



# **Gateshead Primary SCITT**

## **Fitness to Study Policy 2018/19**

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### **Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure**

*Concerns about a trainee's wellbeing should be acted upon promptly. Early intervention may prevent situations developing into crises at a later stage. If you have concerns regarding a trainee's health and consider that it is posing a risk to his/her own health, safety or wellbeing, or that of others, contact the Gateshead Primary SCITT, [info@gatesheadscitt.org.uk](mailto:info@gatesheadscitt.org.uk)*

#### **Introduction**

1. Gateshead Primary SCITT is committed to supporting wellbeing and recognises that a positive approach to the management of physical and mental health issues is critical to trainee learning, academic achievement and to the wider trainee experience.
  
2. Gateshead Primary SCITT also recognises that there may be instances where a trainee's physical or mental health may give rise to concerns about the trainee's fitness to study, for example the trainee's capacity to engage with his/her studies and/or to function more widely as a member of Gateshead Primary SCITT community. Such instances may arise where, for example, Gateshead Primary SCITT is concerned that:
  - a trainee poses a risk to his/her own health, safety and/or wellbeing and/ or that of others
  - a trainee's behaviour is (or is at risk of) adversely affecting the teaching, learning and/or experience of other trainees
  - a trainee's behaviour is (or is at risk of) adversely affecting the day-to-day activities of Gateshead Primary SCITT or a placement provider
  - a trainee's support needs fall outside the scope of the support and other services which Gateshead Primary SCITT can reasonably be expected to provide.
  
3. This Procedure sets out how Gateshead Primary SCITT may respond to instances where a concern is raised regarding a trainee's fitness to study and the type of action that Gateshead Primary SCITT may take to manage the matter and support the trainee.

Gateshead Primary SCITT recognises that concerns may be raised by a variety of individuals, for example the School Based Tutor, Professional Tutor, other trainees, and third parties (such as health professionals or

placement providers). This Procedure seeks to promote early intervention, active collaboration between staff, trainees and third parties, and consistency of approach. Matters will be dealt with sensitively and non-judgementally and in a coordinated manner across Gateshead Primary SCITT. Whilst Gateshead Primary SCITT will seek to work with trainees in a spirit of cooperation, cases may arise in which it may, under this Procedure, determine that a trainee is unfit to study and that his/her registration should be suspended or terminated.

This Procedure applies to all trainees throughout their period of enrolment with Gateshead Primary SCITT and to former trainees seeking a return to study whose registration has previously been interrupted, suspended or terminated under a Fitness to Study Procedure.

In implementing this Procedure, Gateshead Primary SCITT will at all times remain mindful of its duty of care and its obligations to trainees under the Equality Act 2010, including in appropriate cases its obligation to make reasonable adjustments. It will also remain mindful of the confidential and sensitive nature of fitness to study matters and of its obligations under the GDPR 2018.

Gateshead Primary staff dealing with trainees at any and all levels of this Procedure will consider what support may be offered to trainees both from within Gateshead Primary SCITT and externally (for example, directing or referring trainees to local GPs or mental health services). Trainees will be encouraged to seek support.

4. Trainees who are dealt with under this Procedure are entitled at any level to be accompanied and/or represented by a member of staff, friend, relative, representative of the Trainees' Union (including the Trainees' Union Advice Centre), health professional or disability support worker.
5. All matters dealt with under this Procedure will be dealt with according to the individual circumstances. Whilst Gateshead Primary SCITT anticipates that such cases will be exceptional, it reserves the right at any level of this Procedure to vary the process it follows in dealing with a matter in the interests of fairness and/or health and safety (for example, in crisis situations, or where it is concerned that a trainee's attendance at a meeting would be unduly stressful, or where the trainee is in hospital).

6. Should a trainee be unwilling or unable to participate at any level of this Procedure or to attend a meeting, Gateshead Primary SCITT may nonetheless follow this Procedure where it is reasonable to do so. Gateshead Primary SCITT may, where it is reasonable to do so, deal with issues on the basis of written reports and/or statements in the absence of the trainee and/or his/her representative.
7. Where reference is made in this Procedure to any specific named university role, such references are to be read as including reference to their nominees.

8. Trainee Services will monitor and record all incidents falling within the terms of this Procedure and will produce an anonymised annual report on cases in order to monitor trends and plan for future trainee support services.
9. Where there are critical concerns about the risks posed by a trainee's health or where a temporary suspension under section 17 is being considered, Trainee Services will normally get in touch with the "emergency contact" provided by the trainee at the point of registration. The trainee's consent for this action to be taken will be sought. Gateshead Primary SCITT reserves the right to make this contact if it deems the trainee's vital interests are at risk even if such consent is not given and/or the trainee is unable to give such consent.

### **Alternative University Procedures**

10. This Procedure has been developed by Gateshead Primary SCITT to manage situations where, in light of concerns regarding a trainee's health or wellbeing, Gateshead Primary SCITT considers it inappropriate to implement other processes such as its Trainee Conduct Policy and Disciplinary Procedures.
11. There may, however, be situations where it is appropriate to implement alternative University Procedures, such as its Professional Suitability Policy or Trainee Conduct Policy and Disciplinary Procedures, and Gateshead Primary SCITT is not prevented from doing so notwithstanding concerns regarding the trainee's health or wellbeing. The Trainee Casework Manager in Trainee Services will make the decision as to when cases should be transferred from the Fitness to Study Policy into alternative University Procedures and vice versa.

### **Temporary Suspension**

12. Where The SCITT Programme Leader reasonably believes that a trainee about whom a fitness to study concern has been raised poses a serious risk to:
  - his/her health, safety and/or wellbeing and/or that of others
  - University property, and/or
  - the reputation of Gateshead Primary SCITT

*and* immediate action is required, he or she may agree to:

  - suspend the trainee's registration for a specified period of time,

and/or

- exclude the trainee from University premises for a specified period of time pending steps being taken under this Procedure.
13. Any suspension made under paragraph 17 is a temporary and neutral act made in the basis of risk and is not a determination under this Procedure regarding the trainee's fitness to study.

14. Where a trainee is suspended in accordance with paragraph 17, The SCITT Programme Leader will require a review by The SCITT Programme Leader at regular intervals to determine whether it is reasonable for the suspension to continue or whether it should be revoked or extended.
15. In addition, as part of his or her determination under paragraph 17, The SCITT Programme Leader will consider whether specific arrangements can reasonably be put in place for the trainee in order to minimise the impact on his/her studies (for example, to allow the trainee to undertake study remotely or to permit the trainee to attend Gateshead Primary SCITT to sit an examination or submit an assessment).
16. Where The SCITT Programme Leader suspends a trainee in accordance with paragraph 17 and/or 18, the trainee will be notified in writing to all known addresses, normally within two working days of the decision.
17. The trainee may appeal against the decision that they be temporarily suspended within ten working days of the notification, on the grounds that:
  - The correct Procedures were not followed
  - Material irregularity took place
  - The decision was unreasonable in the circumstances

The appeal process is outlined in paragraphs 49 to 53 of this Policy and Procedure.

### **Procedure to be Followed**

18. Concerns about a trainee's fitness to study will be dealt with under the following Procedure which has three levels of action:
  - **Informal (Level 1):** Initial and/or emerging concerns
  - **Level 2:** Continuing and/or serious concerns
  - **Level 3:** Persistent and/or critical concerns
19. The Procedure may be entered at any level, without any requirement for an earlier level to have been commenced or exhausted, although it is hoped that most situations can be remedied by action taken at the informal level. At which level the Procedure is implemented will depend on factors such as the nature of the concern, the seriousness of any risk posed, the trainee's perception of his/her behaviour, and the response of the trainee to any steps taken by Gateshead Primary

SCITT to manage the situation.

20. The processes under all levels of the Procedures will be undertaken in a transparent manner, and the trainee will normally be informed of the identity and capacity of any persons with whom Gateshead Primary SCITT consults (including third parties such as health professionals).

## **Informal(Level 1)– Initial and/or Emerging Concerns**

21. Initial or emerging concerns about a trainee's fitness to study will normally be dealt with informally. Staff taking action under Level 1 are advised to seek guidance from the Trainee Policy Team in Trainee Services prior to invoking his Policy and Procedure.
22. A member of University staff who knows the trainee (for example, an academic personal tutor, programme or module leader, Trainee Support Adviser or accommodation staff) will notify the trainee that there is a concern about his/her fitness to study, the nature of that concern, and that the matter is to be managed under this Procedure. The trainee will be provided with a copy of this Procedure. The member of staff will arrange a meeting with the trainee. The trainee will be notified at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. He or she will be informed who will be present at the meeting and will be reminded that he or she can bring somebody with them for support (see paragraph 9).
23. The aim of the meeting will be to discuss the concern, any support needs the trainee may have, and will seek to identify the trainee's perception of the concern. The trainee will be given the opportunity to respond to the concern. A member of the Wellbeing Service or Disability Service will often be present at the meeting. The staff member may also invite other relevant staff to attend (for example an accommodation manager). He or she may also consult with other relevant staff members in order to deal with the matter and to provide appropriate support to the trainee.
24. The staff member will determine whether the trainee's fitness to study is impaired, or may become impaired, and any actions to be taken. Such actions may include (but are not limited to) one or more of the following outcomes:
  - support arrangements and/or reasonable adjustments to be put in place for the trainee.
  - an action plan to be drawn up, where possible with the agreement of the trainee, setting out how the matter will be managed and any requirements to be placed on the trainee (for example, in respect of his/her conduct and/or support he or she should seek).
  - the matter to be referred to another Level of this Procedure.
25. Where an action plan is drawn up under Level 1, the trainee will be

informed that if he or she fails to comply with any identified actions, the case may be referred to be dealt with at Level 2 or 3 of this Procedure. The trainee will be provided with a copy of the action plan. A date will be arranged at which the action plan will be reviewed and a decision taken on whether the action plan should continue and, if so, whether it should be amended, and whether any requirements have been complied with and, if not, whether the matter should be referred to Level 2 or 3 of this Procedure. The trainee will be invited to the review meeting and the outcomes of the review meeting notified to the trainee in writing.

26. The trainee will normally be notified within five working days of the meeting of the staff member's decision, with reasons, and any actions to be taken.

## **Level 2 – Continuing and/or Serious Concerns**

27. Continuing and/or serious concerns about a trainee's fitness to study will normally be dealt with under Level 2.
28. The trainee will be contacted by the Trainee Policy Team who will inform him/her that there is a concern about his/her fitness to study, the nature of the concern, and that the matter is to be managed under Level 2. The trainee will be provided with a copy of this Procedure.
29. The trainee will be invited to attend a meeting with a Trainee Policy Caseworker to discuss the concern, any support needs the trainee may have, and to seek to identify the trainee's perception of the concern. The trainee will be given a full opportunity to respond to the concern and will be entitled to be accompanied at the meeting (see paragraph 9). The trainee will be given at least 24 hours written notice of the meeting. The Caseworker will consult with and/or seek information from other relevant persons (for example, members of academic or support staff, health professionals) in order to investigate the matter and to identify support for the trainee. Records of any previous meetings under this Procedure and any action plan will be made available.
30. The Trainee Policy Caseworker will provide a report and evidence to The SCITT Programme Leader, who will determine whether the trainee's fitness to study is impaired or may become impaired and any actions to be taken. He or she may decide to meet the trainee to explore the matters raised. Actions may include (but are not limited to) one or more of the following outcomes:
  - support arrangements and/or reasonable adjustments to be put in place for the trainee.
  - an action plan to be drawn up, where possible with the agreement of the trainee, setting out how the matter will be managed and any requirements to be placed on the trainee (for example, in respect of his/her future conduct or support he or she will seek).
  - the matter be referred to another Level.
  - it be recommended to the trainee that s/he take a period of voluntary interruption.

31. Where an action plan is drawn up under Level 2, the trainee will be informed that where he or she fails to comply with any requirements his or her case may be referred to be dealt with at Level 3. The trainee will be provided with a copy of the action plan. A date will be arranged at which the action plan will be reviewed by The SCITT Programme Leader and a decision taken on whether the action plan should continue and, if so, whether it should be amended, and whether any requirements have been complied with and, if not, whether the matter should be referred to Level 3 of this Procedure. The trainee

will be invited to the review meeting and the outcomes of the review meeting notified to the trainee in writing.

32. The trainee will be notified in writing normally within five working days of the decision made by The SCITT Programme Leader, with reasons, and any actions to be taken.

### **Level 3 - Persistent and/or Critical Concerns**

33. Persistent and/or critical concerns about a trainee's fitness to study will be dealt with under Level 3.
34. The particular process to be followed in dealing with a matter under Level 3 will be at the discretion of the Trainee Casework Manager or Head of Trainee Support and Wellbeing and will depend upon the circumstances of the matter (for example, the seriousness of the concern, the risk posed, and whether the trainee is able to engage with the process).
35. Normally, a case conference will be called by the Trainee Casework Manager or Head of Trainee Support and Wellbeing to discuss the nature of the concerns and consider possible outcomes. The case conference will comprise The SCITT Programme Leader or another senior member of Trainee Services (who will act as chair) and, as is appropriate in the circumstances and at the discretion of the Chair, two senior members of staff who will act as Panel members. These could include:
  - Head of Disability
  - Head of Wellbeing
  - Associate Dean of the Faculty
  - (Associate) Head of Department
  - Head of Accommodation Services

A caseworker and a minute taker from the SCITT will also be present. Other individuals may be called upon to provide information (for example, staff who have been involved with the trainee) either in person or in writing. Relevant external professionals (for example, psychiatrists, GPs, mental health workers, probation officers) may also be invited to attend. Provision will be made for the production of written reports (for example, medical reports) where appropriate.

36. Normally the trainee will be invited to attend the case conference, and the case conference will seek to identify the trainee's perception of the concern. The trainee will be entitled to be accompanied to the case

conference (see paragraph 9), normally by no more than one person. The trainee will be informed of the case conference in writing at least 24 hours in advance, the purpose of the case conference, the nature of the concern, who will be present, and that the matter is to be managed under Level 3. The trainee will be provided with a copy of this Procedure. Records of previous meetings under this procedure and any action plan will be available at the meeting. The trainee will be requested to notify Gateshead Primary SCITT in advance whether or not he or she will be attending and

the identity and role of any person(s) who will be accompanying and/or representing them at the meeting (see paragraph 9). The process followed will allow the trainee a full opportunity to respond to the concern.

37. The case conference will determine whether the trainee's fitness to study is impaired, or may become impaired, and any actions to be taken. Such actions may include (but are not limited to) one or more of the following outcomes:
  - support arrangements and/or reasonable adjustments to be put in place for the trainee.
  - an action plan to be drawn up, where possible with the agreement of the trainee, setting out how the matter will be managed and any requirements to be placed on the trainee (for example, in respect of his/her future conduct or support he or she needs to seek).
  - the matter referred to an earlier level of this Procedure.
  - the trainee be withdrawn from placement, overseas study or other SCITT related activity.
  - it be recommended to the trainee that s/he take a period of voluntary interruption.
  - It be recommended to the Management Committee that the trainee be excluded from SCITT premises for a stated period of time, with arrangements put in place to support his or study as is reasonable, with or without conditions, for any subsequent return on to the premises
  - it be recommended to The Management Committee that the trainee be suspended from their programme of study for a stated period of time, with or without conditions, for any subsequent return to study.
  - it be recommended to The Management Committee that the trainee be expelled from Gateshead Primary SCITT.
  
38. Where an action plan is drawn up under Level 3, the trainee will be informed that where he or she fails to comply with any requirements his or her case may be referred to be dealt with again at Level 3. A copy of the action plan will be provided to the trainee. A date will be arranged at which the action plan will be reviewed by the panel and a decision taken on whether the action plan should continue and, if so, whether it should be amended, and whether any requirements have been complied with and, if not, whether the matter should continue to be dealt with at Level 3. The trainee will be invited to the review meeting and the outcomes of the review meeting notified to the trainee in writing.

39. The trainee will be notified in writing of the decision and outcome of the case conference with reasons, normally within three working days.
40. The minutes of the proceedings and the determination of the case conference will be available to all in attendance and will be kept securely by the Trainee Policy Team in Trainee Services.

## **Exclusion, Suspension and Expulsion**

41. If the case conference recommends that a trainee should be subject to an exclusion from the premises, a suspension from their programme or expulsion from Gateshead Primary SCITT, the matter will be referred to the SCITT Programme Leader for a decision to be made.
42. If the SCITT Programme Leader decides to exclude or suspend a trainee, the trainee will be informed of this together with reasons and any conditions associated with eligibility to return. If it is appropriate, details of the suspension will be shared with the Management Committee who will work with The SCITT Programme Leader and the relevant Module Lead to devise and implement a plan to support the trainee's study.
43. In all cases the most appropriate and supportive manner for the outcome to be communicated to the trainee will be considered in advance of notification of the trainee. Wherever possible, the written notification detailing the decision will be given to the trainee in person, for example by a member of staff from the Wellbeing Service, who will explain the contents. The letter will also be sent by registered mail to the current postal address given by the trainee and to the trainee's email accounts known to Gateshead Primary SCITT.

## **Appeals**

44. Trainees may raise a written appeal to the Head of Complaints and Appeals against the outcome of Levels 2 and 3 of this Procedure within ten working days of the date of the notification on one or more of the following grounds:
  - Gateshead Primary SCITT has failed to follow its own Procedure adequately;
  - The decision is unreasonable and/or a disproportionate sanction has been imposed;
  - The trainee has material new information/evidence which was not reasonably available before. The Trainees' Union Advice Centre is able to support trainees through the appeal process.

The Head of Complaints and Appeals will consider the appeal submission and determine whether there are valid grounds to appeal.

45. Where valid grounds have been determined, the trainee will be invited to submit additional evidence within a specified

timeframe.

46. The Vice Chancellor will consider the evidence provided and will determine an appeal against exclusion, suspension or expulsion. The Vice Chancellor will make one of the following decisions:
  - Dismiss the appeal; or
  - Uphold the appeal, and:
    - refer the matter back to an earlier level of this Procedure for reconsideration, e.g. if the correct process had not been followed;
    - or

- refer the matter back to an earlier level of this Procedure for fresh reconsideration,  
e.g. if material new information or evidence was made available;  
or
  - impose an alternative sanction.
47. A Pro Vice Chancellor will consider any appeal that is not an appeal against exclusion, suspension or expulsion, where valid grounds have been determined. He or she will consider the evidence provided and will determine the outcome of the appeal. He or she will make one of the following decisions:
- Dismiss the appeal; or
  - Uphold the appeal, and:
    - refer the matter back to an earlier level of this Procedure for reconsideration, e.g. if the correct process had not been followed;  
or
    - refer the matter back to an earlier level of this Procedure for fresh reconsideration,  
e.g. if material new information or evidence was made available;  
or
    - impose an alternative sanction.
48. The outcome of the appeal will be notified to the trainee in writing together with reasons within seven working days of determination of the appeal. This decision is final and will conclude this Procedure. A “Completion of Procedures” letter will be issued to the trainee. Further information on Procedures for external and independent review can be obtained from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education website ([www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)).

### **Return to Study**

49. A request to return to study must be made by a trainee in writing
50. The process by which the outcome of a return to study request will be determined may vary according to the circumstances of the matter and the interests of fairness, and will be at the discretion of The SCITT Programme Leader. Each trainee’s case will vary depending upon the context and specific circumstances. In each case, however, a return to study by a trainee will be dependent upon the trainee satisfying The SCITT Programme Leader that he or she is fit to study and that s/he has complied with any conditions placed upon his/her return.
51. Normally the trainee will be invited to meet with The SCITT Programme

Leader to consider the request to return to study. He or she may require the trainee to produce satisfactory medical and/or other evidence of his/her fitness to study (for example, a psychiatrist's report or GP's letter) from recognised professionals who have sufficient knowledge of the trainee, the demands of higher education, and the trainee's intended programme of study in order to give an informed opinion.

52. The SCITT Programme Leader will determine whether to permit the trainee

to return to study. In reaching his or her decision, he or she may consult with relevant University staff and/or external professionals. He or she may impose conditions upon any return to study (for example, relating to the trainee's conduct, any support the trainee should seek and/or his or her academic progress). The SCITT Programme Leader will consider any support and/or reasonable adjustments which should be put in place for the trainee in connection with his/her return to study and will be responsible for ensuring that any support and reasonable adjustments identified are provided/made.

53. The decision of The SCITT Programme Leader will be notified to the trainee in writing, with reasons, within a reasonable time of the trainee's written request to return to study. If the request is turned down, the letter will include information on the process of re-application for a return to study.
54. The decision of The SCITT Programme Leader is final.
55. Gateshead Primary SCITT will work collaboratively with the trainee in respect of any support arrangements put in place for a return to study. Before or on his or her return, the trainee will be invited to attend a Return to Study Meeting with appropriate members of academic staff (e.g. the programme leader) and the Wellbeing Service. At the Return to Study Meeting, an action plan will be drawn up to support the trainee's successful transition back to study. The action plan will detail any conditions imposed and any support identified by The SCITT Programme Leader in respect of the trainee's return. The action plan will include a timetable for any review meetings which have been deemed necessary to assist the trainee's successful return to study. If conditions are attached, failure to comply will lead to further Fitness to Study Procedures under Level 3. The trainee will be sent a summary of the Return to Study Meeting and a copy of the action plan, normally within five working days of the meeting.
56. The SCITT Programme Leader will ensure that this Policy Procedure is reviewed every three years unless external or internal changes necessitate earlier review.

Approved by the Management Committee, 6 June 2017