1. Introduction and Principles

1.1 The University recognises that in awarding appropriate academic qualifications, where these lead to a professional qualification, admission to a professional body and/or statutory registration, it must be satisfied that the student will be a safe and suitable entrant to the given profession/job role. A professional body may undertake a separate test of fitness to practise prior to any initial registration.

1.2 The University recognises that there are differences between the standards expected of students and qualified practitioners. Students are however the next generation of qualified practitioners and there are many similarities between the behaviour expected of them whilst at the University and that expected of qualified practitioners.

1.3 Students themselves on courses leading to professional qualifications should also acknowledge that it is in their interests not to proceed into a career for which they may not be well suited or for which a professional or regulatory body may not register them and that they should not engage in any conduct that renders him/her not fit to be admitted to and practise that profession.

1.4 Fitness to practise proceedings will comply with all statutory requirements including the Equality Act 2010 and a student will be presumed to be innocent of any charge until proven otherwise on the balance of probabilities.

1.5 Where a student has declared a disability to the University, the University will endeavour to ensure that information is available to them at all stages of the procedure in appropriate formats, and that any reasonable adjustments are made to the associated proceedings to accommodate the student’s needs.

1.6 The student has the right to be supported and accompanied by a representative at all stages of the procedure, who is not acting in a legal capacity, at any meeting arranged to discuss the matter. The representative must be a member of the University, i.e.:
   a) a registered student;
   b) a member of staff;
   c) a member of staff or Sabbatical Officer of the Students Union.

   The role of the representative will be to support and advise the student and to help them to present their case.

1.7 Where a student withdraws before these procedures are completed but the behaviour in question would normally result in suspension pending an investigation, the process should be completed and the outcome recorded for future reference.
1.8 Enquiries to the Disclosure & Barring Service, both before and after admission, will be managed through the University’s Admissions Office except where the student contract arrangements already place responsibility for such enquiries on a student’s employer.

2. Principles relating to Student Behaviour

2.1 In the context of these procedures, students should understand that the successful completion of a course leading to admission to a professional body and/or statutory registration requires adherence to both the requirements of that body and of these procedures.

2.2 Students will behave in a manner appropriate to the Regulations and Procedures of the University and to the code of conduct (or equivalent) of the relevant professional or regulatory body.

2.3 Students will at all times act in the best interests of their patients, service users, pupils, placement staff, university staff or other students, and conduct themselves in a professional manner.

2.4 Students will report to the appropriate authority within the placement setting and to the University Course/Programme Leader actions by others that may put patients, service users, pupils, staff or other students at risk. Failure to report such actions could lead to disciplinary action being taken against such a student. Persons making disclosures must identify themselves.

2.5 Students whose courses fall under these procedures must disclose any criminal convictions (including spent convictions) to the University before starting the course.

2.6 Students whose courses fall under these procedures must disclose any conviction and/or caution if it occurs while the student remains registered on the course. Students will be provided with guidance about the consequences for registration within the profession concerned. If a student fails to disclose such information and it subsequently becomes known, the student will be referred to a Fitness to Practise Committee.

2.7 The following circumstances may render a student unfit to practise:
   a) exploiting the vulnerability of a patient, client or pupil (including to establish a sexual relationship);
   b) offences against the vulnerable, including children, the elderly and the mentally incapacitated;
   c) chronic drug or alcohol abuse;
   d) acting in an inappropriate manner on or away from University premises;
   e) conviction of a relevant criminal offence or has accepted a caution in relation to such an offence;
   f) intimidation of fellow students, patients, clients or pupils;
   g) failure to rectify behaviour that has been subject to any disciplinary actions under the University’s regulations;
   h) repeated inappropriate behaviour towards others;
   i) falsification of patient, pupil or other professional records;
   j) severe and relapsing mental illness;
   k) being a carrier of a serious communicable disease without appropriate management;
   l) any other circumstance which may call into question a student’s fitness to be admitted to and to practise their profession.
2.8 Where there is an allegation of academic misconduct, it may be appropriate to consider the case under both the academic misconduct and fitness to practise procedures. In these circumstances, the University will conduct the academic misconduct process first and conclude it before beginning the fitness to practise process. This will avoid the student facing simultaneous procedures for the same allegation.

2.9 Where the student is subject to a disciplinary process the Pro Vice Chancellor Students will decide whether the issues should be dealt with under the Student Disciplinary Procedures and/or under this Fitness to Practise Procedure.

3. Initiation of the Procedure

3.1 On receipt of information identifying an allegation of concern under the scope of these procedures, the Head of Department will undertake an initial investigation to establish whether there are grounds to investigate the matter further. The Head of Department will consider whether other routes available e.g. pastoral care, occupational health and student support are more appropriate before initiating fitness to practice procedures.

4. Investigation and Consideration by Department (Stage 1)

4.1 Where, following an initial investigation, the Head of Department believes a case has arisen that warrants the application of these procedures, the student concerned will be interviewed by the Head of Department or nominee (the Investigating Officer) to advise the student of the concerns raised and how they fall below the professional expectations of those taking a particular course. The Investigating Officer should not, as far as possible, be the student’s personal academic tutor or anyone else who is involved in supporting the student or making decisions about their academic progress. The student should be provided with evidence of the issues of concern before this interview. The evidence should be verifiable and not based on hearsay. A note taker will be present at any such meetings.

4.2 The student will be given at least three working days’ notice of the meeting with the Investigating Officer.

4.3 The meeting may proceed in the absence of a student who has either:
   a) indicated an intention to be present and does not attend;
   b) never responded to communications;
   c) indicated that they do not wish to attend.

   The Investigating Officer should be content that s/he has sufficient evidence available to consider the case and that the student has been given adequate notice of the meeting and an opportunity to provide a written submission.

4.5 The outcome of the meeting should be such that the student is clear on:
   a) the nature of the concerns;
   b) why they have been raised.

   There should be a written record of the meeting.

4.6 Following the initial investigation, the Investigating Officer will submit a written report of findings to the Head of Department who then may:-
a) decide that there is no reason for concern and take no further action under these Procedures;
b) establish a written action plan to include details of any follow-up meetings and monitoring if appropriate which is agreed, signed and dated by the student. Any student who refuses to agree to the action plan will be referred by the Head of Department to the Fitness to Practise Committee.
c) issue a formal warning linked to a written action plan to include details of any follow-up meetings and monitoring if appropriate which is agreed, signed and dated by the student. A warning is appropriate when behaviour is significantly different from expected standards but the behaviour does not present a risk to others or to public confidence. Any student who refuses to agree to the action plan will be referred by the Head of Department to the Fitness to Practise Committee.
d) after consulting with the Pro Vice Chancellor Students, decide that the grounds are so serious as to threaten the safety of others and may seek the approval of the Vice Chancellor for an immediate temporary suspension of the students studies in accordance with the Student Disciplinary procedures;
e) conclude that a concern is so serious that the consequences could potentially lead to a termination of studies and refer the case to the Fitness to Practise Committee. The Head of Department will inform the student of the referral and the reason for it, in writing, within ten working days of the decision;
f) refer the student concerned to the Occupation Health Service for a formal assessment in order that a report can be made on his or her fitness to practise on medical grounds. For any student who refuses to attend an occupational health assessment required by the department may, after consulting with the Pro Vice Chancellor Students, seek the approval of the Vice Chancellor for an immediate temporary suspension of the student’s studies in accordance with the Student Disciplinary Procedures. Suspension in these circumstances will automatically lead to the student being referred by the Head of Department to the Fitness to Practise Committee.

5. Fitness to Practise Committee (Stage 2)

5.1 The membership of the Fitness to Practise Committee will be:
a) The Head of School (Chair);
b) A member of academic staff who has links with professional courses, from another Department;
c) A member of Academic Board who is not from the same school;
d) A senior representative of the profession (such as a registered doctor) to which the course for which the student is registered may lead to admission.

5.2 An Academic Support Unit Manager will act as Secretary to the Committee. The Secretary will not be a member of the Committee. A minuting secretary may also be present during the Hearing and will maintain the formal record of the meetings of the Committee.

5.3 No member of the Committee may be or have been directly connected with the teaching or supervision of the student whose case is under consideration, nor must they have any interest or involvement in the circumstances under consideration.

5.4 All attending the Committee will be required to ensure that all matters discussed within the Committee are held in the strictest confidence.

5.5 The Academic Support Unit Manager will give the student at least ten working days notice of the date of the Hearing and:
a) provide details of the case he or she has to answer;
b) provide copies of all documentation, including witness statements, relating to the case and a copy of these Procedures;
c) inform the student of their right to be accompanied at the Hearing by representative who may speak on his/her behalf. The name of this representative must be notified to the Academic Support Unit Manager in advance of the Committee meeting;
d) provide the names of the members of the Fitness to Practise Committee;
e) provide the student with the names of any witnesses that the University proposes to call;
f) require the student to submit as soon as possible and in any event not later than four days before the time fixed for the Hearing;
i) a copy of any further written evidence which he or she may wish to present, in support of their case;
j) the name and status of any person who will accompany the student;
k) the names of any witnesses the student wishes to call.

5.6 If the student wishes to object to a member of the Fitness to Practise Committee they must do so as soon as possible and in any event at least four days before the time fixed for the Hearing. The only ground for objection is that of possible bias arising from either:
   a) involvement in the Fitness to Practise process at an earlier stage;
   b) involvement in a related appeal Hearing, disciplinary Hearing or grievance procedure or
   c) prior knowledge of the matter or the student.

5.7 The Investigating Officer at stage one will normally present the case to be considered by the Committee.

5.8 Guidelines for the procedure for Hearings of the fitness to practise committee hearing are set out in the Appendix 1.

5.9 The hearing will be held in private and with reasonable facilities for the student and his or her representative to consult in private.

5.10 If the student is unwell or prevented from attending the Hearing by other good reason, the student will notify the Secretary to the Committee prior to the Hearing and, in the case of ill health, will submit a medical certificate. In circumstances where there are good reasons, the Hearing may be rearranged. The meeting may proceed in the absence of a student who has either:
   a) indicated an intention to be present and does not attend;
   b) never responded to communications;
   c) indicated that they do not wish to attend.

The Committee should be content that it has sufficient evidence available to consider the case and that the student has been given adequate notice of the meeting and an opportunity to provide a written submission.

5.11 The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the student has been sent all the written evidence, including any witness statements, in advance; and that the student has a proper opportunity to meet the case against him or her, including by making a statement, by calling witnesses and by questioning witnesses called by any other party.

5.12 The Fitness to Practise Committee will decide whether the student’s fitness to practise is either impaired or unimpaired and will have the power to:
   a) Permit the student to continue with the course with no further action;
b) Permit a student to continue with the course but under additional supervision, and conditions if appropriate, and within an additional reporting and monitoring procedure;
c) Impose disciplinary sanctions on the student, consistent with Student Disciplinary Procedures including the suspension of a student;
d) Refer a case to a relevant Board of Examiners for consideration whether or not a resit of a specified part or parts of the course is required;
e) Permit a student to continue with the course but the award made will not lead to a professional qualification and an alternative award title will be used as described in the Programme Specification;
f) Withdraw the student from the course leading to a professional qualification, but permit the student to apply for an alternative course. The Admissions Tutor will be made aware of the reasons why the student was withdrawn from the previous course;
g) Recommend to the Vice Chancellor that the student’s studies on a course be terminated and that the student be permanently excluded from the University.

5.13 The University may be required by a professional body to notify them when if a Committee has reached certain decisions. For example, for outcomes (e), (f) and (g) the University will notify Medical Schools Council, who hold the Excluded Student Database. The student will be told in writing when the University is required to notify a professional body.

5.14 The decision along with the rationale of the Committee will be notified to the student in writing by the Secretary to the Committee within five working days of the Committee Hearing with a copy sent to the Pro Vice Chancellor Students. The student will be notified of their right to request a review of the decision of the Committee.

6. Procedures for Review of the Decision

6.1 A student may request a review of the decision of the Fitness to Practise Committee on the following grounds:
a) New evidence has emerged which can be corroborated and could not have been brought to the attention of the original meeting of the Committee;
b) There is evidence of a procedural irregularity in the conduct of the Fitness to Practise Committee;
c) There is evidence that the sanction imposed was inconsistent with the nature of the offence and penalties described in these procedures.

6.2 A request to review the decision of the Committee should be made in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the written decision to the Deputy Vice Chancellor.

6.3 On receipt of a request to review, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (or nominee) will decide if there are clear grounds for a review.

6.4 The Deputy Vice Chancellor (or nominee) will review the papers submitted to the committee, the minutes and the decision contained in the letter to the student, and will either:
a) refuse the request to review
b) uphold the original decision of the Committee, or
c) constitute a new Committee.
6.5 Throughout the review process, the original decision about fitness to practice will be considered to apply until overturned or set aside, including not agreeing an award if the Board of Examiners are due to meet during the review process.

6.6 Where the outcome of a case is overturned following review because of a failing to follow due process, this does not overrule any decision about whether a student is fit to practise. In these circumstances, the case will need to be reconsidered by the University following the fitness to practise procedures and giving due consideration to any potential impairment of a student’s fitness to practise.

6.7 Where the decision of the Deputy Vice Chancellor or the Committee is to uphold the original decision the letter to the student will draw attention to the individual’s right to refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter.


7.1 A student who is not satisfied with the outcome of the Procedure and has exhausted all the stages of the procedure may request that the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) reviews the case. This may be done by completing the OIA scheme application form within twelve months of the date of the University’s Completion of Procedures letter.

7.2 Where a case is considered eligible, the OIA will provide independent adjudication on the resolution of complaints, once the University’s internal procedures have been exhausted.

7.3 Where the outcome of a case is overturned following appeal to the OIA because of a failing to follow due process, this does not overrule any decision about whether a student is fit to practise. In these circumstances, the case will need to be reconsidered by the University following the fitness to practise procedures and giving due consideration to any potential impairment of a student’s fitness to practise.

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## Revision History

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Appendix 1: Procedure for Fitness to Practise Committee

Hearings will normally follow this procedure in outline. However, the Chair of the Committee has a general discretion over the running of Hearings according to individual circumstances. In particular, the Chair may use his or her discretion to adjourn proceedings or curtail evidence or statements in order to ensure that the Hearing is conducted in an orderly and reasonably expeditious manner.

The Committee members will meet prior to the Hearing to agree on matters of process and procedure. Any submissions by the student in this respect will be considered at this point and oral submissions may also be considered.

The student and, where applicable, his/her representative, will be invited to join the Hearing.

The Investigating Officer will be invited to join the Hearing.

The Chair will summarise the procedure to be adopted at the Hearing, establish there are no conflicts of interest and ask if there are any procedural questions. The Chair will stress to all present the importance of ensuring that matters discussed within the Hearing are treated with the strictest confidence.

The facts relevant to the case will be introduced by the Chair.

The Investigating Officer will set out the case regarding the concerns about the student's fitness to practise. The Investigating Officer may call witnesses and refer to evidence, which will have been disclosed in advance.

[Where witnesses are called, they will normally first be questioned by the person calling them, secondly by the other party and thirdly by the Committee members, through the Chair.]

The student and his or her representative will be given an opportunity to respond to the Investigating Officer's statement and may ask questions.

The Committee members, through the Chair, may also ask questions of the Investigating Officer.

The student or his/her representative will be invited to present a statement and may call witnesses.

The Committee members, through the Chair, may also ask questions of the student.

The Investigating Officer will be given the opportunity to summarise the case in the light of the evidence presented.

The student will be invited to make a closing statement, and will have the last word.

All parties other than the Committee members and Secretary will be asked to withdraw.

The Committee will deliberate in private and come to a decision, either straightaway or at an adjourned meeting.