

## FITNESS TO STUDY PROCEDURES

Yellow highlighted text identifies the most recent revisions to the regulations. If you require these revisions to be identified in an alternative format, please contact the Secretary to Academic Board.

### 1. Scope

- 1.1 This Fitness to Study Procedure applies to all students studying for a University of Worcester award, and paying fees direct to the University, regardless of level, venue or mode of study. In the case of professional courses which are subject to the Fitness to Practise Procedure, the flowchart at [Appendix A](#) will be used to assess which is the appropriate procedure to apply in the circumstances. Both procedures may be followed if necessary, but in this case they will be applied sequentially and not at the same time. The Procedure seeks to ensure that the health and wellbeing of individual students is recognised as being central to their ability to achieve their full potential, and to actively engage in University life.

### 2. Purpose

- 2.1 It is the aim of the University to foster independence, self-awareness and personal responsibility amongst students, in order to promote success. In this context it is essential that students take an active part in the process, and manage their own health and wellbeing appropriately, in order to fulfil their academic potential and enjoy their experience at university. This emphasis on personal responsibility is clearly communicated to students from the outset, and the University provides a range of support, including Personal Academic Tutors (PATs) and professional support services, to encourage an independent and proactive approach to wellbeing. The Students' Union (SU) also provides wellbeing support and advice for all student members.
- 2.2 The University will seek to ensure that students are fully aware of all the advice, support and guidance available to them to maintain their own health and wellbeing, and will help and encourage them to access and engage with services through the University, SU, NHS and other providers.
- 2.3 The purpose of the procedure is to provide a framework for prompt and supportive intervention when a student:
- a) Does not engage with, or sufficiently benefit from, the available support, and their health, wellbeing and/or behaviour is perceived as having a detrimental impact on their ability to cope with University life; or to study or progress on their course;
  - b) Or where their health, wellbeing or behaviour is having a detrimental effect on other students, University staff or the wider community.
- 2.4 The primary aim of this procedure is to provide a framework in which students can be supported to continue studying, where possible. Where this is not in the best interests of the student, and/or others who are directly affected, then the procedure gives guidance on supporting the student to take a break until they are in a position to re-engage with their studies. Specifically, the procedure applies where there is sufficient concern that an aspect of the student's mental or physical health or wellbeing is leading to any of the following:
- a) an unacceptable level of risk to the future health and wellbeing of the student

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- b) exceptionally poor attendance and/or lack of academic progress
- c) behaviour which is having a detrimental impact on the health, wellbeing or safety of other members of the University
- d) behaviour which is placing unreasonable demands on other students, members of University staff, or staff in the SU
- e) behaviour which is having an ongoing negative impact on learning and teaching activities
- f) behaviour which is having a significant negative impact on the wider community and/or the reputation of the University

### 2.5 The procedure is based on the following principles:

- I. The best interests of the student are central to the process, with their personal circumstances being fully taken into account, as far as they are known to the University
- II. Students who are experiencing difficulties in relation to their health and/or wellbeing will be supported to address their difficulties at the earliest appropriate point
- III. Wherever possible, students will be supported to study to the best of their ability, meet the required learning outcomes, and complete their course
- IV. Students will be supported to make informed decisions regarding all of the options available to them
- V. Staff in academic Schools and service departments will work together to ensure that students experience a consistent and fair process that offers them the best opportunities for success
- VI. In exceptional circumstances, where it is deemed appropriate, the University can require a student to take a break or withdraw from their studies
- VII. The University will continue to offer support to any student taking a break from their studies.

## 3. Context

- 3.1 The University of Worcester's Strategic Plan 2019 states the University's values which are built on the principles of inclusion and fairness. These include ethical behaviour, with kindness and mutual respect for human equality, dignity, and social responsibility. The procedure will be implemented in line with these values, taking a prompt, sensitive approach to minimise, as far as possible, any additional stress or anxiety for the student. We will aim to ensure that the student understands the processes involved, and is made aware of the University's focus on their best interests.
- 3.2 Students' individuality is recognised, and within the framework set out in this procedure, each case will be considered based on the specific set of circumstances in which it arises.

## 4. Initial or emerging concerns

- 4.1 Initial or emerging concerns may be identified by any member of the University community, including:
  - a) The student themselves, who is concerned about their ability to study or cope with University life, because of a deterioration in their physical or mental health or wellbeing, where other options (such as Mitigating Circumstances) are inappropriate.

- b) A member of staff from the student's academic School (including, for example, their PAT or a member of the course team, if they feel that the student needs more focused or extended support than the School can offer).
- c) A member of the University's professional support services, such as a School Professional Administrative Services team, Student Services or Accommodation
- d) Elected Officers or staff of the SU
- e) Other students.

## Referral

- 4.2 In the first instance, it is expected that all emerging staff concerns about a deterioration in the health and/or wellbeing of a student which might affect their ability to study, and/or to fully engage with student life, will normally be discussed with their PAT or course team, who will then contact firstpoint if necessary ([firstpoint4staff@worc.ac.uk](mailto:firstpoint4staff@worc.ac.uk)). SU colleagues and students may wish to refer directly to firstpoint.
- 4.3 firstpoint staff will ensure that the student is offered appropriate support and guidance, and will arrange referrals to relevant specialist services, such as Counselling and Mental Health, or Student Support and Wellbeing. At this informal stage, the emphasis will be on putting support systems in place to improve the student's health and wellbeing, and to allow them to continue successfully with their studies.
- 4.4 The decision to request initiation of the formal procedure will normally be taken by Student Services Professionals (such as Student Support Advisers, Counsellors or Mental Health Practitioners) when there is reasonable cause for concern for the student and/or others.
- 4.5 Each case will be considered on an individual basis, but intervention will normally be recommended when:
- a) The student's health, wellbeing or behaviour does not improve to an acceptable level, despite the support available, or
  - b) A student who has previously maintained an acceptable level of health, wellbeing or behaviour with appropriate support demonstrates a deterioration in their condition, or
  - c) The student fails to engage with the support offered and the concerns remain, or
  - d) The nature and/or extent of the support required is considered to be outside the scope of the University's support systems
- 4.6 A formal referral should be made to the Director of Student Life or Assistant Director of Student Life, or in their absence to the Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) Students or a nominated Deputy, using the Fitness to Study Referral template (Appendix B).

## Urgent referrals

- 4.7 Concerns that a student's mental or physical health or wellbeing may represent a serious and acute risk to the student, and/or to others, should be raised directly with the Director of Student Life, Assistant Director of Student Life, PVC Students, or a nominated deputy, by the member of the University community identifying the concerns.
- 4.8 This procedure is not designed to deal with emergency situations. If a student is at immediate risk of harm, or a threat to others, phone Security on 01905 855495 (24 hours) or

phone 999 and ask for an ambulance, and then let Security know. Further guidance is available in the Staff Signposting Guide

## **5. Procedure**

### **Structure of the procedure**

- 5.1 The procedure has three formal stages representing the degree of concern and/or the perceived seriousness of the situation.
- 5.2 In most cases the initial referral will be to Stage 1; however, where a case is considered to be more serious or urgent, referrals may lead directly to Stage 2 or Stage 3. It is possible for a case to move between any of the levels as necessary, depending on progress.
- 5.3 The procedure will be considered complete when a student has regained their mental and physical health and wellbeing to the extent where they are able to continue with their academic studies, and engage appropriately with University life under their own supervision, although support may be ongoing for some students to facilitate this.
- 5.4 If a student interrupts their studies as a result of, or during the implementation of, the procedure, the student will be required to engage in a 'Return to Study' review, following which, the procedure will recommence on their return to the University.
- 5.5 A student may be re-referred to the procedure at any time, and to any stage of the procedure, if the same, or different, concerns arise.

### **Consideration of referrals**

- 5.6 Referrals will normally be considered by the Director of Student Life or an Assistant Director of Student Life, but where necessary may be considered by the PVC Students or a nominated deputy (collectively referred to within this procedure as 'DSL' for ease of reference, but to include the Assistant Directors, PVC Students or any nominated deputy), who will recommend whether to (a) proceed to the formal Fitness to Study procedure, or (b) continue to offer support on an informal basis.
- 5.7 Exceptionally, a decision may also be taken to initiate an alternative procedure, such as the Student Disciplinary Procedure, where this is considered more appropriate to the circumstances. In exceptional circumstances, the Fitness to Study Procedure can be implemented alongside another procedure, such as the Student Disciplinary Procedure, if necessary.

### **Lead Person**

- 5.8 Where a decision is taken to initiate this procedure, the DSL will appoint a Lead Person, and indicate which Stage of the procedure should be implemented.
- 5.9 The Lead Person will be responsible for investigating the circumstances of the case, collating the relevant information, convening the necessary meetings, reporting back to the DSL and following up on any actions. They will act as the key liaison point for the student until the procedure has been completed.

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- 5.10 The Lead Person will normally be a senior member of Student Services, such as a Service Manager, Counsellor, Disability Adviser or Mental Health Practitioner. They may delegate aspects of the procedure but will maintain an overview of the student's health and wellbeing, and their progress.

### **Stage 1**

- 5.11 Stage 1 is used when there are emerging concerns about a student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour and the impact this has on their ability to progress academically, or at University more generally. Such concerns may include significant indications of deterioration in mental or physical health (such as disengagement or withdrawal from social and study activities, changes in/inappropriate attitude or behaviour, inability to meet deadlines, neglect of personal care and/or hygiene).

### **Investigation of concerns**

- 5.12 The Lead Person will investigate the circumstances set out in the referral form, seeking clarification and supporting evidence as necessary to obtain a full picture of the student's health and wellbeing. This may include (but is not limited to):
- a) Collation of any other relevant information about the student, e.g., non-attendance, missed deadlines, academic progress, isolation, security reports etc.
  - b) Clarification of what action has been taken so far and any discussions that have taken place with the student about arising concerns
  - c) Discussion with relevant academic colleagues, such as Course Leaders or Tutors
  - d) Discussion with relevant Student Services professionals to consider the most appropriate way forward.
- 5.13 It may be helpful to convene a case conference to bring together the relevant colleagues and consider all the available information at this stage. If this approach is taken, attendance at the meeting should be limited to those colleagues with direct involvement and/or relevant specialist knowledge, and all attendees must understand the confidential nature of the discussion. Such a meeting may allow consideration of the possible options and limitations for the student in their unique circumstances, but it should be recognised that decisions will normally be made following the opportunity for consultation with the student, as they may have additional information and/or an alternative perspective to provide.

### **Stage 1 meeting with student**

- 5.14 The Lead Person will contact the student to arrange a Stage 1 meeting. They will explain that concerns have been raised about the student in relation to their health and wellbeing, and the potential impact on their studies and/or ability to fully engage in University life. They will also emphasise the intention to support the student to continue their studies. A copy of this procedure should be provided to the student, and they should be advised of the support available from the Students' Union.
- 5.15 All meetings relating to this procedure will be conducted with respect to the principles set out in Appendix C.
- 5.16 The discussion will normally include:

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- a) Joint consideration of what support is available to the student through the University and/or external agencies (such as a GP or Mental Health Service), and the student's responsibility to engage with appropriate support
  - b) Discussion of other options available to the student: for example, applying for a temporary withdrawal from their studies, moving out of halls to commute from their home, or changing their course or mode of study.
- 5.17 The meeting should lead to an agreement between all parties on an action plan, which should include any support to be put in place by the University, expectations of the student's engagement with that support, any changes in behaviour or academic engagement which are indicated, and any external support that the student has been signposted to (such as their GP).
- 5.18 A timeframe for a review meeting to discuss progress should also be agreed during the meeting, based on the full circumstances of the case, except where the student is temporarily withdrawing from their studies, in which case they will be referred to the 'Return to Study' review (see below).
- 5.19 If for some reason it is not possible to reach agreement with the student about the appropriate course of action, it will be necessary to escalate directly to Stage 2 or Stage 3. In this case, a letter will be sent to the student within 10 working days, setting out the recommended action, confirming that the student has not agreed to this action, and inviting them to a Stage 2 or Stage 3 meeting.
- 5.20 If the meeting takes place in the student's absence, the possibility of escalation to Stage 2 or Stage 3 in the event of (a) the student's lack of engagement with the action plan or (b) lack of sufficient improvement in their health and wellbeing, behaviour and/or academic engagement should be made clear in a covering letter.

### **Stage 1 review meeting**

- 5.21 The Lead Person will arrange a meeting with the student and any relevant staff, normally 3-6 weeks after the initial meeting, depending on the circumstances.
- 5.22 The following points should be considered and included as appropriate:
- a) Review of engagement and progress since the last meeting
  - b) Exploration of any continuing or new concerns arising
  - c) Consideration of whether any changes need to be made to the ongoing support
- 5.23 The possible outcomes at this stage are:
- a) There is agreement that the student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour have improved to an extent where monitoring is no longer required under this process. The Lead Person will write to the student within 10 working days to confirm that the process has been completed. Structured support may or may not be ongoing, but where this is not the case, the student will be reassured that support is available as and when required.
  - b) Improvement in the student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour may be identified, but there is agreement that a further review meeting would be helpful. The Lead Person will write to the student within 10 working days to confirm the ongoing support that will be in place, and setting out a timescale for further Stage 1 review meeting, which will take the format set out from 5.21 above. Review meetings at this stage can continue indefinitely

during the programme of study if the review team and student agree that this is appropriate.

- c) A deterioration in the student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour may be identified, which the group agrees can be managed with further support. The Lead Person will write to the student within 10 working days to confirm the enhanced support that will be in place, and setting out a timescale for further Stage 1 review meeting, which will take the format set out from 5.21 above. The timescale should be appropriate to ensure that any further deterioration is identified promptly.
  - d) A deterioration in the student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour may be identified which raises sufficient concern for a referral to Stage 2 or Stage 3 of the process, with the student's agreement. The Lead Person will write to the student within 10 working days to advise of the date of the Stage 2 or Stage 3 meeting.
- 5.24 If for some reason it is not possible to reach agreement with the student about the appropriate course of action, it may be necessary to escalate directly to Stage 2 or Stage 3. In this case, a letter will be sent to the student within 10 working days, setting out the recommended action, confirming that the student has not agreed to this action, and inviting them to a Stage 2 or Stage 3 meeting.
- 5.25 If the review meeting takes place in the student's absence, the letter to the student should clearly state who was involved in the meeting and what the outcome was, and set out the proposed actions for both the University and the student. The possibility of escalation to Stage 2 or Stage 3 in the event of (a) the student's lack of engagement with the action plan or (b) lack of improvement in their health and wellbeing, behaviour and/or academic engagement should be made clear in the letter.

## **Stage 2**

- 5.26 Stage 2 of the procedure is used when there are significant concerns about a student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour, and the impact this has on their ability to progress academically, or at University more generally. A Stage 2 referral can also be made following a Stage 1 review, as outlined in 5.23. In either case, this stage allows for a more direct and formal response where the concerns are of a more serious and/or persistent nature. This might include, for example, behaviours or issues which impact on other students or staff, such as persistent self-harm or a serious lack of self-care; or behaviours impacting on the student's own wellbeing and/or academic progress, such as a persistent lack of engagement with University/academic life, or repeated over-use of alcohol.

### **Investigation of concerns**

- 5.27 The Lead Person will investigate the circumstances set out in the referral form, seeking clarification and supporting evidence as necessary to obtain a full picture of the student's health and wellbeing. This may include (but is not limited to):
- a) Stage 1 documentation (if appropriate)
  - b) Collation of any other relevant information about the student, e.g., non-attendance, grades, missed deadlines, isolation, security reports etc.
  - c) Clarification of what action has been taken so far and any discussions that have taken place with the student about arising concerns
  - d) Discussion with relevant academic colleagues, such as Course Leaders or Tutors
  - e) Discussion with relevant Student Services professionals to consider the most appropriate way forward.

- 5.28 It may be helpful to convene a case conference to bring together the relevant colleagues and consider all the available information at this stage. If this approach is taken, attendance at the meeting should be limited to those colleagues with direct involvement and/or relevant specialist knowledge, and all attendees must understand the confidential nature of the discussion. Such a meeting may allow consideration of the possible options and limitations for the student in their unique circumstances, but it should be recognised that decisions will normally be made following the opportunity for full consultation with the student, as they may have additional information to provide.

### **Stage 2 meeting with the student**

- 5.29 The Stage 2 meeting should include those members of staff who have a direct link or support role with the student and a person in a position of decision-making authority for the relevant area within the University. These will include:
- a) The Director of Student Life or nominated deputy (normally the Chair)
  - b) The Head of the student's academic School or nominated deputy (such as an Associate Head or Course Leader)
  - c) The Lead Person
  - d) A member of staff from Student Services to take confidential notes of the meeting.
  - e) Other attendees may include, for example:
    - I. Mental Health, Counselling, Disability or Student Support professional who has been involved in providing support to the student, and/or presenting the referral
    - II. Other University staff who have been involved in the case, such as the Residential Services Manager, Director of Security, or their nominated deputies.
- 5.30 The Lead Person will contact the student, taking a sensitive and supportive approach, to arrange a Stage 2 meeting. They will explain that concerns have been raised about the student in relation to their health and wellbeing, and the potential impact on their studies and/or ability to fully engage in University life. A copy of this procedure document should be provided to the student, with an explanation of its purpose, emphasising the supportive nature of the University's approach. They should also be advised of the support available from the Students' Union.
- 5.31 Where possible, a mutually convenient date and time should be set for the meeting, although it should be made clear that this meeting is a priority for all parties, and must take place within a reasonable timescale (usually no more than 1 week from the meeting request) because of the importance of the issues to the student's health and wellbeing. The student should be made aware that the meeting is to be prioritised over other University commitments, and that the Lead Person can contact Tutors or other staff, without divulging details of the situation, on behalf of the student to confirm this if requested.
- 5.32 A change of date and/or time, at the request of the student, should only be considered when absolutely necessary, AND if appropriate to the circumstances and urgency of the referral, but the student should be advised that if they are then unable to attend for any reason, the meeting may take place in their absence. This will also be the case if the student refuses to engage with the process, although every effort will be made initially to encourage the student to take an active part in improving their own wellbeing through a package of support.
- 5.33 The date, time, venue and format of the meeting should be confirmed in writing to the student, and they should be advised that they may bring a supporter with them to the



meeting if they wish to do so, although it should be made clear that this is not a disciplinary meeting, and that their role is a supportive one. This person should be a current member of the University (that is a student or member of staff, or a staff or elected member of the Student's Union). The supporter will be able to support the student, including helping them to present their point of view if necessary, but will not speak independently on their behalf. The student must advise the Lead Person 2 days in advance if they are bringing anyone to the meeting, and provide the name of the person who will accompany them. The letter must include a list of the University staff attending, together with their roles and the reason for their attendance.

5.34 The following points should be considered and included as appropriate:

- a) An outline of this procedure and its purpose, drawing to the attention of all parties the extent to which the discussion can be deemed confidential and that a record will be retained on the student's file and a summary of outcomes provided to the relevant Head of School and Course Leader
- b) Identification or explanation of the concerns being raised, with the lead person giving clear examples/evidence of the issues causing concern
- c) Where appropriate, consideration of the actions taken under Stage 1 of this process, and the relevant outcomes
- d) Clarification of the student's personal responsibility, as relevant to the circumstances; e.g. to be 'well enough' to study and/or to be respectful of others
- e) An opportunity for the student to give their perspective of events and provide clarification of any relevant history or context, and details of any actions or treatments that they are currently implementing, or which have previously proved helpful
- f) Joint consideration of what support is available to the student through the University and/or external agencies (such as a GP or Mental Health Service), and the student's responsibility to engage with appropriate support
- g) Discussion of other options available to the student: for example, applying for a temporary withdrawal from their studies, moving out of halls to commute from their home, or changing their course, or mode, of study
- h) Clarification of the consequences of failing to agree an action plan, failing to complete the agreed actions, or continuation or escalation of the cause(s) for concern.

5.35 The meeting should lead to an agreement between all parties on an action plan, which should include any support to be put in place by the University, expectations of the student's engagement with that support, any changes in behaviour or academic engagement which are indicated, and any external support that the student has been signposted to (such as their GP).

5.36 A timeframe for a review meeting to discuss should also be agreed during the meeting, based on the full circumstances of the case, except where the student is withdrawing from their studies, in which case they will be referred to the 'Return to Study' review (see below).

5.37 A report of the meeting, agreed action and review date should be documented by the Lead Person, and a copy sent to the student and other attendees no more than ten working days after the meeting has taken place.

5.38 The Lead Person will confirm to the Head of School and Course Leader that the student has support in place, and will notify them of any action points which relate directly to the programme, such as the requirement for regular attendance.

- 5.39 A copy of this report should be kept on the student's record until at least three months after the student has completed their course, or withdrawn from the University. It should then be securely destroyed.
- 5.40 If for some reason it is not possible to reach agreement with the student about the appropriate course of action, it may be necessary to escalate directly to Stage 3. In this case, a letter will be sent to the student within ten working days, setting out the recommended action, confirming that the student has not agreed to this action, and inviting them to a Stage 3 meeting.
- 5.41 If the meeting takes place in the student's absence (see para 5.32), the report to the student should clearly state who was involved in the meeting and what the outcome was. The possibility of escalation to Stage 3 in the event of (a) the student's lack of engagement with the action plan or (b) lack of improvement in their health and wellbeing, behaviour and/or academic engagement should be made clear in a covering letter.

### **Stage 2 review meeting**

- 5.42 The Lead Person will arrange a meeting with the student and the relevant staff who were involved in the initial Stage 2 meeting (see para 5.29), or, for students referred back from Stage 3, with relevant staff from the Stage 3 meeting, with the exception of the Chair.
- 5.43 A change of date and/or time, at the request of the student, should only be considered when absolutely necessary, AND if appropriate to the circumstances and urgency of the review, but the student should be advised that if they are then unable to attend for any reason, the meeting may take place in their absence. This will also be the case if the student refuses to engage with the process, although every effort will be made initially to encourage the student to take an active part in managing their own wellbeing.
- 5.44 The following points should be considered and included as appropriate:
- a) Review of progress since the last meeting
  - b) Consideration of whether agreed actions have been undertaken
  - c) Explanation and exploration of any continuing or differing concerns arising
  - d) Consideration of whether any changes need to be made to the ongoing support
- 5.45 The possible outcomes at this stage are:
- a) There is agreement that the student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour have improved to an extent where monitoring is no longer required under this process. The Lead Person will write to the student within ten working days to confirm that the process has been completed. Structured support may or may not be ongoing, but where this is not the case, the student will be reassured that support is available as and when required.
  - b) Improvement in the student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour may be identified, but there is agreement that a further review meeting would be helpful. The Lead Person will write to the student within ten working days to confirm the ongoing support that will be in place, and setting out a timescale for further Stage 2 review meeting, which will take the format set out from 5.42 above. Review meetings at this stage can continue indefinitely during the programme of study if the review team and student agree that this is appropriate.

- c) A deterioration in the student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour may be identified, which the group agrees can be managed with further support. The Lead Person will write to the student within ten working days to confirm the enhanced support that will be in place, and setting out a timescale for further Stage 2 review meeting, which will take the format set out from 5.42 above. The timescale should be appropriate to ensure that any further deterioration is identified promptly.
  - d) A deterioration in the student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour may be identified which raises sufficient concern for a referral to Stage 3 of the process, with the student's agreement. The Lead Person will write to the student within ten working days to advise of the date of the Stage 3 meeting.
- 5.46 If for some reason it is not possible to reach agreement with the student about the appropriate course of action, it may be necessary to escalate directly to Stage 3. In this case, a report will be sent to the student within ten working days, setting out the recommended action, confirming that the student has not agreed to this action, and inviting them to a Stage 3 meeting.
- 5.47 If the review meeting takes place in the student's absence (see para 5.43), the report to the student should clearly state who was involved in the meeting and what the outcome was. The possibility of escalation to Stage 3 in the event of (a) the student's lack of engagement with the action plan or (b) lack of improvement in their health and wellbeing, behaviour and/or academic engagement should be made clear in a covering letter.

### **Stage 3**

- 5.48 Stage 3 of the procedure is used where there is very serious, persistent, or pressing concern about a student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour, and the impact this has on their ability to progress academically, or at University more generally. In most cases Stage 3 will follow attempts to address concerns through Stages 1 and/or 2. However, in some cases it may be appropriate to proceed directly to Stage 3, for example:
- a) Where there are serious concerns regarding the risk to the student relating to their health, safety and/or wellbeing
  - b) Where there is a risk that without immediate intervention the student's health, safety and/or wellbeing may quickly deteriorate
  - c) Where there is a perceived current or imminent risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of other members of the University or local community
- 5.49 Where possible the objective of a Stage 3 meeting will be to ensure that the University considers all possible options to enable the student to continue with their studies, taking into account their full circumstances. However, Stage 3 of the procedure signifies real concern about the student's current fitness to continue studying and will therefore ultimately consider whether it is in the student's (or other members of the University's) best interests to consider temporary or permanent withdrawal from study.

### **Investigation of concerns.**

- 5.50 The Lead Person will investigate the circumstances set out in the referral form, seeking clarification and supporting evidence as necessary to obtain a full picture of the student's health and wellbeing. This may include (but is not limited to):
- a) Stage 1/2 documentation (if appropriate)

- b) Collation of any other relevant information about the student, e.g. non-attendance, missed deadlines, isolation, security reports, academic progress etc.
- c) Clarification of what action has been taken so far and any discussions that have taken place with the student about arising concerns
- d) Discussion with relevant academic colleagues, such as Course Leaders or Tutors
- e) Discussion with relevant Student Services professionals

5.51 It may be helpful to convene a case conference to bring together the relevant colleagues and consider all the available information at this stage. If this approach is taken, attendance at the meeting should be limited to those colleagues with direct involvement and/or relevant specialist knowledge, and all attendees must understand the confidential nature of the discussion. Such a meeting may allow consideration of the possible options and limitations for the student in their unique circumstances, but it should be recognised that decisions will usually only be made following the opportunity for full consultation with the student, as they may have additional information to provide.

### **Stage 3 meeting with the student**

5.52 A Stage 3 meeting will be chaired by the PVC Students (or a nominated deputy, who will be a member of the University Executive). The Chair is responsible for deciding the outcome, based on all the available information, in consideration of advice from specialist support staff, and taking into account the student's individual circumstances. The health, wellbeing and safeguarding of the student, and other members of the University and local community will be the most important consideration. Attendees at the meeting will include:

- a) The Head of the student's academic School or nominated deputy (such as an Associate Head or Course Leader)
- b) The Lead Person
- c) A member of staff from Student Services or the Vice Chancellor's office to take confidential notes of the meeting
- d) A representative from the Students' Union (elected or staff members)  
The meeting will be kept to a minimum as far as possible, but where necessary and appropriate, other attendees may include, for example.
- e) The Director of Student Life if the meeting is not chaired by the PVC Students
- f) A Mental Health, Counselling, Disability or Student Support professional who has been involved in providing support to the student, and/or presenting the referral
- g) Other University staff who have been involved in the case, such as the Residential Services Manager, Director of Security, or their nominated deputies.

5.53 The Lead Person will contact the student, taking a sensitive and supportive approach, to arrange a Stage 3 meeting. They will explain that concerns have been raised about the student in relation to their health and wellbeing, and the potential impact on their studies and/or ability to fully engage in University life. A copy of this procedure document should be provided to the student, with an explanation of its purpose, emphasising the supportive nature of the University's approach.

5.54 A date and time will be set for the meeting with an absolute minimum of 3 working days' notice. The student should be made aware that the meeting is to be prioritised over other University commitments, and that the Lead Person can contact Tutors or other staff, without divulging details of the situation, on behalf of the student to confirm this if requested.

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- 5.55 A request from the student for a change in date and time will only be considered if there is a genuine reason for unavailability, although every effort will be made to offer a suitable appointment. The student should be advised that if they are then unable to attend for any reason, the meeting may take place in their absence. This will also be the case if the student refuses to engage with the process, although the student will be strongly encouraged to take an active part in the process.
- 5.56 The date, time, venue and format of the meeting should be confirmed in writing to the student, and they should be advised that they may bring a supporter with them to the meeting if they wish to do so, although it should be made clear that this is not a disciplinary meeting, and that their role is a supportive one. This person should be a current member of the University (that is a student or member of staff, or a staff or elected member of the Student's Union). The supporter will be able to support the student, including helping them to present their point of view if necessary, but will not speak independently on their behalf. The student must advise the Lead Person at least one day in advance if they are bringing anyone to the meeting, and provide the name of the person who will accompany them. The letter must include a list of the University staff attending, together with their roles and the reason for their attendance, and must include an overview of the concerns which have led to the meeting being called.
- 5.57 The Lead Person will be required to provide a summary of the information gathered to all attendees in advance of the meeting, relating to the student's health, wellbeing and circumstances, academic progress, the support that has been provided, and any previous actions or agreements under Stage 1 or 2 of this process.
- 5.58 The student may wish to prepare a summary of their perspective on the situation, which might include, for example, some context for their medical and/or social history, details of actions they have taken to address the concerns, supporting medical evidence (such as a letter from their GP, if relevant), plans they have in place for improving their health and wellbeing, or suggestions of strategies that have worked well for them in the past.
- 5.59 The format of the meeting will be as follows:
- a) The Chair may decide to hold a pre-meeting for a short period before the student is invited to join the meeting. The purpose of this will be to ensure that all attendees understand the recorded background to the case, the student's situation (for example, which year of study they are in, the mode of study, nature of the course etc), and the options available as possible outcomes in the circumstances (such as, the implications of temporary withdrawal, or changing to part-time study).
  - b) The Chair will set out the reason for the meeting, introduce the attendees and explain their role in the process, and invite the Lead Person to present their summary (see 5.57)
  - c) The Lead Person will set out the background information they have collated in advance of the meeting
  - d) The student will be invited to present their perspective. They may do this verbally in person, present a report to be read by the Chair, or ask their supporter to present a written report on their behalf.
  - e) The Chair and other attendees (including the student) will have the opportunity to ask questions about any information that has been presented, or about any further information that they feel is necessary to fully understand the situation
  - f) The Chair will summarise the discussion, and either:

- I. Confirm the outcome of the meeting (normally this will only be the case where a solution has emerged from the discussion and been agreed by all parties), or
  - II. Ask the student to withdraw from the meeting for a short period to allow for further consultation with colleagues, before inviting the student back into the meeting to discuss the proposed outcome, or
  - III. Request further information and reconvene the meeting at the earliest opportunity to discuss the proposed outcome.
- 5.60 The Chair will write to the student within five working days to confirm the final outcome of the meeting. The possible outcomes are:
- a) The Chair may decide that no action is required at this stage. The letter will confirm that the process has been completed. Structured support may or may not be ongoing, but where this is not the case, the student will be reassured that support is available as and when required.
  - b) The Chair may recommend a package of support, to be overseen by the Lead Person. In this case, the student will be referred back to Stage 2 (para 2.42). The letter will confirm the ongoing support that will be in place, and set out a timescale for a Stage 2 review meeting. The timescale should be appropriate to ensure that any further deterioration is identified promptly.
  - c) The student may be asked to withdraw temporarily from their studies, or may take this course of action voluntarily. On their return, the student will be required to undertake a 'Return to Study' review (see below).
  - d) The student may be advised to consider an alternative mode of study (such as changing from full-time to part-time). If they do not wish to take this option, an alternative outcome, such as temporary withdrawal, may be necessary.
  - e) The student may be advised to consider an alternative course. If they do not wish to take this option, an alternative outcome, such as temporary withdrawal, may be necessary.
  - f) Exceptionally, the Chair may need to recommend that a student should withdraw permanently from the University. In this case, they will recommend this course of action to the Vice-Chancellor, who will make the final decision, and confirm this in writing to the student within ten working days of the meeting.

### **Returning to Study**

- 5.61 If any student withdraws temporarily from their course while engaged in the Fitness to Study process, either as a result of a recommendation from the University, or voluntarily, they will be required to undertake a 'Return to Study' review before being re-registered on their programme of study.
- 5.62 In advance of their planned return date, a reminder will be sent to the student asking them to contact the Lead Person, who will normally arrange an Occupational Health Assessment in the first instance, to formally assess the student's fitness to return to the University. A report from a GP or other relevant medical professional stating that the student is fit to study, in relation to their specific course and circumstances, may also be acceptable, depending on the individual case.
- 5.63 If the Occupational Health/Medical Report supports a return to study, the Lead Person will liaise with the course team and arrange to meet with the student, and discuss their ongoing support needs, to ensure that these are in place from the outset. The Lead Person may invite appropriate colleagues to the meeting, with the student's agreement, such as Mental

Health Practitioners, Disability Advisers or the PAT in order to facilitate support arrangements.

- 5.64 The Lead Person will write to the student within ten working days of the meeting to confirm the arrangements for returning to study, and the support framework agreed at the meeting. The letter will also confirm whether the student will be monitored under Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the procedure, and advise them of the timescale for their next review meeting. A copy will be provided to Registry to confirm that the student is fit to return to their studies.
- 5.65 If the Occupational Health/Medical Assessment does not support a return to study, the Lead Person will liaise with the course team and offer to meet with the student, to discuss their situation and options. The Lead Person may invite appropriate colleagues, with the student's agreement, such as Mental Health Practitioners, Disability Advisers or the PAT, in order to facilitate discussions about supporting the student towards being well enough to study.
- 5.66 The Lead Person will write to the student within ten working days of the meeting to confirm the outcome of the discussion. The letter should clarify the student's options for returning at a later date, recommended actions, and the process for requesting a new Occupational Health/Medical Assessment after an appropriate period (which would normally be a minimum of four weeks).

### **Crisis Situations**

- 5.67 There may be some circumstances under which it is not considered reasonable and/or safe to undertake a measured and phased review with a student before making a decision about measures to safeguard their wellbeing. This might include, for example, a student whose mental health or wellbeing gives critical cause for concern; and in particular when it might be considered harmful to invite them to a meeting which may in itself be a cause for added anxiety, when they are already in crisis.
- 5.68 In such situations, the Director of Student Life, PVC or appropriate Deputies may decide to implement the [Student Emergency Contact Opt-in Procedure](#) to involve the student's chosen contact. In extreme cases, such as where a student is considered to be an immediate threat to their own safety, contact may be made without current or prior consent from the student.
- 5.69 The purpose of such contact in the context of this procedure will be to ensure that the student is safe and supported while the process is undertaken. This will usually mean that the contact will be asked to attend an in-person meeting with the student and an appropriate member of University staff (such as a Mental Health Practitioner), where they will be asked to take an immediate, temporary break from their studies while Stage 3 of the process is applied. If they are living in University Managed Accommodation, they will normally be asked to return to their home address during this period.

### **Appeals to Review Decisions**

- 5.70 Students have the right to appeal against a decision that they should temporarily or permanently withdraw from their studies, or move from their accommodation, if there is clear evidence of one of the following:
- a) This procedure has not been properly followed

## Academic Regulations and Procedures: Fitness to Study Procedures

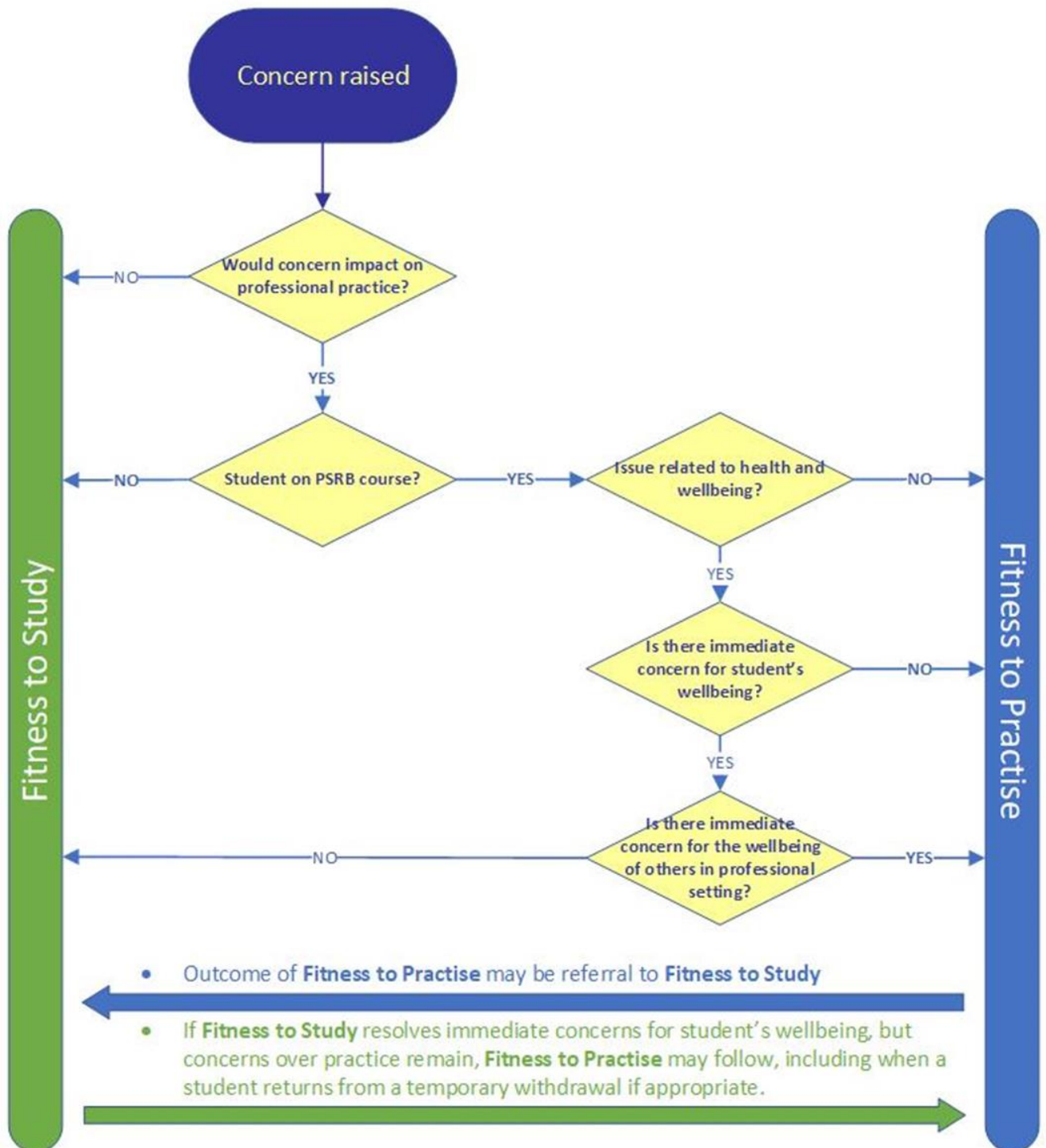
- b) The decision is biased, or unreasonable given the evidence provided at the time
  - c) New, and material, evidence has become available which has not previously been considered
  - d) The student has had a significant change of circumstance which is relevant to the case, and which was not previously considered
- 5.71 Students should lodge any request for review with the Complaints and Appeals Officer by submitting the Appeal for review of Fitness to Study Decision form at Appendix D within ten working days of being notified of the relevant decision.
- 5.72 Appeals will be referred to the Head of School in which the student is studying. They, or their appointed nominee, will review all relevant documents, and meet with the student to explore their concerns. They may also wish to meet with colleagues who have been involved in the process.
- 5.73 They will then recommend one of the following outcomes to the PVC:
- a) The Appeal does not meet any of the criteria listed above
  - b) The Appeal is upheld and the decision should be reviewed (stating the basis for review)
  - c) The Appeal is not upheld, and the decision should stand
- 5.74 The PVC’s decision will be final, with the exception of cases resulting in confirmation of a decision to ask the student to permanently withdraw. These will be referred to the Vice Chancellor. Their decision will be final.
- 5.75 The student should be issued with a ‘Completion of Procedures’ letter detailing their right to complain to the OIA.

<b>Date Approved</b>	<b>Day/Month/Year</b>
<b>Approval Authority</b>	LTSEC
<b>Date of Commencement</b>	July 2022
<b>Amendment Dates</b>	None
<b>Date for Next Review</b>	May 2024
<b>Related Policies, Procedures and Guidance</b>	<a href="#">Fitness to Practise Procedure</a> <a href="#">Mitigating Circumstances Procedure</a> <a href="#">Student Attendance Policy</a> <a href="#">Student Disciplinary Procedure</a> <a href="#">Student Emergency Contact Opt-in procedure</a>



Appendix A

Referral to Fitness to Study or Fitness to Practise flowchart



**Appendix B**

**Fitness to Study Referral Form – confidential**

To be completed by Student Services staff, except where serious concerns are being raised directly with the Director of Student Life, PVC Students, or a nominated deputy – please refer to Fitness to Study Procedure for guidance.

<b>Student's Name:</b>		<b>Student Number:</b>	
<b>Academic School:</b>		<b>Mode of study (p/t or f/t):</b>	
<b>Programme of Study:</b>		<b>Year of Study:</b>	
<b>Name of person referring:</b>		<b>Role:</b>	
<b>Please indicate the referral route (✓):</b>			
Student was referred to Student Services for support but their health and/or wellbeing has not sufficiently improved, or has deteriorated			
Student was referred to Student Services, but they did not engage with support, and their health and/or wellbeing has not sufficiently improved, or has deteriorated			
Student Services professional support staff are concerned about the health and/or wellbeing of a student engaged with their service			
A referral is being made directly to the Director of Student Life, PVC Students or a nominated deputy, based on concerns that the student's health and/or wellbeing may represent a serious risk to the student, or to others.			
Please give a brief overview of the reasons for referring the student to the Fitness to Study Procedure (full details are requested in the next section):			
<b>Please indicate what support has been provided to the student: (✓)</b>		STAR appointment(s)	SU support and advice
		Counselling 1:1	Residential Life Team
		Mental Health 1:1	PAT/Course Team
		Student Support and Wellbeing	External signposting/GP etc.
		Disability support / Mental Health Mentoring	Secondary Care Services

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Please provide details of the support which has been provided to the student:

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Background and reasons for referral (please be specific about the concerns/behaviours that have led you to refer the student to the Fitness to Study Procedure). Continue on a separate sheet, and/or provide supporting evidence if appropriate.:

<b>Signature of person referring:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Referral reviewed by:</b>			
<b>Name:</b>		<b>Role:</b>	
<b>Recommended action:</b>			
<b>Fitness to Study procedure not appropriate – continue with ongoing support</b>			
<b>Initiate procedure at</b>	<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Stage 3</b>
<b>Fitness to Study procedure not appropriate – refer to Student Code of Conduct</b>			
<b>Additional comments:</b>			
<b>Signature of person reviewing:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	

## Appendix C

### Guidance for conduct of Fitness to Study meetings

It is recognised that the Fitness to Study Procedure needs to be managed in a sensitive, supportive and confidential manner, therefore some general principles have been agreed to ensure that there is clarity and consistency of the expectations for Chairs and attendees.

All meetings relating to the Fitness to Study procedure will respect the following principles:

#### Preparation

1. A copy of this procedure will be provided to the student before the first meeting.
2. The purpose of each meeting will be clearly set out in advance.
3. Appropriate notice will be given, depending on the stage and circumstances (while recognizing that sometimes the need for intervention may be urgent where there are safety or safeguarding concerns).
4. Where possible, a mutually convenient date and time will be set for the meeting, although it should be clear that this meeting is a priority for all parties, and must take place within a reasonable timescale because of the importance of addressing concerns around the student's health, wellbeing and/or safety.
5. The student should be made aware that the meeting is to be prioritised over other University commitments, and that the Lead Person can contact Tutors or other staff, without divulging details of the situation, on behalf of the student to confirm this if requested.
6. One change of meeting date and/or time, at the student's request, will normally be facilitated if necessary, but the student should be advised that if they are unable to attend for any reason, the meeting may take place in their absence. This will also be the case if the student refuses to engage with the process, although every effort will be made initially to encourage the student to take an active part in improving their own wellbeing through a package of support.
7. Relevant members of staff may be invited to each meeting. However, in order that the student does not find the meeting unnecessarily intimidating, and that confidentiality can be assured, it is recommended that participants are kept to a minimum. Attendees will normally have attended the case conference, if one has taken place. In any event, the student should be informed of who will be present, and their role at the meeting.
8. The student should be advised that they may bring a supporter with them to each meeting if they wish to do so, although it should be made clear that this is not a disciplinary process, and that their role is a supportive one. This person should normally be a current member of the University (that is, a student or member of staff, or a staff or elected member of the Students' Union). The supporter will be able to support the student, including helping them to present their point of view if necessary, but will not speak independently on their behalf. The student must advise the Lead Person in advance if they are bringing anyone to the meeting, and provide the name and relationship/job role of the person who will accompany them.

### **Meeting format**

*This will vary according to the stage and circumstances of each meeting, but as a minimum:*

9. The Chair should introduce all attendees, stating each person's role at the meeting, and setting out an overview of the procedure and purpose of the meeting.
10. The Lead Person, or nominated Deputy, should summarise the circumstances of the case and action to date.
11. The student, supported by their supporter if appropriate, will be given the opportunity to respond and set out their perspective.
12. Options relevant to the circumstances should be set out and discussed.
13. Outcomes should be mutually agreed where possible, and communicated clearly and promptly. If for any reason it is not possible to reach agreement with the student about the appropriate course of action, it may be necessary to escalate directly to a higher stage of the process. In this case, this must be confirmed in the meeting notes (see below) as the outcome of the meeting.
14. The Chair should advise the student of anyone other than attendees of the meeting who will receive a copy of the notes, or a summary of the outcomes (see below).
15. No attendee is permitted to make a recording of the meeting, unless this is required as a Reasonable Adjustment for a disability, in which case this must be:
  - a) agreed with the Chair in advance
  - b) used only by attendees for the purposes of reviewing the meeting, and
  - c) destroyed securely once the meeting notes have been circulated.

### **Record and follow-up**

16. The Lead Person should provide notes of the meeting, with a full list of attendees, key points and decisions/outcomes, to all attendees within seven working days. Where appropriate, a summary of outcomes will also be provided to the relevant Head of School and Course Leader. These notes should be retained on the student's record until at least three months after the student has completed their course, or withdrawn from the University. They should then be securely destroyed.
17. The Chair should also write directly to the student clearly outlining the outcomes, and any actions required by the student and/or the University, including relevant timescales.

**Appendix D**

**Appeal for review of Fitness to Study decision:**

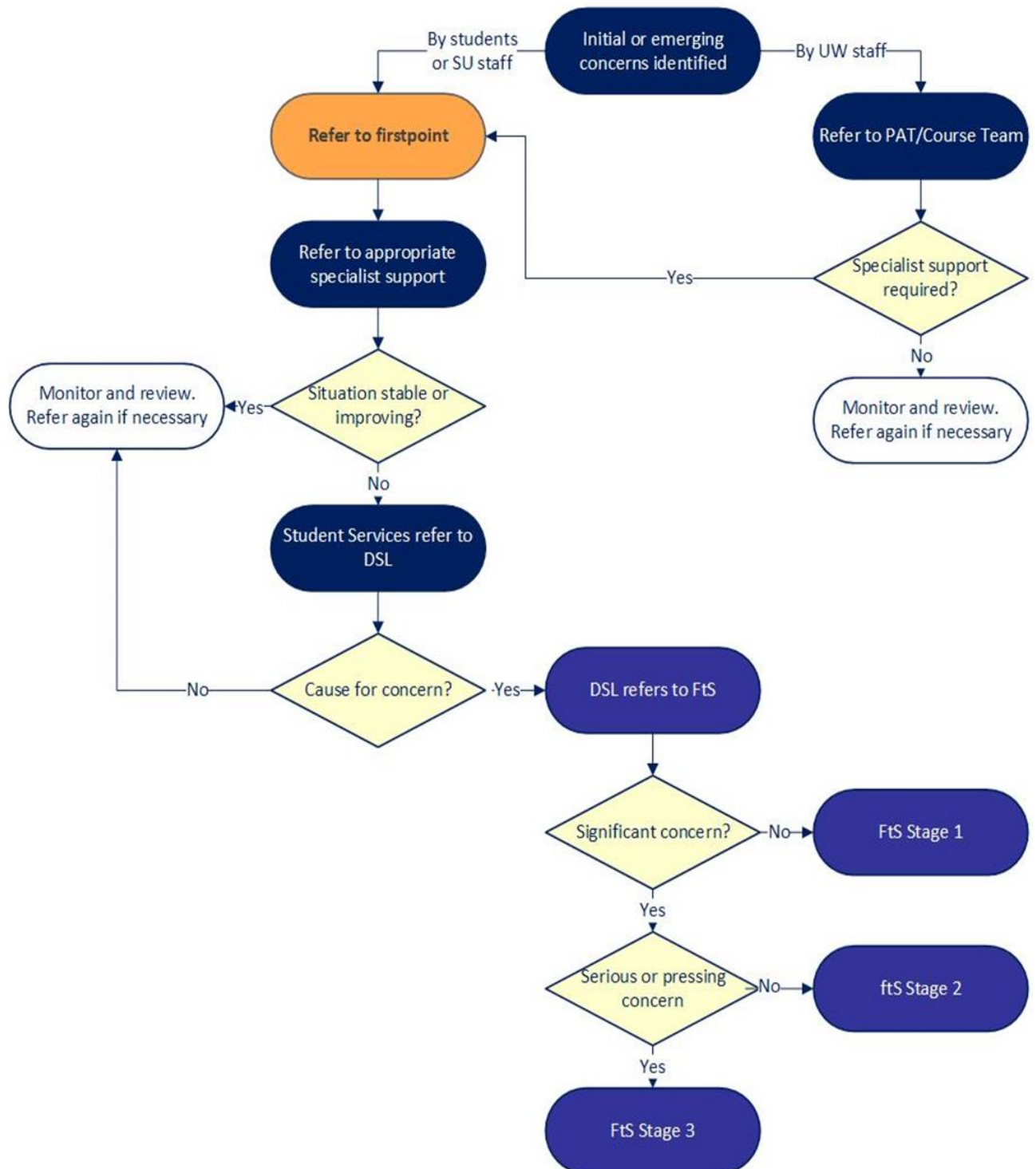
Student's Name:		Student Number:	
Academic Institute:		Mode of Study (p/t or ft)	
Programme of Study:		Year of Study (1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> /PG)	
<b>Please indicate the basis for your appeal</b>			
The Fitness to Study procedure has not been properly followed			
The decision is biased, or unreasonable given the evidence provided at the time			
New, and material, evidence has become available which has not previously been considered			
I have had a significant change of circumstance which is relevant to the case, and which was not previously considered			
Please give a brief overview of the reasons for your Appeal:			

Form to be submitted to [complaintsandappeals@worc.ac.uk](mailto:complaintsandappeals@worc.ac.uk)

Please attach a copy of the decision letter, and any additional evidence you wish to be considered.

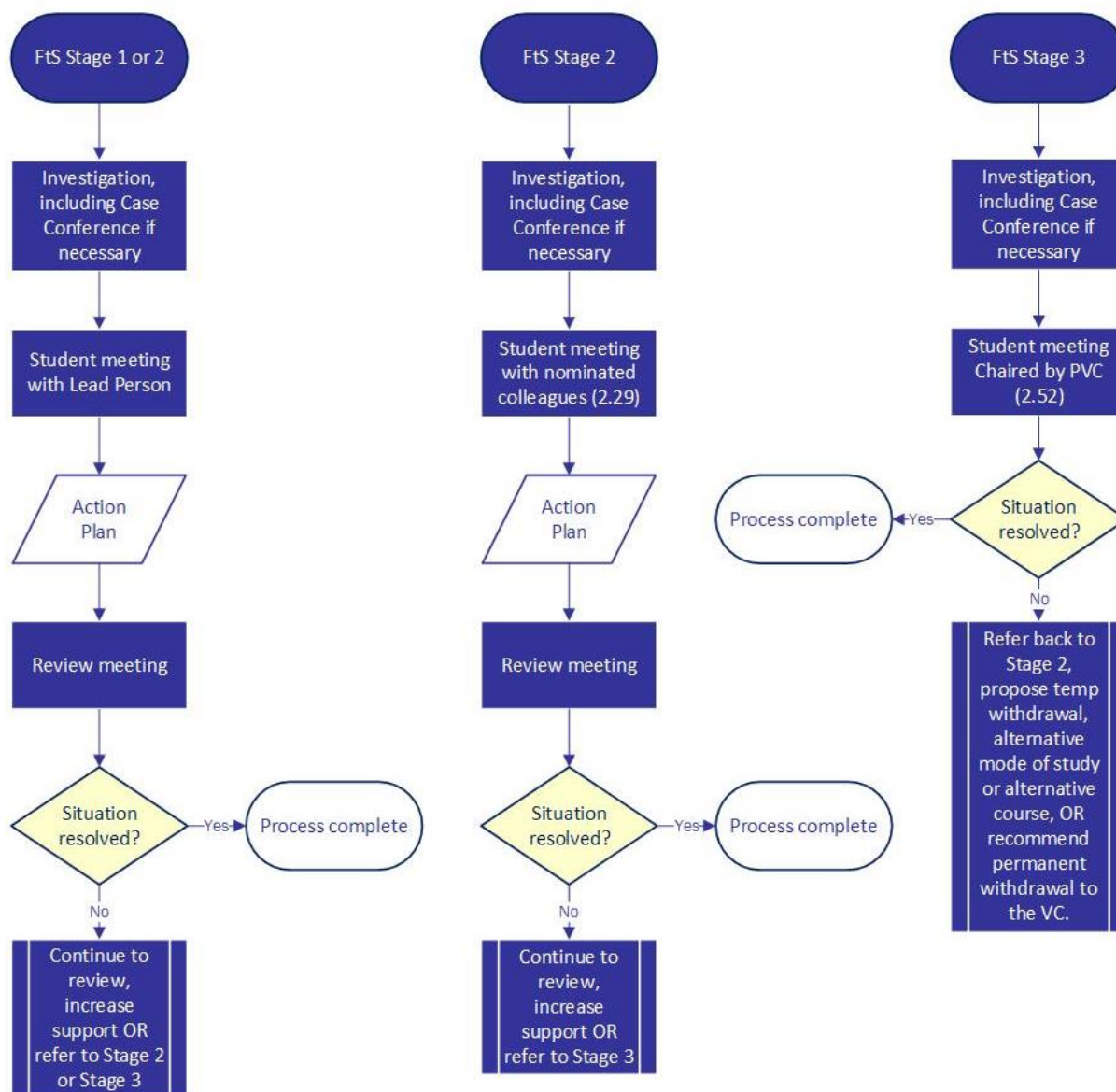
Appendix E

Referral to Fitness to Study Procedure flowchart





**Indicative pathways for Fitness to Study process flowchart**



**Appendix F**

**Glossary of Terms, Abbreviations and Acronyms**

<b>Appeal</b>	An application for a decision under this process to be formally reviewed
<b>Best Interests</b>	Ensuring that the student’s wellbeing is central to any decisions made
<b>Case Conference</b>	A professional meeting to discuss a case
<b><u><a href="#">Completion of Procedure letter</a></u></b>	A letter sent to a student when they have reached the end of the University’s internal processes, as required by the <a href="#">OIA</a>
<b>Confidentiality</b>	Respecting students’ right to privacy, according to <a href="#">GDPR</a> and the University’s <a href="#">Privacy Notice</a>

## Academic Regulations and Procedures: Fitness to Study Procedures

<b>CMH</b>	The University's professional <a href="#">Counselling and Mental Health Service</a>
<b>DSL</b>	The Director of Student Life, who is responsible for leadership of the University's Student Services.
<a href="#">Disability Adviser</a>	Professional colleagues providing support and advice to students with disabilities and long-term health conditions.
<a href="#">Elected Officers of the SU</a>	Students elected by their peers to represent other students in liaison with the University.
<a href="#">Firstpoint</a>	The University's student hub for information, advice and guidance
<a href="#">GDPR</a>	The UK General Data Protection Regulation – the law governing use of personal data
<a href="#">Interruption of study</a>	The option, in certain circumstances, to <a href="#">take a break</a> from a course of study and return at a later date
<a href="#">Mitigating Circumstances</a>	The procedure for notifying the University when things beyond your control affect your ability to meet deadlines, or impact on your performance
<a href="#">NHS</a>	The UK's National Health Service
<b>Occupational Health Assessment</b>	A medical assessment undertaken by a qualified practitioner to advise on an individual's health, safety and wellbeing in the context of their work or study
<a href="#">OIA</a>	Office of the Independent Adjudicator – an independent body set up to review student complaints in higher education
<a href="#">Permanent Withdrawal/ Withdraw from studies</a>	Leaving University before the end of a course
<b>PATs</b>	<a href="#">Personal Academic Tutors</a> – a named Tutor allocated to each student to support their learning and professional development
<b>PVC Students</b>	Pro Vice Chancellor for Students – the senior manager responsible for the student experience
<b>Professional Support Services</b>	The full range of services which the University provides to support student life, in addition to academic support
<b>Request Initiation of formal procedure</b>	The decision to formally apply this Procedure to a particular case.
<b>Required Learning Outcomes</b>	The knowledge, skills and attributes that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of their studies
<b>Return to Study Review</b>	An assessment of the student's fitness to rejoin their programme of study
<b>Secondary Care Services</b>	Hospital or community care provided by the <a href="#">NHS</a>

## Academic Regulations and Procedures: Fitness to Study Procedures

### STAR

Support, Triage, Advise, Refer – appointments offered by [Counselling and Mental Health](#) practitioners in need of support

### Strategic Plan

The document setting out the University's values and objectives

### Student Emergency Contact Opt-in Procedure

Option for students to provide permission for the University to use their preferred contact when their wellbeing is at risk

### Student Support and Wellbeing

The professional team providing pastoral and welfare support to students

### Taking a break from studies

The option, in certain circumstances, to [take a break](#) from a course of study and return at a later date

### **The Chair**

The person convening and leading a meeting

### SU

Worcester Students' Union – the independent organisation representing and supporting students