

FITNESS TO STUDY POLICY & PROCEDURE

What is fitness to study?

Fitness to study relates to an individual's capacity to participate fully and satisfactorily as a student, in relation to academic studies and student life in general at SFS.

SFS is committed to supporting student wellbeing and recognises that a positive approach to the management of physical and mental health is crucial to student learning and academic achievement.

The purpose and scope of this policy

- a) To provide a suitable and co-ordinated response by academic and support staff in circumstances where it is not considered appropriate to apply other internal procedures such as the Student Disciplinary Procedures.
- b) To encourage early intervention and active collaboration between all staff in managing situations where there are concerns regarding fitness to study.
- c) To provide a non-judgemental, consistent and sensitive approach to the management of situations which may require different levels of response according to the perceived level of concern.

When to use this Policy

A student's fitness to study may be a cause for concern as a result of a wide range of circumstances, including (but not restricted to) the following:

- Concerns about the student's fitness to study are raised from a third party i.e. a friend, relative, housemate, colleague, employer, SFS staff or medical professional either whilst the student is at SFS or whilst engaged in SFS outside activities such as placements, gigs, work-based learning or field trips.
- The student has told a member of staff that they have concerns about their fitness to study.
- The student's disposition is such that it indicates that there may be need to address an underlying health issue.
- Behaviour which would usually be dealt with as a disciplinary matter, which may be known to be or suspected to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health difficulty.
- A student's health difficulties are adversely affecting the health, safety or wellbeing of others.
- The student's academic performance is being hindered to the point where it is impacting adversely on their ability to progress and/or achieve and is thought to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem.
- The student's personal conduct is not acceptable and is thought to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem.

Stages of action

The procedure can be entered at any of the stages outlined below, depending on the level of concern and urgency, though the objective is for that most situations to be remedied by action taken at stages 1 or 2.

Stage 1 – Informal Stage

Once concerns have been raised about the student, a member of staff from the student's course or the Student Support team should approach the student and explain to them, in a supportive and understanding way, the concerns about their fitness to study. This would ordinarily be a member of staff with knowledge of the student, such as their Course Leader or Student Support Officer. That member of staff should contact the Head/Deputy Head of Student Services if they require advice or guidance on how to approach the student and discuss difficult issues.

The student will be made aware of the precise nature of the circumstances causing concern, and the member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter in informal discussions with the student. The student should be encouraged to explain their views and should be encouraged to avail fully of the support services offered by SFS. The member of staff should consider with the student whether any specific academic arrangements or other types of support could be applied to help the student study more effectively.

In most cases, it is anticipated that the concerns can be addressed informally at this stage, that the student will engage with this process and will access the support services available to them at SFS. Any plans agreed between the member of staff and the student should be set out formally via email to the student, so it is clear what has been agreed.

If possible, a review period should be agreed between the student and member of staff, for which sufficient time should be granted to allow the student to consider their behaviour and seek support. At the review meeting, the steps taken to address the concerns should be discussed in detail.

Further meetings may be scheduled to monitor progress made by the student, and the member of staff should help the student access the support available to enable them to continue and engage with their studies. The general expectation is that the student will take personal responsibility and fully engage with the support recommended by staff.

If the concerns have not been addressed, support has not been sought, and the member of staff feels that the progress has not been made in the agreed time frame, the case can move on to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Case Review

If action taken under Stage 1 has not been successful or if the concerns raised are too serious to be dealt with informally, Stage 2 should be invoked.

A meeting of a Case Review Panel can be convened by the Head/Deputy Head of Student Services, who will chair the Panel, which will normally be made up of the following members of staff:

- The relevant Course Leader
- The relevant Student Support Officer
- Any other support staff involved in the case

Before the Case Review Panel meeting, medical assessment may be sought, usually from the student's GP or medical practitioner, and the student will be encouraged to consent to the assessment. The student will be able to submit documents for the Panel to consider and will be given a copy of any documents seen by the Panel. The student may request to attend all or part of the Case Review Panel meeting. The Panel will make a reasoned decision regarding whether the student should attend. If the student does attend, they will have the right to bring a friend or representative to the meeting.

A letter will be sent to the student after the meeting setting out any decision made and the rationale for that decision.

The Panel will order its proceedings as it sees fit and may call witnesses if necessary. The outcomes available to the Panel are:

- No further action required.
- To monitor the student formally for a specific period of time. An action plan will be agreed with the student detailing any steps the student will need to take and the support to be provided to the student. Regular review meetings will be arranged with the student and a nominated member of staff. The student should be made aware of what will happen if the action plan is breached, which will normally involve their case moving to Stage 3.
- To recommend a specific academic arrangement be put in place, which may include a suspension of studies. Such recommendations should be agreed between the Head/Deputy Head of Student Services and the student. If the student does not agree, the case will move on to Stage 3.
- To refer the case to a Fitness to Study Panel under Stage 3 of this procedure. This will be appropriate in serious cases, for example where there is evidence of a serious risk to the health and safety of the student or others in the SFS community. This course of action would be used when it is considered that suspension, temporary exclusion, permanent exclusion or withdrawal may be the appropriate course of action, or if the student has not agreed to a recommendation or action plan made under Stage 2.

Stage 3 – Fitness to Study Panel

This stage will only be invoked following a referral from a Case Review Panel or if, in the opinion of the Head of Student Services in consultation with the College Principal, it is decided that the case is sufficiently serious and urgent to warrant an immediate referral without consideration of Stage 1 or 2. The College Principal (or nominee) can convene a Fitness to Study Panel to consider the case and will act as chair of the Panel.

The Members of the Panel will usually be:

- The Head/Deputy Head of Student Services
- The relevant Course Leader
- The relevant Student Support Officer
- Any other support staff involved in the case

As with the Case Review Panel, the student will have the opportunity to submit documents for the consideration and will be sent a copy of any documents seen by the Panel.

The Panel may order the proceedings at its discretion, may call witnesses if required and may request further medical evidence.

The student will not be invited to attend but may send a representative to observe the process.

The outcomes available to the Panel include:

- A short-term exclusion to allow the student to be assessed by a medical professional, access support services both within and outside of SFS or for further information to be obtained. The exclusion will be reviewed within four weeks as set out below in relation to emergency temporary exclusion.
- Suspension with conditions for a period up to twelve months. A student who is suspended from SFS may be prohibited from participating in SFS activities and may either be prohibited from entering SFS premises or have restricted rights to enter the premises. The terms of the suspension will be notified to the student in writing, depending on the circumstances of the case. The decision to suspend a student shall be reviewed as necessary by the Panel.
- Exclusion or requirement to withdraw - if the Panel concludes, taking into account the individual circumstances of the case and any supporting medical evidence, that there is no reasonable prospect of the student re-engaging with their course in the short to medium term, the student will be permanently excluded or required to withdraw. This option should be reserved for the most serious cases.
- Any other action considered to be appropriate and proportionate by the Panel.

Temporary Exclusion

The Panel may impose a temporary exclusion for a set period of time with immediate effect. A student who is subject to a temporary exclusion order is prohibited from entering SFS premises and from participating in SFS activities. The exclusion may, exceptionally, be subject to qualification, such as the permission to take an examination or to enter SFS premises to attend a meeting with a support service. The terms of exclusion will

be individual to each case and will be notified to the student via email. A temporary exclusion does not affect the student's status at SFS.

The decision to temporarily exclude will normally be reviewed within four weeks. The review may include a recommendation that a Fitness to Study Panel be convened to reconsider the case.

Return to Study

The Case Review Panel or Fitness to Study Panel that made the decision regarding a suspension or temporary exclusion, or as many members of the original Panel as possible, will be reconvened to consider whether the student is fit to return to study.

Further medical evidence will be requested from the student which considers their ability to fully engage with their studies and meet the requirements of the course. A student will only be permitted to return if, after receiving the medical evidence, the Panel is satisfied that the individual is fit to study.

If a student agreed to suspend their studies under Stage 2, the Case Review Panel that originally considered the matter can make the decision regarding a return to studies without referral to a Fitness to Study Panel if it is satisfied that the student is fit to return.

If the Fitness to Study Panel made the decision to suspend or temporarily exclude under Stage 3, the Panel should reconvene to consider whether the student is fit to return to study and make a decision.

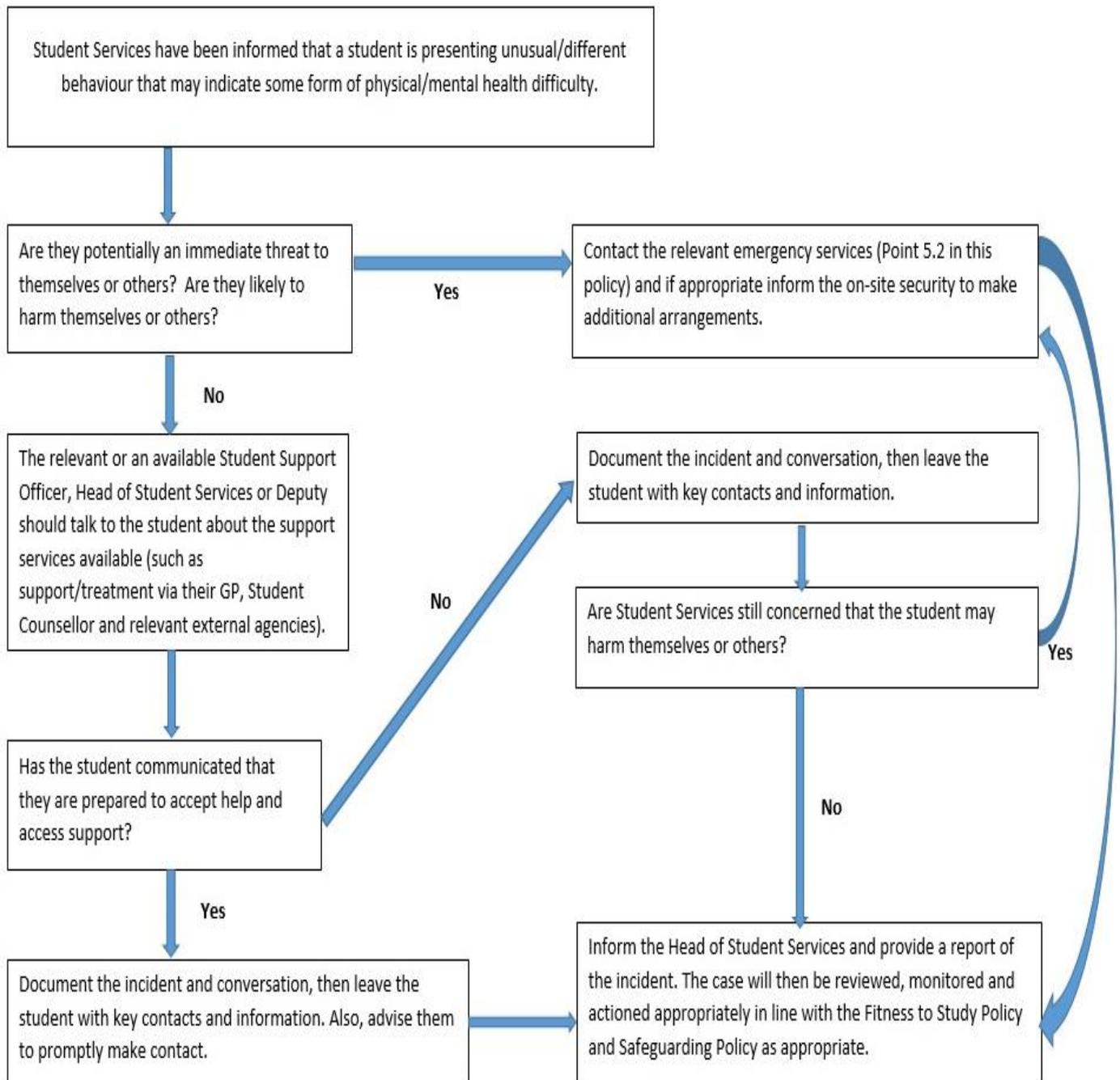
Where a student returns to study after a temporary exclusion/suspension under this policy, the relevant Panel will consider any support that the student may require to support a return to studies, such as regular review meetings or a return to study action plan. The general expectation is that the student will agree to this support plan and take personal responsibility for fully engaging with this support.

Crisis Situations

It is possible that, if a situation requires Stage 3 outlined in this policy, the student may pose an extreme risk to themselves and/or others that will require emergency measures to be taken by members of Student Services and assistance from outside agencies.

In such a situation, the Emergency Services or the local Mental Health Crisis Team should be contacted by a member of Student Services (as for cases of psychosis or suicidal ideation, for example). This should be followed up later by notifying the Head/Deputy Head of Student Services of the details of the incident and action taken. Immediate attendance by a member of Student Services as also outlined in the Safeguarding Policy would also be required in the majority of these situations.

Pathway for action in crisis situations:



Exam Board Decisions

If a period of suspension results in a student being unable to complete assessments, the relevant Exam Board will be informed that the student has been suspended or withdrawn under the Fitness to Study Procedure. The report from Stage 2 or Stage 3 will make a recommendation to the Exam Board on when and how the student is expected to re-engage with their studies and complete the required assessments. The Chair of the Exam Board will have access to the report.

Right of Appeal

The student may appeal to SFS against a suspension or requirement to withdraw.

An appeals form should be submitted to quality@brightonfilmschool.co.uk within 21 days of the date on which the order for suspension or the requirement to withdraw was made.

Any student considering making an appeal is advised to talk to one of the individuals listed below. They can advise on how to deal with an appeal, help to resolve it informally and, if necessary, support the student in the process of making a formal appeal.

- Student Support Officer at SFS
- Course Leader
- Head/Deputy Head of Student Services
- College Principal
- Student Representatives

Appeals forms can be found at www.screenfilmschool.ac.uk/policies/

Nominees

References in this policy to the holders of any post shall be construed to refer either to the post holder or to their respective nominee.

Appendix: Guidelines for Staff on Students & Mental Health

SFS aims to promote a culture of diversity within our community, providing a dynamic working and learning environment where all members are valued for their contribution and individuality. Applicants are encouraged to declare any existing mental health difficulties during the application process and Student Support may contact them and offer them the opportunity to discuss their personal support requirements further confidentially.

However, tutors and reception staff are often the first point of contact for a student experiencing mental distress for the first time and are often more aware of changes in a student's behaviour, which may indicate a need for support.

These guidelines aim to give practical and general guidance for staff where there is concern that a student may be experiencing mental health related difficulties which are either reoccurring or initial.

Introduction

If you're worried about a student's mental health, ask yourself the following questions:

- Has the student told you they have a problem?
- Has someone else expressed concern, such as another student or colleague?
- Have there been any significant changes in the student's appearance, such as sudden weight loss/gain or decline in personal hygiene?
- Do they smell or sound different, e.g. can you smell alcohol, or is their speech very loud/quiet?
- Have you noticed a difference in the mood of the student compared with how they are usually? (We can all experience a 'bad' day, but we need to be mindful of the potential there may be a problem when the day turns into a week, or month.)
- Have you noticed a change in their behaviour, such as being uncharacteristically withdrawn in class or absent, being inappropriate relative to the situation or not completing work?
- We may all experience one or more of these factors at some point in our lives and they do not always signal any cause for concern. The fact that some of the above factors may be present might suggest a need for greater concern, investigation or to seek advice from Student Support.

What you can do if you are concerned

- Try not to avoid the situation or pretend nothing is wrong, as this could make matters worse, or result in them lasting for longer. Approach the student in an empathetic and understanding way. Remember to be sensitive to issues relating to sexuality, race, religion, culture and gender.
- Just by asking the student how they are may give them the opportunity to discuss their concerns with you – they might only want a listening ear.
- Be prepared to listen and give some time if you are able. If there are constraints on your time, tell the student this at the start and consider arranging a different time (e.g. after a class). Complete and return a referral form with as much detail as possible if you really do not have time to ask the student personally.



- Being open and honest with the student in your initial contact will help to develop a level of trust between you. A student might often avoid seeking help because of concerns about the consequences of telling someone.
- Whilst you should usually try to get the student's consent before sharing confidential information with someone else, if you are unsure on how to help the student you can contact Student Support, in confidence, or complete and return a referral form.
- Try not to offer help that is beyond your role. We all have something to offer, but it is critical we are aware of what is realistic, and what we are qualified to do. It is not your responsibility to solve the student's problem, but it is hugely helpful for you to flag up any possible issues.
- The student may not always identify they have a problem or may not want to acknowledge it. Try not to humour them by pretending there isn't a problem if it is clear to you there is.
- How you respond to your concerns will largely depend on your assessment of their situation. The key consideration is the safety and well-being of the student and those around them.
- Student referral forms are available for you to complete with further information about any concerns you may have noticed. These are available from reception and there will be copies in the back of registers. Once you have returned them, they are looked at by Student Services. The referral system is there to support you and the student where a longer conversation is needed or where there are concerns that you feel need investigating. These should be filled in with as much detail as possible and returned promptly.

When a student does not want to talk

- If the student is not ready to accept help or talk about their problem, do not ask insensitive or intrusive questions. Respect the right of the student if they do not wish to discuss things. Offer them an open invitation to come back and talk to you, or Student Support in the future.
- However, if you are still concerned about a student who has refused help, speak to the Head of Student Services.

When a student does want to talk

- If the student does discuss their problem with you, be wary of giving advice that is beyond the boundaries of your role.
- Do express your concern, but remember you are not a therapist or a counsellor. Listen and encourage the student to speak to a Student Support Officer.

Dealing with crisis situations

Whilst very rare, there may be instances where a student's behaviour gives serious cause for concern. Such situations will vary, from indications they are experiencing suicidal thoughts, to exhibitions of bizarre or violent behaviour, which raises concern that the student or others may be at risk.

Assuring your safety and that of others, including the individual, is paramount. The following notes may help:

- Try to remain and appear calm and adopt a non-threatening approach.
- If there are other students nearby, calmly ask them to leave the area.
- Some situations can be distressing – if you do not feel confident to approach the student, then go and



get help.

- Ensure appropriate people are contacted such as Student Support/Student Services, Security and/or First Aider.
- If there is serious concern about the individual do not hesitate to call the emergency services – paramedics or police.