



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

**FITNESS
TO STUDY
PROCEDURE**



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1 Purpose and scope of this policy

1.1 This policy applies to all taught postgraduate provision directly administered by the Department of Graduate Studies (DGS), namely:

- (a) The Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) and
- (b) The Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP).

Agreements with external providers who administer part or all of a programme belonging to but not directly administered by DGS may specify alternative arrangements; in such cases, the external provider's policy shall supersede this procedure.

1.2 **Good practice.** In devising this procedure, we followed the guidelines provided by the University of Westminster, who provide counselling services to DGS students. In developing their policy, they reviewed good practice in the sector and the policies and procedures for five other major universities, who had all followed similar formats. Their procedure is available online at: <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/sites/default/public-files/general-documents/Fitness-to-Study-Procedure-2018.pdf>

1.3 **Consultation.** We consulted with students on the development of this procedure, incorporating their improvements concerning:

- Specifying that each case would be handled according to its own specific needs
- Clarifying that this procedure applies only to cases where a student's ability to continue on their programme of study may be compromised, and does not therefore provide guidance on instances of temporary ill health or stress which may arise in the usual course of working and/or studying practices at Master's level (e.g. additional pressure around the time of deadlines; finding ways to coordinate multiple priorities).

2 Principles

2.1 The purpose of the procedure is to empower staff to make a positive intervention at the earliest sign of concern about an individual student's wellbeing which affects their or others' ability to study. Each case will be considered on an individual basis.

2.2 It enables a wide range of staff, both professional and academic, to raise concerns and be confident that there is a process that supports action and safeguards the rights of students. Issues can arise in a variety of ways and across contexts, both in the Institute and at home. It is likely that first signs of mental health issues arising will present in the residencies or in contact with support staff.



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- 2.3 The procedure is not punitive but is designed to support students with health problems (most mental health and behavioural issues). This may be to put in place an action plan and support to enable the student to continue their studies. It may also be to suspend the student but with a clear plan of the conditions under which a 'Return to Study' can be considered.
- 2.4 This procedure is 'preventative' in providing staff with the confidence to deal with issues early and therefore before they escalate to a crisis.
- 2.5 Students absenting themselves from the process will have an 'independent witness' (usually from the student body, where possible) allocated to attend the key meetings to protect their procedural interests and raise any concerns.
- 2.6 This process may be stressful for students and staff, and so all due care will be taken to recognise this and minimise its impact on those involved.
- 2.7 This procedure applies only to cases where a student's ability to continue on their programme of study may be compromised, and does not therefore provide guidance on instances of temporary ill health or stress which may arise in the usual course of working and/or studying practices at Master's level (e.g. additional pressure around the time of deadlines; finding ways to coordinate multiple priorities). Support in tackling such issues can be provided by programme staff, and students may also find fellow students a valuable source of support for sharing ideas and strategies. However, where the pressure of studying does begin to present as a serious concern that may affect a student's ability to continue on the programme, the terms of this policy may be referred to.

3 Fitness to Study Procedure

- 3.1 On occasions, a student's health, mental wellbeing or behaviour deteriorates to the point where it may become impossible for them to be able to continue their studies.
- 3.2 This procedure outlines the appropriate response and action to be taken by staff where it is believed that the behaviour, or the mental or physical health of a student:
 - (a) May prevent them from gaining benefit from the educational provision at a particular time, and/or
 - (b) Disrupts the teaching, learning or support of other students.
- 3.3 DGS promotes positive behaviour among staff and students, with a view to helping each student tap into and grow from their own potential. Students enjoy a wide range of support besides teaching staff and the programme team (including our dedicated Academic Skills Support Team), namely Academic Advisers and specialist help and guidance with concerns related to mental health through Only Connect and UCL Psychological and Counselling Services (the



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latter is for STEP only). In this vein, students under this procedure will be considered from a supportive perspective rather than a disciplinary one.

- 3.4 The Institute, however, reserves the right to invoke the Student Code of Conduct and/or Disciplinary Policy where students' health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others, or where students do not positively respond to more supportive interventions.
- 3.5 This procedure has three stages, based on the seriousness of risk posed by the behaviour or health of a student. The three stages reflect the level of difficulty or disruption highlighted, as well as the response of a student to any intervention.
- 3.6 **It is possible that concerns raised over the health, safety, conduct or mental wellbeing of a student are of such significance that these procedures can be commenced at either Stage 2 or 3.**
- 3.7 Should a student be unwilling to play a part in these procedures, the process may continue in their absence, with the ultimate sanction being interruption from studies still being able to be invoked. In cases where the student absents themselves from the process, the Institute will appoint an independent witness to attend meetings in order to safeguard the student's interests.

Stage 1 – Emerging Concerns: Emerging or initial concerns about an individual student's health, safety, behaviour or mental wellbeing are raised.

- 3.8 These concerns should be reported to the Programme Leader, Student Services Manager or Academic Adviser (AA). The person to whom this is reported will then confer with the other two, i.e. if the Programme Leader is informed, they will confer with the Student Services Manager and the AA.* Jointly, they will recommend the appropriate person to approach the student to raise and discuss the specific issues with them in a supportive and understanding manner.

* Where the Programme Leader and AA are the same person, the Academic Support Programmes Adviser or Programme Leader for another programme may be consulted.
- 3.9 Emerging concerns may be identified and raised by both professional and academic staff. The context in which the initial causes of concern are raised will determine the most appropriate person to understand and address the issues with the student sensitively.
- 3.10 The nature of the concerns should be clearly identified to the student and they should be encouraged to discuss the issues (it is possible that they will not have realised the impact of their actions). If appropriate, information should be provided about sources of support within and outside of the Institute that the student can access (e.g. student counselling).



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- 3.11 A record will be kept on the confidential Welfare Log of the ‘emerging concern’ and the actions taken or agreed to address the issues and by whom. These notes will be shared with the student, their AA, and the Senior Educational Programmes Officer so that the matter can be included for recording in the meetings of the Academic Management Committee (AMC) and relevant Programme Board(s).
- 3.12 All students have the opportunity to declare a physical or mental health condition at the point of entry. Students who do not do so at the point of entry can do so at any point during their programme. This involves the student registering with the Academic Skills Support Team (ASST), where their needs are assessed and support discussed and arranged as appropriate. In line with the principles of this procedure, committed to supporting students, students may be encouraged to apply for reasonable adjustments and/or a Learning Support Agreement.
- 3.13 It is likely that the student will respond positively and, where appropriate, cooperate fully in accessing the outlined support or modifying their behaviour accordingly.
- 3.14 Should the student be unable to respond positively then staff must discuss the situation with the Head of Department and Special Projects Manager. It may then be an outcome that Stage 2 is invoked.

Stage 2 – Continuing or Serious Concerns: Continuing or serious concerns about an individual student’s health, safety or mental wellbeing are raised.

- 3.15 The student will be invited to meet with the Programme Leader or Student Services Manager to discuss the issues (note-taker* to be present). Together they can assess the student’s perception of the impact that their ill health and/or behaviour is having on themselves and/or the Institute community. The student may bring a friend (this does not include a lawyer or legal adviser) to the meeting.
- 3.16 An Action Plan will be devised to put in place support for the student (where appropriate) and formally agree expectations for the student to observe. These may include academic as well as conduct-related expectations.
- 3.17 This Action Plan will have a review date from the outset, and the consequences of not adhering to the Action Plan will be made clear.
- 3.18 A record of the meeting will be made by the *Senior Educational Programmes Officer (SEPO; note-taker), with a copy sent to the student and to the AMC. A copy of the agreed Action Plan will be submitted to the student’s AA, the AMC and the relevant Programme Board(s). A brief record will be kept on the confidential Welfare Log.
- 3.19 In line with the principles of this procedure, committed to supporting students, students may be encouraged to apply for reasonable adjustments and/or a Learning Support Agreement.



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- 3.20 It is hoped and expected that the student will respond positively to the Action Plan and as such cooperate fully in accessing the outlined support or modifying their behaviour accordingly.
- 3.21 Should the student not respond positively then staff must discuss the situation with the Head of Department and Special Projects Manager. It is then likely that Stage 3 is invoked.

Stage 3 – Significant or Persistent Concerns: Significant or persistent concerns are raised about an individual student's actions or behaviour that are putting the health, safety, wellbeing or academic progress of themselves or other members of the Institute community at significant risk.

- 3.22 The Head of Department or Special Projects Manager will call a 'Fitness to Study Case Panel' to discuss the situation. A record of the meeting will be made by the SEPO.
- 3.23 The student will be invited to make a representation to the Case Panel in writing, having had sight of all relevant documentation a reasonable time before the representation is required for the Panel. The representation may include all relevant supporting evidence which may include information that has not previously been disclosed or that is the result of a recent diagnosis or event.
- 3.24 Those present at the Case Panel might include, depending on the nature of the issue:
- Programme Leader
 - Student Services Manager
 - Academic Skills Programmes Adviser
 - AA
 - GP or other relevant professional (with student's consent).

As well as fellow students or relevant staff from:

- Student Services
- Other relevant staff members (e.g. Victoria Halls Manager).

The Case Panel will determine an agreed action, either:

- An enhanced Action Plan, or
- Recommend an interruption of the student's studies.

- 3.25 The student will be invited to meet with the Head of Department or Special Projects Manager to receive and discuss the recommended actions from the Case Panel. The student will be invited to bring along a person to support them at the meeting. The student may bring a friend (this does not include a lawyer or legal adviser) to the meeting. Should the student elect not to attend the meeting then the Institute will ask a representative of the student body to hear the



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outcome and raise any issues relating to the procedural fairness of the process. Notes will be taken at this meeting by the SEPO. The final recommendation will be sent by post to the student at the address they have provided to the Institute and to their email account. The recommendation will include clear information for the student of what process they will have to follow to be considered for 'Return to Study'.

- 3.26 If the AA was not present, the SEPO will inform them of the outcome from the Case Panel and meeting with the student (or representative).
- 3.27 If the recommended action is that of an enhanced Action Plan, this plan will have a review date from the outset, and the consequences of not adhering to the Action Plan will be made clear. A copy of the agreed Action Plan will be submitted to the Co-Director, AMC, relevant Programme Board(s) and the student's AA.
- 3.28 If the agreed recommended action is an interruption of studies, the AMC will temporarily suspend the student with immediate effect. The Student Services Manager will meet with the student to confirm this course of action and discuss implications and next steps. The SEPO will then inform the student in writing of this decision with regard to the interruption.
- 3.29 This stage of the process may be particularly stressful for students and staff, and so all due care will be taken to recognise this and minimise its impact on those involved.

In cases of interruption the following must be informed:

- Co-Director and Governors
- Any external partners
- Head of Quality and Evaluation
- Academic and support staff as necessary
- Relevant Student Services and Front-of-House staff
- Victoria Halls Manager.

If the student wishes to appeal against the outcome from the decision, they must write within 14 working days to the Co-Director (darpa@iis.ac.uk). In cases of interruption, depending on the nature of the case, the student may be permitted to continue studying during the term of an appeal, although they may also be required not to attend classes and/or complete academic work and/or conduct any other duties or responsibilities they have assumed in the course of their enrolment. Such terms will be decided by the Case Panel, seeking all relevant guidance and advice.

On receipt of the appeal, the Co-Director will respond to the student within 10 working days. The decision of the Co-Director will be final. In some cases, the student may also have recourse to an external partner who validates the programme on which they were enrolled.



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Decisions about accommodation for students making an appeal will be determined on a case-by-case basis. The student may be entitled to IIS-provided accommodation during the period of any appeal, although this would depend on the nature of the circumstances leading to the Case Panel's decision to suspend the student's studies.

- 3.30 During a period of agreed interruption, a student would not receive the benefits of their IIS scholarship, which include IIS-provided accommodation and the stipend.
- 3.31 Any interruption in studies will be subject to periodic review by the AMC. Such periodic review will include consideration of medical evidence by the AMC and an appropriate external authority as necessary and academic advice from the student's AA, Programme Leader and relevant academic staff.
- 3.32 The Institute will provide the student with a Completion of Procedures Letter when the student has exhausted the Institute's procedures. Students who remain dissatisfied with the final outcome of their appeal may take their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) within one year of the issuing date of the Completion of Procedures Letter.

4 Return to Study

- 4.1 Following a period of absence from the Institute for recuperation, it may be appropriate for the student to resume studies. If this is the case, it will be necessary to ensure that the student is assisted in their return to the Institute. On return, the student should normally comply with the approved academic regulations, in particular the period of time of registration on a programme.
- 4.2 The student will be required to produce appropriate confirmation of their health and ability to resume studying. The AMC, assisted by external authorities as necessary, will review the content of reports with a view to making a recommendation to the Co-Director to agree or reject a Return to Study. In making that decision, account will be taken of the Institute's duty of care to staff.
- 4.3 Members of the Academic Skills Support Team and Student Services will be available to provide assistance with drawing up a Return to Study Plan in consultation with the student and the Head of Department or relevant Programme Leader. This will address:
 - Specific study-related support needs of the student in returning to education
 - Support which is reasonably required in the short term
 - Involvement of and liaison with external agencies
 - Any longer-term support or adjustments that are reasonably required
 - Any conditions that might apply to provision.



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- 4.4 The Return to Study Plan should incorporate a risk-management plan which takes account of the experiences which led to the student initially leaving their programme and any other information which is known to be relevant. Any Return to Study will be subject to cooperation with this process and adherence to any agreements made.
- 4.5 Other members of staff (e.g. the AA) will be available to provide advice and support to facilitate the student's transition back on to the programme, particularly in relation to any action that might be required under the Disability Discrimination Act. This will be arranged with the direct involvement of, or in consultation with, appropriate external health professionals.

5 Data Protection

The Institute's policy on Data Protection contains guidance on the use of sensitive information (e.g. details about a student's mental health or condition) and must be consulted by staff.

6 Relationship with other Codes, Policies and Procedures

Student Code of Conduct

There are occasions where a student who suffers from a mental health difficulty may break aspects of the Student Code of Conduct. In such cases, they will not necessarily be exempt from disciplinary action and may face an investigation.

In the case of a student whose behaviour appears to be indicative of a mental health problem, the relevant stage of the disciplinary procedures may be adjourned to allow the student to seek advice and support. Following an assessment with a qualified medical professional, the student may present a confidential report from them to the AMC for reference by the post-holder responsible for conducting that stage of the disciplinary procedures. The student would be allowed to retain a copy of the report.

The purpose of the adjournment would be to inform the disciplinary procedures of any psychological circumstances which may have affected or be currently affecting the student. It would also ensure that, as far as possible, a student who is not deemed to pose a risk to themselves or others but whose problems may be exacerbated unduly by formal investigation may be given the opportunity to seek help and the possibility of a resolution of the issue independently of the disciplinary procedures. A student referred to a medical professional should be strongly encouraged to take advantage of the offer. However, if the student refuses the offer, or fails to make an appointment to see a medical professional, the Institute reserves the right to continue with the disciplinary procedures.

The Fitness to Study Procedure does in this circumstance provide a process for supporting students in this situation but retains the same sanctions to suspend.



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Accessibility Policy

Staff and students must not confuse the Fitness to Study Procedure with the Accessibility Policy, which includes information about reasonable adjustments and our process for initiating Learning Support Agreements. More details can be found on Moodle.

Mitigating Circumstances Policy

Staff and students must not confuse the Fitness to Study Procedure with the Mitigating Circumstances Policy, which includes information about special exam arrangements. More details can be found on Moodle.

Academic Progress Policy

Staff and students must not confuse the Fitness to Study Procedure with the Academic Progress Policy, which includes information about definitions for satisfactory academic progress, Academic Probation and withdrawal of the scholarship. More details can be found on Moodle.

7 Document Control

Version	Role / Activity	Person(s) responsible	Date
Version 1	Document Owner and Author	Student Services Manager; Programme Leaders	December 2018
	Reviewer	AMC	January 2019
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