action considering 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 of engagement might be addressed and, if applicable, any mitigating circumstances accepted. Actions may include any of the following alone or in combination:
- 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:
 - Close supervision by the School;
 - Engagement with an appropriate medical or mental health professional;
 - Engagement with a University Study Advice Team 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 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;
 - Termination of current course and removal from membership of the University, but retaining eligibility to receive any lesser award if applicable;
 - Termination of current course and removal from membership of the University.
38. The outcome letter and a copy of the minutes of the hearing 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 decision 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.
39. 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.
40. 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 and the case may be considered by Chairs Action rather than convening a further full Stage 3 meeting with the student.
41. Failure to accept the conditions or submit an appeal within five working days will result in the case being referred back to the Committee for further consideration and a decision made, usually by Chair's Action.

Appeals process

42. 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 Student Appeals Committee shall have the authority either to overturn or uphold the decision of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study.
43. The student should submit to studentappeals@reading.ac.uk their request for a review and the basis for that request in writing within five working days of the date of issue of the formal notification of the decision of the Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study.
44. The student must identify and demonstrate with evidence one or more of the following admissible grounds for appeal:
- There has been a procedural error; or
 - New and relevant evidence is available that was not known at the time; or

- The decision-making Committee acted unreasonably, or the impact of the sanction imposed was unreasonably disproportionate.
45. The Head of Governance (or their nominee) will consider the grounds for appeal and the evidence provided and decide whether they meet the stated grounds and whether the request has been received within the time limits set. If the Head of Governance decides that the appeal has not been received within the required time limits or that the grounds for appeal submitted do not meet the grounds required under this Procedure, then the student should receive in writing within 5 working days of receipt, notification that the appeal has been rejected as ineligible, setting out the reasons for that decision and notifying them that the original decision appealed against will stand.
 46. There is no right of appeal against the decision made by the Head of Governance and a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued stating the decision not to uphold the appeal, and the reasoning.
 47. If the request for appeal is accepted by the Head of Governance, then it will be acknowledged within 5 working days and the student will be notified of its referral to the Student Appeals Committee.
 48. 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.
 49. Where the appeal is upheld 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/Department Director of Academic Tutoring or School/Department Director of Teaching and Learning or their delegate, the School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies/Head of School or their delegate, and the relevant Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor of the decision.
 50. The Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study will reconvene to hear 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 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.
 51. 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/Department Director of Academic Tutoring or School/Department Director of Teaching and Learning or their delegate, the School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies/Head of School or their delegate, and the relevant 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

49. 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, [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.

50. 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.