

Fitness to Study Policy

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Scope and purpose	3
3. Exceptions.....	4
4. Referral to process and invitation to meeting	4
5. Panel membership	5
6. Outcomes available.....	5
7. Invitation to a meeting	6
8. Appeal.....	6

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy is intended to be used in circumstances where concerns are raised about a taught (Foundation, Undergraduate or Postgraduate Taught) student's fitness to study, i.e., their ability to engage or re-engage with their studies. This may include serious concerns about:
 - a) Their wellbeing and personal circumstances.
 - b) Their ability to meet the academic requirements of their programme.
 - c) Their engagement with any support that has previously been put in place.
 - d) Their behaviour towards other students or staff.
- 1.2 Concerns relating to Postgraduate Research Students will not be considered under Fitness to Study, but instead under either the Student Engagement Policy for Postgraduate Research Students or the Withdrawal Policy for Research Degrees.
- 1.3 It is acknowledged that during the Support to Study process, sensitive data may be shared. This data will be handled in line with SOAS's Data Protection Policy, related notices and procedures. In cases where there are serious concerns about a student's risk to themselves or others, staff may notify third parties. Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.
- 1.4 The following SOAS policies, plans and procedures are related to this policy:
 - a) Taught Degree Regulations
 - b) Support to Study Policy
 - c) Student Engagement Policies (Foundation, UG and PG Taught)
 - d) Student Disciplinary Procedure
 - e) Suspension of Regulations Policy
 - f) Academic Appeals Procedure
 - g) SOAS Safeguarding Policy
 - h) Mitigating Circumstances Policy

2. Scope and purpose

- 2.1 Fitness to Study is to be used for urgent assessment of a taught student's ability to continue with their studies.
- 2.2 The policy aims to ensure that:
 - a) Students who are experiencing difficult personal circumstances are supported, wherever possible, to meet the required learning outcomes and complete their degree.
 - b) The best interests of the student are considered in relation to their personal circumstances.
 - c) Students can make informed decisions regarding options available.
 - d) Where it is determined that it is not possible for a student to remain on their degree programme, decisions are taken consistently and fairly.

- 2.3 Serious circumstances which could lead to a referral to the Fitness to Study process include, but are not limited to:
- a) Health concerns, including mental health.
 - b) Unsafe living environment.
 - c) Risk of financial destitution or homelessness.
 - d) Ongoing, long-term conflict or humanitarian crisis.
 - e) Ongoing effects of a serious disruption to the student's life e.g., following a crime.

3. Exceptions

- 3.1 Fitness to Study is not to be used for circumstances which solely relate to the impact of any student on other members of the SOAS community – the Student Disciplinary Procedure should be used in these cases. Where there are also concerns about a student's ability to engage with their studies due to their own personal circumstances, this can be referred to the Fitness to Study Policy.

4. Referral to process and invitation to meeting

- 4.1 Students will be referred to Fitness to Study to assess whether any immediate action needs to be taken if:
- a) They are experiencing new serious circumstances which have not yet stabilised or for which they are not in receipt of internal or external support.
 - b) Intervention through Support to Study has failed to lead to improvements in the student's ability to engage in their studies effectively.
 - c) Following the completion of the Engagement Policy processes, they have not re-engaged.
 - d) Serious concerns are raised about a student which cannot be resolved through other policies and procedures.
- 4.2 The student will be informed in writing at least 7 working days in advance that they have been referred to the Fitness to Study Panel, invited to attend, and advised of the potential outcomes.
- 4.3 The student will be informed that the meeting will take place even in their absence.
- 4.4 The student will be notified that they can bring one person to the meeting with them, either for personal support or in a professional category.
- a) Personal support may include a friend, relative or mentor, and in this case the person will be able to observe but not speak on behalf of the student.
 - b) Professional support may include a caseworker from the Students' Union or advocacy service, and in this case the person may advise and provide additional relevant information. Legal representation at this meeting is not permitted.
 - c) The student is asked to respond at least 2 working days in advance of the meeting in

order to inform the panel who will be attending, and in what capacity.

- 4.5 The student will be asked to provide information for the panel to consider at least 2 working days in advance of the meeting. This includes any documentation or evidence that details how the student's circumstances are direct or indirect factors in difficulties engaging with their studies. If the student has requested information but will not be able to obtain it until closer to the date of the meeting, they must respond at least 3 working days before the meeting to notify the panel of this.
- 4.6 The referring party will be asked to submit written information about the reason(s) for the referral to Fitness to Study, including any specific concerns and their view of what may happen if there is no intervention.
- 4.7 The student's academic department and any internal services who have had related and relevant contact with the student will be asked to submit written information about any action(s) undertaken to support the student to date.
- 4.8 If there has been relevant contact with any external organisations, such as halls of residence or emergency services, these organisations may be asked to provide information to the panel.

5. Panel membership

- 5.1 Staff attending the panel will include the following (or their nominees):
 - a) Academic Registrar (Chair)
 - b) Head of Department
 - c) Head of Advice & Wellbeing
 - d) Student Visa Compliance Manager (if the student is sponsored under the Tier 4/Student Route)
 - e) A member of the Student Experience, Engagement & Retention Team (acting as secretary)

6. Outcomes available

- 6.1 Outcomes available to the Fitness to Study Panel include:
 - a) Voluntary leave of absence agreed with the student.
 - b) Mandatory leave of absence with return to study at an agreed date.
 - c) Voluntary withdrawal from studies agreed with the student.
 - d) Mandatory withdrawal of the student.
 - e) Further reasonable adjustments or support.
 - f) Conditions for continued study or return to study at a later date.
 - g) Suspension of Regulations.
- 6.2 More than one outcome may be proposed by the panel.
- 6.3 The decision will be confirmed to the student in writing no later than 10 working days after the

conclusion of the panel meeting. The notification will include a reference to the timeline for appeal, should the student wish to do this.

7. Return to Study

7.1 Any student who has undertaken a leave of absence following the Fitness to Study process will be contacted prior to their return to assess and support their readiness to return to study.

7.2 The student will be contacted at least 4 weeks before their return date by their department, copying the Head of Advice & Wellbeing, and will be asked to provide information within 5 working days to help determine their fitness to return to study, including:

- a) Actions they have taken to ensure previous concerns have been resolved.
- b) Any supporting evidence that they are well enough to return to a higher education environment.
- c) Any concerns they have about their readiness to return to study.
- d) If one of the reasons they took a leave of absence was due to medical reasons, evidence from an appropriate medical professional about their progress/that returning to study will not be detrimental to them.

7.3 The evidence will be reviewed by the Head of 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 leave of absence.
- b) A recommendation that the student returns to study with a Support to Study Plan in place, and a date to review progress.
- c) A recommendation that the student returns to study with no further actions needed.
- d) A request for further information from medical professionals or other related third parties.
- e) A request for a meeting with the student.

7.4 Once a student has returned to study, a review meeting should take place within the first two weeks with a member of Student Advice and Wellbeing and an appropriate member of the student's academic department(s).

8. Appeal

8.1 Any student wishing to appeal the outcome of a Fitness to Study Panel must do so under the Student Academic Appeals Procedure. An Appeal would be reviewed at Stage 1 of the Procedure, with no further right to appeal. A student would be issued with a Completion of Procedures following this.

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