



## HIGHER EDUCATION - PROFESSIONAL SUITABILITY AND FITNESS TO PRACTICE: POLICY AND PROCEDURE

<b>Process Area</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>
<b>Reference Number</b>	<b>CUR/011</b>
<b>Directorate</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>

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001	June 2015		MG	GD	May 2018
002	May 2018	Minor changes to 6.1	KK	Governing Body	Mar 2021
003	Mar 2021	Minor changes job titles & section 4.5	KK	Governing Body	Feb 2024
004	Feb 2024	Minor changes to job titles & section 6.1, 7.2 and 9.0	LS	Governing Body	Feb 2027

If requested, the College will make the policy available in alternative formats to accommodate visual impairments. The policy can also be downloaded from the College website and made available in alternative languages upon request.

## 1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 Any programme of study which may lead to a professional registration will be governed by a requirement that students demonstrate their 'Professional Suitability and Fitness to Practice.' At the heart of the Professional Suitability and Fitness to Practice Policy and Procedure is recognition of the College's duty of care to all students and stakeholders.
- 1.2 All training makes high academic and personal demands on students. Students are required to demonstrate not only academic ability but also personal suitability, fitness to practice and a commitment to their chosen profession at the point of admission as well as throughout their programme.
- 1.3 The responsibilities in relation to suitability and fitness to practice are not confined to the process and content of the academic programme but have a broader scope and application. They encompass all behaviour including that outside the academic or placement setting which may reflect negatively on the profession, College or University awarding body.
- 1.4 Suitability and fitness for professional work include qualities such as patience, honesty, integrity, resilience and the ability to help people face difficult situations. Evidence of clear thinking, sound judgement, sensitivity and tolerance are required, together with the ability to establish and maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries. This demands sound interpersonal and communication skills as well as both physical and mental ability to carry out the role appropriately.
- 1.5 On occasions, students may be the subject of concerns about their suitability and fitness to practice in one or more of these fields. It must be clear to all parties (students, academic staff, and placement supervisors) what kinds of concerns or information will trigger formal action on behalf of the College, how the formal action will be implemented and what are the possible outcomes.
- 1.6 There is a clear professional obligation laid down by regulating bodies to have robust processes that encourage the disclosure of matters that may affect suitability and fitness to practise.
- 1.7 Professional Suitability and Fitness to Practise procedures are distinct from Southern Regional College's general disciplinary procedures. There may be situations, however, where more than one set of College procedures are utilised to consider the College's position and professional implications of a student's behaviour or fitness to practise.

## 2.0 SCOPE

- 2.1 Students registered on a programme of study that requires them to undertake practical training in a professional role in relation to patients, pupils, clients or service-users, or where the end qualification provides a direct license to practice or is a requirement for a license to practice, are subject to this policy of fitness to practice.
- 2.2 The purpose of this policy is to give effect to the College's duty to ensure that such students are fit to practice, in order to protect present or future patients, pupils, clients or service users and to comply with the requirements of professional/regulatory bodies and to maintain public confidence.
- 2.3 If students registered on a programme of study are subject to this policy, this shall be stated in the Course Regulations for that programme of study.

- 2.4 If any student subject to this Regulation is the subject of alleged or proven academic misconduct or disciplinary offence, this shall be disclosed without prejudice to the Head of Faculty so that any implications regarding fitness to practice may be considered.
- 2.5 The basis for any determination or action concerning the fitness to practice of a student shall be the relevant professional requirements and code of behaviour. The standard of proof required shall be the balance of probabilities.

### 3.0 DEFINITIONS

<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>DoC</b>	Director of Curriculum
<b>ADFET ADHEQ</b>	Assistant Director of Further Education and Training Assistant Director of Higher Education and Quality
<b>Heads of Faculty</b>	Heads of Curriculum Areas
<b>Student</b>	Is defined as a person who has enrolled on a programme of study at the College.

### 4.0 PROCEDURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 This policy refers to the procedures to be implemented when a student is judged unfit for entry to a profession for which there are academic, behavioural and health requirements that must be met in order to ensure suitability to practice that profession. Examples of relevant profession are Nursing, Health Visiting, Health and Social Care, Early Years Education, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Radiography, Optometry, Podiatry, Chiropractic, Dietetics, Clinical Physiology, Sports Studies, Speech and Language Therapy, Education, Counselling, Social Work, Youth and Community Work. This list is not exhaustive, and it may be added to by the College at any time.
- 4.2 The Fitness for Professional Practice procedure exists to protect:
- the public interest, by safeguarding client/patient well-being.
  - The student's interests by ensuring that students do not proceed into a career for which they may well not be suited or for which a regulatory body may not register them.
- 4.3 Students may be considered unfit for practice on the grounds of:
- physical or mental health reasons.
  - criminal or other serious misconduct.
  - unprofessional conduct or action
  - Failure to disclose information at the admissions stage of a course.
  - Academic unsuitability for the demands of the professional training.

- 4.4 Concern that a student may, for behavioural or health reasons, be deemed unfit to be admitted to or to practice in a profession towards which his or her course of study leads, should be disclosed in writing to the appropriate Head of Faculty. Concerns may arise from one incident or from a pattern of behaviour over time.
- 4.5 Anyone, including College teaching staff and academic support staff involved in student placement who become aware of evidence of health, behavioural or academic unsuitability which may preclude a student from completing the course of study or from undertaking the required professional practice should ensure that this is reported to the appropriate CAM who will meet with the student to establish the nature of the concern. If a resolution is not possible, the student must report the facts in writing to the Head of Faculty at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.6 Anyone making such disclosure, as in 4.4 and 4.5 above, must identify his or herself. Anonymous disclosure will not be accepted. In exceptional circumstances the College may permit the discloser's identity to remain confidential, provided this is consistent with natural justice.
- 4.7 Boards of Examiners and Student Progress Committees may also refer students to the Head of Faculty under this Fitness for Professional Practice policy.
- 4.8 Students whose courses are covered by the Fitness for Practice policy must disclose any criminal convictions to the College before entering the course or immediately such a conviction occurs during the course. This will enable the student to be provided with guidance about entry requirements for registration within the profession concerned. If a student fails to disclose this information and it subsequently comes to light, the student will be referred to the Head of Faculty who may instigate the Fitness for Professional Practice procedure.
- 4.9 Issues relating to professional practice may arise as a consequence of behaviour associated with diagnosed or suspected mental problems or from addiction. In such circumstances the Fitness for Professional Practice policy will only be invoked if medical and counselling interventions have not successfully addressed the behaviour or if the student has refused all such interventions. The medical and counselling interventions should be evidenced.

## **5.0 PRECAUTIONARY SUSPENSION**

- 5.1 The Chief Executive or delegated authority of the College may suspend a student pending a fuller investigation of the circumstances reported. This power may be used when a student displays inappropriate behaviour while on clinical placement or when about to go on clinical placement.
- 5.2 When such action is necessary, the Course Coordinator will prepare a report on the circumstances of the case, normally within 3 working days of the action and will make this report available to a Fitness for Professional Practice panel.
- 5.3 During a period of precautionary suspension, the student will be entitled to access the College's student support services and will be offered any pastoral support required.

## 6.0 INVESTIGATION

- 6.1 The Head of Faculty will, within 5 working days of receiving the disclosure, appoint a Faculty Fitness for Professional Practice Panel (hereinafter the Panel). The Panel shall consist of:
- the Head of Faculty or his/her nominee (the Head of Faculty will normally Chair the Panel).
  - the Assistant Director for Higher Education and Quality or Assistant Director for Further Education and Training.
  - a member of lecturing staff from the same professional discipline as the student.
  - a member of lecturing staff who is not from the professional area concerned and who does not know the student.
  - a registered professional practitioner from the professional area concerned.
- 6.2 The panel will meet within 21 days of the disclosure being received.
- 6.3 The student will be given 10 working days' notice of the meeting of the Panel. The notice will include:
- a brief statement of the allegations against him or her.
  - details of any precautionary suspension or limitations on or conditions placed upon his or her studies or clinical placement experience during the investigation.
  - Information on his/her right to be accompanied at the Panel meeting by a representative who is a member of the College student or staff body.
- 6.4 The Head of Faculty or his/her representative may ask academic or clinical staff connected with the case to provide written comments on the student's academic standing, conduct or health, explaining why there is concern as to the student's fitness for professional practice. The Head of Faculty will also be provided with information about the student's professional and academic progress and any other relevant information.
- 6.5 The Panel will establish the facts of the case and in so doing may interview relevant individuals, including the student. The student may be accompanied at the interview by a member of staff of the College, by another student, by a representative of the Students' Union or by a member of the professional organisation. Legal representation is not permitted.
- 6.6 A member of the College administration staff will, with due regard to confidentiality, keep records of the proceedings and be responsible for circulating relevant documents.
- 6.7 The Panel shall satisfy itself that the student understands the purpose and import of the proceedings of the Panel in respect of his/her case, understands his/her rights within the process, and has adequate support.
- 6.8 Wherever possible the Panel will resolve the issue in consultation with the student.
- 6.9 The Panel has the following powers when considering the student's behaviour and conduct:
- no action may be required.
  - The student may be encouraged to obtain medical support following which they may be asked to provide medical confirmation of fitness to practice. This action may result in an agreed period of leave of absence.

- recommend to the College Senior Management team that the student discontinue studies on the course with or without possibility of transfer to another course.
- if the student is at an appropriate stage in his/her programme, he/she may be offered an alternative award which does not lead to a professional qualification.
- the student may be referred to the College's Disciplinary procedures.
- Other action as deemed appropriate to the situation.

6.10 Should the Panel take the decision to refer a student to the College Disciplinary procedures, it will state in writing the reasons for its recommendation and supply any evidence it may have.

6.11 When the Fitness for Professional Practice Panel takes the decision to remove a student from a professional course it will:

- inform the student in writing, within 10 days of the Panel meeting, of the decision of the Panel, giving reasons for the decision.
- apprise the Director of Curriculum.
- provide feedback to the complainant(s).
- the findings of the Panel will be entered on the student's file.

## **7.0 APPEALS PROCEDURE**

7.1 The student may appeal against the decision of the Departmental Fitness for Practice Panel on any of the following grounds:

- that new evidence has become available.
- that there has been procedural irregularity.
- that the decision of the panel was inappropriate or too severe.

7.2 An appeal should normally be made through the Director of Curriculum within 10 days of receiving the decision of the Panel. The Director of Curriculum will set up an Appeal Board (hereinafter the Board). The Board will consist of:

- Director of Curriculum or his/her delegated deputy (Chair).
- Head of Faculty of another area.
- A member of the professional body concerned who has not been involved in the consideration of the case.

The appeal will be considered within 28 days of the date the appeal was lodged. The Board will consider the statements and information provided by the Panel. The Board may set aside or vary or confirm the decision of the Panel. There shall be no appeal against the decision of the Appeal Board.

## **8.0 DISTRIBUTION**

SharePoint  
All Clients

## **9.0 RELATED DOCUMENTS**

Data Protection UK GDPR Policy  
Equality and Good Relations Policy (Staff and Students)  
Safeguarding Policy  
Whistle Blowing Policy – All Staff.  
Admissions Criteria  
Admissions Policy