INTRODUCTION

The Fitness to Study Procedure is intended for use when other University student procedures do not apply or may not be sufficient to address serious concerns of physical or psychological difficulties.

Fitness to study cases should be rare but the procedure will help in the management and support of those students who experience serious and complex difficulties during their time at the University. Another aim of the procedure is to manage student expectations; there will be occasions when the University is unable to support a student any further in their studies and termination or suspension of studies is imposed with or without the agreement of the student.

The Fitness to Study Procedure was approved by ULTSEC in June 2012. The procedure does not supersede or replace any existing student procedures, such as PEC, Fitness to Practise, Unsatisfactory Progress or the Student Disciplinary Procedure.

The Fitness to Study Procedure often relies on concerns being raised by those staff in close, regular contact with the student. It is therefore advised that all staff make themselves familiar with this guidance and the procedure. Personal tutors, supervisors and senior tutors should take particular note, as cases resulting in ‘Level 1’ intervention will be managed by these staff within academic units. At all stages of intervention, Student Progress Service and Student Wellbeing Service can be contacted for additional advice and support.

The following have been prepared to aid in the management and administration of Fitness to Study cases:

A. General guidance notes about the Fitness to Study procedures
B. Template documentation for use within academic units (timeline, letters, memorandum)

Any comments or suggestions about this document would be appreciated, and should be sent to the Student Progress Service.

Contact: Angela McNeill or Suzanne Johnson via casework@ncl.ac.uk
A. Guidance notes about the Fitness to Study Procedure

The following guidance is intended to be read in conjunction with the Fitness to Study Procedure and the University Regulations.

Timeline of Events Table (for all cases) – *(Template Document B1)*

A timeline should be started as soon as Level 1 of the procedure is considered and should be completed on each occasion that a Fitness to Study discussion, meeting or communication takes place within the academic unit. Please also keep a record of all communications with the student and any additional evidence – this will be required by Student Progress Service if Level 3 of the procedure is invoked. In some cases it may be relevant to include details about discussions taken under other procedures – for example unsatisfactory progress discussions / actions, discussions about progress and / or PEC issues. A complete timeline will greatly aid the Fitness to Study Panel to reach informed decisions about the student’s case; especially should Level 3 intervention be required. A complete timeline will also aid in communication between relevant concerned parties within the academic unit, for example a personal tutor (who may have invoked Level 1 of the procedure) and a Head of School (who may then be required to invoke Level 2).

It is highly likely that a Fitness to Study case will involve in-depth discussions of a sensitive and personal nature. Whilst it is important to maintain full records of discussions and decisions, staff must ensure that access to this information is restricted in order to maintain confidentiality.

Is Fitness to Study the right procedure?

Think very carefully about the student’s circumstances and assess all options available - PEC / DPD request for adjustment or consideration under Unsatisfactory Progress instead? You should follow the most appropriate procedure in the first instance. If no other procedure is deemed appropriate however, or all other options have been exhausted, you should initiate the Fitness to Study procedure. Remember that you can seek advice from the Head of Student Wellbeing Service or Head of Student Progress Service before doing anything or during the process. It should also be noted that moving to another procedure during the Fitness to Study process may be appropriate and this is entirely acceptable dependent on the circumstances of the case.

Considering the appropriate level of intervention

Staff should seek appropriate advice from the Head of Student Wellbeing Service or Head of Student Progress Service if wishing to commence Fitness to Study proceedings other than at level 1.
Notes about Fitness to Study cases:

Expectation is that this procedure will only be used for rare cases where normal adjustments are not sufficient or other procedures are not deemed appropriate; especially for level 3 intervention.

As the implications for the student may be very serious – suspension or termination of studies – it is important that the procedure is adhered to and good records are kept. Except for the initial meeting under level 1 which is intended to be informal and supportive, all other meetings with the student should be formal. Good notes (not verbatim) should be kept of all meetings.

A fitness to study case should be dealt with in a timely manner and it is important that you follow the time frames specified within the procedure as closely as possible. If there is any unavoidable delay in the proceedings, the student should be kept up-to-date and given the reason for the delay.

It is hoped that students will engage in the Fitness to Study procedure at any level. However, should they refuse to cooperate and attend scheduled meetings, the case should proceed in their absence and the student will be informed of any decision as a result.

At any stage of the Fitness to Study Procedure, the Head of Student Progress Service, or nominee, may temporarily suspend a student from the University, upon report of serious concerns and pending further investigation.

Level 2 Intervention:

For level 2 intervention, the Head of Academic Unit or authorised nominee shall arrange a formal meeting with the student and invite other members of staff who can contribute to a solution. If support can be offered for the student to continue studies, an action plan should be produced and the student requested to sign this. Review meetings should be held at regular intervals appropriate to the circumstances (normally no more than 1 month) to ensure that the student is adhering to the agreed action and to consider whether there is improvement. If there is insufficient improvement or the case is too serious to be addressed at level 2, level 3 of the procedure should be invoked. The student shall have the right to appeal a level 2 decision.

Level 3 Intervention:

Level 3 intervention shall only be invoked by the Head of Student Progress Service who will organise a Fitness to Study Panel and determine who shall act as Chair. Relevant members of staff including appropriate academics shall be asked to join the panel to consider the case. The student will be asked to attend a meeting with the Panel and shall be encouraged to provide detailed information including medical evidence to be considered. If there is no contact from the student following initial notification of Level 3 proceedings and hearing arrangements, the Secretary to the Panel should attempt to contact the student by all means available e.g. telephone, emails, all postal addresses.
A suitable course of action may be agreed in the presence of the student. In some circumstances however, it may be necessary to ask the student to leave the room at the end of the meeting for a short time whilst the Panel deliberate the case and reach a conclusion. The student will then be asked to return to the meeting room to be informed of the decision. A suspension or termination of a student’s studies will only be enforced when it is believed that there is no alternative solution. The outcome will be confirmed in writing to the student asap following the meeting with a copy of the action plan or reasons for a suspension or termination of studies. The student shall also be informed that they have the right to appeal the level 3 decision.

**Appeal Procedure:**

A student appealing against action taken under levels 2 or 3 must follow Part 4 of the Fitness to Study Procedure. Appeals should be lodged within 21 calendar days of the relevant decision and should be addressed to the Academic Registrar, King’s Gate Building or sent by email to casework@ncl.ac.uk.

**Further Review:**

There shall be no further review within the University once the appeal is complete. Provision for external review is made through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (www.oiahe.org.uk/).

**Return to Study:**

Students will only be permitted to return to study once suitable medical or other evidence stating that they are fit to return to study has been received and is accepted as being sufficient.

A study plan should be agreed with the student prior to their return and the student should be made aware that they must comply with all agreed actions in order to remain at the University.

Following the student’s return to study, regular review meetings must be held for part or all of the duration of the student's study.
B. Template Documentation for use by academic units:

1. Timeline of Events Table (all levels)

**LEVEL 1 (From personal/ senior tutor or supervisor)**
2. Invite student to meeting (level 1)
3. Confirmation of action agreed at meeting (level 1)
4. Outcome letter to student following 1 month review – no action (level 1)
5. Outcome letter to student following 1 month review – further action required (level 1)

**LEVEL 2 (From Head of School or nominee)**
6. Invite student to meeting (level 2)
7. Confirmation of action plan agreed at meeting/ review meeting (level 2)
8. Outcome letter to student following 1 month review – no action (level 2)
9. Outcome letter to student following 1 month review – further action required (level 2)

**LEVEL 3 (From Head of School or nominee)**
10. Memorandum to SPS (level 3)

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1. TIMELINE OF EVENTS – FITNESS TO STUDY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TRANSACTION</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eg</td>
<td>Module leader reports concerns about student to senior tutor</td>
<td>XXX displayed erratic behaviour in seminar, module leader was very worried – some general advice sought from SWS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/3/10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/3/10</td>
<td>Letter 1 sent</td>
<td>XXX invited to meeting with personal tutor on 10/3/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SPS Guidance on Fitness to Study (June 2012)
2. INVITE STUDENT TO FITNESS TO STUDY MEETING (LEVEL 1 INTERVENTION)

Can be sent by email.

Dear XXXXX

As your personal tutor/ supervisor/ Senior Tutor for the XX programme, I am contacting you to arrange a meeting to discuss concerns about your current fitness to study.

Outline the main concerns:

Examples:

It has been noted that

- you have not attended lectures since.....
- you have submitted five PEC forms this semester
- there have been a number of concerns about your health and wellbeing since the start of the stage

(for further details about what may constitute concerns about a student’s fitness to study, please refer to the Fitness to Study Procedure, section 2.2. Be as specific as you can so that the student understands what issues are likely to be discussed. However, avoid becoming accusatory.)

I would like to discuss these concerns with you and consider whether there is anything that the University is able to do to help you. An appointment has been scheduled for you at XXX on XXX in XXX. You may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or supporter. Please report to XXX upon arrival.

The purpose of this meeting will be to establish whether there is need for further supportive action under the University’s Fitness to Study Procedure (Level 1). In accordance with this procedure, further action may include, for example, an agreement that you seek advice from specialist services, or that you improve your attendance, or that you consider alternative modes of study. In some cases, it may be necessary to proceed to Level 2 or 3 of the Fitness to Study procedure. Following the arranged meeting, I will write to you again to inform you of the decision of what, if any, further action is being taken.

I would like to highlight the seriousness of this matter and strongly advise you to make use of this opportunity for a meeting by attending at the scheduled time. If there is a good reason why you are unable to attend at this time, please contact me immediately. If you wish to submit a written statement, it would be helpful if this could be received in advance of the meeting.

The Fitness to Study Procedure is accessible at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/Regulations/SPS/f2s.htm.

Yours sincerely
3. CONFIRMATION OF ACTION AGREED AT MEETING (LEVEL 1 INTERVENTION)

Can be sent by email

Dear XXXXX

Thank you for meeting with me on XXXX.

I am writing to you to provide a brief written record of what was discussed at our meeting concerning your fitness to study.

We discussed:

Example: (this should be sufficiently detailed to act as the formal record of the Level 1 meeting discussions, but does not need to be verbatim)

How your ill health during Semester One has affected your attendance. I reminded you of the student sickness procedures and the requirement of students to provide self-certification/medical evidence when unwell. We also talked about your module selection and strategies that you might use to try to catch up. You talked about how you have been feeling stressed and lonely and that this has made it difficult for you to interact in seminars.

We agreed:

Example: (this is a record of the informal action plan – bullet points are used to make the agreed action points clear)

- That you would register with a local GP so that it will be easier for you to get medical help if you fall ill again whilst at University.
- You do not want to talk to a GP about low mood at this time but have agreed to access the University’s Student Wellbeing team for more advice first.
- You are going to submit a PEC form for module XXX although you understand that the impact of the PEC will be limited as you do not have any formal evidence.
- You are going to make efforts to improve your attendance and have agreed to email me and the School Office whenever you miss a lecture, explaining the reasons for your absence.

A review meeting has been arranged for you at XXX on XXX in XXX (normally around one month after the initial meeting). As before, you may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or supporter. Please report to XXX upon arrival.

The Fitness to Study Procedure is accessible at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/Regulations/SPS/f2s.htm.

Yours sincerely
4. OUTCOME LETTER TO STUDENT FOLLOWING 1 MONTH REVIEW – NO ACTION (LEVEL 1 INTERVENTION)

Can be sent by email.

Dear XXXXX

Thank you for meeting with me on XXXX to further review your fitness to study.

I am writing to inform you that there will be no further action under the Fitness to Study procedures at this time. Following our meeting on XXXX and the review meeting on XXXX I am now satisfied that the concerns about your fitness to study have been significantly reduced/eliminated.

I have reached this decision because: Summarise how the situation has improved. Review and sum up against the agreed action points following the initial meeting

Example:

Your attendance has improved significantly and I have had no further reports from staff about erratic behaviour.

As agreed you have made contact with the Student Wellbeing Service and have provided evidence that you have registered with a local GP.

Please be aware that any future concerns about your fitness to study will also be considered in line with the University Fitness to Study procedure and that if concerns are particularly serious a higher level of the procedure may be invoked. It is advisable, therefore, to ensure that you keep the School informed of any personal or medical issues that may affect your ability to attend University or submit assignments. Provide contact details for reporting concerns of F2S.

The Fitness to Study Procedure is accessible at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/Regulations/SPS/f2s.htm.

Yours sincerely
5. OUTCOME LETTER TO STUDENT FOLLOWING 1 MONTH REVIEW – FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED (LEVEL 1 INTERVENTION)

Should be prepared as a formal letter but can also be sent by email

Dear XXXXX

Following our meetings on XXX and XXX, I am writing to inform you that I continue to be concerned about your current fitness to study. Therefore, in accordance with the Fitness to Study Procedure the concerns about your fitness to study will be brought to the attention of the Head of School. The Head of School (or nominee) will then invoke Level 2 of the Fitness to Study Procedure. This is a formal level of intervention and is necessary because our meetings under Level 1 of the procedure have not successfully addressed the ongoing concerns.

You will receive a further letter from the Head of School within the next few days. The first step of the Level 2 intervention is a formal meeting, which I may also be asked to attend.

The Fitness to Study Procedure is accessible at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/Regulations/SPS/f2s.htm.

Yours sincerely
6. INVITE STUDENT TO FORMAL FITNESS TO STUDY MEETING (LEVEL 2 INTERVENTION)

Should be prepared as a formal letter but can also be sent by email

Dear XXXXX

As/ On behalf of the Head of the School of XXXX, I am writing to you regarding concerns about your current fitness to study.

Outline the main concerns – EXAMPLE:

It has been noted that

- you have not attended lectures since.....
- you have submitted five PEC forms this semester
- there have been a number of concerns about your health and wellbeing since the start of the stage

(for further details about what may constitute concerns about a student’s fitness to study, please refer to the Fitness to Study Procedure, section 2.2. Be as specific as you can so that the student understands what issues are likely to be discussed. However, avoid becoming accusatory.)

- you have had meetings with your tutor under Level 1 of the Fitness to Study procedure, but concerns about your fitness to study remain. (Include, unless intervention has commenced at Level 2)

We would like to discuss these concerns with you and consider whether there is anything that the University is able to do to help you. A meeting has been arranged at XXX on XXX in XXX. You may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or supporter. Please report to XXX upon arrival.

The purpose of this meeting will be to establish whether there is need for formal action under the University’s Fitness to Study Procedure (Level 2). In accordance with this procedure, formal action may include, for example, an agreed Action Plan, an agreement to adjust your mode of study or an agreement that you take a leave of absence. In some cases, it may be necessary to proceed to Level 3 of the Fitness to Study procedure. Following the meeting, I will write to you again to inform you of the decision of what, if any, further action is being taken.

I would like to highlight the seriousness of this matter and strongly advise you to make use of this opportunity for a meeting by attending at the scheduled time. If there is a good reason why you are unable to attend at this time, please contact me immediately. If you wish to submit a written statement, it would be helpful if this could be received in advance of the meeting. Please also submit any relevant medical evidence.

The Fitness to Study Procedure is accessible at
http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/Regulations/SPS/f2s.htm.

Yours sincerely

SPS Guidance on Fitness to Study (June 2012)
7. CONFIRMATION OF ACTION AGREED AT MEETING/ REVIEW MEETING (LEVEL 2 INTERVENTION)

Should be prepared as a formal letter but can also be sent by email – within 5 working days of the meeting.

Dear XXXXX

Thank you for attending the meeting held on XXX to discuss your fitness to study.

Enclosed/ Attached are a copy of the Minutes of the meeting and an Action Plan summarising what was agreed at the meeting. Please sign and return a copy of the Action Plan to XXX within the next 7 calendar days. If you disagree with any points of the Action Plan, please contact me immediately.

A further Fitness to Study review meeting has been arranged for you at XXX on XXX in XXX (normally around one month after the initial meeting). As before, you may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or supporter. Please report to XXX upon arrival.

The Fitness to Study Procedure is accessible at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/Regulations/SPS/f2s.htm.

Yours sincerely

NOTE: It is possible that there may be more than one review meeting. A similar letter to that above, along with a copy of the Minutes and agreed/ amended Action Plan, should be sent to the student following each meeting.
8. OUTCOME LETTER TO STUDENT FOLLOWING 1 MONTH REVIEW – NO FURTHER ACTION (LEVEL 2 INTERVENTION)

Should be prepared as a formal letter but can also be sent by email – within 5 working days of the meeting.

Dear XXXXX

Thank you for attending the Fitness to Study meeting/ review meeting held on XXX.

I am writing to inform you that there will be no further action under the Fitness to Study procedures at this time. Following our meeting on XXXX and the review meeting on XXXX I am now satisfied that the concerns about your fitness to study have been significantly reduced/ eliminated.

I have reached this decision because: Summarise how the situation has improved. Review and sum up against the agreed Action Plan.

Example:

Your attendance has improved significantly and I have had no further reports from staff about erratic behaviour.

As agreed you have made contact with the Student Wellbeing Service and have provided evidence that you have registered with a local GP.

You have provided recent medical evidence which confirms that you are fit to study, and have a strong support network around you.

Enclosed/ Attached is a copy of the Minutes of the meeting of XXX, for your information.

Please be aware that any future concerns about your fitness to study will also be considered in line with the University Fitness to Study procedure, and that if concerns are particularly serious a higher level of the procedure may be invoked. It is advisable, therefore, to ensure that you keep your School informed of any personal or medical issues that may affect your ability to attend University or submit assignments.

The Fitness to Study Procedure is accessible at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/Regulations/SPS/f2s.htm.

Yours sincerely
9. OUTCOME LETTER TO STUDENT FOLLOWING 1 MONTH REVIEW – FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED (LEVEL 2 INTERVENTION)

Should be prepared as a formal letter but can also be sent by email – within 5 working days of the meeting.

Dear XXXXX

Following our meetings on XXX and XXX, I am writing to inform you that there continues to be significant concerns about your current fitness to study. Therefore, in accordance with the Fitness to Study Procedure your case is being referred to the Student Progress Service for further action. The Student Progress Service will invoke Level 3 of the Fitness to Study Procedure and a Fitness to Study Panel will be appointed. This is a more formal level of intervention and is deemed necessary as our meetings under Level 1/2 of the procedure have not successfully addressed the ongoing concerns.

You will receive a further letter from the Student Progress Service within the next few days. You will be invited to attend a Fitness to Study Panel meeting as part of the Level 3 intervention, which I may also be asked to attend.

Enclosed/Attached is a copy of the Minutes of the meeting of XXX, for your information.

The Fitness to Study Procedure is accessible at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/Regulations/SPS/f2s.htm.

Yours sincerely
10. MEMORANDUM TO STUDENT PROGRESS SERVICE – LEVEL 3 INTERVENTION REQUIRED

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

To: Student Progress Service (Case Team), Level 3, King’s Gate (casework@ncl.ac.uk).

From: YOUR NAME. Head of XXX (School/ Academic Unit)

School of XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

Date: DATE

FITNESS TO STUDY – REQUEST FOR LEVEL 3 INTERVENTION

STUDENT NAME: ............................................................

STUDENT NUMBER: ............................................

DEGREE PROGRAMME: ...........................................

________________________________________________________________________

In accordance with the University Fitness to Study Procedure, the above student is referred to Student Progress Service with the recommendation that Level 3 intervention is initiated as soon as possible.

I enclose the following items:

- Copies of all written correspondence with the student relating to their consideration under the Fitness to Study procedures to date (e.g. copies of letters, minutes, Action Plans under Levels 1 and 2);

- Timeline of Events.

- Any other documentation of relevance.

In accordance with the University’s Fitness to Study Procedure, I find the following factors should be considered as evidence that this student is not currently fit to study.

Provide a short summary of the case, outlining the main issues with the student. Much of this detail can be copied from Minutes/ Action Plans, but you may feel it necessary to provide additional explanation here.

Signature :...............................................................................................................

Head of School (or nominee) for XXXX

SPS Guidance on Fitness to Study (June 2012)