



## **Support to Study Policy**

Core Documentation Cover Page					
Support to Study Policy					
Version number	Dates produced and approved (include committee)	Reason for production/ revision	Author	Location(s)	Proposed next review date and approval required
V1.0	Sep 2018 Academic Council	New policy to provide a process to support all students at the UCO where there are concerns about their ability to study due to personal or health difficulties.	Student Support Manager	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Website	Aug 2020
V2.0	May 2019 PRAG Chair	Administrative changes in line with role title update	Student Support Officer	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Website	May 2022

Equality Impact	
Positive equality impact (i.e. the policy/procedure/guideline significantly reduces inequalities)	X
Neutral equality impact (i.e. no significant effect)	
Negative equality impact (i.e. increasing inequalities)	
<p><b>If you have any feedback or suggestions for enhancing this policy, please email your comments to: <a href="mailto:quality@uco.ac.uk">quality@uco.ac.uk</a></b></p>	

## Contents

1. Scope .....	4
2. Introduction .....	4
3. Purpose .....	4
4. When should this policy be used? .....	4
5. Stage One – Emerging Concerns .....	5
6. Stage Two – Continuous Concerns.....	6
7. Stage Three – Serious Ongoing Concerns.....	6
8. Appeals Procedure .....	7
9. Evidence for each Stage .....	8
10. Assessing Concern .....	8
11. Return to Study .....	8
12. Accompanying a Student.....	8
13. Confidentiality.....	9
14. Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) .....	9

## 1. SCOPE

- 1.1 The Support to Study Policy creates a framework to support all students at the UCO where there are concerns about their ability to study.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The UCO recognises that students may go through difficult times throughout their studies. Many personal challenges can have a profound effect on students and will naturally impact their ability to study and participate in aspects of university life. Nevertheless, with the right support, most students are able to continue their studies and complete their course.
- 2.2 In instances where a student does not engage with the university, does not seek support for issues affecting their studies, or has a disability or health condition that affects their ability to recognise their support needs, the UCO will have to take action that is in the best interest of all students, staff and patients. This can ultimately mean the UCO withdrawing a student temporarily or permanently. Any decision of this nature will be made as a last resort, after all reasonable avenues of support are exhausted and the student still falls below the commitment and general expectations of a UCO Student. All decisions made under this policy will involve weighing the student's interest against the interest of other students, staff and patients.
- 2.3 The support services the UCO provides are important to the Support to Study Policy however, there is a limit to the support and advice the UCO can provide students. Staff and student should be aware that this policy or the support the UCO provide is no substitution to statutory support and other professional care.
- 2.4 Engagement with the UCO is essential to the Support to Study Policy. Students must engage with the support on offer in order to gain its benefits. Communication and honesty are essential to positive outcomes.

## 3. PURPOSE

- 3.1 The policy is designed to be an alternative to the disciplinary actions for those students who lack a degree of capability due to mental health difficulties, disabilities and acute emotional distress to engage with the course. Therefore, the process is not concerned about passing judgement on student's actions or seeking punishment, rather its focus is on finding pathways to facilitate a student's affective learning.
- 3.2 When students are going through this policy, the UCO reserve the right to revert to disciplinary or fitness to practice procedures where they feel it is appropriate. An unwillingness to engage with the Support to Study Policy and any other supportive measures are likely to result in disciplinary or fitness to practice procedures being implemented.

## 4. WHEN SHOULD THIS POLICY BE USED?

- 4.1 Staff who have concerns about another student's behaviour or engagement, should initially make every effort to try and support the student informally. This can mean having a general conversation about the students' well-being or signposting them to the support available at the UCO, see Student Welfare Policy.

- 4.2 Where staff feel uncomfortable or unable to speak with a student about their concerns, staff should encourage the student to contact the Student Support Officer.
- 4.3 The Support to Study Policy should be used where there are concerns about a student's behaviour and participation and staff feel the student is unable to identify the issue or unwilling to seek support.
- 4.4 Some of the circumstances that would give rise to a student's referral under this policy are:
- a) Low attendance.
  - b) Multiple unauthorised absences.
  - c) Consistently missing clinic hours providing little or no notice of absence.
  - d) Extreme mood changes that negatively affect a student's well-being or the well-being of other students, staff and patients.
  - e) Out of character behaviour in clinic or classes that may be a result of a disability or mental health difficulty.
  - f) Failures to communicate and engage with the UCO.
  - g) Aggressive behaviour that may be a result of a disability or mental health difficulty.
  - h) Strange thought process such as paranoia, hallucinations and general psychotic experiences.
  - i) Extremely anxious behaviour or an inability to cope with stressful situations.
  - j) Illogical thinking such as unusual or exaggerated beliefs about personal powers.
  - k) Addiction.

## 5. STAGE ONE – EMERGING CONCERNS

- 5.1 Where staff feel unable to relieve any of their concerns through an informal conversation with a student, staff should contact the Student Support Officer to initiate Stage One of this policy.
- 5.2 Before contacting the student, the Student Support Officer will discuss the situation with the staff member and from there a decision will be made on whether the Support to Study Policy is the appropriate route to address the issue.
- 5.3 Where it is considered appropriate to initiate Stage One of the policy, the student will be invited in writing to a meeting with the Student Support Officer or their Academic Tutor to discuss the concerns raised. The student will be informed of the concerns about their welfare and that the matter is being dealt with under the Support to Study Policy. A copy of the policy will be provided to the student.
- 5.4 On receipt of the invitation, a meeting will be held within two weeks.
- 5.5 During the meeting, the student will be explained the nature of the concerns raised and how these concerns began. Students will be encouraged to give their prospective and disclose any information that will help support them.

- 5.6 Following the meeting, a decision will be made on whether there is any genuine concern over a student's ability to effectively study. Where there are concerns, advice will be provided on the support available within the UCO and outside organisations.
- 5.7 A summary of the meeting will be sent to the student after the meeting. A copy will be kept on file with the Student Support Department. Following a Stage One meeting, the onus will be on the student to take on board any advice provided and utilise the support offered. The UCO will not take specific steps to monitor the student's actions but the Student Support Department will be happy to provide further advice and support following the meeting if a request is made by the student.

## 6. STAGE TWO – CONTINUOUS CONCERNS

- 6.1 A Stage Two meeting will be initiated where staff feel there are continuous concerns about a student's ability to study. The staff member raising the concern will contact the Student Support Officer and a decision will be taken as to whether the matter should be escalated to Stage 2 of the procedure.
- 6.2 Where a case is brought to Stage 2 of the procedure, a student will have a meeting with the Student Support Officer, their Course Leader and another member of staff not involved in the Stage 1 meeting. The Course Leader and the Student Support Officer must be present for a Stage 2 meeting to go ahead.
- 6.3 During the meeting, the panel will discuss the concern raised and address the reasons why it has been brought to Stage 2 of the procedure. The student will be given the opportunity to explain their perspective and provide any information the UCO were not privy to beforehand.
- 6.4 Following this discussion, the panel will decide whether there is any cause for concern. Any decision will normally be communicated to the student at the end of the meeting or at the latest 7 days after. Where the panel have deemed there to be no cause for concern, no further action will be taken.
- 6.5 In the event there is a cause for concern, the panel will devise an action plan to enable the student to become ready to study in a specific timeframe. The action plan will have specific and measurable conditions that require the student to seek support from within the UCO or outside parties such as their GP. The panel may also set any other conditions they see fit which will demonstrate a student's ability to study.
- 6.6 Once an action plan is agreed, a meeting will be scheduled later to review a student's progress. If the panel deem there to be sufficient progress made since the last meeting, no further action will be taken. Where the panel feel the student has not made sufficient progress satisfying the conditions set, the student will be referred to Stage Three of the procedure. In the event a student explicitly states that they do not want to engage with the action plan or any other support the panel recommend, the panel can decide to forward the case to Stage Three of the process.

## 7. STAGE THREE – SERIOUS ONGOING CONCERNS

- 7.1 Where a student has been referred to Stage Three of the Support to Study policy, the decision will be communicated in writing. Students will be notified of the meeting at least 14 days in advance.

- 7.2 A Stage Three hearing panel will consist of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) as Chair, the student's Course Leader, the Head of Student Services, and a student representative.
- 7.3 The panel will consider the student's overall circumstances and evaluate what steps to take next. During the meeting, the panel will go through the circumstances that brought about this meeting as well as any previous meetings and measures put in place by the UCO to support the student. A decision will then be made on the student's suitability to continue their studies.
- 7.4 Where there are no concerns about the student's ability to study, no further action will be taken.
- 7.5 Where there are concerns about a student's ability to study, the panel may decide to withdraw the student permanently, put the student on an interruption or put in place an action plan.
- 7.6 Stage Three action plans will clearly stipulate the consequences of failing to meet any of the set conditions. The action plan will also set a date for the panel to reconvene and decide on whether the conditions of the plan have been met.

## 8. APPEALS PROCEDURE

- 8.1 A student may appeal a Stage Three outcome based on the following grounds:
- a) There was a significant procedural error that affected the decision of the panel
  - b) There is evidence that was not available, or for good reason, not provided to the panel at the time of the hearing and, if it were available, may have affected their decision
- 8.2 An appeal must be submitted in writing and addressed to the Registrar who will decide whether there are possible grounds for an appeal. Where the Registrar considers the appeal to have no merit, a student's appeal will be rejected and a Completion of Procedures Letter will be provided. Where there are possible grounds of appeal, the registrar will convene a panel to consider the appeal.
- 8.3 An initial decision on a student's appeal will be communicated within 28 working days of receipt. Where an appeal has been forwarded to a panel, the panel will be convened within 60 days of the student being notified.
- 8.4 An appeal panel will consist of the Vice Chancellor, a member of the Board of Governors and a student representative.
- 8.5 Students will have the opportunities to represent themselves and answer any questions the committee may have. However, non-attendance of the student will not postpone the hearing.
- 8.6 After hearing the student's case and considering any evidence, the panel will decide whether the student has satisfied either of the grounds for appeal. Where the panel considers the student to have not satisfied any of the grounds of appeal, their appeal will be rejected and a Completion of Procedures Letter will be given.
- 8.7 Where the panel uphold an appeal, they can decide to modify or reverse the decision of the Stage Three Committee.

8.8 Any decision made by the Appeal Committee is final.

## 9. EVIDENCE FOR EACH STAGE

9.1 At each stage of the procedure, evidence is crucial to help staff and students agree on actions that are in the best interest of all parties. Students are encouraged to provide relevant evidence as soon as possible.

9.2 Before a Stage Two and Three meeting, the student will be requested to provide any relevant evidence to help the panel come to a decision if they have not provided any evidence previously. Where medical evidence is essential for the panel to make a decision, the panel can postpone the meeting to allow time for the student to obtain appropriate evidence.

9.3 During Stage Two or Three meetings, where a second medical opinion is considered necessary, the panel can request the student to undertake a medical assessment by an independent third party at the UCO's expense.

9.4 Further information may be requested from witnesses or other staff and students to assist the panels with their deliberations.

## 10. ASSESSING CONCERN

10.1 In many instances, students will go through the support to study procedures at Stage One. However, in some circumstances, more immediate action is needed and therefore a Stage One meeting may not be appropriate. The Student Support Officer will make a decision about what stage of the policy is most appropriate to support the student along with the staff member raising the concern.

## 11. RETURN TO STUDY

11.1 Where a student has been temporarily withdrawn as part of these procedures, on their return they are to meet up with their Student Support Officer to discuss their return to study.

11.2 Where adjustments needed to facilitate a student's return the Student Support Officer will discuss the matter with the student before their return.

11.3 In some instances, where a temporary withdrawal has been put in place, the UCO may require medical evidence that the student has been engaging with treatment and is medically suitable to study before they are allowed to return. Any requirement for medical evidence before a return to study will be confirmed to a student before they are temporarily withdrawn.

## 12. ACCOMPANYING A STUDENT

12.1 A staff member, another student, a friend or family member may accompany a student to any meeting. The UCO will need 3 working days' notice of anyone accompanying a student and usually only one person may accompany a student at a time.

12.2 Legal representatives may not accompany a student at any stage of this procedure.



### 13. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 13.1 The UCO takes the privacy of its students seriously and will only look to share information where it is necessary. Information on students referred under this policy will initially be restricted to the staff members involved in the procedures. Once it has been established that action and support is needed, staff may share information on the matter with teaching staff to enable a supportive environment.

### 14. OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR (OIA)

- 14.1 Students who have exhausted the Support to Study Policy procedures may bring their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education within one calendar year of receiving a Completion of Procedures Letter.