

Fitness to Study Policy

Date: 10 June 2026

Last amended by: Tim Johnson

1 Overview

- 1.1 Fitness to study relates to an individual's capacity to participate fully and satisfactorily as a student. Consideration of Fitness to Study encompasses student academic studies and their safety, including the means to live independently, and the effect on fellow students studying at ThinkSpace Education (TSE).
- 1.2 In keeping with this policy, TSE is committed to fully facilitating and supporting the wellbeing of those studying with us and recognises the importance of identifying signs early. Therefore, a multistage, supportive approach is taken which fairly assesses the needs of students and how TSE may positively pursue the most supportive outcome for all students and staff affected.
- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to provide the most suitable and coordinated outcome when:
 - (a) Other academic procedures are not appropriate, including disciplinary or grievance procedures by TSE and our validating university, Arts University Bournemouth (AUB).
 - (b) Other progression routes have been exhausted, including consideration and advice by the Director, Head of Postgraduate Education (HPE) and AUB, and the outcome has been the procedures outlined in this policy.

2 Guidance

- 2.1 This policy should be used when the circumstances above have been identified and a student's fitness to study is a cause for concern and must be used as a last resort. A student's fitness to study may be a cause for concern as a result of actions affecting themselves or others, circumstances, or wellbeing in a wide range of circumstances, including:
 - (a) Behaviour adversely affecting themselves or others, which may be the result of an underlying physical or mental health difficulty.
 - (b) Health complications adversely affecting themselves, academic performance or others, which may also put at risk their safety.
 - (c) Evidently declining or low academic performance as the result of the above two points, which would benefit positively from the recommended actions of the postgraduate team.
 - (d) Actions of the student adversely affecting the student and those around them, which may also put their ability to live independently whilst studying at risk.
- 2.2 The recommended actions outlined below should follow through the stages in order.

3 Stage 0 — Informal Action

- 3.1 Whilst it is hoped that this approach has been attempted before and found to be an exhausted method, it must be ensured that this is the case. If this is the case, Stage 1 may be followed through. If it has not been attempted, approach students and those who raised the concerns regarding fitness to study to investigate and attempt to resolve the matter by informal discussions.
- 3.2 Appropriate to the circumstances established as a result of the discussions, the student and any affected as a result of the circumstances should be encouraged to use one or more of the support services offered by TSE. Examples may include one-to-one support, Togetherall mental health support

and advice on seeking medical assistance. Communication and supportive assistance with staff may achieve informal resolution of the concerns raised.

- 3.3 Furthermore, support may also be necessary regarding academic arrangements, which if appropriate should be considered and agreed with the student. This may include alternative assessment or temporary interruption of studies. Staff members should resolve most cases this way.
- 3.4 Stage 0 should normally be concluded within 20 working days of concerns being raised. If informal action has not resolved the concerns within that period, or sooner where the circumstances warrant it, consideration should be given to convening a Stage 1 Panel meeting.

4 Stage 1 — Panel Meeting

- 4.1 Stage 1 should ensure early intervention and that positive, informal action is taken with the student's co-operation and involvement. A meeting of the Panel should take place, with the panel members made up of the following:
 - (a) Chair of the Panel: HPE, or Director if the HPE is unavailable or conflicted.
 - (b) Senior Tutor and a Team Leader.
- 4.2 The student may request to attend the meeting. The Chair can decide whether the student should attend. If the student attends, they will have the right to also bring a representative to the meeting.
- 4.3 An email will be sent to the student after the meeting clearly explaining any decisions made and the rationale.
- 4.4 The Panel may call witnesses necessary to the meeting, or to support the investigations. Before the Panel meeting the following evidence must be considered and obtained if appropriate: a medical assessment. The student should submit documents for the Panel to consider and will be given a copy of any documents seen by the Panel.
- 4.5 Outcomes agreed by the Panel should normally be an outcome not already previously attempted, unless additional aspects are included. Normal outcomes available to the Panel are:
 - (a) Monitor the student formally for a specified duration to prevent endangerment or negative impact. An action plan will be agreed with the student detailing any steps the student will need to take in designated areas and the support to be provided to the student.
 - (b) Regular review meetings to be arranged with the student and a nominated member of staff. The student should be made aware of what will happen if the action plan is breached, which will normally involve their case moving to Stage 2.
 - (c) To recommend a specific academic arrangement such as alternative assessment, distance learning arrangement, interruption of studies or suspension of studies. These recommendations should be agreed with the student. If the student does not agree, the case will move on to Stage 2.
- 4.6 Serious outcomes of the meeting may refer the case to a Fitness to Study Panel, under Stage 2 of this procedure, if:
 - (a) All previous attempts to support the student have been unsuccessful.
 - (b) The student does not agree to the actions resulting from the meeting.
 - (c) The student does not have self-determining insight regarding their fitness to study.
 - (d) There is evidence of a serious risk to the health and safety of the student or others.

5 Stage 2 — Fitness to Study Panel

- 5.1 Membership of this Panel will be as described in Stage 1 but with the addition of an external member. That external member can be from another university, an external member of the Academic Board, or other suitably qualified person.

- 5.2 This stage will only be invoked in the following circumstances:
- (a) Where emergency suspension appears necessary (e.g. where there is evidence of a serious risk to the health and safety of the student or others, and therefore Stage 1 must be skipped). An emergency meeting may be called to come to a decision as soon as possible.
 - (b) Following a referral from a Panel meeting at Stage 1.
 - (c) The student does not agree to the actions resulting from the meeting.
 - (d) The student does not have self-determining insight regarding their fitness to study.
- 5.3 If the student does not have an appropriate supporting representative to bring to the meeting, a member of staff who has been supporting the student throughout their circumstances may be invited to attend the meeting to give information but must not be part of the decision-making process. The student may request to attend all or part of the Panel meeting. The Chair will decide whether the student should attend, which may not be appropriate or possible in all cases. The Panel may also call witnesses if required and request further evidence to support decision making.

5.4 Possible Outcomes

- 5.4.1 Possible outcomes of the meeting include, but are not limited to:
- (a) Suspension or temporary interruption for a specified duration to allow the student to be assessed by a medical professional, access support services within and outside of TSE, or whilst the case is being investigated to ensure the safety of the student or others. The suspension will be reviewed within four weeks and every term following this, as detailed below in relation to emergency suspension.
 - (b) Suspension with conditions. A student may be prohibited from participating in classes, activities, contact with specific individuals and be prohibited from entering TSE premises whilst suspended. The specific terms of the suspension will be communicated to the student in writing. The suspension will be reviewed every two months, as detailed below in relation to emergency suspension.
 - (c) Withdrawal. With consideration of the individual circumstances and any supporting medical evidence, it may be concluded that there is no judicious prospect of the student re-engaging with their programme, or re-engaging whilst ensuring it is in the best interest of the student or other students. This outcome of withdrawal should only be considered in the most serious of cases.
- 5.4.2 The Chair has the power of the deciding vote if the Panel is unable to make a majority decision.
- 5.4.3 The decision will be detailed in a letter, clearly including any specific terms or conditions, and conveyed to the student by a member of the postgraduate team.
- 5.4.4 Where the outcome of a Stage 2 Panel involves suspension, interruption or withdrawal, TSE will notify Arts University Bournemouth (AUB) of the change to the student's registration.

6 Emergency Suspension

- 6.1 The HPE may refer the case to the Director or Chair of the Board of Directors if it is considered that the risk to the student or TSE is very high and emergency suspension at the soonest opportunity is in the best interest of all who may be affected.
- 6.2 If this course of action is commenced, the Director or Chair of the Board of Directors may impose an emergency suspension with immediate effect. The student in concern will be prohibited from participating in TSE activities, including assessment. In exceptional circumstances, the student may still be allowed to attend a meeting with members of the postgraduate team, to further clarify the decision.
- 6.3 The decision and terms of the suspension will be communicated to the student in writing. A meeting should also take place with the student to clarify and explain the rationale of the decision by the HPE and/or Director. A student will be marked as "suspended" on their student record and no further fees will

be charged to the student whilst suspended, except any debt already held by the student prior to suspension.

- 6.4 The decision to suspend may be reviewed every term following commencement of the decision at the request of the student if there is any evident change to the circumstances under concern. The review should follow the processes detailed in Stage 2, until the suspension is lifted or a decision to withdraw the student is made.

7 Return to Study

- 7.1 Further medical evidence will be requested from the student regarding their ability to fully engage with their studies if relevant. Evidence will also be required that they meet the requirements of the programme and are able to live or study independently or safely within the academic community before a student can return to study. Medical evidence should normally take the form of a letter or report from a GP, consultant or other appropriately qualified professional, confirming the student's fitness to return to study and describing any recommended support or adjustments.
- 7.2 A student will only be permitted to return if, after receiving the evidence, the Panel is fully assured that the individual is fit to study. If the decision to suspend was made under Stage 2 by a Fitness to Study Panel, the Panel should meet as detailed in Stage 2 again to consider the evidence and determine whether the student is fit to return to study.
- 7.3 Where a student returns to study after an emergency suspension the Panel should meet as detailed in Stage 2 to consider whether the student is fit to return and arrange any support that the student may require to support a return to studies. Regular review meetings or a return-to-study action plan are strongly recommended alongside written communication from the student that they agree to cooperating with the course of action.

8 Right of Appeal

- 8.1 The student may appeal against a suspension or withdrawal. An email requesting this should be sent to the Director within 21 calendar days of the decision. The appeal will be heard by senior members of staff not so far involved in the procedure and where that proves impossible, the decision will be reviewed by a suitably qualified external member, for example a representative from AUB, a member of staff from another institution, an external member of the Academic Board, or a non-executive director of the Board of Directors.
- 8.2 An appeal may be made on one or both of the following grounds: (a) a procedural irregularity in the conduct of the process which materially affected the outcome; or (b) substantial new information which, for good reason, could not be presented earlier. Disagreement with the Panel's judgement is not in itself a ground of appeal.
- 8.3 Once TSE's internal procedures are exhausted, TSE will issue a Completion of Procedures letter. Where eligible, the student may refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) at <https://www.oiahe.org.uk>.