

## Fitness to Study Procedure

### Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out the procedures that the Department of Psychology follows when there are concerns about the fitness to study of one of its students with the Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology (DPCP).

It outlines the steps to be taken by the Department when there is concern that a student's behaviour or health has the potential to disrupt or threaten the welfare or academic progress of the student himself or herself or of others in the academic community.

The procedures described below do not take precedence over the relevant provisions of the Department's procedures or, where applicable, the University's regulations.

As a general rule this procedure is only intended for use in cases in which the behaviour, disruption or risk presented by the student is perceived to be of a serious or potentially serious nature. Where possible mentoring and other student support services should be used as the first port of call, prior to taking any formal action.

### What are its benefits?

1. Student have a guide to refer to providing them clear guidance of their responsibilities and expectations related to studying at UCY.
2. Should a problem arise, steps taken are limited to those absolutely needed to safeguard the best interests of the student, and other members of the UCY community ensuring a consistent and sensitive approach to managing situations.
3. It allows for staff to initiate processes when issues are detected and to address them in a structured manner early on.
4. Shared concerns in different study sections (e.g., Department, University, placement) can be formally collated.
5. Use of a problem-solving, collaborative and objective-oriented approach allows for a focused implementation of agreed actions geared to achieve aims that are clearly documented based on a supportive perspective, rather than disciplinary one.

### Background knowledge

In advance of this policy being initiated there are other support services in the Department and the University to which students may be directed by Academic Advisors or other support staff, if it is felt that this may be of benefit.

Students with a mental or physical health difficulty:

- are strongly advised to consult all relevant support services available in the Department and University, and in particular the University nurse, the Mental Health Center, the Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Services; **but first they should inform and discuss with the Department Academic Advisor**

- are strongly encouraged to speak to their Academic Advisor, Chair of the DPCP Committee or other appropriate member of staff in the Department about the difficulty and any related problems that they may be experiencing.

Early intervention in student health/behaviour and recommendations for support can avoid a crisis situation (see Appendix A).

Advice available from Academic Advisors and in the self-help leaflets from the Mental Health Center (<https://websites.ucy.ac.cy/mhc/common-issues.html>) will be useful, as may be advice from one or more of the following:

- University Mental Health Center <https://ucyweb.ucy.ac.cy/mhc/>
- University Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Services <https://www.ucy.ac.cy/aasw/>
- University Students' Union <https://websites.ucy.ac.cy/feapan/>

## **Fitness to Study Procedure**

### **1. Purpose and Scope of the procedure**

1.1 Whilst at University, all students should be able to study and perform to the best of their ability in a safe and comfortable environment. The reality of Department and University life means that students not only work but also live in close proximity to each other, and whilst many students find studying and living in such an environment easy and enjoyable, others can find it more challenging.

The term 'fitness to study' as used in this document relates to the entire student experience, and not just a student's ability to engage with their studies. For example, unless it is informed otherwise, the Department expects its students to be able to live in harmony with others, and not conduct themselves in a way that has an adverse impact on those around them. This procedure is not designed to address academic performance issues (which should be dealt with under the normal academic assessment and monitoring procedures) except where poor academic performance is resulting from a fitness to study issue.

1.2 In order to maintain and enhance the Departmental community, students need to conform to certain standards of behaviour. However, it is recognized that the cause of concern regarding fitness to study may include issues relating to a student's health and general wellbeing, where disciplinary action may not be appropriate. The Department and University have disciplinary mechanisms in place to deal with students whose behaviour falls outside acceptable standards, for example the University's *Procedures in the case of unsatisfactory academic performance* (See also University Regulations).

1.3 A student's fitness to study may be questioned if health problems are disrupting their own studies or the studies of others, or result in unreasonable demands being placed on staff or other students. The Department has a duty of care to its community and is bound by health and safety legislation, which means that it is obliged to take action if a student presents a risk to themselves or to others.

1.4 The level of risk to himself /herself, other students or others posed by a student will be measured by the use of a risk assessment process, which should be used throughout the

procedure to provide a consistent means of assessing the risk to the student, other individuals and the institution. This process will be led by the Academic Advisor in close collaboration with health professionals. Even when no risk is involved, the fact that a student has a problem does not in itself justify or excuse inappropriate behaviour.

1.5 Once this procedure has been used (at any of the three stages) the behaviour observed will normally be considered under this procedure rather than under a disciplinary procedure.

1.6 If concerns are raised whilst a student is on authorised study away from UCY (e.g. is on a gap year, has leave for an Erasmus programme or secondments, or is on a placement) the DPCP Committee will discuss with the other institution and the University, where appropriate, alternative arrangements that might address any concerns.

## **2. Circumstances under which a student's fitness to study may be brought into question**

2.1 A student's fitness to study may be brought into question as a result of a wide range of circumstances. These include (but are not restricted to) the following: -

- Serious concerns about the student emerge from a third party (e.g. friend, other student, department, placement provider, member of the public, medical professional etc.), which indicate that there is a need to address their fitness to study.
- The student has told a member of the Department that he/she has a problem and/or has provided information, which indicates that there is a need to address their fitness to study.
- The student's disposition is such that it indicates that there may be a need to address an underlying problem because their behaviour is causing problems to themselves or others, for example if they have demonstrated mood swings; shown signs of depression or become withdrawn.
- Behaviour, that would otherwise be dealt with as a disciplinary matter, but may be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem.
- The student's academic performance or persistent behaviour is not acceptable and this is thought to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem.

If Academic or Support Staff have concerns regarding a student's fitness to study they should discuss this with the Academic Advisor and with student support services, in particular the University Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Services as a first point of contact if appropriate, and consider implementing Stage 1 of the procedure.

This Fitness to Study Procedure has three stages depending on the perceived level of risk, the severity of the problem and the student's engagement with efforts to respond to it. When a member of Department raises concerns, the relevant member of Department staff (usually the Academic Advisor) has a duty to investigate and initiate this policy as part of their larger duty of care to Department members.

## **3. Stage 1 - Informal Action by the Department**

3.1 Should preliminary action in terms of support and guidance be unsuccessful, the designated member of Department staff should approach the student and explain to them, in a supportive and understanding manner that concerns about their fitness to study have emerged. This would ordinarily be their Academic Advisor but might be a University nurse or other member of the Mental Health Center team. Should the Advisor or other member of staff require advice or guidance on this they should contact the Department Chair and/or staff at the Student Welfare Services and/or the Mental Health Center.

3.2 The student should be made aware of the precise nature of the behaviour that has caused these concerns to be raised. Normally the Advisor, but on occasions the Department Chair or other staff member will attempt to resolve the matter by informal discussions with the student. The student should be given the opportunity to explain their own views on the matter, and be encouraged to think about using one or more of the support services offered by the University. It may also be appropriate to look into the possibility of applying academic arrangements or support to enable the student to study effectively.

3.3 It is hoped that in most cases issues can be resolved at this level, and that the student will respond positively, co-operating fully with the process and taking advantage of the support available. It may be necessary to obtain independent corroboration as to whether support offered is being taken up. The responsibility for providing this will lie with the student.

3.4 A review period should be determined by agreement between the Tutor, DOS (if applicable) and the student to allow the student to consider their own behaviour and seek advice from the support services available. At the end of this period a meeting should be held to discuss any steps taken by the student to address the concerns. If the concerns have been addressed satisfactorily, this will be noted. Further meetings may be scheduled to continue to monitor the situation/progress and help ensure that continued support is provided to the student to enable them to study effectively. If, however, the concerns have not been addressed, a further review period may be agreed, or the case will move to the next stage of the policy.

3.5 The informal discussions, advice and any undertakings made by the Department or University and/or the student should be documented for the benefit of the Department, the University and the student, but should be kept confidential. Copies of documents are to be kept by the Academic Advisor and the student. A letter setting out what has been agreed should be given to the student.

3.6 If a student is unable or unwilling to co-operate with the above process or modify their behaviour, they should be informed that more formal action under Stage 2 of this procedure may be considered appropriate.

#### **4. Stage 2 – DCPC Committee**

4.1 If the action taken under Stage 1 has not been successful, or it is felt that the case is too serious to be dealt with informally, Stage 2 of the procedure can be invoked.

A meeting of a DCPC Committee shall be convened by the Committee Chair, and to include if appropriate: the Department Chair; Research Supervisor; and a member of the University support services. The student may be accompanied to this meeting by a student or other friend or representative if they so wish.

In both stage 2 and stage 3 processes the student's Academic Advisor should be the point of contact with the student and should ensure that the DCPC Chair is kept informed of all communications. The DCPC Chair should be the main point of contact with all other agencies and individuals and should keep records of the whole process.

The DCPC Chair should appoint a Deputy if unavailable to act at any stage.

4.2 Before the meeting, a medical assessment may be sought from a qualified practitioner familiar with the UCY system and the spectrum of student difficulties. The student will be encouraged to consent to this, as it will ultimately enable the Department to address the student's difficulties in the most effective manner possible and make an accurate assessment of risk.

The medical assessment will be used to determine the following matters:

- the nature and extent of any medical condition from which the student may be suffering,
- the student's prognosis,
- the extent to which it may affect his/her fitness to study and manage the demands of student life,
- any impact it may have or risk it may pose to others,
- whether any additional steps should be taken by the Department, in light of the medical condition, to enable the student to study effectively,
- whether the student will be receiving any on-going medical treatment or support.

4.3 The student will be asked to authorise full disclosure to the Department of the results of any medical examination. The Department recognises that any such information disclosed will constitute "sensitive data" for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998 and The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and will be handled, processed and stored accordingly.

Should the student refuse to undertake a medical examination, or disclose results, the Department may continue this procedure based on the information already in its possession.

4.4 The student will be given at least 7 working days' notice of the convening of the DCPC Committee and informed of the purpose of the meeting. This period may be shortened in emergency on the advice of the DCPC Chair. They will also be provided with any documents that will be considered by the Committee, and asked to provide any documentation they may wish the group to consider, in good time for the meeting.

4.5 The student may be accompanied at the meeting by a Students' Union representative, a fellow student, or other advisor. A support worker, if required may also accompany disabled students. The student should notify the Academic Advisor at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting if they are to be accompanied and by whom.

4.6 The purpose of the meeting will be to ensure that:

- the student is made fully aware of the nature of the concerns that have been raised,
- the student's views are heard and taken account of and the best way to proceed is agreed upon,
- the student is fully aware of the possible outcomes if difficulties remain.

4.7 The DCPC Committee will order its proceedings at its own discretion and may call witnesses, including Student Services staff (as in paragraph 3) working with the student, and institute enquiries to assist its deliberations.

4.8 The DCPC Committee may decide:

- (a) That no further action is required.
- (b) To formally monitor the student's progress for a specified period of time. In this case an action plan will be agreed with the student, outlining any steps, which the student will need to take, and/or any support to be provided to the student, to address the concerns identified. Regular review meetings with the student will need to be arranged with a nominated member of Department staff, to ensure that the action plan is being appropriately followed and/or that reasonable support to enable the student to study effectively is being provided. The student will also need to be informed of the consequences of any breaches of the action plan, which will normally involve their fitness to study being considered at Stage 3.
- (c) To recommend that special academic arrangements or support are put in place. Such recommendations should be agreed with the DCPC Committee and by the student and approved by the Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Services. The student will be informed that unless these arrangements remedy the concerns to the Department's satisfaction, their fitness to study may be considered at Stage 3 of these procedures.
- (d) With the consent of the student, to agree that their studies be suspended for a period of time with appropriate application to the relevant University authority.
- (e) To refer the case to the Department Chair, to be considered under Stage 3 of this procedure. This will only be appropriate in the most serious of cases, where for example evidence of a serious risk to either the health and safety of the student or others has been identified, and it is thought that suspension, exclusion or expulsion of the student may be the appropriate course of action, or where a particular course of action has been recommended but the student does not agree.

4.9 The decision of the DCPC Committee, together with a concise record of the meeting, should be sent to the student within 7 working days from the date of the meeting, and a copy kept on the student's personal file. A copy of this documentation should be shared with the Department where relevant.

## **5. Stage 3 - Department Review Panel**

5.1 This stage of the procedure will only be implemented following a referral from a Stage 2 DCPC Committee, or if in the opinion of the Academic Advisor (having consulted as appropriate) initial concerns are raised, which are sufficiently serious as to warrant the consideration of the student's suspension, exclusion or expulsion (e.g. if they pose a potentially threat to the health and safety of themselves or others, or disruption to the working of the institution).

5.2 As a first step in this stage the Academic Advisor shall consider whether interim suspension of the student pending further action is appropriate, including from University

accommodation.

5.3 The Academic Advisor shall then convene a Review Panel, which shall be chaired by a senior member of the Department Council (appointed by the Department Chair) with no previous involvement in the case. The Review Panel will normally comprise the Department Chair, the student's Research supervisor, the Academic Advisor, and another independent member of the Department Council, has had no previous connection with the student.

5.4 The Chair will fix a date for a formal meeting of the Department Review Panel to hear the case and invite the student to attend to discuss the concerns and all relevant issues.

5.5 Wherever possible the student will be given at least 7 working days' notice of the meeting of the Department Review Panel. The student will be informed of the purpose of the hearing. The student will also be provided with any documents to be considered at the meeting, and asked to provide any documentation he /she may wish the Panel to consider in good time for the meeting. In serious cases the Department may temporarily suspend a student, including sending out of residence pending a meeting of the Review Panel,

5.6 The student may be accompanied at the meeting by a Students' Union representative, a fellow student or other adviser. Disabled students may also be accompanied by a support worker where required. The student should notify the Academic Advisor at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting if they are to be accompanied and by whom.

5.7 The purpose of the meeting will be to consider the evidence available, including the student's perception of these concerns and to reach an appropriate decision, action plan or other outcome.

5.8 The Review Panel will order its proceedings at its discretion and may call witnesses and institute enquiries to assist its deliberations, including Student Welfare Services staff working with the student, and which may include requesting further medical assessments of the student's fitness to study.

It will also consider any previous risk assessments.

The Chair of the Review Panel will ensure that all parties have access to all documents.

5.9 The decision it arrives at shall be confirmed by the Chair of the Review Panel having obtained a collective decision from members of the Panel.

5.10 The student shall be notified in writing of the decision, with reasons, within 14 working days of the meeting of the Department Review Panel. It is advisable that the decision is communicated in such a way that support is available to the student at the time, preferably from the student's Tutor or Senior Tutor.

The decision may include one or more of the following:

- To formally monitor the student's progress for a specified period of time. In this case the Panel will provide the student with an agreed action plan, outlining any steps which the student will need to take and/or any support to be provided to the student to address the concerns identified. Regular review meetings with the student will need to be arranged with a nominated member of staff (to ensure that the action plan is being appropriately followed

and/or that reasonable support to enable the student to study effectively is being provided). The student will also need to be informed of the consequences of any breaches of the action plan.

- That, following consultation with the Department, and subject to the approval of the relevant University authority, special academic arrangements are put in place – or an interruption of studies is agreed. The student will be informed of the consequences should these arrangements fail to remedy the concerns identified to the Department's satisfaction.
- To recommend that the Department exercises its statutory power to suspend or exclude the student.
- Any other action considered to be appropriate and proportionate.

Any decision regarding suspension or exclusion should be communicated by the Academic Advisor to the University and to any support services who have been involved with the student.

## **6. Return to Study**

6.1 After a break in study, the student may make a request to the Department for permission to return to the course. The decision as to whether to ask the University permission for the student to be put in standing to return to study will then be made by the DCPC Committee who will request authorization for the student to return from the relevant University authority.

6.2 To this end, the DCPC Committee, in consultation with relevant bodies, such as the Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Services, will identify the issues of concern that the Department may have in respect of the student's fitness to study.

The DCPC Committee will also contact the relevant medical professional as needed for an assessment of the student's ability to manage the demands of returning to studying at the University, drawing attention to the nature and extent of the student's previous problems and the Department's concerns about them.

6.3 The student will only be permitted to return if, after receiving medical advice, the Department and relevant University authority are satisfied that the individual is fit to study and able to comply with any conditions imposed on their return.

6.4 In cases where the Department has any continuing concerns about the individual's fitness to study, it may require a second medical opinion. In this case a student may be asked to submit themselves for medical examinations by doctors / specialists, including the University Mental Health Center staff, nominated by the Department, at the Department's expense to allow the situation to be properly evaluated.

6.5 In any case where a student returns to study following the implementation of the fitness to study procedure, the Department should hold an initial meeting with the student to discuss what support measures need to be put into place for the student's return and establish a *Return to Study Plan*. This initial meeting should include the student's Academic Advisor, the Research Supervisor and the Department Chair and if necessary, the practicum placement coordinator. At this meeting it may be decided that there should be regular review meetings with the student, which can be used to monitor and support a return to study plan.

If so, the student must provide their continued cooperation in this respect and such review



meetings may continue for part or all of their remaining time at the Department. There should be a written record of what is agreed for the return to study plan and a copy given to the student.

The Department should ensure that, where appropriate, a copy of the plan is sent to the relevant support agencies, who have agreed to help implement the plan and that any necessary support from agencies external to the Department is put in place.

The Academic Advisor should make arrangements for monitoring that the support plan is being delivered and accepted.

## **7. Completion of Procedure and Right of Appeal**

7.1 Following Stage 3 (or Stage 2 where Stage 3 was not invoked), the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter, indicating the end of the procedure. If the student remains dissatisfied at this stage, a complaint can be submitted to the appropriate bodies.

Students are advised to seek advice before raising a complaint. Advice can be sought from their Academic Advisor or other trusted advisor. Independent advice on all complaint procedures can also be sought from the Students' Union.

7.2 If the student is not satisfied with any decision made in accordance with the Fitness to Study Procedure, they may also follow the University's complaints procedure within 14 days of the receipt of a letter outlining that decision, at any stage in the proceedings (deadlines will depend on University's complaints procedure).

## **8. General Matters**

8.1 The Department will take account of relevant legislation such as the Data Protection Act, the GDPR, the Mental Health Act, the Human Rights Act, and the general rights and expectations of a student of confidentiality. In cases where Stages 2 or 3 of the Fitness to Study Procedure have been invoked, the Department Chair will make a decision about whether the student's emergency contact should be informed, and discuss with the student whether any statutory services should be contacted.

8.2 The Department acknowledges that as a result of implementing this procedure it will receive personal sensitive data and data of a confidential nature pertaining to the student and other third parties, and shall ensure that all such data is handled, processed and stored accordingly.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Crisis Situations**

It is possible that a student may pose such an extreme risk to themselves and / or others that they require emergency assistance outside these procedures.

In a situation where it is believed that a student's behaviour presents an immediate risk to themselves or others, the Emergency Services should be contacted by dialing 112.

The DCPC Committee should be informed.

This should be followed up as soon as possible by notifying the Academic Advisor of the details of the incident and action taken.

The person witnessing the student's behaviour should not leave the scene until they have briefed the Emergency Services, bearing in mind the primary necessity to ensure their own safety.

The DCPC Committee will keep a record of the action taken by the Emergency Services. The Academic Advisor or nominee will ensure that contact is made at the appropriate level of detail with the student, the student's Research Supervisor, and Chair of the Department, and that appropriate arrangements are made with regard to follow up. Issues should also be considered as to whether there might be Fitness to Practice issues to consider.