

Support to Study Policy

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Scope and purpose	3
3. Referral to process	4
4. Stage 1 meetings	6
5. Stage 2 meetings	6
6. Stage 3 meetings	7
7. Invitation to a meeting	8
8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	8

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy is intended to be used in circumstances where students have long-term factors which disrupt their ability to study and/or submit assessments effectively. It aims to inclusively enable taught students with specific circumstances to have discussions with staff about any support they may need to stay on track to complete their degree and provides mechanisms for this support to be put in place.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 The following SOAS policies, plans and procedures are related to this policy:
 - a) Taught Degree Regulations
 - b) Mitigating Circumstances Policy
 - c) Student Engagement Policies (Foundation, UG and PG Taught)
 - d) Fitness to Study Policy
 - e) Student Disciplinary Procedure
 - f) Maternity and Paternity Policy
 - g) Study Inclusion Plans
 - h) Permitted Extended Deadlines Policy
 - i) SOAS Safeguarding Policy

2. Scope and purpose

- 2.1 This policy and process may be used for Foundation, Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Study Abroad students. The policy and process do not apply to Postgraduate Research Students.
- 2.2 Support to Study is designed for long-term circumstances which disrupt a student's ability to progress academically and function effectively at university. The circumstances may relate to health, wellbeing and/or other factors which impact on their ability to attend classes, prepare for assessments or submit assessments.
- 2.3 The process aims to facilitate early intervention, support, and prevention of more complex difficulties emerging, in order to result in better outcomes for the student.
- 2.4 Through Support to Study, students will have an initial meeting with a staff member to determine what internal or external sources of support may help the student to stay on track towards completing their degree. Staff will help the student to understand their options, discuss how they will meet their deadlines, and if needed, put a Support to Study Plan (SSP) in place.
- 2.5 Students can have both a Study Inclusion Plan and a Support to Study Plan, and both remain separate processes. Student Inclusion Plans may be consulted as part of the Support to Study process and vice versa.
- 2.6 Support to Study relates to non-academic situations only. Any difficulties with the organisation or operation of programmes of study should be dealt with via the Student Complaints Procedure.

2.7 Circumstances which could lead to a referral to the Support to Study process include, but are not limited to:

- a) Lack of engagement with studies or assessments.
- b) Difficulties focusing on studies and/or meeting deadlines.
- c) Difficulties due to working alongside studies.
- d) Pregnancy, parenting or caring responsibilities.
- e) Ongoing effects of a long-term health condition, including mental health.
- f) Status as a high performing athlete/sportsperson involved in recognised international competition.
- g) Unsafe living environment.
- h) Family crisis.
- i) Affected by ongoing, long-term conflict or humanitarian crisis.
- j) Ongoing effects of a serious disruption to the student's life e.g., following a crime.

2.8 The procedure aims to ensure that:

- a) Students are supported to study to the best of their ability, and wherever possible to meet the required learning outcomes and complete their course.
- b) Students are supported to make informed decisions regarding options available to support them at the earliest appropriate point, and to develop a plan to complete their studies.
- c) Students can access support from SOAS and are aware of external support where available. Support options available to students are consistent, equitable and fair.
- d) The best interests of the student are considered in relation to their personal situation. The chosen support method is relevant to the student's situation.
- e) Any feasible support that a student may be entitled to is considered and put in place where appropriate.
- f) Where the Support to Study process has not resolved the difficulties, students are escalated effectively, efficiently, and in the best interests of the student and, if relevant, the wider SOAS community.

2.9 Any staff member seeking advice on whether or not to initiate the Support to Study process should discuss with a relevant member of staff, such as their Head of Department, the Departmental Learning and Teaching Convenor, or a relevant Head of Service (Head of Student Experience, Engagement & Retention, Head of Student Advice & Wellbeing or Head of Academic Support).

2.10 Cases considered under Support to Study will be reviewed annually in order to recognise trends and determine any related additional support which could be put in place/better signposted. This review will also consider any cases that were not effectively resolved in order to continuously improve this process.

3. Referral to process

3.1 Student referrals will take place via a form on SID (Student Information Desk). Students can proactively self-refer or can be referred to the Support to Study process by a member of academic or professional

services staff who have had direct contact with the student.

3.2 Staff referrals may come as a result of:

- a) Academic advising discussions.
- b) Discussions in, before or after class.
- c) Mitigating Circumstances applications.
- d) Discussions in appointments with SOAS services.
- e) Concerning content in emails.
- f) Lack of engagement or non-submission of assessments.
- g) Other circumstances which highlight that the student needs support.

3.3 When a student is referred from a supporting policy or process (such as the Mitigating Circumstances process or an Engagement Policy) the student should be notified in their outcome or response that they will be referred to the Support to Study process, but does not need to be notified in advance of the referral taking place.

3.4 When staff refer a student independently of a supporting policy or process, they should do so with the student's knowledge. If the student does not wish to be referred and the severity of their circumstances are unlikely to warrant a stage 3 meeting, they should not be referred, but if there are mental health concerns, Student Advice & Wellbeing should be notified. If the severity of their circumstances could warrant a stage 3 meeting, the staff member should raise their concerns with an appropriate staff member (such as those listed in 2.9) in order to determine whether a Fitness to Study meeting or another course of action is needed. Staff should be mindful when disclosing sensitive information, and therefore keep the number of people they ask for guidance to a minimum.

3.5 The form will be reviewed by a member of the Student Experience, Engagement & Retention Team, and then the student will be allocated for an initial support conversation with a staff member depending on the severity of the content and circumstances outlined.

3.6 The options available for staff to recommend under this policy are to refer the student to:

- a) Academic Adviser.
- b) Student and Academic Support Officer.
- c) Student Experience, Engagement & Retention team member.
- d) Student Advice & Wellbeing team member.
- e) Other staff who can discuss specific processes or support options, such as: study skills support, leave of absence, funding, peer support.
- f) The Fitness to Study process.

3.7 Not all meetings will result in a Support to Study Plan being put in place, for example if one-off signposting is more appropriate. If a Support to Study Plan is put in place, any recommendations made during this process should be reviewed at least once per term, especially if there is a subsequent change in circumstances.

3.8 Within the Support to Study Process there will be three stages of support meetings, stage 1, stage 2 and stage 3.

4. Stage 1 meetings

4.1 Stage 1 meetings will be appropriate in cases where the student meets all of the following criteria:

- a) The student does not have more than one circumstance which is making it difficult to focus on their studies.
- b) They can be supported relatively quickly by an internal service at SOAS, or a close partner.
- c) They are not showing signs of mental ill-health and are not identified as a danger to themselves or others.
- d) They are unlikely to require the adjustment or deferral of any academic deadlines.

4.2 Stage 1 meetings may be held by:

- a) Academic Adviser.
- b) Student Support Officer.
- c) Student Experience, Engagement & Retention team member.
- d) Another staff member as per 3.6e) above.

4.3 Stage 1 meetings will not result in Support to Study Plans being created, but can have the following outcomes:

- a) Referral to an internal service for support, advice or funding.
- b) Referral or signposting to an appropriate external organisation.
- c) Referral to a stage 2 or 3 Support to Study meeting.
- d) Referral to the Fitness to Study process.

4.4 Referral on to stage 3 Support to Study or Fitness to Study would only be undertaken when new and concerning information is shared which was not apparent at the time of the initial referral.

5. Stage 2 meetings

5.1 Stage 2 meetings will be appropriate in cases where the student meets any one of the following criteria:

- a) The student has more than one circumstance which is making it difficult to focus on their studies.
- b) They are showing signs of mental ill-health, or have a diagnosed mental health condition, and have not been identified as a danger to themselves or others.
- c) They can partially be supported by an internal service at SOAS but may require the support of external services as well.
- d) They are unlikely to require the adjustment or deferral of any academic deadlines.

5.2 Stage 2 meetings may be held by:

- a) Student Experience, Engagement & Retention team member.
- b) Student Advice & Wellbeing team member.
- c) Student and Academic Support Officer.

d) Another staff member as per 3.6e) above.

5.3 Stage 2 meetings can have the following results:

a) Referral to internal services for support, advice or funding.

b) Arrangement of a secondary meeting with the Student Advice and Wellbeing Team.

c) Referral to appropriate external partner organisations.

d) Creation of a Support to Study Plan.

e) Referral to a stage 3 Support to Study meeting.

f) Referral to the Fitness to Study process.

5.4 Referral on to stage 3 Support to Study or Fitness to Study would only be undertaken when new and concerning information is shared which was not apparent at the time of the initial referral.

6. Stage 3 meetings

6.1 Stage 3 interventions will be appropriate in cases where the student is experiencing any of the following, but in a way which presently appears stable or managed:

a) Unsafe living environment.

b) Risk of financial destitution or homelessness.

c) Recent family crisis, or suffering due to prior crisis.

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.

f) They are showing severe signs of mental ill-health, or has a diagnosed mental health condition, and have not been identified as a danger to themselves or others.

g) Any other serious circumstances which do not meet the threshold for Fitness to Study.

6.2 Note that in circumstances where the student is experiencing any unstable/unmanaged circumstances listed under 6.1 the student will be referred on to the Fitness to Study Process rather than the Support to Study process.

6.3 Stage 3 meetings may be held with one or more of the following:

a) Student Advice & Wellbeing team member.

b) College Learning and Teaching Convenor, with a department representative.

c) Another staff member as per 3.6e) above.

6.4 Stage 3 meetings can have the following results:

a) Referral to internal services for support, advice or funding.

b) Arrangement of a secondary appointment with the Student Advice and Wellbeing Team.

c) Referral to appropriate external partner organisations.

d) Referral to the Mitigating Circumstances procedure for 14-day extension on assessments taking place within two weeks of the meeting.

- e) Referral to College for adjustment of future deadlines.
 - f) Creation of a Support to Study Plan, complete with a review date.
 - g) Referral to the Fitness to Study process.
- 6.5 The circumstances listed in 6.1. are serious, and therefore, 6.4e) is a possible outcome, the authority for which lies with the College Learning and Teaching Convenor. In cases where future deadlines may be adjusted, the College and Department must ensure that:
- a) Timescales for student progression or upgrade are not compromised.
 - b) The proposed adjustments will not cluster assessments together in a way that is unmanageable for the student at a future point in time.
 - c) Marking can be arranged with the standard turnaround times for feedback.
 - d) Marking can be completed before Boards.
 - e) The maximum period of registration will not be exceeded.
- 6.6 Any adjustments to deadlines must be agreed with, and countersigned by, the College Learning and Teaching Convenor, with input from an appropriate member of academic staff within the student's department. The agreed adjustments must then be shared with the Head of Student Experience, Engagement and Retention and the relevant department administration team.
- a) Where a student is on a joint degree in more than one College, both College Learning and Teaching Convenors must be consulted, with the Convenor in the lead department countersigning the approval.
- 6.7 At the end of each term, the Head of Student Experience, Engagement and Retention and all College Learning and Teaching Convenors will meet to discuss anonymised cases where deadlines were adjusted, in order to ensure parity of any future cases across the School.

7. Invitation to a meeting

- 7.1 The following process will be followed in setting up and undertaking meetings at stages 1, 2, and 3:
- 7.2 The student will be invited to a meeting via email and will be told they have been referred under the Support to Study procedure, which will be attached.
- 7.3 Students on a language year abroad or summer abroad may be offered this meeting via video call.
- 7.4 At the meeting, the staff member(s) will outline the concerns which led to the referral and ask the student for their perspective on their own situation at present. The staff member(s) will then outline possible support options or onward referral options.
- 7.5 Next steps will be agreed and documented by the lead staff member and sent to the student.
- 7.6 If a further referral to a service is needed, the lead staff member will then make the referral, including all relevant information. The student should be informed that this will happen in the meeting.

8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 8.1 This policy has been developed in accordance with the School's obligations as set out in the Equality Act (2010) and the SOAS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
- 8.2 The policy will not disadvantage anyone on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or

civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

8.3 An Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted annually with respect to this policy.

8.4 In coming to any decision within 6.4e) and 6.4f), the panel will consider equality, diversity and inclusion.

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