



The Union Advice Service

Guide to Fitness to Study

Overview

The Fitness to Study procedure applies to all students' registered at Brunel University.

It is intended to be used to support students experiencing difficulties that are impacting their studies. The procedure is usually put in practice when the university has concern for a student's health, wellbeing and safety for themselves and/or others.

The Fitness to Study Process

The process involves **3 levels**. However, a FTS case may not always start at Level 1. For instance a report may be made and it may already be perceived as a serious or critical concern (Level 3).

✓ Level 1 : Initial concerns

An **appropriate member of staff** will arrange a **meeting**. The meeting will give both the member of staff and the student the opportunity to discuss their concerns. Once the meeting has finished the staff member will determine if any further action needs to be taken. Within **5 working days** of the meeting, student will be informed of the reasons for the decision made by the member of staff.

✓ Level 2 : Ongoing and/or further concerns

The **Head of Student Services** will inform the student in writing **48hrs** before the next meeting. The meeting is arranged to give the student and the head of student services the opportunity to discuss the student's fitness to study. Once the meeting has finished the **head of Student Services** will determine if any further action needs to be taken. Within **5 working days** of the meeting, students will be informed of the reasons for the decision made by the **Head of Student Services**.

✓ Level 3 : Serious, persistent and/or critical concerns.

Similarly, to level 2, the **Head of Student Services** will inform the student in writing **48hrs** before the next meeting. The meeting is arranged to give the student and the head of student services the opportunity to discuss the student's fitness to study. They may also ask you to get in contact with the **Universities Doctor**. Once the meeting has finished the **head of Student Services** may call a conference to determine any potential courses of action. Within **5 working days** of the meeting, students will be informed of the reasons for the decision made by the **Head of Student Services**. This may include switching to part time, suspension or withdrawal of studies.

Right to appeal:

If you wish to appeal the decision made by the university this must be done **within 28 days** of receiving your outcome.

To appeal you must write to the Head of Registry and set out appeal grounds (these can be found in [SR11.45 of Fitness to Study Regulation](#) as well as later on in this guide)

What is fitness to study?

The University have a duty of care to all registered students, including you, to ensure that all students studying at Brunel are healthy and their wellbeing raises no concerns to the safety of themselves and everyone else on campus.

[Senate Regulation II](#) which can be found on the university's website as well as the [union's website](#), is something that has been developed as an alternative to the student rules of discipline. It is intended to be used in circumstances where, in light of concerns regarding a student's health and/or wellbeing, the University considers it inappropriate to deal with the matter as a disciplinary one.

The University's Student Welfare Team have prepared a helpful guide, which can be found [here](#) or by searching "Fitness to Study" on Brunel Intranet.

Who does the FTS regulations apply to?

This regulation applies to ALL students registered at Brunel, irrespective of the mode or place of study. It applies to students on placements including sandwich courses or professional programmes of study. It also applies to students who request a return to their studies after a long break.

The fitness to study policy is not normally used to determine issues of professional competence (The Suitability Procedure should be followed in such cases – please see the Advice Service guidance on [Suitability Procedures](#)).

Who decides whether i am fit or not to study?

All Brunel University Staff members have a duty to report a concern of fitness to study to the Head of Student Services. It would then be the Head of Student Services' responsibility to investigate the matter.

Will i have an opportunity to get involved?

Yes, the Fitness to Study is an inclusive process, however should a student be unwilling or unable to play a part at any stage of the process, the University may nonetheless follow the procedure where it is reasonable to do so.

Level 1 – initial concerns:

An appropriate member of staff (for example Personal Tutor, Supervisor, a member of residence staff) will arrange to speak with the student. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss and to consider the concern regarding student's fitness to study. The student will be invited to respond and the staff member will seek to establish the students' perception of the concern.

Once the meeting has taken place, the staff member will determine whether any further action needs to be taken; this could be (but is not limited to):

- No action to be taken;
- Refer the student to Occupational Health Physician
- Put in place support arrangements
- Draw up and action plan
- Ensure that a date is arranged for the action plan to be reviewed.
- Refer the matter to another level
- Recommend that the student takes a period of voluntary abeyance (break from studies).

Students' will be notified in writing with the reasons for the decision within **5 working days** of the meeting.

Level 2 – ongoing and/or further concerns:

The student will be invited to a meeting with the Head of Student Services to discuss the concern. The Head of Service will inform the student in writing at least 48 hours prior to the meeting date.

The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss and to consider the concern regarding the student's fitness to study. The student will be invited to respond to the concern and the Head of Student Services will seek to establish the students' perception of the concern.

Once the meeting has occurred, the Head of Service will determine whether any further action needs to be taken; this could be (but is not limited to):

- No action to be taken;
- Refer the student to Occupational Health Physician
- Put in place support arrangements
- Draw up and action plan
- Ensure that a date is arranged for the action plan to be reviewed.
- Refer the matter to another level
- Recommend that the student takes a period of voluntary abeyance (break from studies).

Students will be notified in writing, with the reasons for the decision within **5 working days** of the meeting.

Level 3 – serious, persistent and/or critical concerns:

The student will be invited to a meeting with the Head of Student Services to discuss the concern. The Head of Service will inform the student in writing at least 48 hours prior to the meeting date.

The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss and to consider the concern regarding the student's fitness to study. At this point they may ask you to be in contact with the university's doctor. The student will be invited to respond to the concern and the Head of Student Services will seek to establish the students' perception of the concern.

Once the meeting has occurred, the Head of Service will determine whether any further action needs to be taken. They may call a case conference to help determine potential courses of action, which students do not usually attend. This could be (but is not limited to):

- No action to be taken;
- The matter referred to lower level (level 1 or 2)
- Refer the student to Occupational Health Physician
- Student withdrawn from placement
- Put in place support arrangements
- Draw up and action plan
- Recommend that the student takes a period of voluntary abeyance (break from studies).
- Recommend the student should be suspended, excluded or expelled

Students will be notified in writing, with the reasons for the decision within **5 working days** of the meeting.

This is an overview of the Fitness to Study Process. For in depth detail please refer to [Senate Regulation II.](#)

How long will the process take?

Unfortunately, there is not a definitive answer to this. It is all dependent on the facts of the matter, how serious the concern is and to what extent the concern could affect your ability to participate in your studies.

What could this mean for me?

The University predicts that cases of fitness to study will be exceptional and as such in the interest of fairness each case will be considered on an individual basis and will depend on the specific circumstances. To give you an idea of what may happen:

- A student may be referred to the Occupational Health Physician for an assessment of his/her fitness to study. A referral would be made through Head of Student Services.
- If the Vice-Chancellor's representative believes that there is a risk to the health, safety and/or wellbeing of a student and/or to other persons, and/or that the student's behaviour impacts negatively on the teaching and learning of other students, the VCR may:
 - **Temporarily exclude the student** from all or specified areas of the University and/or placement and/or from using any of the University's facilities for a specified period as is reasonable in the circumstances of the matter. **You will be advised of the exclusion within 3 days of the decision being made.**
 - **Temporarily suspend** the student from the University and/or placement for a specified period of time as is reasonable in the circumstances of the matter.

You will be advised of the suspension within 3 days of the decision being made.

Firstly and quite importantly: any temporary exclusion or suspension made is a neutral act and is not a determination regarding a students' fitness to study, therefore it does not necessarily imply you are not fit to study but is a precautionary measure whilst the matter is looked in to.

Further, a review of the exclusion or suspension will take place at regular intervals and consideration made whether it is reasonable to revoke, amend or extend the action.

Can I appeal the decision to exclude or suspend me?

Yes you can appeal; you have **28 days** to do it. The Process is described in details in **Section E** of the [Senate Regulation II](#).

The appeal has to be made on one of the below grounds:

- *There has been procedural irregularity;*
- *There was prejudice or bias on the part of the decision maker;*
- *The decision of the Head of Student Services and/or Vice-Chancellor is unreasonable and/or disproportionate;*
- *New material evidence has become available which was not previously reasonably available during the process.*

The appeal needs to be put in writing to the Head of Registry. The Head of Registry will normally inform the student within **10 working days** whether the appeal can be accepted for further consideration.

Who will consider my appeal?

A Review Panel will convene consisting of three members of senate, one of which will be a student representative. The review panel will determine the process to be followed for dealing with the appeal in light of the circumstances of the matter. The student might be invited to appear before the panel- unless there are serious concerns that student may find a formal review meeting unduly stressful.

Preparing for a meeting

You might be invited to meet with Review Panel. For this meeting you are not required to prepare a written statement but it may help you to jot few things down.

The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss the concern, think about what can assist and consider an appropriate way forward.

It is often difficult to know where to start in explaining an issue, particularly a health issue that may change and worsen on a daily basis.

You may feel worried that you are not coping or feel concerned about being honest about the impact on you but being honest may result in a better support package for you.

You may want to make notes about following issues:

- That dates are vital. Try to remember dates which are relevant to your problem
- It is also important that you are clear on how these circumstances have impacted on you directly, what this has meant for you.

- Have a good understanding of why the concerns have been raised- if you are not clear, don't hesitate to ask
- Take this opportunity to explain what extra support you need.
- Think about what medical evidence you may have which shows and explains if there are health issues involved.
- Avoid being defensive; the Fitness to Study process is designed to benefit you- you are not in trouble.
- Be prepared to explain things patiently in detail; people who want to help you may not know you that well- don't assume anything.
- Accept that revealing some difficult personal details might be distressing for you- seek sources of emotional support like [Counselling Service](#)

I submitted extenuating circumstances so why fitness to study?

Ensuring your College are aware of any circumstances that you are experiencing is a good thing and means you are meeting your responsibility as a student.

Your College may have accepted your Extenuating Circumstances but may be concerned about the ongoing nature and/or severity of the issues you are encountering.

For instance:

- a) You may pose a risk to your own health, safety and wellbeing and may require some time out to fully recuperate
- b) It may be considered that you could do with some additional support from the Disability and Dyslexia Service.
- c) Your behaviour may impact on your own and others learning
- d) It may be considered that carrying on at the current time may disadvantage you.

My GP stated I am fit to study, what next?

If your Doctor has provided a letter confirming you are fit to study then this will be considered when making a decision about whether you should continue or not. It may still be necessary for you to attend an appointment with the University's Medical Centre to also confirm this.

Any decision reached about a your fitness to study will be made wherever possible through an inclusive process involving you, the College or Department staff, health care professionals and University Services.

Can I still go on placement if I am considered not fit to study?

The placement is part of your course and if you are not fit to study then it is very unlikely you will be considered fit to go on placement.

IF there is a risk to the health, safety and wellbeing then the University may consider it is appropriate to:

- a) Temporarily exclude you from all or specified areas of the University and/or a placement and/or from using any of the University's facilities or services for a specified period as is reasonable in the circumstances of the matter;
- b) Temporarily suspend the student from his/her studies and/or a placement for a specified period as is reasonable in the circumstances of the matter.

Returning to study

Students who wish to return to study will need to satisfy the Head of Student Services that they are fit to study and fulfilled any conditions attached to their return. This may mean

obtaining satisfactory medical or other evidence of their fitness to study (for example from the University Occupational Health Physician, psychiatrist, GP or mental health support worker).

Students should put their request to the Head of Student Services in writing.

The Head of Student Services may invite the student to discuss the return to studies in person.

The HOSS may consult other professionals involved in student's care and may also seek advice from other support services in relation to potential adjustments if the student was to return to studies.

The HOSS will be responsible for ensuring that arrangements are put in place for providing support identified for a student returning to study and for that support to be reviewed at such intervals as is appropriate in the circumstances.

The decision will be notified to the student in writing normally within 14 working days of the student's written request to return to study.

This decision will be final.

What advice and help can I expect from the Advice Service?

The Advice Service can help you in the following ways:

- Help you to understand the process
- Check draft letters and statements before you submit them
- Talk through realistic outcomes and what you could expect
- Help you to define appeal grounds if you wish to appeal
- Support you at the appeal and through the process
- Help you decide whether appealing is a realistic option
- Help you outline support arrangements which you require

Document Record	
Maintained by:	Miss Megan Fernandes
Owned by:	Advice and Representation Centre
Date:	20/03/2020
Location of master document	H:\Membership Engagement\ADVICE SERVICE General\ADVICE SERVICE CENTRE\ADVICE SERVICE GENERAL INFORMATION\ADVICE SERVICE Guides\Academic\Academic Best Practice Guides

Version Control		
Document	Version	H:\Membership Engagement\ADVICE SERVICE
Amendments:		General\ADVICE SERVICE CENTRE\ADVICE SERVICE GENERAL INFORMATION\ADVICE SERVICE Guides\Academic\Academic Best Practice Guides\OLD VERSIONS DO NOT USE
Amended by:		Miss Megan Fernandes