

Support to Study Policy

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Version Control

Version Number	Change Description	Name Job title	Approval (Body/Owner/Lead)	Approval Date
1.0	Replaces Fitness to Study Policy	Dan Shaffer, Director of Academic Services	Academic Board	23/07/25

¹ Unless by exception to three (3) years

Policy Statement

The Royal Agricultural University is committed to supporting student's health and wellbeing. Our Support to Study policy ensures the University has a supportive and coordinated approach, to help students to participate fully when they might be struggling because of health, disability, mental health or other welfare challenges.

The policy covers a student's academic studies and the ability of a student to live independently and safely whilst at university, while interacting appropriately with others. There will be times when a student's physical or mental health may mean that they pose a risk to themselves, to other students, staff, or to the activities of the University and that risk needs to be understood across the University.

Scope

The Support to Study Policy is used where there are concerns that a student's health, wellbeing or behaviour is impacting on their ability to engage with their studies, University life as a whole, or their personal safety or that of others.

This policy may be implemented at all stages and modes of study and applies to applicants as well as enrolled students at the RAU. It applies to all RAU students, regardless of location, except where a collaborative partner has an approved equivalent policy, taking into account local concerns, legislation, regulation or culture.

This policy describes what the University will do when there is a concern that a student's:

- health, disability, mental health or other welfare challenges are affecting their ability to engage appropriately in university activities and life as a student, including, but not limited to, engagement with or performance in their academic studies; and/or
- health and/or behaviour is impacting on other people, such as other students or staff; and/or
- health and safety is at risk; and/or
- support needs fall outside the scope of the support and other services which the University can reasonably be expected to provide as, primarily, a higher education institution.

The University will consider reasonable adjustments for disabled and neurodivergent students where this is needed to enable students to engage with this policy; for more information please contact [Student Services](#).

Applicants and pre-admission support

The University endeavours to ensure everyone who applies to study at the University is able to engage with their chosen programme. Where there is a concern that, due to health, wellbeing or disability, a student may be unable to fully engage with their programme of study, this policy is used.

Safeguarding and Prevent

The University wants its community to be a safe place to study and provide a positive experience for all. Any concerns that someone may be at risk of harm, abuse, exploitation or radicalisation are taken seriously. The University has a team of Designated Safeguarding Officers and Local Safeguarding Leads who receive referrals from the University community and external stakeholders

and may initiate a report to the relevant local authority. Find out more in the [RAU Safeguarding Policy](#).

Data protection, confidentiality and sharing information

The University complies with current data protection legislation including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. The University treats all personal information as confidential within the terms of the legislation.

The University will share students' personal information only amongst members of staff who need to know in order to offer students support. The University will ask for a student's agreement to share personal information obtained under this policy with relevant professionals outside of the University so that they can support a student. Without a student's consent to do so, the University will not pass on this information except if there is a safeguarding concern.

International students should be aware that the University is required to report any interruption to study or withdrawal from study to the UK Visa and Immigration Department which may impact on their right to reside in the UK.

Relevant legislation / guidance

For the purpose of this policy the following legislation is relevant:

- [The Equality Act 2010](#)
- [The Data Protection Act 2018](#)
- [RAU Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [The Mental Health Act](#)
- [The Human Rights Act](#)

Policy details

This Policy outlines the University's commitment to our students' health, wellbeing, academic success and wider University experience. The University is dedicated to making sure that all students can fully engage in student life free from the impact of any physical, mental, emotional or psychological actions from other students and the potential effect this may also have on University staff and visitors.

The aims of this policy are to ensure that all students benefit from being part of the University community and are able to participate in all aspects of their programme of study, with a reasonable chance of obtaining the award for which they are registered. The University has an obligation to make sure that all students engage satisfactorily with their studies and assessments, placements, or fieldtrips and that no student is prevented from accessing their studies due to the actions of another student.

The policy aims to:

- Support students to remain on and succeed in their studies wherever possible.
- Empower students to take personal responsibility and an active part in the management of their health and wellbeing.
- Promote collaboration between students, staff and third parties to ensure a coordinated and consistent response.
- Ensure the best interests of the student are always considered in relation to their personal situation. Decisions taken against the student's wishes will be made with transparency and openness.
- Enable the University to protect the health and wellbeing of the University community and its members as a whole.

Where a student's health or wellbeing begins to give the University concerns or starts to impact on a student's studies or life as a student, the University will refer to this policy and usually arrange a meeting with the student. Details of such Support Meetings are outlined below.

Support and reasonable adjustments

RAU is committed to providing a welcoming campus where staff and students work closely together within a supportive environment, enabling them to participate fully in their studies and life at the University. The Support to Study Policy is not intended to replace normal student support arrangements or staff and student responsibilities to seek informal resolution of other concerns where appropriate.

We understand that involvement in a Support to Study process can be very stressful for students and are committed to the process being as empathic and supportive as possible and taking all reasonable steps to minimise additional concerns and anxieties experienced by the student. All students will be made aware of, and actively encouraged to engage with, the support options that are available to them throughout the process, except where they are incapacitated or otherwise unable to respond.

Where a student is disabled or neurodivergent the University will make reasonable adjustments. Further details can be found in the University's [Disability Policy](#). Please contact the University's [Student Services](#) Team for further information.

The University will consider a reasonable adjustment, which might be necessary for students to be able to engage with this policy. We will consider adjustments as reasonable if they:

- Remove or reduce the possible barriers to students engaging with the policy or being disadvantaged by it
- Are practical and affordable to make
- Are legal and do not compromise any regulatory responsibilities
- Do not harm or adversely affect the health, safety and wellbeing of others

The student is expected to be able to fully engage in the meeting, with reasonable adjustments where applicable, by talking themselves, not using any text-based service unless this is for a disability-related reason.

Conflicts of interest

No individual with a conflict of interest may investigate or make a decision relating to a student's case. A conflict of interest occurs when an individual's professional or personal interests – family, friendships, financial, or social factors – could compromise their ability to apply judgement or act fairly and objectively. A conflict of interest can be actual or perceived. Should a potential conflict of interest be reported by anyone other than the individual, it will be investigated by the Director of Academic Services or Director of Human Resources, as appropriate.

Support Meetings

There are three levels of Support Meeting, relating to the level of perceived risk:

1. Initial Support Meeting

Instigated where there are low-risk, emerging, initial concerns about a student's health, wellbeing or academic engagement or success.

What happens at the Initial Support meeting?

- A meeting will be scheduled where there are emerging concerns about a student's health, wellbeing or academic engagement or success.
- The University, normally the student's Academic Support Tutor, Module Leader or Programme Leader, will contact a student via their University email and by text through the University's central system, to organise a meeting.
- Students can attend with a friend or family member, a member of the Student Union or an external support worker to provide support for them. Students are not able to bring legal representation to the meeting.
- The Initial Support Meeting will be organised by the relevant academic staff or nominee, and may include staff from the Student Services team where appropriate, and will discuss concerns they may have.
- The student is encouraged to share details of any underlying issues so that the University can identify how best to support them.
- A record of the meeting will be kept and students will usually receive a follow up email summarising agreed actions.
- The outcome of this meeting will be an agreed action plan on how to help the student move forwards.
- The email will usually be sent by the relevant academic staff or nominee.
- Students are required to adhere to the spirit of the outcome and comply with the agreed action plan.
- If this Initial Support Meeting raises concerns around a student's wellbeing or health, or if the student fails to attend, the University may decide to convene a Support to Study Meeting.

2. Support to Study Meeting

Where concerns discussed at an Initial Support Meeting do not suitably improve, or where there are more serious concerns about a student's health, wellbeing or academic engagement or success, which the University might refer to as medium-risk.

What happens at the Support to Study meeting?

- The University will email the student via their University email address and by text through the University's central system, to organise a meeting and will take notes of the meeting.
- The Support to Study Meeting will be organised by the relevant academic staff or nominee and will discuss concerns they may have.
- The meeting will be chaired by the Dean for that student's programme, or nominee
- The meeting may include an academic representative, a member of Student Services and a member of professional services staff to take notes.
- Students can attend with a friend or family member, a member of the Student Union or an external support worker to provide support for them. Students are not able to bring legal representation to the meeting.
- The student is encouraged to share details of any underlying issues so that the University can identify how best to support them.
- A record of the meeting will kept and students will usually receive a follow up email summarising agreed actions which will be shared with appropriate members of RAU staff who need to know.
- The email will usually be sent by the relevant academic staff or nominee.
- Students are required to adhere to the spirit of the outcome and comply with the agreed action plan.
- If the Support to Study Meeting raises further concerns around a student's wellbeing or health the University may decide to convene a Serious or Continuing Concerns Meeting.
- If, in the informed opinion of the Chair of the Support to Study Meeting, the concerns raised do not relate to the student's health, disability, mental health or other welfare challenges, and the student is otherwise able but unwilling to engage, then it may be referred, as appropriate, under relevant academic regulations or student conduct policies.

3. Serious or Continuing Support Concerns Meeting

Where concerns discussed at a Support to Study Meeting remain unresolved or if there are more significant concerns about a student's health or wellbeing which the University might refer to as high-risk. The University will hold a meeting to discuss the student's overall fitness to study, including whether the student should be temporarily suspended from study. A key purpose of this meeting is to support students to engage with their studies.

What happens at the Serious or Continuing Support Concerns Meeting?

- If concerns persist following the end of any time-bound action plan agreed at a Support to Study Meeting, or if the student does not engage with the recommendations arising from any previous meetings, or if more serious concerns emerge, the Head of Student Services or a Dean can refer the student to the Director of Academic Services.

- The Serious or Continuing Support Concerns Meeting will be organised by the Student Conduct team and will discuss concerns they may have.
- The University will email the student via their University email address to organise a meeting and will take notes of the meeting.
- Students can attend with a friend or family member, a member of the Student Union or an external support worker to provide support for them, but not testify on their behalf. Students are not able to bring legal representation to the meeting.
- The meeting will include an academic representative such as a Pro-Vice Chancellor or nominee not previously involved in related Support Meetings, who will normally chair the meeting.
- The meeting can include a member of Student Services acting in an advisory, not advocacy capacity, and other advisory panellists required by the Chair.
- Where appropriate the Chair may request external panel members to attend to support the discussion.
- This meeting is an information-based discussion, where the University makes a decision about actions to support a student's studies, to address the concerns that have been identified.
- The student will be provided with a copy of the information the other members of the meeting will have access to that the University is legally permitted to disclose, so that they can prepare and understand the issues that will be discussed. Where there is legitimate concern for the safety of individuals, the University reserves the right to anonymise relevant witness statements and related evidence.
- The student will have the opportunity to provide the panel with their own description of the situation and their views about the best way forward, and the student can share with the panel what their preferred outcome from the meeting would be.
- The panel are keen to hear about a student's ability and willingness to engage in support, whether provided by the University or externally.
- The panel may seek to obtain additional information from an expert, such as a registered health or social work practitioner, if appropriate and with the student's consent. This could include a letter from a student's GP, or a report from a clinical psychiatrist, psychologist or an occupational health specialist, and, in some cases, the University may decide to ask the expert to attend the meeting where appropriate.
- The University will make decisions based on the full range of information available and will not act upon the specific opinions or recommendations of any single person.

Outcomes of Support Meetings

The main purpose of all Support Meetings is to explore reasonable measures with a student to allow them the opportunity to succeed. Where panel members are confident there is no longer a risk, there may be no actions or additional requirements from the Support Meeting. However, it is likely the outcome will be one or several requirements. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Including specific conditions or terms to an application prior to entry, or withdrawing the application
- Supporting a student to implement an action plan to resolve the concerns that led to the meeting

- A change in the student's mode of study (e.g. full time to part time)
- A transfer to a more suitable programme of study
- Temporary interruption from study, with a further Support Meeting assessment prior to being permitted to return to study
- Restrictions or ban from non-academic University activities/locations related to the concerns (e.g. bar)
- Referral for student misconduct or disciplinary action in cases where a Support Meeting concludes concerns are not related to health or welfare support needs
- In the most significant cases considered by a Serious or Continuing Support Concerns Meeting, a recommendation to the Vice Chancellor (or nominee) that the student is withdrawn permanently from the University

All outcomes of Support Meetings are deemed necessary and therefore compulsory. Failure to demonstrate compliance, including satisfying any progress or timelines, or failure to attend Support Meetings, will likely lead to further intervention and escalation, potentially leading to withdrawal from the University.

Emergency concerns

There are occasions where all options of support have been explored and the student is not well enough to continue their studies, or where there are credible grounds to believe there is imminent severe risk of harm. In such instances, the Director of Academic Services or nominee may make the decision to suspend the student immediately when a risk assessment does not identify satisfactory alternatives to mitigate that risk. Examples of where this may happen are:

- the student poses an urgent and severe risk to themselves
- the student poses an urgent and severe risk to others
- the student is at urgent and severe risk from others

In situations where a student has been admitted to hospital under a section of the Mental Health Act 1983 or for other health reasons and is not considered at urgent and severe risk, but may be unable to engage with the University for a protracted period of time, the Director of Academic Services or nominee may enact an interruption of study, without prejudice, to prevent the student from being classed as not attending and failing non-submitted assessments.

In an emergency the University may notify emergency services and relevant staff, including the University Security Team (if the incident is on campus) and Student Services.

The decision to suspend or interrupt a student's studies may be reviewed at the request of the student, submitted to conduct@rau.ac.uk. A review will only take place if the student can provide appropriate medical evidence that demonstrates that they are fit to return to their studies, meet the requirements of their programme and live independently in residences or the community. A student may request an immediate review if they can provide the necessary evidence at that time. The review will take place as soon as possible and normally within 21 days of the receipt of the request. Once this evidence has been received, a 3. Serious or Continuing Support Concerns Meeting will be convened to review the suspension. The meeting will consider whether the student is fit to return and

if so any support that the student may require. Even if a student is fit to return to their studies, it may not be academically viable for them to return at that point in the term. Any return to study may be conditional and require further Support to Study meetings.

Right of Appeal

The student may appeal against a decision to suspend or requirement to withdraw made under this Policy, but completing a Support to Study Appeal Form and submitting it to conduct@rau.ac.uk within 10 working days of the date of suspension or withdrawal.

The grounds of appeal are:

- a) that new and relevant evidence is available which, for good and reasonable cause, was not available to the panel (Exceptional circumstances are needed to explain why any evidence could not have been made available)
- b) that there was a relevant and significant defect, error or mistake in the conduct of the Support Meeting which casts reasonable doubt on the decision reached by the panel, in that the decision might have been different if the defect, error or mistake had not occurred
- c) that the decision reached by the panel is manifestly unreasonable. In this context, unreasonable will be taken to mean perverse, i.e. the decision was not one that a similar process might have reached.

The student must not only state their grounds for appeal but must also provide evidence to substantiate those grounds. An appeal request will only be granted if there is evidence to support one or more of the grounds set out above. An appeal request will not be granted if it is based on other grounds.

The Director of Academic Services, or nominee, will be responsible for determining whether the appeal has been received within the appropriate timescale and for assessing whether or not there are valid grounds for appeal. A decision will normally be made within five University working days, although additional time may be needed to review and verify particularly complex details. The University shall reject any appeal which does not disclose valid grounds for appeal; does not evidence grounds for appeal or is out of time. In such instances, the student shall be formally notified by a Completion of Procedures Letter. If the notice of appeal is accepted as valid, the case will be referred to a Support to Study Appeals Panel. The decision to refer a case for appeal does not imply any judgement; only that there are grounds to review the case.

The University shall have the power to defer the operation of the sanction where an appeal is pending, but must be mindful of risk and therefore may deem it appropriate to maintain measures, or impose new measures on other parties, during an appeal investigation.

The Support to Study Appeals Panel shall be drawn from a pool of senior staff nominated by the University. No member of staff directly involved in any related Support Meeting, decision to suspend or withdraw, or anyone declaring a conflict of interest, shall sit as a member of the Appeals Panel.

Additional staff may be required to perform administrative or secretarial duties, or may be called for testimony, but they shall not constitute members of the Appeal Panel or take part in the decision-making of the Panel.

Student and guest attendance at an Appeal Panel will be the same as for the relevant Support Panel. The student shall receive written notification from the University giving at least one week's notice of the date and time when the Appeals Panel will convene, and any other relevant information about the conduct of the Appeals Panel.

Regardless of whether or not a decision is given verbally to the student at the end of the Panel, the full outcome and its reasons will be sent in writing, normally within five University working days of the date of the Appeals Panel. The decision of the Appeals Panel shall be final and no further appeal may be permitted within the University. Unless the case against the appellant is dismissed, this will be accompanied by a Completion of Procedures letter.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)

If the student is still dissatisfied, they may take the case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education within 12 months from the date of the Completion of Procedures letter. The OIA provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints and will consider cases only when the University's own internal complaints procedure has been exhausted. It will not intervene on matters which turn purely on academic judgment. Further information about this scheme is available at www.oiahe.org.uk.

Responsibilities

All staff members are responsible for ensuring awareness of this policy and are supported to develop and maintain good practice.

All students at the University are expected to abide by this policy.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Policies are inclusive of all University students, regardless of age, civil status, dependency or caring status, care experience, disability, family status, gender, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnerships, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic background, sex, or sexual orientation.

This policy promotes EDI on campus and across the University's partnerships by celebrating and valuing the diversity of our University community. The University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across the University will not be tolerated.

Other related policies / procedures

Relationship to other relevant RAU policies, codes of practice etc. are listed below:

- [Data Protection](#)

- [Student Disability Policy](#)
- [Admissions Policy](#)
- [Academic Policies & Procedures](#)
- [Student Code of Conduct Policy](#)
- [Equality and Diversity Policy & Procedures](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Inclusivity, Equality and Diversity Policy](#)
- [Prevent Policy](#)

Consequences

Disability is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, granting individuals legal protection against discrimination, and placing a duty on Royal Agricultural University to promote equality of opportunity and prevent a student being treated unfairly because of something connected with their disability. Failure to uphold this duty and make reasonable adjustments would constitute unlawful discrimination.