

Name of Document:	Student Fitness to Study Policy
Current version:	1.5
Date of last review:	October 2025
Last review by:	Head of Centre
Policy Owned and approved by:	SEEC
Next review due date:	October 2027

Section / Location	Summary of Change	Rationale / Regulatory Reference
Document-wide	Replaced <i>DGHE / SEEC</i> with <i>the College</i> ; standardised references to roles and panels	Consistency and neutrality; avoids institutional confusion
Introduction	Inserted new sub-section “Regulatory and Legal Framework” referencing OfS Conditions (C1–C2, E2–E3), Equality Act 2010, and OIA Framework	Ensures explicit alignment with OfS Conditions of Registration and statutory duties
Stage 3 – Fitness to Study Panel	Added new sub-section on “Student Representation and Transparency” clarifying that students may attend the panel with support; non-attendance must be justified and recorded	Aligns with OIA Good Practice Framework principles of fairness and right to be heard
After Stage 3 (before Appeals)	Inserted section “Equality, Diversity and Data Protection”	Reflects Equality Act 2010 and GDPR compliance requirements; reinforces inclusive practice
Appeals	Replaced the existing Appeals section with a clearer structure detailing: 1) valid grounds for appeal, 2) 21-day timeframe, 3) independent reviewer, and 4) right to escalate to OIA	Aligns with OfS Condition C2 (complaints and appeals) and OIA Framework
New final section	Introduced “Governance, Monitoring and Review” section specifying Academic Board oversight, Quality Committee monitoring, and biennial review	Strengthens governance and accountability under OfS Condition E2
Language and tone	Reframed “temporary interruption to study” as “temporary interruption to study”; softened disciplinary tone to supportive and collaborative	Reflects sector best practice for wellbeing-based interventions
Formatting and accessibility	Introduced consistent heading hierarchy (1.0, 2.0, etc.), improved readability, and accessible layout for publication	Enhances clarity and accessibility per OfS student engagement expectations
Data management	Added statements about handling medical/personal information in accordance with GDPR and internal policy	Meets data protection and confidentiality requirements

INTRODUCTION

Definition of 'Fitness to study'

DGHE is committed to developing a positive and safe environment that is supportive of students and enables them to engage with their studies and achieve to the best of their ability. The Fitness to Study procedure outlined in this policy is intended to inform and guide DGHE's response to situations where there are concerns that a student is not well enough to study, including situations where a student is unaware that they are not well enough to study.

Fitness to Study is concerned with an individual's capacity to participate fully and satisfactorily as a student in relation to their academic studies, and in relation to DGHE community in general. In addition to academic study, it applies to student activities on DGHE premises, for example study/research activities off premises, field work or work-based placements. It applies to situations where student conduct is brought to the attention of DGHE, which may suggest a potential risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of the student or others.

The procedure is intended to be supportive. The focus at all stages is to provide the infrastructure to support the student to succeed on their course. This may include temporary interruption to study of study until such time as the student is well enough to complete successfully. There will be however, a small number of cases where students do not engage with, or are unable to agree with, the support or adjustments that DGHE considers to be reasonable to enable the student to satisfactorily continue. In these rare circumstances, DGHE may no longer consider it feasible for the student to continue their studies. In such cases students may need to be suspended or required to withdraw from studies.

Regulatory and Legal Framework

This policy has been reviewed to ensure alignment with the Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration — specifically Conditions C1 (Consumer Protection), C2 (Complaints Handling), and E2–E3 (Management and Governance).

It also aligns with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the Equality Act 2010, and the good practice framework of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

The College is committed to operating its Fitness to Study process in a way that is fair, transparent, and supportive, ensuring compliance with these regulatory expectations while prioritising student wellbeing and academic success.

This policy operates alongside the College's Student Complaints Policy, Academic Appeals Policy, and Non-Academic Misconduct Policy. Where cases overlap, the relevant policy will be determined based on the primary nature of the concern (e.g., wellbeing, academic, or conduct).

THE PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

1. To provide a suitable and co-ordinated response by Academic and Advice & Wellbeing staff in circumstances where it is not considered appropriate to apply disciplinary procedures.
2. To encourage early intervention and active collaboration between all staff in managing situations where there are concerns regarding fitness to study.

3. 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 limited to) the following:

- The student has told a member of staff that they have concerns about their fitness to study.
- Concerns about the student's fitness to study are raised from a third party i.e. a friend, relative, housemate, colleague, employer, College staff or medical professional either whilst the student is at DGHE or whilst engaged in DGHE outside activities such as placements or field trips.
- The student's academic performance or personal conduct is not acceptable and is thought to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem.
- The student's disposition is such that it indicates that there may be need to address an underlying health issue.
- A student's health difficulties are adversely affecting the health, safety or wellbeing of others.

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.

PROCEDURES

The procedures can be entered at any stage depending on the level of concern and urgency.

NOTE: Where a student raises concerns about how this policy has been administered, rather than its outcome, they may use the College's Student Complaints Policy after the Fitness to Study appeal process has concluded.

Stage 1 – The Informal Stage

Once concerns have been raised about the student, a member of staff such as the Personal Tutor or the Head of Student Services should approach the student and explain to them, in a supportive and understanding way that concerns about their fitness to study have emerged. The student will be made aware of the precise nature of the behaviour that has caused the concern. The member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter by informal discussions with the student. The student should be encouraged to explain their views on the matter.

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 to study more effectively. It is anticipated that in most cases the concerns can be resolved informally at this stage and that the student will engage with this process and access the support services that are available to them.

Any plans agreed between the member of staff and the student should be set out in a letter to the student so it is clear what has been agreed. A review period should be established, by agreement between the student and member of staff if possible. Sufficient time should be given 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. Further meetings may be scheduled to monitor the

situation and progress made by the student. The member of staff should help the student access the support available to them to enable them to continue with their studies and engage in 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, the case can move on to the next stage of the process.

A member of staff should normally contact the student within 10 working days¹ of the concern being raised, consistent with the College's early resolution timeframe.

Stage 2 – The Review Panel

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 the Review Panel can be convened by the Head of Student Services who will also chair the Panel, usually consisting of the following members:

- The students' Programme Leader or Manager
- The students' Personal Tutor
- Other support staff involved in the case

Before the Review Panel meeting, medical assessment may be sought, usually from the student's GP or medical practitioner. 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 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 reasons for the decision. The Panel will order its proceedings as it sees fit and may call witnesses if necessary.

The outcomes available to this Panel are:

- No further action required.
- To recommend a specific academic arrangement be put in place which may include a temporary interruption of studies. Such recommendations should be agreed by the student's school and faculty where appropriate and the student. If the student does not agree, the case will move on to stage 3.
- 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 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 university community. This course of action would be used when it is considered that temporary interruption to study, 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.

¹ A working day is any day except a Saturday, a Sunday, Christmas Day, Good Friday or a bank holiday.

The Review Panel will normally be convened within 20 working days of the referral from Stage 1. A written outcome will be issued to the student within 10 working days of the meeting

Stage 3 – The Fitness to Study Panel

This stage will only be invoked following a referral from the Review Panel or if in the opinion of the Head of Student Services in consultation with the Head of Centre (or nominee) decide that the case is sufficiently serious and urgent to warrant an immediate referral without consideration of stages 1 and 2.

The Head of Centre (or nominee) can convene a Fitness to Study Panel to consider the case and will act as chair of this Panel. The Members of the Panel will usually consist of:

- The students' Programme Leader or Manager
- The students' Personal Tutor
- The Head of Student Services

The student will have the opportunity to submit documents for the Panel to consider and will be sent a copy of any documents seen by the Panel. The Panel may order the proceedings at its discretion and may call witnesses if required. The Panel may request further medical evidence. The student will not be invited to attend but may send a representative to observe the process.

The Panel will make a recommendation to the Head of Centre (or nominee). Possible recommendations may include:

- A short-term exclusion to allow the student to be assessed by a medical professional, access support services both within and outside of DGHE to obtain further information. The exclusion will be reviewed within three weeks.
- Temporary interruption to study with conditions for a period up to twelve months. A student who is suspended from DGHE may be prohibited from participating in college activities and may either be prohibited from entering the College's premises or have restricted rights to enter the premises. The terms of the temporary interruption to study 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 a recommendation will be made to the Head of Centre (or nominee) that the student is permanently excluded or required to withdraw. This recommendation should only be made in the most serious cases.
- Any other action considered to be appropriate and proportionate.

Student Representation and Transparency

The College recognises that decisions about continuation of study are sensitive and potentially distressing. Students may be accompanied by a friend, class representative, colleague, or a member of the Welfare or Advice & Wellbeing team

Where attendance is not deemed appropriate — for example, in cases where there are serious concerns about safety or wellbeing — the reasons will be clearly recorded and communicated in writing.

The student will always be given a written record of any decision made, including the rationale, evidence considered, and available next steps.

Returning to Study

The Review Panel or Fitness to Study Panel that made the recommendation regarding a temporary interruption to study 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 programme. 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 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 the Head of Centre (or nominee) if it is satisfied that the student is fit to return.

If the Head of Centre (or nominee) made the decision to suspend or temporarily exclude under stage 3 on the recommendation of the Fitness to Study Panel, the Panel should reconvene to consider whether the student is fit to return to study and make a recommendation to the Head of Centre (or nominee). The Head of Centre (or nominee) will make the final decision based on the Panel's recommendation.

Where a student returns to study after a temporary exclusion/temporary interruption to study 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 take personal responsibility for fully engaging with this support.

Equality, Diversity and Data Protection

The College is committed to upholding its duties under the Equality Act 2010. This includes making reasonable adjustments and providing appropriate support to students with disabilities, mental health conditions, or long-term health issues.

All decisions made under this policy will take account of individual circumstances, ensuring fairness, dignity, and respect for all students.

Any medical or personal information obtained as part of the Fitness to Study process will be handled sensitively and in accordance with the College's Data Protection Policy and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Records of Fitness to Study cases will be securely retained for a period of three years in accordance with the College's Data Protection and Records Management Policies.

Appeals and External Review

Students may appeal against a decision to suspend, withdraw, or exclude them on one or more of the following grounds:

- procedural irregularity;
- new or material evidence not previously available;
- disproportionate outcome.

Appeals must be submitted within 10 working days of notification of the decision. Grounds for appeal are:

- Procedural irregularity
- Unreasonable or disproportionate decision
- New, material evidence not previously available

Appeals should be submitted to the Head of Academic Administration. A written response will normally be issued within 20 working days.

Following completion of the College's internal procedures, students will be issued a Completion of Procedures letter². If dissatisfied with the outcome, they may refer their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) within 12 months.

Further information is available at www.oiahe.org.uk

Governance, Monitoring and Review

Oversight of Fitness to Study cases and appeals rests with the Quality Committee, reporting to the Academic Board. An anonymised annual summary will be reviewed to ensure consistency and compliance

This monitoring enables the College to identify trends, ensure consistency and fairness in decision-making, and review the effectiveness of the support offered to students.

The policy will be reviewed biennially or earlier if required by legislative, regulatory, or institutional changes.

Related Policies

Complaints Policy, Academic Appeals Policy, and Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

² A Completion of Procedures (COP) letter is a document that officially confirms a student has exhausted all internal complaints, appeals, or other procedures.