

Mattersey Hall College – Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure

Mattersey Hall College is committed to supporting the overall well-being of students, including the recognition that a positive approach to the management of physical and mental health plays an important part in learning and academic achievement. However, we also recognise that there may be instances where a student's physical or mental health may give rise to concerns about the student's fitness to study, for example the capacity to engage with the academic programme and/or to function more widely as a member of the College community.

This policy and set of procedures apply in cases where a student's fitness to study is a cause for concern, and where all other avenues, including pastoral support, have been exhausted. Particular areas for concern include, but are not limited to:

- Students' behaviour that would normally be dealt with through our misconduct procedures but may be the result of an underlying physical or mental health issue;
- Students' physical or mental health difficulties that may adversely affect the health, safety or well-being of themselves or others;
- Students' unsatisfactory academic performance that may be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem;
- Students' behaviour that adversely affects those around them and calls into question the ability to live within a residential community;
- Students' support needs that fall outside the scope of the support and other services which the College can reasonably be expected to provide.

In extreme cases, where the risk to the student, to others or to the College and its staff is very high, an immediate emergency suspension may be considered, by senior staff, to be the most appropriate course of action. If so, the procedure will move immediately to the second stage of this policy.

It is expected, however, that most issues can be resolved informally, through the involvement of the College's Pastoral Team, in co-operation with the Health and Safety Officer. In such cases, staff will speak to those involved and, where appropriate, agree and implement a personalised action plan. Only when informal intervention has proven unsuccessful, and other procedures have been deemed inappropriate will the more formal measures under this policy be undertaken.

Where informal measures have proven unsuccessful, where a student has not engaged with the process, where action plans have not been met and where other processes are deemed not to be appropriate, the following formal steps will be followed:

Stage 1 – Review Meeting

1. The Dean will convene a Review Meeting, comprising a member of the Pastoral Team, the Disability Officer, and, where appropriate, the Health and Safety Officer. Due to the low levels of staff at Mattersey Hall, it may occasionally be the case that one person may attend the Review Meeting in two roles.
2. Before the Review Meeting, relevant external professionals (for example, psychiatrists, GPs, mental health workers, probation officers) may be consulted in conversation with the

student. The Panel may call witnesses and/or view written statements, as appropriate. The student will also be able to submit documents for the Review Meeting to consider and will be given a copy of any documents seen at the Review Meeting. The student may request to attend all or part of the Review Panel meeting. The Chair will decide whether the student should attend. If the student does attend, they will have the right to bring a friend or representative to the meeting.

3. After the Review Meeting a letter will be sent to the student setting out the decision reached, and the reasons for the decision. It is expected that any action recommended will be different from that already attempted as part of the informal procedure. Outcomes may be:
 - a. No further action;
 - b. Monitoring the student for a prescribed period of time. This will normally include an agreed action plan setting out what is expected of the student, and what support will be provided, and regular review meetings between the student and a nominated member of staff. The student will be made aware that failure to comply with the action plan will move the procedure to a second stage. This specific arrangement may include a temporary suspension of studies. This would normally be with the agreement of the student and Academic Staff. If the student does not agree, the procedure moves to the second stage;
 - c. In serious cases, the case may be referred immediately to a Fitness to Study Panel, under the second stage of the procedure.

Stage 2 – Fitness to Study Panel

1. This will be convened only if:
 - a. A student has been subject to an emergency suspension;
 - b. A student has been referred by a Review Meeting;
 - c. A student does not agree with, or is not engaging with, the recommendations of a Review Meeting
2. Members of the Panel will comprise: a member of the SLT, the Health and Safety Officer (if not part of the Review Meeting) and a member of the Pastoral Team, who was also not involved in the Review Meeting. The student's LFG leader may also attend but will not be involved in the decision.
3. The Panel will have access to documents from the Review Meeting and may call for further medical evidence (this will require the written permission of the student) and/or for further witness statements. As with the Review Meeting, the student will also 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 Chair will decide whether the student should attend. If the student does attend, they will have the right to bring a friend or representative to the meeting.
4. Possible outcomes may include:
 - a. A limited suspension, to allow the student to be assessed by a health professional and/or to access additional support services, or for the College to obtain further information. This will be reviewed within four weeks of the suspension (see, below, **Return to study following a suspension**);

- b. A longer suspension. This will only be considered in serious cases, where there is no reasonable prospect of the student re-engaging with their programme. This will be reviewed regularly, and in particular if a review is requested by the student (see, below, **Return to study following a suspension**);
- c. Recommending that a residential student become a day student, or study by Distance Learning. This will normally be when the main problem relates to behaviour that calls into question the ability to live within a residential community, or the inability or unwillingness to engage with the on-campus lecture programme.

Return to study following a suspension

1. The decision to allow a student to return should be made by the Review Meeting or the Fitness to Study Panel that made the initial recommendation, or as many members thereof as possible.
2. The Meeting or Panel should be reconvened to consider whether the student is fit to return to study. This may involve requesting further medical evidence from the student regarding the ability to fully engage with the requirements of the programme and to live, independently within a residential community.
3. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments will be made and appropriate support offered. The general expectation is that the student will take personal responsibility for fully engaging with this support.

Right of Appeal

Students have the right to appeal against any decisions made by a Review Meeting or Fitness to Study Panel, through the Student Complaints and Appeals procedure.

The Principal will not be involved in earlier elements of this process, so that they can head up the Appeals process should the procedure reach this stage.

Sharing Information

We will not normally give information to third parties who ask for it, except with express permission, or when we are legally allowed to do so. (Third parties include GPs, parents, placement providers, the Police, friends, and landlords). If a student's conduct may be in breach of the criminal law, Mattersey Hall may refer this to the Police. We might decide that it is appropriate to discuss professional suitability matters and their outcomes with third parties, or refer matters to them. If it is not clear whether we should share information, we will be normally be guided by what will benefit the student, or by our legal or statutory obligations.

APPENDIX I: Fitness to Study Procedure Flowchart

Informal conversation: Where a student’s behaviour is causing concern, but does not present an immediate risk to themselves or others, Mattersey Hall will seek to address any issues informally, in conversation with the Pastoral Team.

Where a staff member identifies behaviour which is causing concern, they should seek permission from the student to discuss this with the Pastoral Team. If this is not given, the staff member should get general advice from the Pastoral Team without disclosing the identity of the student. That general advice should include advice as to whether it is appropriate to break the student’s confidence.

Issues that might lead to an informal conversation can include suspected depression, anxiety, bereavement, relationship breakup, stress, homesickness.

Where the issue cannot be resolved informally – including when the student has not engaged with the informal process – and begins to produce any of the adverse effects noted above, a review meeting (stage 1) should be arranged. If the student’s behaviour presents a high risk to themselves or others meriting an emergency suspension a fitness to study panel (stage 2) should be arranged without going through the earlier stages of the procedure.

Stage 1 – Review Meeting: Where the student’s behaviour appears to be worsening, or they are not engaging with the process, a review meeting should be convened by the Dean. If the student’s behaviour presents a high risk to themselves or others a fitness to study panel (stage 2) should be arranged without a review meeting having first been arranged.

The conclusion of the meeting will be detailed to the student in a letter.

No Further Action.

Monitoring the Student: This will normally include a prescribed action plan, and can include a temporary suspension. If the student does not engage with the process or their behaviour worsens, a Fitness to Study Panel will be convened (see ‘Stage 2 – Fitness to Study Panel’ below). If the student engages with the action plan resulting in a satisfactory resolution, they may return to study (see ‘Return to study’ below).

Referral to Fitness to Study Panel: See ‘Stage 2 – Fitness to Study Panel’ below.



Return to Study: The decision to allow a student to return to study should be made by those involved in the original decision to monitor or suspend the student after the student's circumstances have been reviewed and when they are convinced that the student is fit to return to study. At this point it may be that reasonable adjustments may be made, and further support offered.

Where the panel is not convinced that the student is fit to return to residential study, they may be offered the option of continuing their study as a day or DL student.



Stage 2 – Fitness to Study Panel: A fitness to study panel will be convened when a student's behaviour is a high risk to themselves or others and has resulted in an emergency suspension; when a student is referred by a review meeting; or when a student disagrees with or is not engaging with the recommendations of a review meeting.

A fitness to study panel will result in one of three outcomes: 1) a limited suspension reviewed by the panel within four weeks; 2) a longer suspension reviewed regularly by the panel and particularly if requested by the student; 3) a decision that the student is not fit to return to residential study.