

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

SUPPORT FOR STUDY POLICY REVIEW

1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper presents the Committee with an updated revised draft of the Support for Study Policy (the **Policy**) for approval.

2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	Student Support & Experience Committee (SSEC)	September 2023 November 2023 February 2024
Further consideration/ approval required by	Senate	March 2024

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

The Committee is invited to consider and discuss the updated draft of the Policy, for onwards approval by Senate. The current policy can be found in the [AQH](#), and the draft revision in Appendix A.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1** The Policy was introduced in November 2016, following approval by Senate. Student Support Management Team (**SSMT**) have responsibility for operating the Policy, with the Head of Student Support Services having overall oversight for cases supported under it.
- 4.2** The Policy provides a useful and supportive framework to work with students whose engagement is impacted due to significant health or personal challenges, and in recent years it has allowed for positive proactive support to be delivered to students at risk, and swift reactive support to be discussed and delivered to those who may have otherwise been unable to engage positively in University life and/or continue with their studies.
- 4.3** As agreed at SSEC, a working group of SSEC members and key stakeholders have met twice to feed into the review and consider the changes presented by SSMT in the previous draft. A revised draft has been prepared, based on these discussions and feedback.
- 4.4** The draft Policy has been included with general comments highlighting key changes which have been made following consultation with the working group, key stakeholders and SSMT. Due to the volume of changes made, especially when compared to the current Policy, a tracked change version would have been unreadable and has not been provided.

5. COMMENTS FROM THE INITIAL DRAFTS

- 5.1** The initial draft was shared with the working group and SSEC for comments and input and a summary of their main comments, and changes made following these, are noted below:

- The language used in the Policy has been considered carefully, to seek to balance the supportive nature of the processes flowing from it, whilst maintaining the formality of a University policy.
- The language used in the Policy has been amended to reflect that the reader may be a staff member or a student.
- The format and processes flowing from the Policy have been amended to fall into line with amendments made recently to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic) (The **Code**), to allow for greater consistency and clarity.
- The structure of the Policy has been reformatted to make each section clearer, with possible outcomes sitting within each Stage, rather than at the foot of the Policy.
- Additional context has been added around when the Policy does and does not apply, making it clear that usual monitoring, engagement, and progression exercises should continue, and that the Policy will only be considered when concerns are directly stemming from personal/health issues experienced by the student (recognising these may have impacted engagement and/or progression).
- The list of other policies which interplay with the Policy has been amended, with further clarity provided around movement of cases between policies.
- The Prevention section of the Policy has been revised to provide greater clarity around responsibilities of the Schools/departments, and those of Student Support. This section has been reworded to remove the terminology around “stage” and has been drafted as “guidance” to reiterate that the intention is not to over-engineer or formalise standard support discussions, but to provide a framework around cases which require additional guidance or intervention.
- Language around pastoral support has been amended to reflect all students – previous versions didn’t adequately represent PGT and PGR structures/processes.
- Further detail has been added around support for students who take a break from studies following intervention under the Policy, with further clarity around how an interruption will be arranged, and the route for returning to study in a supported manner thereafter.
- An appeal section has been added, aligned with the appeals section in the Code.
- Clarity has been given to where responsibility for the Policy ultimately lies, with clearer guidance to staff around making relevant referrals. The updated Policy will be paired with updated staff and student guides which give anonymised examples of how and when to refer cases under the Policy.

6. ACTION REQUIRED

- 6.1 The UEC is invited to consider and discuss the draft revision to the Support for Study Policy, as presented in Appendix A.

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is being finalised.
- 7.2 Guidance notes will be developed for both staff and students, to help support implementation of the updated Policy.

8. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Jemma Murdoch, Deputy Head of Student Support Services (j.murdoch@abdn.ac.uk) and Nick Edwards, Deputy Director of People and Head of Student Support Services (n.edwards@abdn.ac.uk).

27 February 2024

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open

Support for Study Policy

This policy outlines the processes the University can follow when there are concerns that a student's health, or personal difficulties, are affecting: their ability to participate fully and effectively in their studies; or impacting on their engagement in university life or with the university community. Early interventions and support are fundamental elements to supporting positive outcomes for students. This policy provides initial, informal, prevention guidance aimed at reducing the need for escalations and interventions by more formal actions. Where concerns are acute, or this early intervention is unsuccessful, this policy further provides details of how to escalate the situation for consideration by the Student Support Management Team. Intervention or escalation under the Policy will be managed by Student Support, in collaboration with Schools and/or the relevant Professional Services team(s) as appropriate.

Version 2

Launched on XXXXXXXX 2024

Review date XXXXXXXX 2026

1. When does the Policy apply?

The University is committed to supporting our students with all aspects of their student life and recognises the importance of a student's health and wellbeing in relation to their academic progression and wider university experience. This policy is a supportive way of assisting students whose interactions at the University, and beyond, are giving cause for concern.

This policy can be applied in a range of situations, including where:

- Concerns are raised about a student failing to engage positively with their studies and/or the wider learning environment, even after inclusion adjustments have been explored and implemented.
- A student has multiple monitoring flags on their record and the School(s) has/have identified that there are underlying support needs.
- A student is disrupting the teaching, learning or support of other students and/or the wellbeing or studies/work of other students and staff.
- A student is disrupting the living environment or impacting on the experience and/or the wellbeing of other residents in University Halls of Residence.
- A student is unable to participate independently and safely in wider elements of university life e.g., socialising, extracurricular activities on campus, placements (work/clinical), field trips, part time employment, engagements with the Students' Union (AUSA) or living in University or PBSA accommodation.
- A student has spent a significant period, or is receiving ongoing care, in hospital, due to underlying medical difficulties, or a mental health crisis.
- The University receives a report of a serious incident involving a student (e.g., from the Police, a private student accommodation provider, or from a friend/family member of the student) which is likely to impact on their studies.
- A student is returning to their studies, following a break, and it has been identified that support extending beyond inclusion adjustments would be beneficial to the student, in the initial period following their return.

Ultimately decisions on the application of the policy will be guided by the Student Support Management Team (**SSMT**) through the operation of the Student Case Management Group (**SCMG**) which has responsibility to consider student support cases and progression under this policy.

This policy works alongside other formal University regulations, policies, and procedures. The most common policies it may interplay with are:

- [Code of Practice on Student Discipline \(Academic\)](#)
- [Code of Practice on Student Discipline \(Non-Academic\)](#)
- [Policy on Fitness to Practise](#)
- [Unacceptable Actions Policy](#)
- [Policy on Drugs and Alcohol Misuse \(Students\)](#)
- [Student Monitoring procedures](#)
- [PGR Engagement policy \(PGR Code of Practice\)](#)

At any time during a process being progressed under this policy a decision can be taken to proceed under another policy if it is deemed more appropriate. In cases where there has been behaviour which would be deemed as misconduct under the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic) (**The Code**), the SCMG reserve the right to apply any one of the outcomes available to an Investigator under the Code as part of an outcome under the Policy.

2. When does the Policy not apply?

This policy does not seek to replicate or take precedence over other University policies and should not be used in place of the relevant policies for monitoring of student engagement and/or progress. Stages 2 and 3 of this policy will only apply when concerns raised directly result from a student's personal and/or medical circumstances.

3. Who does the Policy apply to?

This policy applies to all University students who are registered/enrolled on a full-time or part-time programme, including distance learning students. The policy will apply to individuals regardless of their level of study and may be applied should they move to a new programme or level of study. It will also apply to applicants holding an offer of study, and to students who are taking a break from their studies and planning their return in the current or following academic year.

4. Who has oversight and responsibility for cases under the Policy?

The Policy is overseen by SSMT, who have overall responsibility for this policy, coordinated by the Head of Student Support Services.

The initial prevention guidance highlights the responsibility of all staff working with and/or supporting students, across the University, who can implement support under the Policy without the need for input from other staff.

Staff across the University can refer any cases of concern to the SCMG for consideration across various policies and processes, which may include intervention under this Policy. If progressing under the Policy, the intervention and escalation stages will be led by a member of the SSMT, in collaboration with the School(s) and/or other Professional Services department(s) as appropriate.

Whilst this policy has been developed with prevention and early intervention in mind, it is not necessary to work sequentially through each stage. At the discretion of the SSMT or Head of Student Support Services it may be determined that a case should progress immediately to any stage. This could be because the case has already been progressed under the Policy before, or due to the severity of the situation and its impact and/or risk. The Policy can also be initiated at any point for students who seek to return to study following a break, including those who have not been supported under the Policy before or to those who have previously been on a different programme of study at the University.

5. Summary of the stages of the Policy

The policy has three sections: informal prevention guidance; a formal intervention stage; and a further formal escalation stage for cases of higher risk/urgency, or ongoing concern which has not been addressed through the earlier sections.

6. Prevention Guidance

Supportive conversations

This guidance section of the Policy is intended to provide an opportunity to staff across the University who have concerns of a low level to discuss these with the student and ensure that adequate support is in place.

It can be used where a student's actions, lack of engagement with their studies, or wellbeing is causing concern, but not presenting any immediate crisis or putting themselves or others at risk. There is no formal process for having a discussion with the student at this stage. Conversations are likely to be progressed by academic staff delivering teaching to the student, staff monitoring student engagement, personal tutors, Research Supervisors, staff in university accommodation or members of a student facing service. Concerns in relation to engagement should be raised as early as possible, when it is possible for a student to re-engage with their studies.

It is acknowledged that staff will discuss support with students on a regular basis and this guidance is not designed to formalise or inhibit such conversations, but to provide a structure to explore emergency concerns with a student in a supportive environment.

If a member of staff has concerns about a student and needs guidance on how to approach a conversation about them, they should contact Student Advice & Support on 01224 273935; or by emailing student.support@abdn.ac.uk. The team is available from 0900-1700, Monday to Friday. The team can also provide staff with details of services that can support students, and relevant information for signposting.

During a supportive conversation under the Policy, staff should clearly outline the concerns with the student, and allow them the opportunity to share their perspective. Staff should take the opportunity to discuss and explore support with the student and make suggestions regarding appropriate support services. Details of the University support services are available on the [website](#) and in the staff guidance on the Policy.

7. Next steps under the Policy (Prevention)

Following any conversation about support under the Policy, staff will follow up with the student in writing, outlining the discussion shared and the support options that were raised. Any expectations will also be clearly documented: e.g., attendance at follow-up meetings, actively seeking support from another service, or a change in behaviour. It may be that no further action was required, but a follow up should always be sent signposting to support services.

Further guidance around approaching supportive conversations with students can be found on the pastoral support [website](#).

If there are continuing concerns (for example if the student does not attend or engage positively with the meeting or take appropriate action following it) then it may be considered appropriate to refer the case to SCMG for review and consideration under the Policy. This should be clearly highlighted in an email to student.support@abdn.ac.uk. In the referral, staff should include details of the conversations which have already taken place with the student. The referral will be reviewed by the SCMG, and appropriate next steps agreed on the case. You will be informed on any input needed as the case progresses.

8. Intervention Stage

Engagement/Support agreements

A meeting with the student about continuing/significant concerns may be considered if the student is unable to engage positively with their studies and/or university life following an initial meeting, and significant concerns continue. This stage may also be considered if the concern raised is too serious to be dealt with as an emerging/low level concern using the Prevention guidance in the policy.

The purpose of a meeting under this stage is to provide a supportive environment in which concerns can be discussed with the student and any actions to support the student to re-engage positively with their studies and/or student life can be developed and agreed. This stage will be managed by a member of Student Support staff, and any meeting conducted will include 2 members of university staff. Where an earlier conversation has already taken place under the Policy, it is hoped that in most cases the staff member involved in the initial meeting will remain involved during this to ensure a consistent and supportive approach for the student.

In the invite to a meeting at this stage of the policy, the student will be given clear information about the reason for the meeting, along with a copy of the policy, and any relevant information relating to the concern. Students will be given written notice of the meeting and will be expected to attend it. Students will be invited to take a supporter to any meeting at this stage (page 7).

During a meeting at this stage, the concerns will be outlined to the student, giving them the opportunity to share their perspective and discuss their experiences. Support opportunities will be explored and agreed, wherever possible, and a clear agreement will be drawn up collaboratively between the staff involved and the student. As part of the agreement, a review date will be agreed. In most cases, students will continue to be supported under an agreement for at least the rest of the relevant academic term.

9. Next steps under the Policy (Intervention)

Following a meeting at this stage, the agreement will be shared with the student in writing, along with clear information about the relevant support services and details of any follow-up meetings. The agreement will be shared with other university staff/departments, as deemed appropriate by the member of staff leading this stage of the process. In the sharing of the agreement, Student Support will outline the expectation of reporting under the agreement with the relevant department(s).

All students supported under an agreement will be assigned a lead member of staff in Student Support who will meet with the student as outlined in the agreement. Where possible, this will be the same member of staff who led the meeting on behalf of Student Support. The Adviser will report to the SCMG at the review date with recommendation to conclude or extend the agreement. The Adviser will also report to the SCMG with any escalations or concerns during the period of the agreement. The Adviser will liaise with the relevant academic and support departments, regarding engagement under the agreement, during the period of the agreement.

Following a meeting under this stage of the Policy, the lead member of staff may refer the case back to the SCMG for consideration under a different policy. The lead member of staff may also determine that a further meeting or more information is required before an engagement agreement can be drawn up. In these cases, the outcome of the meeting will be communicated in writing to the student, with clear guidance about the next steps. In some cases, the outcome of a meeting at this stage will be agreement that no further action is required. This will be confirmed in writing to the student.

10. Escalation Stage

Support for Study Review Panel

A Support for Study Review Panel may be initiated if:

- Previous stages of the Policy have not resolved the concern, or a student is not able to engage fully with an agreement under the Policy.
- Concerns are established as being more severe than originally anticipated.
- A risk assessment conducted by SCMG has deemed that the concern is so serious that immediate escalation is deemed suitable by the SCMG or Head of Student Support Services.
- A student's health and/or wellbeing are significantly affecting their ability to engage with studies, placements (work/clinical) or impacting on their engagement in university life, University accommodation, or with the university community.
- There is immediate risk to the student and/or others.
- There is consideration by the SCMG that an outcome under the Policy may result in disruption to the student's registration, i.e., suspension/withdrawal.

Where possible and appropriate, the staff involved any earlier meetings will be included in the composition of the Support for Study Review Panel for a consistent and supportive process.

The panel should appropriately represent departments/services in contact with the student. The panel must include three members of staff, including the Convener. Additional staff may be asked to attend to provide insight into the situation, and this may include external parties at the discretion of the Convener.

The following staff may convene a Support for Study Review Panel:

- Director of People or their Deputy
- Head of Student Support Services or their Deputy
- Dean for Student Support & Experience
- Any Vice Principal

In the invite to a meeting at this stage of the policy, the student will be given clear information about the reason for the meeting. They will be provided with information about the composition of the panel, and a copy of the Review Panel papers which will include an outline of the concern(s), copies of any relevant emails or meeting notes from earlier stages of the process, and a copy of the student's record card. An invite and documentation will be shared with the student and the panel, wherever possible, 3 working days prior to the meeting. The Review Panel will also receive a copy of the referral from the SCMG, where relevant.

Students will be invited to include a written statement and/or any relevant evidence in advance of the Review Panel meeting. Students will be invited to take a supporter to any meeting at this stage (section 12). Student engagement in the meeting is strongly encouraged. If a student chooses not to attend, or is unable to engage fully in the meeting, the process for proceeding in their absence is outlined below (section 13).

During a meeting at this stage, the concerns will be outlined to the student, giving them the opportunity to share their perspective and discuss their experiences. Previous support agreed, including any agreement drawn up, will be discussed in detail. The panel will have the opportunity to ask the student questions relating to their experience of studying/University life and explore

mitigating circumstances. The meeting is intended to explore all possible support, both internally and externally to the University.

Review Panel meetings under the Policy will follow a similar format and structure to those conducted under the Code, and further details about procedures to be followed can be found in the appropriate section of the Code.

11. Next steps under the Policy (Escalation)

Following the Review Panel, the panel will meet to consider the decision. The decision of the Support for Study Review Panel will be notified to the student in writing, with clear reasons and with any agreed action points, within 5 working days of the decision.

The possible outcomes of a Review Panel may include:

- No further action.
- If a student has shared that they are disabled or have a medical condition for which they have not been receiving study-support due to no prior sharing, they will be referred to Student Advice & Support for a meeting to discuss reasonable adjustments and support. This may include the implementation inclusion adjustments, and/or referral for specialist study-related support e.g., specialist study skills and/or specialist mentoring.
- The drawing up of an Engagement Agreement, or revision to an existing Agreement, under the Policy.
- An exclusion from areas of the University's campus where issues have arisen (e.g., University student accommodation, the Students' Union Building, or the Library). The period of exclusion will be confirmed with the student in the outcome, and the Panel will consider mitigations to reduce any detrimental impact on the student's ability to engage with their studies or with support services during any exclusion period.
- A recommendation to explore alternative study mode options, e.g. part-time study.
- An interruption to studies for the duration of the current academic year, which will be reviewed before the following academic year commences. If approved academically, any request for readmission from a student who has been withdrawn under the Policy will be at the discretion of the Panel or, at their discretion and delegation, the Head of Student Support Services.
- A referral to any relevant Fitness to Practice processes, which may include a recommendation for an Occupational Health Review meeting for students studying Medicine, Dentistry, or other Allied Health programmes.

12. Supporter

Students have the right to be accompanied to meetings at every stage under the policy. This could be a peer, family member or friend, for the purpose of moral support. The supporter will not be expected to speak on behalf of the student or represent their own views or opinions in the meeting. Students will be asked to provide information about anyone attending a meeting with them in advance. If a student wishes to have representation during the meeting, they can request this support from the Students' Union. The Students' Union can provide independent advice, assistance, or representation for students at every stage under the Support for Study Policy, including accompanying them to or representing them at meetings. Initial enquiries can be directed to the Students' Union Advice team by telephone: 01224 274200; or by email: ausaadvice@abdn.ac.uk. The University will not provide legal or other representation for any party involved in the proceedings brought under this Policy.

13. Proceeding in a student's absence

Where a student cannot attend the first offered time for a meeting under the Policy, they can ask for an alternative time to be offered on a different day. Given the importance of meetings under the Policy, attendance at meetings required under it will take precedence over all other University activity. If the student is unable to attend the rescheduled meeting, the case can be considered, and a decision reached in the absence of the student. The student will be invited to provide a written statement in advance where this is the case.

Although every effort will be made to ensure that the student is able to engage with meetings under the policy, the meetings at any stage may proceed in a student's absence where there is evidence that they cannot effectively engage in the process, or this is reasonably considered by the University to be in a student's best interests e.g. where there is a concern that attending a panel meeting would be detrimental to the student's mental health and wellbeing.

Where a student is invited to a meeting under this policy and does not attend, and does not provide advance notice of their inability to attend, the meeting may proceed in their absence at the discretion of the Head of Student Support Services or their Deputy, or the Convener of a Support for Study Review Panel, as long as, in line with policy, they have received appropriate notice of the date and time of the meeting.

Any notes of the meeting, together with copies of any relevant documents, and the reason for the decision to proceed will be provided to the student.

14. Interruption to Studies – an outcome under the Policy

Where it is recommended that a student interrupts their studies under the Policy, the case will be reviewed when the student applies for readmission.

Where it is recommended that a student takes a break from their studies under the Policy, the implications on their funding, housing, and student visa (where applicable) must be considered by the Panel and any relevant advice or information must be shared with the student in a written outcome.

Students who are recommended to take a break from studies will be allocated a Student Support Adviser as a named contact to discuss practical matters relating to funding, housing, etc.

15. Interruption to Studies – students unable to engage with the University in the management of their wellbeing

For any student who is unable to engage with their studies and/or to interact with the University in the management of their wellbeing due to personal or medical circumstances (e.g. hospitalisation, being under the care of a Compulsory Treatment Order (CTO), under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, engagement in criminal justice processes, other serious personal reasons), the University will put an appropriate interruption of studies in place. The University will liaise with the Emergency Contact of all students in this position and will liaise with the Emergency Contact until such a time that the student is able to re-engage.

SCMG will liaise with the Emergency Contact, the relevant academic department(s), Registry, and the Immigration team (where relevant) to establish the appropriate interruption period for any student unable to engage with the University due to health/personal reasons, which would usually be until the start of the next academic year. If a student's engagement has not been impacted prior to the point

they have become unable to engage, it may be possible to return to studies after a short break, however the student's ability to return to their studies at a particular time will be determined depending on their ability to achieve the learning outcomes for each course they are registered for.

16. Return to study after an interruption

During a break from studies under the Policy, a Student Support Adviser will check in with the student via email to offer support and highlight any upcoming readmission and/or funding deadlines. When a student expresses a desire to consider readmission, the Adviser will meet with the student to discuss next steps, and practical matters to consider, which may include arrangements to meet with relevant staff in the School or support services such as the Student Learning Service, Student Support Services, etc.

When a student is returning to study following an interruption recommended under the Policy or due to being unable to engage with the University in the management of their wellbeing, the student may be asked to provide evidence that the issues that presented concerns have been addressed. This could include evidence of having received appropriate medical or other support that may also be ongoing. Where relevant, students charged or convicted with a relevant criminal offence during their interruption will need to provide information about the charge or conviction to studentconduct@abdn.ac.uk. The readmission to study will be reviewed by the Student Case Management Group (SCMG).

Following review, a meeting will be arranged with a member of the SCMG to discuss a possible return to studies.

If students have any concerns about providing evidence to support their readmission, they should contact the Head of Student Support Services.

17. Monitoring after a return to study

Once a student has returned to study, both Student Advice & Support and the School/s will have a role in monitoring the wellbeing of the student for a review period of up to six months. During the initial meeting with Student Advice & Support/SCMG as noted in section 16, this will be discussed, and any appropriate follow up meetings will be agreed. Student Support will liaise with the School regarding any specific monitoring requirements. If any concerns re-emerge, these will be raised promptly with the student. The student is expected to engage with meetings arranged by their School/s or Student Advice & Support during this review period.

18. Appeals

It is hoped that decisions made under the Policy will be in collaboration with the student and their supporters/support teams. A student can appeal against an outcome under stages 2 and 3 of the policy, but only if there are valid grounds to appeal. The possible grounds for appeal, which must be evidenced when making an appeal are:

- the University's procedures were not followed (without the reported parties' prior approval); or
- the person or body making the decision did not have the authority to do so; or
- the person or body making the decision did not act impartially; or
- the penalty imposed was unreasonable, that is, that it is one which no reasonable person, properly advised, would have imposed under this Code.

If a student wishes to appeal an outcome from stage 2, this should be sent to student.support@abdn.ac.uk within 5 working days of receiving the outcome email, and the appeal will be reviewed by the SCMG. An appeal against a decision of a Review Panel must be made in accordance with the prevailing University appeal process available on the University website. This process is managed by the Academic Services team.

When an appeal is received by Registry, a Case Officer for the appeal will be appointed and receipt of the appeal will be acknowledged. On receipt of the appeal, a Grounds to Proceed panel, composed of the Case Officer and two senior academic or administrative staff members (depending on the nature of the case), will review the case to determine whether there are grounds for the appeal to proceed. If the appeal is deemed not to contain grounds to proceed, the appellant will be advised of this outcome within 5 working days of receipt of the appeal. The appellant will be informed of his or her right to seek independent review of the University's decision by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. If the Grounds to Proceed Panel consider that the appeal should proceed, the original case lead/Panel will be asked whether they wish to review their decision. If they do not wish to amend the original decision taken, the matter is to be referred to an Appeal Panel, in accordance with the University's Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals. The people who form the Appeal will not be the same as those involved in the original decision.