



## Centre for Wellbeing Policy: Fitness to Practise and Support to Study

### 1 Fitness to Practise

Fitness to Practise issues can arise with staff of the university in caring or responsible roles and with students on certain courses where they perform a responsible and/or caring role with members of the public. These courses would include all Nursing courses, Paramedic Practice, Dietetics, Veterinary Science etc.

At the University of Surrey, the Robens Centre for Occupation Health will carry out assessments for Fitness to Practise and assess any staff member or student on a professional course for fitness for work in their role.

Fitness to Practise is related to our policy concerning risk to self or others. If a counsellor/advisor has cause for concern that a staff member or student is not fit to carry out their role and that harm to themselves or to their charges may ensue, the counsellor/advisor should take the following steps.

#### **a) Discuss their concerns with their client if at all possible.**

The counsellor/advisor should ideally start with an open conversation with their client, balancing respect and understanding for the client's perspective with duty of care for those under the client's care.

The counsellor/advisor should encourage the client to disclose their difficulties to tutors, workplace mentors, managers or other staff with oversight of the client's role. The counsellor/advisor would thus encourage the client to take responsibility for their own practise and to seek appropriate support.

Consideration should also be given to discussing the case in clinical supervision meetings.

#### **b) Seek permission from the client to liaise with the relevant contact in their department**

The counsellor/advisor should, with the client's permission, seek to make contact to ensure that the person responsible for the client's fitness to practise has been informed, and to satisfy her/himself that a supportive plan is in place. The expectation should be that this person will liaise with Occupational Health as appropriate.

In discussions with any staff in this instance counsellors/advisors should share only what is relevant of the client's case.

#### **c) Monitor the situation**

The counsellor/advisor should return to open discussions with their client concerning their fitness to practise regularly and assess the situation as to whether any further action needs to be taken.

#### **d) When a client is unable to give permission to contact the responsible person, or refuses permission**

The counsellor/advisor should always satisfy themselves that they have taken reasonable steps to gain the client's permission. However, they may be unable to gain the client's



permission to go outside of normal confidentiality because the client is unavailable for sessions, DNAs sessions, or does not reply to emails.

In this case if the counsellor/advisor believes that the risk is reasonably sufficient and that the client is still practising, they may decide to contact the relevant responsible person in the client's department without permission. In this case they should inform the client via email.

If the client refuses permission after full discussion, and in the counsellor's/advisor's judgement the risk is substantial, the counsellor/advisor may need to explain to the client that they have a duty in line with our internal policy to alert the relevant staff.

## **2 Support to Study**

University of Surrey definition of Fitness to Study:

“being able to participate in the programmes of study, research and scholarship that the University provides for them, to the extent that they are able to do so in safety, and without endangering the safety or wellbeing of themselves or others, with reasonable adjustments where appropriate, and with full opportunities to meet the learning outcome for their programme”

Please note that the phrase “or wellbeing of... others” is generally interpreted by university staff to mean that a student's behaviour should not be disruptive towards other people's work/study activity in order for them to be considered fit to study. Also the reference to “reasonable adjustments” and “full opportunities” reflects the expectation that measures will be taken to help the student remain on their course through changes to assessment method, timetabling, frequency and nature of offered support meetings, accommodation arrangements etc. before arriving at a decision to course interrupt as a last resort. This implies involvement from Disability and Neurodiversity.

Clients who are struggling to study or who find study negatively impacts on their wellbeing will always be encouraged to make full use of relevant support provided by the University (including Disability and Neurodiversity). On occasion, even though the client has availed themselves of this support, study itself may seem to the counsellor/advisor to be exacerbating the client's difficulties to the point where the best course of action would be a course interrupt.

In the first instance, the counsellor/advisor would engage the client in a full and open discussion about their concerns, making sure that this discussion was collaborative. The counsellor/advisor would encourage the student to make contact with their department and discuss an academic plan of action. The university's process is for a Professionals Meeting to take place and a managed study plan to be trialled before considering escalation to formal Support to Study proceedings. Ideally, this study plan is drawn up through collaboration between the student, their tutor/supervisor, Disability and Neurodiversity and CWB staff.

If appropriate and with the client's signed consent the counsellor may make contact with relevant departmental staff, for the sole purpose of benefiting the client. However, this may not be necessary.



### **3 Escalation of Concerns**

If a counsellor/advisor has significant concerns about a client's fitness to practise or study they should discuss this with the Senior Counsellor/Wellbeing Advisor, or in her/his absence the Head of Wellbeing and Welfare. A decision will be taken by them about whether to bring the case to the attention of the Case Review Management Group, so that the various other services at the university outside the CWB who share responsibility for safety of students and staff have necessary information to join up support and provide a "safety net".

### **4 Fitness to Practise/Support to Study evidence**

On occasion we have been asked to provide evidence for Support to Study or Fitness to Practise Panels, or evidence of fitness to return to study or practise.

**The counselling team does not provide evidence of this kind**, in line with guidance issued by the Universities and Colleges Division of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Evidence of this kind should be sought from GPs, Occupation Health, or other medical/healthcare practitioners working either within the CWB team or in an external service.

At the University of Surrey, the Robens Centre for Occupation Health will carry out assessments for Fitness to Practise and assess any staff member's fitness for work in their role.

### **Other relevant Policies**

See also the CWB policy on Working with Clients at Risk and also Safeguarding. See University Policies on Safeguarding, Support to Study and Fitness to Practise.