

Fitness to Study Policy

Policy/Procedure Title and Number	Fitness to Study policy
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1. Introduction

Abingdon and Witney College is committed to supporting students so that they can be successful in their learning. To meet individual needs we make reasonable adjustments where appropriate. However, there are some students whose mental health may impact on their learning thus compromising their safety, or that of others, in College. Given our 'duty of care' to all students and staff, there may be occasions where we cannot meet the learning needs, as this may conflict with meeting the needs of others.

2. Context

This policy relates to students and prospective students who experience significant health needs, including mental health.

A number of prospective students may experience behaviours including severe anxiety, violence or anti-social behaviour. Diagnosis is a matter for mental health professionals outside of college, based on a range of symptoms that have been observed, verified and documented over a period of time. Many students experiencing mental ill health manage this in a way that does not affect their studies and college staff will not always be aware they are unwell. The College takes advice from the College Nurse, Counsellor and external health providers.

3. The purpose of this policy

This is a framework to assess the College's ability to provide appropriate levels of support to students with mental health needs that may impact on their ability to learn or impact on others around them including students, staff and others.

4. Support for Students

Through its marketing materials, application and interview processes, the college ensures that prospective students feel confident to declare their mental health needs when choosing and starting a course. The college will work with the prospective student and, where necessary, seek advice from external health professionals to assess any additional support needs. The aim is to ensure that Abingdon and Witney College is a suitable environment for these students. Where necessary, the college will make a referral to specialist agencies.

The college recognises that some students may choose not to disclose their mental health needs, or may not wish the college to contact their professional support providers outside the college. In these cases, we respect their right to confidentiality but if it cannot be evidenced in a risk assessment that there is a minimal impact on the health and safety of the student and others, the College may seek professional advice. When serious mental health needs come to light after the applicant has started college, the student may need to take a break from their studies while the college seeks professional advice about whether or not the college is a suitable environment for the student. At this point the college will require a new or updated risk assessment to be completed prior to any return to studies.

Should a student's behaviour indicate that they present an immediate danger to themselves or others, the Duty Manager will attend urgently; Student Services will be informed and appropriate records updated. **The personal safety of all concerned is paramount.**

5. Procedures for dealing with students with significant mental health needs

- A meeting will be arranged with the Learning Support Adviser for any students who disclose to the college about their mental health needs, or if their mental health issues become apparent.
- At this meeting, a risk assessment involving the curriculum staff will be considered which forms the basis for the decision on whether or not the student will be accepted or continue at college.
- This decision will be made firstly by the Learning Support Adviser and the Admissions panel, and the student will be informed of the decision.

6. Right of Appeal

- There is an appeals process whereby students are invited to appeal to the Vice Principal Student Engagement who will reply within 10 working days.

7. Attendance at college

It will not be appropriate for a student to attend college if:

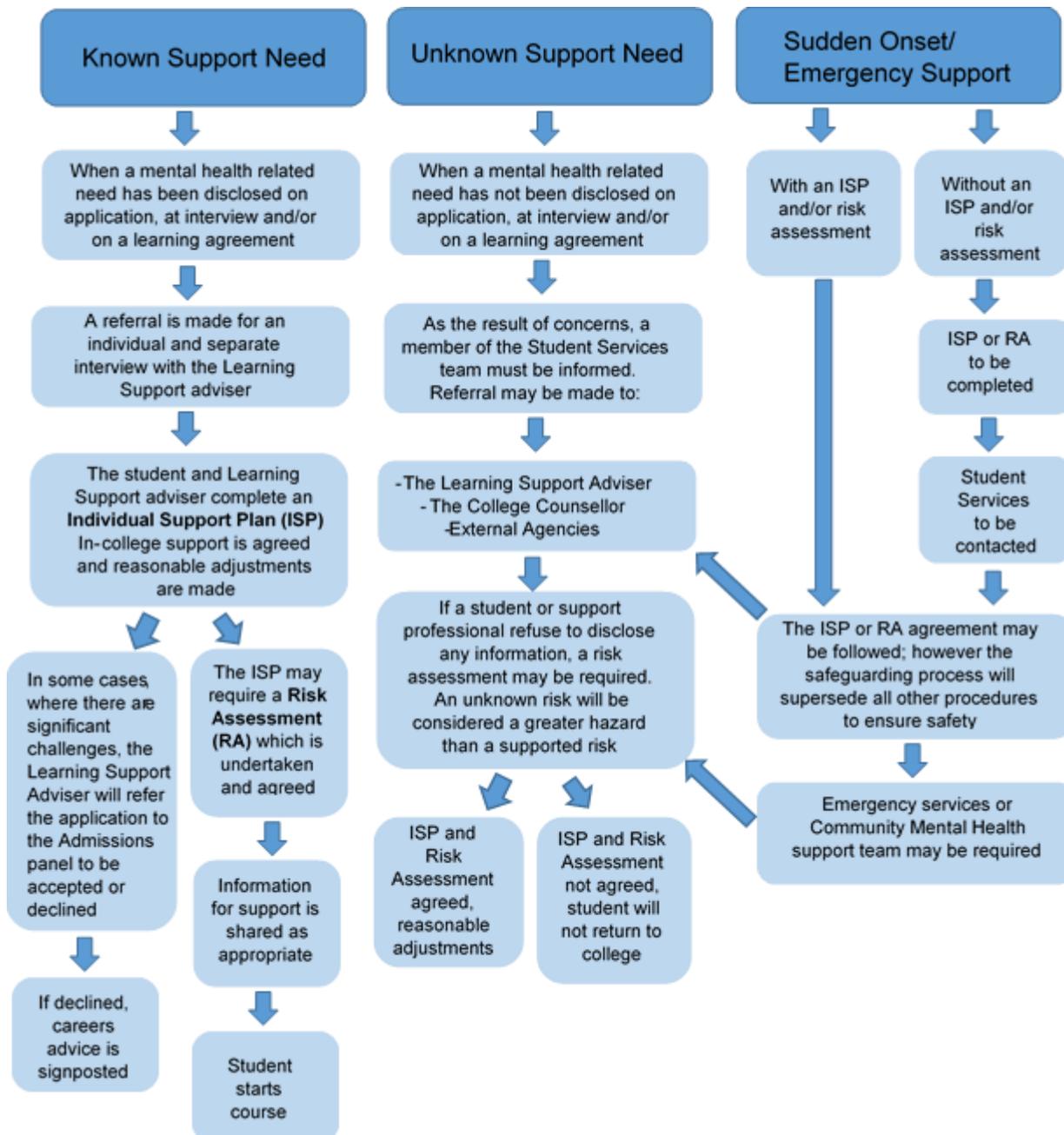
- They have not been deemed fit to attend college by a health professional, or by the Admissions panel
- An agreed support plan and/or risk assessment have not been completed or complied with as a result of a lack of co-operation by the student
- They have withdrawn from their medical/health support or treatment, including discharging themselves from hospital against medical advice
- They are unwilling to comply with the routines/strategies for their support and/or safety outlined in their support plan/risk assessment/PEEPs
- All reasonable avenues for supporting the student in college have been exhausted, or there is an apparent safeguarding risk for others

In all cases, we will explore ways to support students studying from home or from hospital, which will usually mean the student needs to have access to the college intranet and college email system to access work and have contact with their tutors. There may be limits to the academic support we can provide and indeed, the work the student can complete.

8. Additional Policies

- Safeguarding & Prevent
- Admissions Policy
- Complaints Procedure

The process



General guidelines for supporting students with mental health difficulties:

The purpose of the guidelines below is to give basic guidance to staff.

1. **In deciding whether there may be a mental health need regarding referral**, it may be useful to consider the following questions to see if any of them are relevant:

- Has the student told you they have a problem?
- Have there been any significant changes in the student's appearance?
- Does the student smell any different (e.g. can you smell alcohol or cannabis)?
- How does the student sound? (e.g. flat, agitated, very quiet, very loud)
- Has the mood of the student recently changed a lot from your previous experiences with them? (e.g. moods very up and down, miserable, tired a lot)
- Have others expressed concern about the student?
- Have there been recent changes in the student's behaviour?
- How long has the student been feeling or behaving like this (everyone can have bad days, but if it goes on for weeks / months there may be a problem)?

2. **If the answer to some of the above questions is yes, then the following guidance may be useful in approaching the student:**

- Do not avoid the situation or pretend nothing is wrong, as this could make the problem worse and persist for longer.
- Approach the students in a sympathetic and understanding way. Remember to be sensitive to issues relating to sexuality, race, religion, culture and gender.
- **If you simply ask the student how they are**, this may provide them with an opportunity to discuss their concerns with you.
- Be prepared to listen and give some time if you can. If there are constraints on your time, inform the student from the start that this is the case.
- Avoid using unhelpful comments like "pull yourself together"
- Being open and honest in your initial contact will help to develop a position of trust.
- If you feel you can, do support the student, but be clear about your role and its boundaries. Maintain professional boundaries i.e. do not give your phone number or address to the student.
- Record your concerns on ProMonitor
- If you are still concerned, contact Student Services for further guidance or advice

3. **When a student does not want to talk but you are concerned:**

- It is often difficult to help someone with a mental health need unless they are ready to admit they have one. If the student is not ready to accept help or talk about their problem, do not ask intrusive questions. Always respect the right of the students if they do not wish to discuss things.
- Offer an open invitation to students to come back and talk to you in the future. When you see them again, continue to ask how they are and reiterate that they can talk to you. Give them information about other people they could talk to e.g. Counsellor, Student Service team.
- However, if you are still concerned about a student who has refused help, speak to the Learning Support Adviser for advice, record your concerns on ProMonitor and complete a [referral form](#) via the Student Services site on Office 365.

4. **When a student does want to talk:**

If you do not feel able to handle an initial discussion with the student yourself, you might:

- Ask the student how they have handled similar difficulties in the past, highlighting what has and has not worked? Encourage them to use their own strategies.
- Explore with the student what changes they would like to make to enable them to continue with their studies.
- Complete a [Student Referral form](#) via Office 365.
- Try not to give advice that is not within the boundaries of your role, but rather listen and encourage the student to seek the appropriate help through their GP or by making an appointment for counselling in college.
- It can be stressful helping a student with mental health needs. Staff can be supported by their Line Manager or Human Resources when required.

5. Handling crisis situations:

The steps outlined above are usually sufficient. Occasionally, the student concerned may reach a point of crisis when their feelings have become overwhelming. These emotions might express themselves in a number of ways, for example self-harming, talking about suicide or having persistent suicidal thoughts, having no sense of reality and exhibiting behaviour that is unusual or out of character. However, it is important to emphasise two points:

- People experiencing mental health problems are rarely violent towards others and;
- Crisis situations are extremely rare and often occur in private rather than in public.

In all crisis situations, assuring staff safety and that of others, including the person involved, is paramount. These guidance notes may help:

- Try to remain calm and adopt an open and non-threatening approach. In most cases calm behaviour by others is all that is required.
- If there are other students about, calmly ask them to leave the area.
- Some situations can be frightening and distressing. If you do not feel confident to approach the student, then get help.
- If you stay with the student, give them space, avoid touching them, explain your actions before you act and continue to reassure the student, without being patronising.
- **Take threats of suicide seriously – do not ignore them – it is a myth that “those who talk about it don’t do it”.**
- If the situation escalates ensure an appropriate manager, First Aider and a Student Adviser is contacted, as appropriate.

6. Useful Contacts

- Emergency Services
- Student Services
- Human Resources
- Outside agencies
- Reception for duty managers

7. Training

Staff members are advised to liaise with HR to arrange appropriate training to familiarise themselves with different aspects of mental health.