

Support to Study Policy

1. Introduction

SOAS is committed to supporting students and recognises the importance of good health and wellbeing in relation to academic engagement and wider university experience.

SOAS recognises that the use of any formal procedure may cause stress, particularly if the role and purpose of the procedure is not understood. In order to minimise the risk of causing additional stress, the procedure should be used sensitively, ensuring that any student subject to the procedure understands the focus is on their best interests, and that steps are taken to minimise additional concerns and anxieties experienced by the student.

Stakeholders: Registry; Student Advice and Wellbeing; Academic Services; Heads of Department; Associate Director (Student Welfare); Student.

Scope and purpose

The Support to Study Procedure is intended as a supportive and protective procedure which can be used when a student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour has a detrimental impact on their ability to progress academically and function at university. It is intended to ensure that students who cause concern can expect a considered and consistent response.

This procedure should be used with any student whose ability to manage university life, to study or progress on their course is significantly compromised as the result of their health, wellbeing or a disability and where intervention beyond normal support mechanisms is deemed necessary and/or where the student has not engaged with support mechanisms offered. It may also be used where the student's behaviour is adversely affecting the activities of the University or a placement provider and/or the teaching, learning and/or experience of other students.

Where a student is perceived to pose a risk to their own (or others') health, safety or wellbeing the priority will be to follow the [crisis intervention procedure](#) first. Following which it may be appropriate to initiate this policy.

The procedure may be used for all levels and modes of study:

The procedure aims to ensure that:

- Staff from Departments and Professional Services work together so students experience a consistent and fair process.
- The best interests of the student are considered in relation to their personal situation, their health, wellbeing and/or any disability they may experience.
- Students are supported to study to the best of their ability, and wherever possible to meet the required learning outcomes and complete their course.
- Students who are experiencing difficulties in relation to their health, wellbeing and/or disability are supported to address their difficulties at the earliest appropriate point.
- Students are able to make informed decisions regarding options available.
- Any reasonable adjustments that the student may be entitled to are considered and put in place where appropriate.

How the procedure should be used

Concerns should be acted on promptly as early intervention and support can result in better outcomes for the student.

The procedure may be initiated by anyone with regular contact with the student concerned. If staff are unsure about whether to implement this procedure, they should seek advice and discuss their concerns

with the Department Manager.

Monitoring

It will be the responsibility of the Support to Study Panel to monitor the effectiveness of this policy/procedure by:

- assessing the nature and frequency of cases and identifying any patterns which need to be addressed;
- monitoring individual complaints or cases to ensure that they are effectively resolved.

2. Summary of Stages

(a) Stage 1: Initial Cause for Concern

1. Identifying the concern
2. Approaching the student
3. Informal meeting with student with agreed action points. Most students should not progress past stage 1

(b) Stage 2: Continuing cause for concern

1. More formal meeting with agreed outcomes that student must meet by specified dates.
2. Student given opportunity to decide to suspend studies prior to escalation to panel.

(c) Stage 3: Fitness to Study Panel

1. Formal decision about the student's fitness to study
2. Supporting evidence required about student's fitness to study
3. Panel may decide to suspend or withdraw student from their studies
4. Panel may decide how long the period of suspension should be

(d) Appeal

A student is entitled to submit an Appeal on one or both of the following grounds:

1. The School failed to correctly follow its own procedure.
2. The student has significant new information or evidence which was not reasonably available at an earlier time.

When submitting an Appeal, the student must provide associated evidence/information in support of the ground(s) on which the Appeal is being made.

(e) Return to Study

1. Student contacted 8 weeks prior to return to provide evidence of fitness to return to study
2. Decision made by Panel and next steps communicated to student.

3. Detail of Procedure

For any early initial concern - where a staff member feels a student may not be managing their studies, and that it may relate to health problems they should first follow '[Helping students to succeed guidance](#)' and/or [Student Continuation Policy](#). This policy would be initiated after these processes have been followed.

Stage 1 Initial Cause for Concern

1. A concern has been identified and not resolved through usual process of support (Where the student has already had intervention through the [School Continuation Policy](#) Stage 1 and/or 2 may be bypassed)
2. Student is told they are being referred to the Support to Study procedure.
3. Student is sent a copy of this document and invited to a meeting to discuss the concerns.
4. Action points are agreed and documented by the department student support officer and sent to all present at the meeting.
5. Students on a language year abroad, summer abroad or research field work may be offered this meeting via video call.
6. Agree with student what will happen next if they don't meet action points by a designated time.
7. Follow up meeting scheduled.

Present at meeting: Programme convenor/supervisor, student, student support officer, disability advisor (where a student has a SIP or has disclosed a disability as part of the process)

Stage 2 Continuing Cause for Concern

1. Student has not responded to all the agreed actions at stage 1 and concern continues. This stage may be bypassed when student has already has significant intervention through the Student Continuation Policy or where the situation is so severe that immediate action at stage 3 is required.
2. Student is told in writing (email or letter) they are now at Stage 2 of the Support to Study Procedure.
3. Student is invited to a meeting to review why the action points at stage 1 have not been completed.
4. Student is given option of interrupting their study if the department feels the student is unlikely to be able to demonstrate their academic ability even with adjustments and support (Additional information from the Student Advice team may be needed for international students on a visa, or students with scholarships/bursaries, research grants, and students living in halls of residence).
5. Implications of interrupting their study should be outlined to the student. This may need further liaison with professional services not present in the meeting. A return date is agreed and the student is referred to the Return to Study Process.
6. Implications of not interrupting their study should also be outlined to the student, for example being referred to the Fitness to Study Panel, where the panel has the authority to suspend or withdraw a student.
7. The department may feel that the student is able to continue with additional support in which case the action plan may be revised and new deadlines agreed and a further meeting is scheduled at stage 2.

Present at meeting: Head of Department (or nominee such as Learning and Teaching co-ordinator); Programme Convenor/Supervisor; Student; Senior Counsellor/Disability co-ordinator; SU representation or advocate if requested by the student. Specialist knowledge may be sought from Registry, SAaW, or other relevant services in advance of the meeting.

Stage 3 Fitness to Study Panel (Severe or persistent concern)

1. Student has not responded to agreed action and concern continues, student does not agree to meeting at Stage 2 or the concern is so severe that immediate action at Stage 3 is required.
2. Student is informed in writing that they have been referred to the Fitness to Study Panel, and the implications of this. Student informed that the meeting will take place even in their absence.

3. Student asked to provide information at least 5 days in advance of the meeting. This may be medical information, a statement about how they are managing their health and wellbeing in order to study, evidence of personal problems or anything they think is appropriate. Student should be told who will have access to this information and how long it will be kept.
4. Department asked to submit written information about actions taken at stage 1 and 2 of Support to Study Policy, Continuation of Study Policy, or why they are referring directly to stage 3 Fitness to Study Panel. This may include information from other departments, professional services, or external organisations such as halls of residence, emergency services.
5. The panel is able to make recommendations that may include; interruption of studies, suspension of regulations, further reasonable adjustments, withdrawal from studies
6. The student encouraged to bring someone appropriate to support them. They are asked to inform the panel 5 working days before the meeting who will be in attendance and whether they are acting in a professional capacity or as support.
7. Where a student has their studies interrupted a return date is agreed and the student will be referred to the return to study process.

Panel membership: Associate Director of Student Welfare (Chair); Head of Department; Head of SAaW; Academic registrar.

Attendees: Student; Student may bring friend or family member, or relevant medical professional, SU caseworker or advocacy service should be highlighted to the student as additional people who can be present.

Student asked to attend meeting and informed the meeting will take place even if they are absent.

Appeal

A student is entitled to submit an Appeal on one or both of the following grounds:

- The School failed to correctly follow its own Procedure.
- The student has significant new information or evidence which was not reasonably available at an earlier time.

When submitting an Appeal, the student must provide associated evidence/information in support of the ground(s) on which the Appeal is being made. The Appeal will be reviewed by the Chair of the Fitness to Study Panel.

Appeal Officer: Associate Director of Student Welfare

1. The appeal should be considered within five working days of its receipt
2. The Appeal Officer has the power to decide whether the original outcome decision should stand, be revoked or be amended.
3. If the Appeal Officer decides to amend the original decision, they have the power to vary the nature and extent of any obligations imposed on the student by that original decision.
4. The outcome of the Appeal will be notified to the student in writing together with reasons within ten working days of determination of the Appeal.
5. The decision of the Appeal Officer/Panel is final.

6. The written notification of the Appeal outcome will also represent a formal “Completion of Procedures” and will provide information on the student’s right to seek independent external review

Return to Study Process

Any student who has suspended study via Support to Study process should return via this process. Any student who has suspended studies on health grounds, may benefit from returning under this process.

1. The student is contacted at least 8 weeks before their return date by their department.
2. They are asked to provide a written statement of their fitness to return to study under the following areas:
 - a) What actions they have taken to ensure previous concerns have been resolved.
 - b) Evidence that they are well enough to live and work in a university environment.
 - c) Evidence that studying will not be detrimental to their health or wellbeing.
3. They should be asked to supply supporting evidence from an appropriate third party about their fitness to return to study under the following areas:
 - a) What actions they have taken to ensure previous concerns have been resolved.
 - b) Evidence that they are well enough to live and work in a university environment.
 - c) Evidence that studying will not be detrimental to their health or wellbeing.
4. The evidence is reviewed by the Head of Student Advice and Wellbeing on behalf of the Panel and the following actions may be taken.
 - a) a recommendation that the Panel extends the period of interruption or suspension
 - b) a recommendation that the student returns to study with an action plan with review date
 - c) a recommendation that the student returns to study with no further actions needed
 - d) a request for further information from medical professionals
 - e) a request for an in-person meeting with the student, or where appropriate a video call.
4. Where a student then returns to study, they have a review meeting within the first two weeks with a member of SAaW and an appropriate member of their department.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Referrer to Support to Study	Can be referred by any SOAS staff member who has concerns
Student	Is expected to engage with process, attend meetings where invited, and keep staff updated about their progress
Academic Advisor	Involved in stage 1, and return to study stage, provides pastoral and academic support in initial stages and may refer student to policy in first instance
Programme Convenor / Supervisor	Involved in stage 1 and 2 and provides information to student about expectations, academic progress, and agrees appropriate goals in action plan
Student Support Officer	Invites student to meetings, minutes meetings in Stage 1 and 2 and send to attendees.
Registry	Informs staff in all stages about regulations that impact on decision making. Processes any change in student status. Involved in Fitness to Study Panel
Head of SAaW	Involved in Stage 3 and Return to Study stages. Provides specialist understanding of Support services available to student and link to support in SAaW
Disability Advisor/Mental Health Advisor	Where a student has a SIP or has disclosed a disability can advise on any disability related support for studies and reasonable adjustments available. Can be involved in stage 1,2 and return to study and may input into decision making at Fitness to Study Panel stage 3.
SU Caseworker	Student is informed of role of SU Caseworker and encouraged to access support and advice where needed. May attend meeting as support to student. Not involved in decision making.
Head of Department / Head of Doctoral School (where appropriate)/ Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator (where nominated by Head of	Involved in Stage 2 and Fitness to Study Panel

Department)	
Associate Director of Student Welfare	Chair of Fitness to Study Panel, Appeal Officer
Specialist Advice	May be sought at any stage when decision impacts on student's finances, accommodation, immigration, study abroad, research funding, safety
Halls of Residence	When concerns relate to behaviour in nominated partners halls of residence
Doctoral School manager	In place of department student support officer where appropriate

Document Version

Valid from	Author	Changes	Published
2015/16	Alison Barty, Head of Student Advice and Wellbeing	---	September 2015
2018/19	Rebecca Harrison, Academic Registrar	Terminology updates in line with restructuring. Clarification of applicability. Clarification of appeals stage. Approved by LTQC 03.05.2018.	
2018/19	Lydia Pell, Head of Student Advice and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Change in title from Fitness to Study to Support to Study- The policy has been simplified and aligned with the new Continuation policy.- Inclusion of a chapter outlining Return to Study- Roles and Responsibilities have been outlined- There is a clear centralised panel stage that will be chaired by the Assoc. Director for Student Welfare as Chair.- The Head of Student Advice and Wellbeing is only involved at the Panel stage, this increases impartiality, and brings support staff into the process who are likely to be providing the regular support to a student.	September 2019