



Ruskin College Oxford

FITNESS TO STUDY POLICY

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1.0 Policy on Fitness to Study

The external reference points for this policy are:

- 1.1** Equality Act 2010
- 1.2** Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- 1.3** Mental Capacity Act 2005
- 1.4** This policy has drawn on examples sourced from Newham Sixth Form College.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Ruskin College aims to provide the best level of education and inclusion opportunities to adults - particularly those who may be excluded or disadvantaged - and to transform the individuals concerned along with the communities, groups and societies from which they came'. We will engage our best endeavours to meet the needs of students with learning needs, medical conditions and disabilities. We will make all reasonable adjustments so that barriers are removed to enable academic success.

3.0 Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all Ruskin College students and learners registered on applicants where any adjustments made are no longer reasonable or possible.

4.0 Definitions

4.1 The College recognises that there may be times when physical or mental health of students is so affected that academic progress is unable to be maintained. In very rare situations where support is required that is beyond what is reasonable, it is useful to bear in mind that:

- Whilst on a temporary basis it is reasonable for tutors and support staff to be flexible with attendance due to ill health, prolonged periods of absence cannot be sustained, as we are not a distance learning college.
- 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.
- Occasionally ill health may also present a health and safety hazard and in this situation a risk assessment will be undertaken. Sometimes, however, risks cannot be managed at an appropriate level in the college environment.

4.2 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.

4.3 There may be other circumstances such as pregnancy or gender reassignment surgery where the principles of this policy will apply.

4.4 This policy and accompanying appendix provide a framework to guide decision making in the event of "fitness to study" issues arising, a set of parameters for the minimum acceptable level of academic progress and attendance and a series of stages for reviewing support and improvement.

5.0 Procedure

5.1 Telling the College

5.1.1 We will do all we can to create an inclusive and supportive environment to encourage 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 when speaking with your tutor. Students are made aware of the extensive range of student services at the college both at interview, at induction and via the College Handbook.

5.1.2 Students are encouraged to disclose any physical or mental health conditions as part of their application. Information disclosed 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 the student can receive support at the earliest opportunity and that we can make timely reasonable adjustments.

5.1.3 In cases where a complex or significant physical or mental health condition is disclosed on application, it may be appropriate that the Money and Welfare Officer seeks further information from health professionals to formulate a support plan, including when the student has an Education Health and Care Plan. A transition meeting may take place to discuss and agree details of the support plan, the appropriate programme to be studied and any reasonable adjustments. In these cases, the support plan will require formal medical paperwork to be provided. Agreement will be reached on the information given to staff so that they can best make adjustments.

5.1.4 Whenever students disclose to a member of staff we will always seek to provide appropriate support, whether the condition is pre-existing or begins during study at the college. Students each have a personal tutor with whom information is most likely to be shared. However, 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 the Money and Welfare Officer.

5.1.5 The Money and Welfare Officer will meet with students, provide information for staff, and with the relevant Head of Higher Education or Head of Further Education create support plans. The support plan may also involve referral to outside agencies, such as the student's GP. This is particularly true 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 medical support lies with the external services.

5.1.6 Occasionally a deferred start for the following academic year may be appropriate if students are not able to begin a programme of study at Ruskin College because of a physical or mental health condition. This may be possible if there has been improvement to their condition by the next enrolment and students meet the conditions of general entry requirements. Guidance will be given both on what support might be appropriate to ensure fitness to study on return the following academic year, but also importantly on what evidence will be expected at enrolment to support this. Any future enrolment would be with the recommendation of external agencies involved, the agreement of parents/guardians (if applicable) and a support plan.

5.2 Support during the course

5.2.1 We will use our best endeavours to support students when issues arise which mean they are finding it difficult 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.

5.2.2 On an individual basis we will look at any possible flexibility around academic progress (attendance, meeting assessment expectations, length of programme) and the support (types, location and frequency) 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.

5.2.3 The following should 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.
- 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 pastoral support the College can provide general support on site and where complex medical or psychiatric support is needed refer students to external agencies and services.
- Students must prepare for assessment through completion of formative assessment 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, then there comes 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.

5.3 Fitness to study

5.3.1 When issues arise the College will follow a staged process. At each stage we will use our best endeavours to support students and to make reasonable adjustments with the aim of students remaining at the college. 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 certain circumstances it may not be possible for students to remain at the college.

5.3.2 In these situations the best interests of each student and their welfare are at the centre of decisions. The student who has struggled to maintain academic progress against the odds and for whom trying to keep the structure of college life going has been so far a positive factor in their rehabilitation, 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.

5.3.3 A panel of college staff will review each student's situation and may make a recommendation for withdrawal to the Head of Student Services. If withdrawal is the outcome, then the student would have the right of appeal.

5.3.4 If it is agreed that a restart in the following academic year is an option, this may be possible if there has been improvement by enrolment and students meet the conditions of general entry requirements. Any restarts would be with the recommendation of external agencies involved and an agreed support plan as outlined in

5.3.5 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.

5.4 Time frames and stages

These time-frames and stages are indicative and may vary from student to student. It may be appropriate in some cases to remain at the concern stage for a longer period of time or to move straight to a panel review.

5.5 Concern

The student is absent through ill-health (e.g. absence of more than two weeks) or is failing to make academic progress because of a physical or mental condition. The tutor raises concerns with the student. The tutor puts in place a support plan with agreed targets. The tutor reviews the situation in an agreed time frame, usually two weeks' time.

5.6 Tutor Review 1

The student is continuing to be absent through ill-health (e.g. absence of more than four weeks) or is failing to make academic progress because of a physical or mental condition.

The tutor reviews the support plan and agrees targets at a formal meeting. The tutor reviews the situation in an agreed time frame, usually two weeks' time.

5.7 Tutor Review 2

The student is continuing to be absent through ill-health (e.g. absence of more than six weeks) or is failing to make academic progress because of a physical or mental condition. The tutor, in conjunction with the Head of Further Education or Head of Higher Education (as appropriate) reviews the support plan and agrees targets at a formal meeting. The tutor reviews the situation in an agreed time frame, usually two weeks' time.

5.8 Panel review

If when the final stage is reviewed the student cannot demonstrate fitness to study, a panel of college staff to include Head of FE/HE as appropriate, Money and Welfare Officer, Tutor and Warden if residential will review the student's position at the college. The panel may make a recommendation for withdrawal to the Head of Student Services. If withdrawal is the outcome, then the student will have the right of appeal to the Assistant Principal. The student will always be offered a careers interview to explore alternative options and referrals to external agencies as appropriate.

6.0 Outcomes

6.1 Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Assistant 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.