

Fitness to Study policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Arts University Bournemouth is committed to supporting students in their academic studies, and in their participation in the widest range of university activities. The University recognises the significant investment made by students in their pursuit of higher education and its responsibility to provide appropriate support as students seek to fulfil their academic potential.
- 1.2 In exceptional cases there may be concerns about a student's current capacity to engage in academic engagements, maintain their own safety or to reside in the academic and residential communities of Arts University Bournemouth without adversely impacting other students or staff.
- 1.3 This policy is intended to provide a supportive process where a student's welfare or behaviour is giving cause for concern, where the range of supportive measures that the university may reasonably be expected to provide have been employed but have not satisfactorily resolved concerns, and/or where the use of the Student Disciplinary Procedure would be inappropriate or counter-productive.
- 1.4 This policy should in no way distract from any acute or dangerous situation where it is believed that a student's behaviour presents an immediate risk to themselves or others. In such circumstances, the Emergency Services should be contacted by calling 999, and the university security officers informed.

2. Fitness to study

- 2.1 Fitness to study means a student's fitness to start, continue or return to a course of academic study, and their ability to meet the reasonable academic, social and behavioural requirements of the university without having an unacceptably detrimental effect on the health, safety, welfare or educational experience of other students, or the reputation and good order of the university.
- 2.2 Fitness to study equates to "fitness to be a student", and as such relates to all activities associated with the student experience, including those taking place on the AUB campus, off-campus activities such as study visits and work experience placements, and living in university halls of residence.
- 2.3 A student may be deemed unfit to study where they are unable to meet the above definitions and/or where one or more of the following criteria apply:
 - a. The student is unable actively to engage in their programme of study, to attend classes or meetings with tutors or supervisors or to spend sufficient regular time in private study in such a way as to enable them to succeed;

- b. The student's commenced or continued study is likely to detrimentally affect their health and wellbeing;
- c. The student's commenced or continued study is likely to have a detrimental impact on fellow students, staff or the University's external partners;
- d. The adjustments required in respect of the student's disability (including mental health difficulty) have become unreasonable.

3. Mental health difficulties

- 3.1 Arts University Bournemouth aims to promote a culture in which mental health difficulties are recognised and supported. It will ensure that students are not disadvantaged, academically or otherwise, because of their difficulties in accordance with the university's Equality commitment. The university has specific responsibilities towards those students whose mental health is defined as a disability under the law to ensure that reasonable adjustments are put in place to support their learning. Where a student is facing academic progression or disciplinary processes, and mental health may be a contributing factor, the student will be offered support to protect their longer-term academic prospects.
- 3.2 However, the University recognises that students are individual, adult learners, with a responsibility to contribute to their own self-care and to contribute to the quality and wellbeing of the AUB community. Students are invited to engage appropriately and professionally with the support available, where mental health difficulties are adversely affecting the student's capacity to engage productively with their studies or with the AUB community. The university will assist students to understand the support provision at AUB, within its remit as an education institution, and to assist students to access appropriate external support where necessary.
- 3.3 Whilst the university is committed to providing a supportive environment, it is important to recognise that it is not a mental health facility nor is it a therapeutic community. There are, of necessity, limits to the extent of the support that can be provided. The university cannot provide treatment for mental illness but aims to provide an environment and the resources to support students to maximise their sense of mental wellbeing.

4. Duty of care, safeguarding and data protection

- 4.1 AUB owes a "Duty of Care" to all students as a result of the "proximate relationship" which exists between the University and its students. AUB has a duty to take reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all its students and visitors.
- 4.2 The University has additional legal duties to respond to any safeguarding concerns regarding children or adults who may be at risk. Any belief that an individual may be at risk of harm from others should be reported to an AUB Safeguarding Officer (email safeguarding@aub.ac.uk, as detailed in the AUB Safeguarding policy).
- 4.3 In accordance with General Data Protection Regulations, all data relating to a person's mental or physical health is treated as sensitive personal data. If there

is a need to share sensitive personal data the student's consent will normally be sought.

- 4.4 In the event that the University considers there to be an urgent threat to the student's health and safety, or the health and safety of others, or where it is reasonably believed that the student's ill health impairs their ability to provide consent, the University's duty of care may result in direct action being taken without the student's consent.

5. Initial concern

- 5.1 AUB embraces diversity and is accepting of difference; a student giving cause for concern is likely to be one who is behaving out of character. Signs may include:

- Significant changes in appearance such as dramatic loss or gain of weight, deteriorating self-care and hygiene, or extreme signs of sleeplessness;
- Changes in the pattern of attendance or standard of work;
- Changes of mood from previous experience of the student;
- Other people, such as friends, housemates or external third parties expressing concern;
- Talk or evidence of self-harming behaviour;
- Evidence of alcohol or drug abuse;
- Inappropriate responses which are disproportionate to the causal situation.

- 5.2 Initial concerns should be raised informally with the student by the member of staff who has noted the concern. This will provide an opportunity for the student to disclose any underlying difficulties or mental health condition, and enable referral to counselling / wellbeing / disability teams in Student Services so that appropriate support may be arranged.

6. Serious concern

- 6.1 If the issues are not resolved by informal action, or if there is a high level of concern for the student and / or others, the Student Support Manager / Senior Wellbeing Officer should be informed.
- 6.2 The Student Support Manager / Senior Wellbeing Officer will invite the student to attend a meeting to discuss their fitness to study. The student's Course Leader will be invited to attend, and the student will be informed that they may be accompanied by a friend or representative. The aim of the meeting is to encourage the student to acknowledge their difficulties and to engage with appropriate help. Although stressing that the aim is to support the student, the Student Support Manager / Senior Wellbeing Officer will note that it is the student's responsibility to be fit to study.
- 6.3 The Student Support Manager / Senior Wellbeing Officer and the Course Leader will agree an action plan with the student to bring about the required changes in presenting behaviour. This may include requiring the student to attend regular appointments with the Senior Wellbeing Officer or meet with other University staff for regular monitoring. The name of the student's GP will be noted (if the student

is not registered with a local GP, a registration form for the local surgery will be provided). If the Student Support Manager / Senior Wellbeing Officer considers it necessary to inform the student's GP or community mental health services / medical specialist of the level of concern, they will inform the student of their intention to do so. A copy of the agreed action plan will be provided to the student and Course Leader. A date for formal review will be set.

7. Acute concern

- 7.1 Acute concern may very occasionally arise from a crisis situation, such as a sudden or violent breakdown in behaviour, or from the student being unwilling or unable to comply with the action plan agreed at the Serious Concern meeting. If the student's behaviour persists or deteriorates, or if there is a crisis situation, the Student Support Manager / Senior Wellbeing Officer should be informed.
- 7.2 The Student Support Manager / Senior Wellbeing Officer will conduct a risk assessment to formally assess the level of risk to the student and / or others and whether the student is fit to study, as defined in para 1.2.
- 7.3 If the student's fitness to study is in doubt the Student Support Manager / Senior Wellbeing Officer will establish a Fitness to Study panel. The panel will be chaired by the Director of Student Experience and Employability (or nominee) and will include the Student Support Manager (or nominee) / Senior Wellbeing Officer, the Head of Quality and Standards (or nominee) and the Course Leader (or nominee).
- 7.4 The student will receive written notification of the Fitness to Study panel meeting, and the reasons for the meeting, at least 2 working days prior to the meeting. The student will be informed of their right to attend the panel meeting and their right to be accompanied by a friend or representative. If the student is living in AUB halls of residence they will be informed that the Fitness to Study panel will also consider whether the student is required to relocate to alternative accommodation, in accordance with the AUB Residence Agreement. Other AUB staff, professional agencies or the student's GP may also be invited to attend if appropriate.
- 7.5 During the Fitness to Study panel meeting the Student Support Manager / Senior Wellbeing Officer will specify the concerns regarding the student's fitness to study, and will discuss what options are open to the student, including intermitting their studies. The Head of Quality and Standards will explain any implications for academic progression / award. Where students fail to respond or engage with a Fitness to Study process in a timely fashion, the University may proceed to reach conclusions in the absence of the student.
- 7.6 If the student is living in AUB halls of residence the Fitness to Study panel will consider whether the student is required to relocate to alternative accommodation. If so, the panel will give the student written notice of this, providing details of the alternative accommodation and notifying the student of the date on which the student is to relocate. The Fitness to Study panel will give the student reasonable notice of this date, taking into account the circumstances.

If the alternative accommodation is not satisfactory to the student (acting reasonably), the student may terminate their Residence Agreement, in accordance of clause 6.7 of the AUB Residence Agreement.

- 7.7 Any decision reached by the Fitness to Study panel will be communicated to the student in writing, whether or not they are present at the meeting. A written note of the Fitness to Study panel decision may be sent to the student's GP or community mental health services if appropriate.

8. Suspension

- 8.1 A Fitness to Study panel may consider whether a student should be suspended from the University. This is a precautionary act, based upon the perceived level of risk, and will take into account the risk of harm either to self or others, a risk to the property of the Arts University, or to third parties.
- 8.2 Where there is considered to be an urgent and imminent risk to the student or others, a student may be suspended pending a Fitness to Study panel meeting.
- 8.3 Suspension from AUB must be carried out by a member of the Vice Chancellor's Group, and will be communicated by a letter, sent both in printed copy to the student's term address, and electronically to the student's AUB email address. A text will be sent to the student to notify them of the importance of the email.
- 8.4 An order of suspension may include a requirement that the student shall have no contact with a named person or persons, or may wholly or partly prohibit the student from entering all or specific University premises, or participating in all or specific University activities.
- 8.5 Suspension pending a Fitness to Study panel meeting may also require a student to relocate to alternative accommodation, if there is considered to be an imminent risk to residents in University halls of residence. If so, the letter of suspension will give the student written notice of the alternative accommodation to be provided and the date on which the student is to relocate.
- 8.6 An order of suspension will specify the arrangements for review, which will normally be at intervals of no more than two months.
- 8.7 A student may appeal the decision to suspend on the following grounds:
- That the Fitness to Study procedures were not followed correctly;
 - That the student has material evidence that they were unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier.
- Students should submit their appeal in writing to the Principal and Vice Chancellor within 10 working days of the suspension.

9. Return to Study

- 9.1 Where a student has been suspended or has intermitted their studies, or has not yet commenced their studies, any return to or commencement of study will be conditional upon a GP or relevant medical specialist's letter confirming that the student is fit to engage in study and university life. The University reserves the

right to disclose details of any action taken under the Fitness to Study policy in order to gain relevant medical opinion.

- 9.2 In addition, the student may be required to agree an action plan, setting out the expectations of student conduct, the support to be put in place, and arrangements for ongoing monitoring and review.

The Arts University Bournemouth is committed to the provision of a working and learning environment founded on dignity, respect and equity where unfair discrimination of any kind is treated with the utmost seriousness. It has developed and implemented an Equalities Strategy and Action Plan to guide its work in this area. All the University's policies and practices are designed to meet the principles of dignity, respect and fairness, and take account of the commitments set out in the Equalities Strategy.

This policy has been subject to an equality analysis to ensure consideration with regard to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.