
Support to Study Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

The University of Sunderland is committed to an ethos of equality and inclusivity. We aim to facilitate and promote positive and inclusive health and wellbeing through the recognition and understanding of all relevant health conditions and disabilities. This is essential to our wider strategic agenda to provide a transformative experience for our students, working in collaboration with a shared vision of success.

Where necessary, the University encourages all students to seek help and support from the appropriate service(s) at the earliest possible opportunity.

This procedure has been developed in response to an increasing occurrence of ill health (including mental health difficulties, psychological, personality or emotional disorders) experienced by students in Higher Education Institutions. The aim is to sustain the academic progression and wellbeing of students in a supportive environment, whilst being mindful of the need for all staff and students to be / feel safe.

Whilst this policy is intended to complement the [Fitness to Practise Policy](#) by supporting students to manage their health and wellbeing, the Fitness to Practise policy takes precedence for students on professionally recognised programmes.

This document is designed for members of staff, to offer an alternative pathway to the standard referral to Student Wellbeing.

This procedure can be used by any member of staff who has concerns about a student's health, safety and mental wellbeing. This can include personal tutors, programme leaders, module leaders and professional services staff.

Students who express concerns about another student should raise this with a member of staff or appropriate person such as an academic tutor, member of Student's Union, Residential Adviser, Student Rep or the Student Wellbeing team. The student expressing concern would not be required to manage the situation themselves, the staff member (who the student has reported concerns to) will be expected to move the issue forward either individually or by appropriate referral.

A cause for concern does not necessarily indicate that all stages outlined in this document will be required.

2. DEFINITION, SCOPE AND PURPOSE

2.1 The University defines “Fitness for Study” as the ability to participate appropriately as a student in study and as a member of the University community.

2.2 The University is committed to supporting all students to fulfill their potential. Occasionally a student’s circumstances or health may impact upon their own, or others’ ability to fulfill that potential. **The University expects its students to be able to live and work with others and to conduct themselves in ways which do not have an adverse impact on other members of the University and the local community.** This policy and the accompanying procedures are designed to outline the processes that the University will follow in instances where this ability is in doubt and/or associated levels of risk are unacceptable. This may be as a result of a student’s extended absence, health condition, wellbeing concern or other circumstances that lead to an inability to progress in their programme, or that adversely affect others.

The Support to Study Policy has a primary focus on supporting a student to engage with and remain in both study and at University.

The Support to Study Policy procedure is staged and progressive. In some circumstances it may be judged appropriate to initiate the policy at any of these stages depending on the level and type of concerns raised. It is not intended that the procedure should always or only be strictly sequential.

2.3 This policy relates specifically to student behaviours which may be related to a health condition and/or disability. When they are not, the [Student Disciplinary procedure](#) will apply.

2.4 In an emergency situation where it is believed that a student’s health or wellbeing condition presents an immediate risk to themselves or others, the appropriate Emergency Services should be contacted and the Deputy Director / Director of Student Journey or nominee, should be notified as soon as possible. For the University of Sunderland in London (UoSIL) this should be the Director of UoSIL or a member of the Senior Management Team.

See ‘When to Refer’ for further information about dealing with emergencies.

For UoS staff

<https://sj.sunderland.ac.uk/gateway/whentorefer/staff/>

London Campus staff

<https://services.sunderland.ac.uk/gateway/whentorefer/london/>

2.5. If a member of academic staff has more general concerns about appropriate response to student behaviours in learning and teaching settings they should contact their Human Resources Business Partner for guidance and support. <https://services.sunderland.ac.uk/hr/contacts/whotocontact/>

3. Criteria

Concerns about a student's "fitness to study" may occur for many reasons and due to a range of circumstances. These include (but are not restricted to) the following:

- Social isolation/significant withdrawal from others.
- A sudden deterioration in academic performance or motivation.
- Significant non-attendance or engagement.
- Repeated applications for Extenuating Circumstances.
- Psychological symptoms or repeated inappropriate emotional outbursts.
- Inappropriate behaviour, for example inappropriate touching, invading personal space, postings on social media
- Obvious signs of substance or alcohol misuse.
- A suicide attempt.
- Serious self-harming behaviours.
- Aggressive, suspicious or paranoid behaviour.
- Extreme mood swings.
- A student's declaration to a member of staff that he or she has a problem and has provided details that indicate a need to consider his or her fitness to study.
- Repeated patterns of unacceptable behaviour.
- Significant lack of self-awareness.
- The student's academic performance, attendance and/or behaviour considered not satisfactory/acceptable and thought to be a result of a physical condition or mental health difficulty.

Stages in the process

Stage 1- Initial concern is raised

Informal Procedure

- a. Initial concerns about a student's health, safety or mental wellbeing are raised. The member of staff will arrange to speak to the student. Concerns will be discussed in an understanding manner with the student and where possible resolved.
- b. If following discussion with the student, concerns are resolved; no further action will be taken.
- c. Should concerns be continued and/or issues can't be resolved then the staff member should explain that, due to concerns about the student's Fitness to

Study, it will be necessary for the matter to be passed to the Wellbeing Team in Sunderland or London who will contact the student to arrange a further meeting. It should be made clear to the student that the purpose of involving the Wellbeing Team is to ensure that the student is offered appropriate support and is not intended to be a punishment or sanction.

- d. Staff member will complete Support to Study – Follow up form (Appendix 1)

Stage 2 - Continuing or significant concerns

Continuing or significant concerns occur when an individual student's health, safety or mental wellbeing is raised and cannot or is considered inappropriate to be addressed via stage 1.

Stage 2 will be carried out by Wellbeing service in Sunderland or London. The Wellbeing Team will work collaboratively with the student, the Faculty and other relevant services.

If the action undertaken in stage 1 has not resolved the concern, or it is felt the case is too serious to be handled informally, stage 2 (or exceptionally stage 3) of the procedure may be initiated.

- a. The student will be asked to meet with a member of the Wellbeing Team to discuss the concerns raised. This should ideally be within 5 working days of the decision to move to stage 2 of the procedure. (Appendix 2 – Standardised Support to Study email)

The student will be informed that engaging with stage 2 of the procedure is mandatory and refusal to engage may result in further escalation to stage 3.

The purpose of the meeting will be to ascertain the student's perception of the issues that have been identified including the impact which their ill health and/or behaviour is having upon them and/or the University community.

The student should be informed of the purpose of the meeting and be advised of any documents they may be required to bring. The student may be accompanied by someone to this meeting for example a member of the Student's Union or a close friend / family member.

Disabled students may also be accompanied by a support worker (e.g. sign language interpreter or MH worker).

Wellbeing staff will consider the concern raised in the Support to Study follow up form (Appendix 1) and any other information provided by the student and confirm whether concerns are resolved or ongoing.

During the meeting, if concerns are not resolved, a mutually agreed action plan will be devised to put all appropriate support in place for the student and formally agree expectations for the student to observe. In cases where academic adjustments are required, the Wellbeing Adviser or appropriate Disability Adviser will be consulted. (Appendix 3. Support to Study – Agreed Action plan)

This action plan will have a specific review date and the consequences of not keeping to the agreed action plan must be clearly outlined to the student. This may involve moving to stage 3 of the procedure where a number of further support options and including LOA or a possible suspension may be considered depending on individual circumstance.

If the action plan cannot be agreed, or the concern is so significant that an action plan is inappropriate then the procedure will move to stage 3.

A report of the meeting and its outcomes will be recorded by the Wellbeing Team and a copy of the agreed action plan will be submitted to the student's Programme Leader. For London this will be the Programme Manager. The student will also receive a copy.

The Programme Leader or Programme Manager for London will disseminate this to the relevant staff in the school on a strict "need to know" basis.

The student should be informed that if the concern continues or any additional cause of concern arises or student fails to engage with action plan, this could result in their fitness to study being further considered by moving to stage 3.

Stage 3 – Serious or persistent concerns

Serious or persistent concerns are raised about an individual student's actions or behaviour that are putting the health, safety, wellbeing or academic process of them or other members of the University community, or the effective operation of the University, at significant risk.

The Deputy Director of Student Journey or Head of Services for Students (UoSiL) will be informed that stage 3 needs to be invoked and a case conference group will be set in motion.

Case conference attendees may include academic or professional services staff as necessary and appropriate. Membership of the group may involve members of the University Incident Group as/if appropriate to the concerns. University professional services staff in attendance will act in an advisory capacity and not as advocates for the student.

Further to the case conference, the student will normally be invited to attend a follow up Support Review meeting with members of the Case Conference. The student may choose to be accompanied by a member of the Student's Union or a close friend / family member. This meeting will discuss the outcomes of the Case Conference and review next steps.

The case conference will be an evidence based process, assessing risk to self and others and drawing upon expert professional judgment, where appropriate.

Appropriate medical evidence may include a letter from the student's GP or a report from a Clinical Psychologist or Psychiatrist. The University reserves the right to make decisions based on the full information available in each case and is not obliged to act upon the specific opinions or recommendations of any professional.

At this time the student may or may not be considered fit to study at the University of Sunderland or University of Sunderland in London.

Various options will be considered in relation to the student including:

- Additional support strategies.
- A change in the mode of study
- Interruption from study (Leave of Absence)
- Or a recommendation to the VC that the student be suspended or withdrawn

from the University. (See Stage 4)

The students will be informed of the decision within 10 working days.

Stage 4: Suspension or withdrawal

There may come a point when it is apparent that in the interests of the student's own health and welfare, or those of other students and staff, it is not appropriate for the student to continue with their studies. This Stage is intended to manage such situations where it is necessary to exclude a student from study on health grounds.

Such exclusions will operate until either the University can be satisfied that the risk or issue which prompted the exclusion is not likely to recur throughout the rest of the student's study following their return, or a decision is made that this is not achievable within a reasonable timeframe, and that therefore withdrawal from the programme is necessary.

Such a decision may be made where the case has been escalated via Stage 3 above, or where a senior member of University staff deems there to be urgent enough concern of Significant Risk. Where possible a case conference of appropriate professional services/academic staff should be held to consider recommending suspension or withdrawal as detailed in Stage 3 (if one has not already taken place). In serious, immediate and urgent circumstances such a recommendation can be made by a member of the senior team in Academic Registry or Senior Management Team in London; in such circumstance, a case conference should be held to review that decision as soon as is practicable.

Following the case conference and any subsequent follow-up with the student, there can, depending on the individual circumstance and identified risks, be a 5 day "time out" to allow for further review and collection of any further information before any suspension is agreed and issued.

A recommendation is made to a member of the University Executive, who will make the decision on whether to suspend or withdraw the student. If suspension is recommended the Deputy Vice-Chancellor will consider this advice, and convey their decision to the student in writing. The letter of suspension will make reference to these Regulations, to the conditions of the suspension, to support available during the suspension, to arrangements for any return and to the student's right of appeal.

The maximum period of suspension will be for one academic year, with the suspension reviewed after the first four weeks, and after that as appropriate but no less than once every six months. The suspension may be renewed for a maximum of one further academic year. If this renewal is not deemed appropriate, or the end of the second year is reached, the student should be withdrawn from the University on health grounds. Any withdrawal issue will be communicated in writing.

Where new information is received that is judged by the University to be material to the suspension, a case conference can be called at anytime.

Appeals

A student has the right to appeal a suspension or withdrawal decision on one or more of

the following grounds:

- that there has been material procedural irregularity in arriving at the decision;
- that the decision is materially factually incorrect;
- that there are further material circumstances not known at the time the decision was reached and which have a significant bearing on that decision;

An appeal will be heard by an Appeals Panel consisting of a member of the University Executive who did not make the original decision (who will Chair the Panel), a member of senior staff of the University with no prior involvement in the case, and a President of the Students' Union. The Student Casework Manager in Academic Registry will act as officer to this Panel.

The student must have ten working days' notice of the date of the Appeals Panel hearing, and may attend and be accompanied or represented by another member of the University community (current member of staff, student, or member of the Student Union either elected or staff), or choose not to attend but be represented by another member of the University community. The student will be given copies of the evidence which the Appeals Panel will use to make its determination a minimum of five working days before the date of the Appeals Panel, unless otherwise mutually agreed, and may submit his or her own evidence, in writing to the Officer of the Panel, for the Panel to consider.

The Chair will inform the student of his or her decision in writing within three working days. At this point the University processes are concluded, and the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter which will entitle him or her to take a case with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE if not satisfied with the outcome of the review.

Return to Study

Following any period of interruption from the University under these procedures it may be appropriate for the student to return to resume their studies.

Where an interruption of studies was voluntary, the Wellbeing Team in Sunderland and London will be informed of a student's return to study via Programme Support Officers in Sunderland and Student Administration Team Leaders in London who will contact the student 6 weeks before they return to 'check in' with a formal appointment on return to study. (See Appendix 4 - Fitness to Study – Returning to Study)

Each student's case depends on the specific circumstances but in all cases, return to study will be conditional upon satisfactory evidence of Fitness to Study.

Evidence provided for this purpose could be from a registered Health Practitioner or designated member of the Wellbeing Team with enough knowledge of the student's circumstances to be able to make an informed statement about the student's Fitness to Study.

The University reserves the right not to permit a return to study if the evidence provided is deemed insufficient to mitigate any perceived remaining risk.

The decision to permit a student to return to study will be made by the Dean of Faculty or nominee in consultation with the Deputy Director of Student Journey. Specific conditions may be imposed as deemed appropriate to the relevant case such as a return to study plan. In London the decision to permit a student to return will be made by Head of Academic Operations in consultation with the Head of Services for Students and

Marketing. This return will also be monitored by the Wellbeing Team.

Any decision about a return by students who were suspended from the University will be made by a member of the University Executive, with advice from the Student Casework Manager or nominee and/or Deputy Director of Student Journey who will in turn be advised by the Wellbeing Team. For London this will be the Head of Services for Student and Marketing.

ADMIN ONLY:F2S

Date Received.....
Initial appointment.....

Date Allocated.....

Ongoing work if required

**STUDENT WELLBEING
Request to follow up**

Name:	Student number:
Date of Birth:	Nationality:
Gender:	
Preferred telephone No. Can we leave a message yes / no	Preferred E-Mail address:

Academic Details

Faculty	Health, Sciences & Wellbeing / Education & Society / Business, Law, Tourism / Arts & Creative Industries / Engineering & Adv. Manufacturing / Computer Science. London Campus
Year of study	0, 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , research
Course	

Request made by:

Name of referrer:

Please provide the reason for request to follow up:

Wellbeing Service

Standardised email relating to stage 2 – Support to Study

Sent within 5 working days of decision to move to stage 2

Dear student,

We are writing to you today as we are aware / have been made aware (*delete as appropriate*) of continuing and / or concerns relating to your health / safety / wellbeing (*delete as appropriate*).

An appointment has been made for you to meet with our Wellbeing Adviser onat (*include date /time*)

The purpose of our meeting is to ascertain your perspective relating to particular concerns raised, which may include the impact of your wellbeing upon yourself / or the University community (*delete as appropriate*)

You may wish to be accompanied to this meeting by someone in a supportive capacity for example a close friend / family member or a member of your Student's Union. *Advise of any documentation if relevant.*

Please be aware that engagement with the Wellbeing Team and appropriate support under the University's Support for Study policy is mandatory. Please be aware that if you choose not to engage with this support this may result in progression to stage 3 of the Support to Study policy

If for any reason you are unable to attend this given time, please can you contact us wellbeing@sunderland.ac.uk as soon as possible so we can rearrange for a more suitable time.

With kind regards,

.....

Wellbeing Team

Wellbeing Service

Support to Study – Agreed Action Plan

Support Action Plan	
Name of student:	Student number:
Course:	Year of Study:
Name of Wellbeing worker:	Staff title:

Issues raised:	
Agreed expectations:	
Any academic adjustments required: (in liaison with DST)	
Does this action plan need to be shared with any other service? (if so, authorisation to release form required)	Explain:
Date of Meeting:
Date of Review:

Wellbeing Service

Support to Study – Agreed Action Plan

Please tick if you agree:	
I am aware of the implications of not keeping to this agreed Wellbeing action plan	
I am aware that failure to adhere to my plan may result in a movement to stage 3 as outlined (<i>add policy link</i>)	
I am aware that a report of this meeting will be recorded and securely stored on the Wellbeing database	
I am aware that a copy of the agreed action plan will be submitted to my Programme Leader.	
I am aware that if the concern continues or any additional cause of concern arises, this could result in my Fitness to Study being further considered by moving to stage3.	

Signature of student:

Signature of Wellbeing worker:

STUDENT WELLBEING	
Return to Study	
Name:	Student Number:

Academic Details

Faculty	Health, Sciences & Wellbeing / Education & Society / Business, Law, Tourism / Arts & Creative Industries / Engineering & Adv. Manufacturing / Computer Science. London Campus
Year of study	0, 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , research
Course	

Fitness to Study

What was planned:	
What action took place:	
External support accessed. Attached documentation if deemed appropriate	
Current support requirements:	
Known current risk factors:	
In the opinion of Wellbeing, is the student deemed Fit to Study?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Name of Wellbeing Worker:	