

Fitness to Study Policy 2026/27

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

At St Mary's University, the wellbeing of our students is a priority. We have a duty of care to ensure that all students can participate safely, independently and successfully in both academic study and everyday life at the University.

This Policy is supportive in nature and is not a disciplinary process. Its primary purpose is to ensure that students are appropriately supported while safeguarding both the individual and the wider University community. The Fitness to Study Policy ("The Policy") is intended to be implemented in an open, transparent, consistent and sensitive manner, with the aim of minimising any disadvantage or distress.

The University aims to identify concerns at the earliest opportunity and provide appropriate support to prevent escalation wherever possible

St Mary's University is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across all activities, processes, and our broader culture, in line with its Public Sector Equality Duties and the Equality Act 2010.

Reasonable adjustments will be considered at all stages of this Policy to ensure fair and inclusive participation.

1.2 Definition of Fitness to Study

For the purpose of this Policy, 'fitness to study' is defined as a student's ability to engage, with reasonable adjustments and support where necessary, in their

programme of study and University life without compromising the safety or wellbeing of themselves or others.

1.3 Scope

This Policy will normally only be applied where concerns are significant, ongoing, or present a level of risk that cannot be effectively managed through routine academic or pastoral support processes.

This Policy applies to all students of the University, including those who:

- are registered or enrolled on a full-time or part-time undergraduate or postgraduate course;
- are undertaking a professional placement off-campus;
- are on a leave of absence;
- are applicants who have not yet enrolled, where concerns have been identified during pre-enrolment stage.

This Policy operates alongside other University policies and procedures such as Safeguarding, Disciplinary, Fitness to Practice. Where multiple policies may apply concurrently, the University may:

- suspend one procedure until the outcome of another is complete; or
- decide not to pursue one procedure in favour of the other.

This Policy is not intended to deal with:

- disciplinary cases;
- issues solely related to a student's academic performance;
- routine cases of non-attendance;
- Extenuating Circumstances;
- Fitness to Practice issues on professional programmes of study, which takes precedence over Fitness to Study.

1.4 Purpose and when the policy applies

This Policy sets out the formal steps the University may take where there is concern that a student's behaviour or health is seriously affecting their academic progress, personal welfare or the wellbeing of other members of the University community, or has the potential to do so.

Any action taken under this Policy will be limited to what is necessary and proportionate to protect the interests of the student and the wider St Mary's University community. It provides a structured, consistent and fair approach while prioritising support and safeguarding.

This Policy may be applied in situations where:

- a student's ability to participate safely, independently and successfully in academic study or everyday life as a student at the University is in doubt, including living in halls of residence (see annexe A: Fitness to Reside).
Examples of when this might apply include (but are not limited to);
 - significant deterioration in physical or mental health;
 - repeated or escalating wellbeing concerns;
 - persistent disengagement linked to wellbeing concerns;
 - inability to manage own health, independent living or personal safety.
- a student's health, wellbeing or behaviour poses a significant risk to themselves, other students, staff or the University community, regardless of whether there is an impact on your academic work or progression.
- a student's behaviour places unreasonable demands on University staff or other students.

1.5 Ownership

The Vice-Chancellor holds overall responsibility for this Policy but has delegated day-to-day oversight of its implementation to the Provost, the Academic Registrar and the Head of Student Services, along with their nominated deputies.

2. Procedure

2.1 Initiating process

A concern regarding a student's fitness to study may be raised by any member of University staff or by the student themselves if they have concerns about their own fitness to study, by contacting the Wellbeing Service.

Once a concern is raised, the case will be assessed to determine the appropriate next steps, which may include:

- no further formal action is needed;
- referral to Fitness to Practice or Disciplinary procedures;
- holding a level 1 Cause for Concern meeting
- convening a Case Conference to consider the student's fitness to study;
- assessment under Fitness to Reside where concerns are accommodation specific (see Annexe A: Fitness to Reside);
- immediate suspension in exceptional circumstance.

2.2 Level 1 (Cause for Concern meeting) – Emerging/Low-Level Concerns

Scope: Minor concerns relating to a student's health, wellbeing or behaviour.

Procedure:

- A named member of staff from Student Services will normally take responsibility for monitoring progress and maintaining contact with the student.
- This Lead Person will introduce themselves and explain the concerns, providing an opportunity for the student to respond.
- Cause for concern meetings, focus on support and encouraging engagement with University support services.
- Follow-up meetings may be arranged to review progress after the student has had reasonable time to engage with support or to address the concern.

2.3 Level 2 (Case Conference) - Continuing/Significant Concerns

Scope: Considered when Level 1 interventions have not resolved the concern; the concern raised is too serious to be addressed informally; or the student refuses to engage with interventions and the concern persists.

Procedure:

- Students will receive at least 2 working days notice of a Case Conference (although the University will where reasonably possible provide longer notice), including the purpose of the meeting and the people who will be present.
- Attendees will normally include representation from Student Services (Lead Person - Wellbeing Service), Registry (Academic Registrar) and the course team (Personal Tutor/ Course Leader) or their nominee.
- Students may submit documents for consideration and will normally receive copies of University documentation at least 2 days in advance of the meeting.
- Students have the right to be accompanied by a fellow student, a friend or a Students' Union Officer (e.g. Sabbatical Officer or a member of the Students' Union Executive Committee or Council). Legal representation is not permitted. Details of any companion must be provided in advance.
- The Chair of the meeting will ensure that the student's views are heard.
- Meetings may proceed in the student's absence where sufficient notice has been provided and non-attendance is without reasonable explanation, or

where the student is unable to effectively engage in the process. In such cases, students may be given the opportunity to submit written representations for consideration.

Possible Outcomes: The emphasis of the Case Conference will be to provide you with appropriate support and to agree outcomes where possible.

Possible outcomes may include one or more of the following;

- To impose a mandatory Leave of Absence (LoA), the duration of which to be determined by the Case Conference panel.
- To recommend a voluntary Leave of Absence with the agreement of the student.
- To implement a support plan, which should detail any steps that you will need to take and any support to be provided by the University, failure to engage with a support plan may result in further action under this Policy.
- Where the option is available, and with your consent, to recommend a transfer to an alternative mode of study, for example part-time. Any such arrangements may need to be agreed with the relevant Faculty/Department before they can be implemented.
- To impose a temporary or permanent suspension from accommodation (see Annexe A: Fitness to Reside)
- No formal action is required.

Outcomes and any agreed actions will be monitored and further Case Conferences, or follow-up meetings may be convened as necessary. Suspension of studies will be in accordance with the University [Leave of Absence procedure](#).

Written confirmation of the outcomes will be provided within 5 working days, including how to request a review of the decisions made. Unless a review is requested, this letter will serve as the Completion of Procedures (CoP) letter.

2.4 Immediate Suspension of Studies

- The Provost or nominee may suspend a student immediately as a precautionary measure if there is a reasonable belief the student presents an immediate risk to themselves or others.
- Suspension may include restrictions to campus access, attending lectures, engaging with your course, occupation in accommodation, or placement

activities. During this time alternative provisions, such as online classes, will not be made available.

- Students will be notified of the reasons, duration and conditions in writing.
- Following initial notification, a level 2 Case Conference will be held and any updated details confirmed.

2.5 Return-to-Study

- You are encouraged to maintain contact with the Student Wellbeing Service during your leave of absence or suspension of studies in order for them to facilitate a return to study when you are considered by the University to be well enough to do so.
- Students will be required to submit satisfactory evidence that they are fit to return. The evidence provided must include an up-to-date medical report, usually from an appropriate independent health professional with sufficient knowledge of the student's health, highlighting any potential impact on their return to study.
- The University may request clarification or additional evidence where required.
- Students are normally responsible for obtaining medical evidence unless otherwise agreed.
- Where an LoA was enforced, the chair of the Case Conference will write to you in advance of your expected return date to arrange a return to study meeting to assess your readiness to return and agree support that should be put in place.
- You have the right to be accompanied by a fellow student, friend, or Students' Union Officer. Legal representation is not permitted. Details of any companion must be provided in advance.
- A support plan will normally be agreed and implemented as part of your return to study arrangements.
- Prolonged suspensions or absence may require programme adjustments, as over time programmes may be discontinued or significantly modified. The University will take reasonable steps to keep you informed of any changes during your absence.

- Prolonged lack of engagement or failure to provide satisfactory evidence that you are fit to return, may with the approval of the Provost, result in termination of studies.

2.6 Review of the Decision of Panel

- Students may request a Review of a Level 2 Case Conference decision or Return-To-Study determination within 10 days of the outcome being communicated.
- Requests must be submitted in writing to statuschange@stmarys.ac.uk and include any supporting evidence.
- Any decisions or outcomes imposed by the Panel will remain in effect until the Review process has been concluded and the final outcome communicated to the student.
- Possible grounds for a Review are:
 - (a) That there is new evidence/information that, for good reason, was not made available to the Panel at the relevant time.
 - (b) That there was a procedural irregularity e.g. bias or failure to comply with the procedure, which had an adverse effect on the outcome.
 - (c) The outcome was unreasonable and/or disproportionate to the evidence made available to the Panel.
- Reviews will be conducted by the Provost or their nominee and the outcome will normally be communicated in writing within 10 working days.
- The letter detailing the outcome of the Review will serve as the Completion of Procedures (CoP) letter.

2.7 Monitoring and Closure

- Cases will be reviewed at agreed intervals.
- A case will be considered closed where concerns have been resolved and no further action is required.
- Students will be notified when a case is closed.

3. Support

- **Students' Union:** Room 11, K Building, Tel: 0208 240 2377, smsu@stmarys.ac.uk
- **Wellbeing Service:** 2nd Floor, J Building, Tel: 0208 240 4353, wellbeing@stmarys.ac.uk
- **Registry:** Location: Room J115 (1st Floor J Block). Tel: 0208 240 4000. E: registryservices@stmarys.ac.uk

- Emergencies: Call 999; notify University at 0208 240 4000 or Security at 0207 240 4335.
- **Other key services and external support details are available on the University [website](#).**

4. Data Protection

- All information is treated as confidential, shared only on a need-to-know basis. Data may be anonymised for reporting purposes.
- Personal/sensitive data may be shared internally or with regulators solely to manage the case, this procedure, or a complaint arising out of it.
- Personal Data will not be shared with any other third parties unless the University has obtained your consent, has a statutory obligation to do so, or is otherwise permitted to do so under the GDPR.
- Where there is a reasonable belief that a student may pose a risk of harm to themselves or others, the University may disclose relevant personal data, including sensitive personal data, to appropriate internal staff or external agencies for safeguarding purposes. Such disclosures will be made in accordance with data protection legislation and limited to what is necessary and proportionate to protect the student or others from harm.

Annexe A: Fitness to Reside Procedure

A1. Purpose

The Fitness to Reside process forms part of the University's Fitness to Study. It provides a framework for addressing concerns specifically related to a student's ability to live safely and independently in University-managed accommodation.

Where concerns are limited to accommodation, the Fitness to Reside process may be considered on its own. However, where wider concerns relating to a student's health, wellbeing, behaviour, or academic engagement are identified, these will be considered under the wider Fitness to Study Policy.

A2. When the Procedure May Be Applied

This process may be used where there are concerns about;

- a student's ability to live safely and independently in accommodation;
- risks to the health, safety, or wellbeing of the student or others in the residence;
- behaviours that significantly disrupt or negatively impact other residents;
- repeated incidents that place unreasonable demands on support staff.

It does not cover routine accommodation issues, disciplinary breaches or minor welfare concerns, which will be managed through standard accommodation or university processes.

A3. How the process works

Initiating the Process - Concerns may be raised by University staff or by the student themselves to Student Services. Students with concerns about fellow students that have not been resolved should raise them with their Resident Mentor or a member of Student Services. The University will assess the situation and determine the appropriate action, which may include no further action, informal resolution or referral to another University Policy such as Fitness to Study or the Disciplinary Process.

Level 1 (Cause for Concern) - For emerging concerns.

- A member of staff (e.g. Accommodation and Wellbeing) will meet with you to discuss the concern.
- The focus will be on support, guidance, and practical steps to help you remain in accommodation.
- If concerns are resolved, no further action will be taken. If not, the case may be reviewed or progress.

Level 2 (Case Conference) – For ongoing or significant concerns

- You will be invited to attend a Case Conference and provided with appropriate notice in advance of the meeting.
- Relevant staff may attend the meeting, including representatives from Accommodation, Wellbeing, Registry, or other appropriate University services.
- In line with the Fitness to Study Policy, you will have the opportunity to share your views and may be accompanied by a friend or Students' Union representative if you wish. Meetings may proceed in your absence where appropriate and in accordance with the Fitness to Study Policy.
- Outcomes will be proportionate and may include one or more of the following:
 - a support plan to help you remain in accommodation;
 - conditions relating to continued residence (e.g. engagement with support services);
 - relocation within University accommodation;
 - recommendation of alternative living arrangements;
 - temporary or permanent removal from University accommodation.

Where removal from accommodation occurs, this may involve termination of the accommodation licence agreement. Fees may apply in accordance with the Accommodation Licence, and restrictions may apply to eligibility for University accommodation in future academic years.

Where appropriate, follow-up meetings may be arranged to review progress and any ongoing support needs.

A4. Immediate Action

Where there is a reasonable belief that a student poses an immediate risk to themselves or others within University accommodation:

- the University may take immediate and proportionate action, including temporary exclusion from accommodation or relocation;
- the student will be informed of the decision and reasons for it in writing as soon as reasonably practicable;
- further assessment will be undertaken, which may include consideration under the Fitness to Study Policy or other relevant University procedures, including the Disciplinary Procedure.

Where immediate action is taken, the University will seek to ensure that appropriate wellbeing and practical support is made available through Student Services and other relevant support services.

A5. Review and Return

- You may request a review of a decision in line with the Review provisions set out in the Fitness to Study Policy.
- Where you have been temporarily removed from, or relocated within, University accommodation, returning to accommodation may be subject to evidence that the original concerns have been appropriately addressed. This may include medical or other professional evidence confirming that you are able to live safely and independently within University accommodation.
- A support plan and/or conditions relating to your return to accommodation may also be implemented where appropriate.

Document Title	Fitness to Study Policy
Accountable person	Provost
Author – Job Title	Academic Registrar and Head of Student Services
Document date	1 August 2026
Effective from	1 August 2026
Review Date	July 2027
Version	1.0
Related Policies	Student Conduct Procedure Fitness to Practice Leave of Absence Policy Break in Study Policy Withdrawal Policy