

Name of Policy:	Fitness to Study
Last Approved:	June 2019
Approved By:	Leadership Team
Consultation	Curriculum Group, Guidance Team
SLT Owner:	Vice Principal

Introduction

The college aims to be a welcoming and supportive college for all who work and learn here. We actively promote equality, and value diversity. We aim to foster a community which is inclusive, where all can flourish, and which is free from discrimination. We endeavour to meet the needs and aspirations of all our students. For students with learning needs, medical conditions and disabilities, we will make all reasonable adjustments to remove any barriers to their progress and academic success. There may be times when the physical or mental health of students is so affected that they cannot maintain academic progress and this policy sets out the ways in which the college can support students and how we ascertain their fitness to study.

Policy Summary

The purpose of the policy is to provide students, parents/carers and staff with a clear framework for the support and management of complex and significant health issues which affect academic progress. It provides a guide to the decision making process in the event of "fitness to study" issues, a set of parameters for the minimum acceptable level of academic progress and attendance and a series of stages for reviewing support and improvement. Whilst our aim is to support students to continue and complete their programme of study, this may not always be possible:

- Whilst it is reasonable to be flexible with attendance on a temporary basis, prolonged periods of absence cannot be sustained. All our courses are full-time and Schemes of Work are developed around classroom activities. We cannot successfully provide distance learning except for very short periods.
- There may be times when the nature of a student's ill health requires support beyond the expertise or capacity that we can reasonably offer at the college.
- Occasionally ill health may also present a health and safety hazard to an individual or to other students and in this situation a risk assessment will be undertaken. Sometimes, however, risks cannot be managed at an appropriate level in the college environment.

There are therefore occasions where, for one or more of the reasons above, it will be our collective judgement that to continue at the college is no longer in the best interests of the student.

Telling the College

We aim to create an ethos which encourages students to feel safe to disclose and tell us about their learning needs, medical conditions and disabilities. There are many opportunities for

disclosure such as on application, interview, enrolment, induction and at 1-1 reviews. Students are made aware of the range of support available at Induction and throughout their course.

Applications

Information disclosed in an application does not prejudice any decision about the application. The information is used to establish how best we can respond to the individual need and what reasonable adjustments can be made. Early disclosure is encouraged so that adjustments can be made in advance and the student can receive support at the earliest opportunity.

Students will be expected to meet the academic entry requirements for courses and programmes of study. The qualifications required for courses are not just to gauge ability, but to show the foundation of skills and knowledge a student has achieved in preparation for higher level study. Our entry qualifications are also in place to ensure that students are not put under the stress of being on course where they may not succeed. Evidence of recent regular attendance at school or alternative educational provision should also be provided to ensure that applicants are ready to attend and access a full-time programme of study in the college environment.

Where a complex or significant physical or mental health condition is disclosed in an application or interview, the Academic Support team will liaise with the student and family to discuss and agree details of the support required, the appropriate programme to be studied and any reasonable adjustments. Agreement will be reached on the information to be given to staff so that Transition Notes can be circulated and the best adjustments made. In these cases the support plan will also require formal medical paperwork to be provided to recommend adjustments and to evidence that a student is well enough to study full-time. This is particularly important where the health condition causes significant concern, since the expertise and capacity of the college in providing medical support is finite and the responsibility for appropriate medical support lies with the external services.

Occasionally a deferred start for the following academic year may be deemed more appropriate. This would be possible if there have been improvements by the next enrolment which make it possible for the student to commit to full time study and they continue to meet the conditions of entry requirements. Guidance will be given on what evidence will be expected at future enrolment to support this. Any future enrolment would be with the recommendation of external agencies involved, the agreement of parents/guardians and a support plan.

Support during the course

Whenever students disclose to a member of staff we will always seek to provide appropriate support, whether the condition is pre-existing or develops during study at the college. All members of staff have a duty of care and students may share this information with any member of the college staff. Members of staff will refer students who disclose to their Progress Coach and the Academic Support and Welfare team. Our objective is always to support students to remain on their programme of study and fulfil the requirements needed for successful completion of their courses.

We will use our best endeavours to support students when issues arise which make it difficult for them to meet the college's expectations of attendance and academic progress. Physical and mental health conditions may be temporary or permanent, stable or prone to remission. On an individual basis we will look at any possible flexibility around academic progress and the support that is needed for students to remain at college. We will make reasonable adjustments, for example, supporting students to study at home for a short period as a temporary measure.

The following would be considered on an individual basis:

- A minimum level of attendance needs to be maintained overall that will allow students to realistically achieve. The specific expectations regarding attendance will be set in each case depending on individual circumstances. (See Appendix A)
- It is reasonable for teaching staff, on a short term temporary basis, to liaise with students via email and online learning. However, this can only be a temporary solution as we do not have the resources and expertise of a distance learning college.
- In terms of personal support the Guidance team, the Academic Support and Welfare team and tutors can provide general support. There are counsellors on site and a daily drop-in session for support with anxiety.
- Help to catch up missed work can be arranged through curriculum departments and through the Academic Support team.
- Students must prepare for assessment through completion of homework, coursework, and exam preparation. Academic success depends on engagement in classroom activity, so long periods of complete absence or very poor attendance will make students' studies untenable. With regards to coursework and homework, if students fall significantly behind with their deadlines, despite extensions being offered, there will come a point at which catching up is not viable.
- The college has to meet awarding body regulations with regards to meeting coursework deadlines, specification requirements and procedures for access arrangements.

Fitness to study

When issues arise, the college will follow a staged process as outlined in Appendix A. At each stage we will make reasonable adjustments with the aim of supporting students to continue with their programme of study. There may be situations where the college believes that we have exhausted the support options available and made reasonable adjustments but students are unable to maintain their fitness to study. This means that in very rare circumstances it may not be possible for students to remain at the college.

In these situations the best interests of each student and their welfare are at the centre of decisions. For a student who has struggled to maintain academic progress against the odds there comes a point at which trying to catch up after a lengthy absence may have more of a negative impact on health than withdrawing from studies. To continue this situation would place the college in breach of its duty of care to young people.

A panel of college staff will review each student's situation and may make a recommendation for withdrawal to the Senior Leadership Team. If withdrawal is the outcome, then the student would have the right of appeal as outlined in Appendix A.

If it is agreed that a restart in the following academic year is an option, this may be possible if there have been improvements in the student's health by enrolment which make it possible for them to commit to full-time study and they continue to meet the college entry requirements. Any restarts would be with the recommendation of external agencies involved, the agreement of parents/guardians and an agreed support plan. When students withdraw from studies, guidance will be given both on what support might be appropriate to ensure fitness to study on return, but also importantly on what evidence will be expected at enrolment to support this.

This policy should be read in conjunction with other college policies, in particular:

Academic Support
Admissions
Assessment Policy

Appendix A: Fitness to Study

This is a framework for the support and management of students with health conditions that affect their studies. There are three levels and all parties should be made aware of the level that has been reached in the support process. This policy can be applied at interview or after enrolment.

Level 1

A health condition has been identified and there are concerns that the student may underachieve because of this. Concerns may be raised by the student, staff or parents/carers. This is usually because attendance has fallen or there has been a period of continuous absence. Any existing medical evidence or external support received (current or past) will be requested at this point, but it is not required in order for college support to be implemented. The student will meet with their Progress Coach to discuss concerns. The Progress Coach will discuss various support mechanisms that may help, including but not limited to:

- Planning study periods
- Additional Learning Conversations with teachers
- Moodle resources
- Counselling
- Referral to Academic Support (to be discussed with the Senior Guidance Team before referral)

The outcome of the meeting should be recorded on ProMonitor and shared with relevant staff. *Level 1* must be clearly identified. At this stage the student and parents/carers should be made aware of this policy.

Level 2

The student is at high risk of underachieving, or not achieving some of their programme of study. Measures put in place at Level 1 have not been successful in helping the student to make progress on their courses or improve their ability to attend.

The Senior Guidance Team will decide if Level 2 is appropriate, taking into account feedback from teachers, Progress Audits, Key Assessments and attendance data. A member of the Senior Guidance Team will meet with the student, parents/carers and other relevant staff to determine appropriate action and reasonable adjustment, including but not limited to:

- Changes to timetable
- Reduction in timetable
- Reduction in programme of study

Medical evidence must be submitted at this point (if not done so before). Confirmation of professional diagnosis and/or support may be a condition of further college support and/or programme adjustment. Other interested professionals may also be invited to the meeting if appropriate and agreed by both parties. The risks to progression of each adjustment should be made clear to the student and parents/carers. The outcome of the meeting should be recorded on ProMonitor and shared with relevant staff. *Level 2* must be clearly identified. Teachers will be asked to monitor performance and a review will be arranged within six weeks by the Head of Studies.

Level 3

The student is at high risk of not achieving their programme of study.

The Senior Guidance Team will decide if Level 3 is appropriate, taking into account feedback from teachers, Progress Audits, Key Assessments and attendance data (and monitoring at Level 2 if appropriate). Additional reasonable adjustments will be discussed at this level and risks to progression must be made clear. There are three possible outcomes:

1. If the student has a chronic health condition that is unlikely to improve then the student will be further supported to complete the remainder of their current programme to the best of their ability.
2. If the student is undergoing medical treatment and their condition is likely to improve then the restart process may be discussed, see below.
3. The student cannot continue in education and a restart is not possible or recommended. The student will be referred to the Youth Support Service for advice and guidance and will be withdrawn from the roll.

In each case progression options, risks and contingency plans will be made clear to the student and parents/carers by the Senior Guidance Team if appropriate. The outcome of any meeting should be recorded on ProMonitor and shared with relevant staff. *Level 3 Fitness to study* must be clearly identified. Teachers will be asked to monitor performance and a review will be arranged within six weeks, if appropriate.

Restart: Year 1

The student will formally withdraw from college and complete a new application for the following September. They are not required to apply for the same programme or courses they have just left. If the student withdraws and re-applies, the student will be interviewed by a member of the Senior Guidance Team. If the student is qualified then they will be offered a place on the condition that written medical evidence is submitted no more than four weeks prior to starting but before enrolment, clearly stating they are fit for full-time education, and that there is space on the course applied for.

Restart: Year 2

The student will formally withdraw from college but is not required to complete a new application. They are required to continue the same programme of study they have just left. External factors must also be considered, such as changes in course structure and exam specifications.

The student may be interviewed by a member of the Senior Guidance Team and if appropriate they will be offered a place on the condition that written medical evidence is submitted no more than four weeks prior to starting, clearly stating they are fit for full-time education. Following the Fitness to Study interview, the appropriate point at which a student can join classes and re-engage with their studies will be determined.

Further guidance

- The student's Progress Coach and the Senior Guidance team will be primary points of contact throughout the process.
- The levels are not necessarily sequential. It is possible to start at any level and to reverse levels if a student's health improves, however it may not be possible to reverse timetable or programme changes. The level will be decided by the Senior Guidance Team.
- If a restart is successful the student will be offered consistency of staff (Progress Coach and teachers) where possible.
- If a student is unable to complete their programme following a restart, the college will not offer a further period of study.
- Students with an EHC Plan will also be managed under this policy if their health is

affecting their studies.

Appeals

Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Principal, within 10 days of receipt of confirmation of the decision to withdraw the student, under the following criteria:

- The student can demonstrate a serious breach in the handling of this fitness to study process
- The student has substantial, relevant evidence that was not available to consider at the Panel review.