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For the future you want

# Student Mental Health & Wellbeing Policy

## Guidance for Staff



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# 1. STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

## Guidance for staff

The purpose of this guidance is:

- To ensure that there is a coherent approach across the College for students and prospective students who disclose or experience mental ill health.
  - To promote mental wellbeing for all Edinburgh College students.
1. Students with mental health difficulties are protected by the Equality Act 2010. This came into force in October 2010 and combines a number of laws including the Disability Discrimination Act, into one single act. People with mental ill health are protected by the act where they meet the following definition:  
  
‘A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.’
  2. All Edinburgh College staff and students have a responsibility to create an atmosphere where all students, including those who experience mental health difficulties, are treated with respect and understanding and are supported and valued as members of the College community. We welcome and support all people, including people of all ages, disabilities, ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, religions/beliefs and sexual orientations, people who are pregnant and people from different backgrounds and experiences.
  3. Furthermore, all staff and students of the College have a responsibility to promote equal opportunities for all and to tackle discrimination due to mental health difficulties.
  4. Students who disclose or experience mental health difficulties are offered support. Staff must be aware of the limits of the support which can be offered and of how to refer on appropriately.
  5. Edinburgh College works in partnership with other agencies to support students who experience mental health difficulties.

## **What are mental health difficulties?**

Mental health difficulties cover a wide range of issues from mild anxiety to severe problems affecting mood and the ability to think and communicate rationally. In line with other institutions we have seen a year-on-year increase in students declaring a mental health condition. (Student Records stats demonstrate an increase from 837 in 2017/18 to 1074 in 2020 of students disclosing mental ill health as a disability). This is the second highest group of disabled students, the highest group being those with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia. This demonstrates how common mental health difficulties are and that we can all be affected by these kinds of challenges at various times in our lives.

Individual students will be affected differently by mental health difficulties. Signs that a student may be experiencing mental health difficulties include:

- Patterns of absence
- Changes in the student's performance in their course work
- Student appears tired and listless
- Poor concentration
- Unpredictable behaviour
- Physical complaints such as headaches, stomach upsets etc.
- Additional stress associated with online learning and isolation

Students may be reluctant to admit that they are experiencing mental health difficulties because of perceived stigma so it is important that all staff are aware of the possible signs of distress and feel confident to respond appropriately.

## **Role of students**

Students can be encouraged to take care of their mental health in a range of ways and Edinburgh College is committed to providing an open, supportive and accepting environment, which provides opportunities for students to access information about mental health and wellbeing.

All students can be encouraged to seek support when required and, in some cases, may disclose to fellow students that they have or have had mental health difficulties. Students can, in these cases, play a key role in encouraging fellow students (who disclose to them) to seek help and support at the earliest opportunity. These students should be aware of their personal limitations in offering assistance.

## **Disclosure on course application**

Applicants are encouraged to disclose if they have support needs because of mental ill health throughout the recruitment process so that support can be put

in place from the start of the course according to need. Applicants should be encouraged to seek assistance from the **Learning Support team** prior to starting their course of study.

### **Role of staff**

The College encourages students who are experiencing difficulties to make these known to staff.

The College has responded to COVID-19 and is developing additional resources to support students' health and wellbeing (see links below), however it is important that staff feel confident in their interactions with students and ensure appropriate initial support and referrals.

<https://moodle.edinburghcollege.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=71903>

Staff should respond to disclosure by students in a non-judgemental and supportive manner; Should be clear about the specific responsibilities relating to their role; and should ensure students are suitably supported and referred on, as appropriate.

In general, students should be involved in all decisions affecting their welfare though this may not always be possible depending on the nature and degree of their illness. Staff who work with students should make it a priority to attend any relevant training, such as Mental Health First Aid, to assist them in their role.

Staff must treat any disclosure of mental health difficulty by a student with sensitivity and respect for **confidentiality**. The General Data Protection Regulation classifies data about mental health as sensitive personal data. Staff should keep sensitive personal data secure at all times and share it only:

- When they have the student's written consent to do so.
- With those with an express need to receive the information.

Where there are situations where a student's data shall be shared without their consent, they will be informed of this (again, at the time the data are collected) Occasions when it may be necessary to share information include:

- The student's behaviour poses a threat to themselves or others (if there is a real and present threat to life, data must be shared immediately; consent is not required).
- A crime has been committed or criminal activity is threatened.

- A child or vulnerable adult's wellbeing is compromised through abuse or neglect (see the college's guidance on Safeguarding in this circumstance). See section regarding Helping Students in Crisis.

On these rare occasions staff must not disclose any more information than is necessary and must ensure that anyone in receipt of this information treats it in strictest confidence. It may be necessary to inform other College staff (for example, the student's lecturers) if the student is to benefit from reasonable adjustments to take account of their mental health difficulty, and that should be made clear to the student. If staff are in any doubt they should contact the Student Experience team.

### **Reasonable adjustments**

Many students with a mental health condition require no extra support or adjustments. However, the Equality Act places a duty on the College to make reasonable adjustments where someone with a disability would be at substantial disadvantage to someone who does not have a disability.

These reasonable adjustments are anticipatory so we must prepare and plan to address barriers that students with a disability may face.

Anticipatory reasonable adjustments for students with mental health difficulties might include:

- Providing notes prior to a class
- Allowing a student to move classes to avoid morning classes
- Allowing absence for illness-related appointments
- Allowing regular breaks if, for example, a student becomes very anxious
- Giving extensions for pieces of work
- Extra time in assessments and exams
- Recording in class to support note taking
- A separate room for assessments and exams
- Arranging for mentoring /study skill support
- Support to apply for Disabled Student Award funding if on an HE course
- Allow for cameras to be turned off during online classes

All necessary and reasonable adjustments should be put in place to allow the student to succeed on their chosen programme, and staff have an obligation to

ensure that recommended adjustments are consistently adhered to. Advice on reasonable adjustments can be sought from the Learning Support team. These adjustments will be implemented with any current government guidelines regarding COVID-19.

### **Helping students in crisis**

Most of us experience psychological or emotional distress at some point in our lives. We can often be helped by family and friends but sometimes expert help is required.

All staff have a role in responding to the needs of students with mental health difficulties and for supporting the safety and wellbeing of students.

Staff should be ready to offer support to students within the boundaries of what they feel competent to do. (See previous comments about taking advantage of training opportunities) and if they recognise that a student is in difficulty.

Staff should feel confident to:

- Listen without judgment
- Give the student time to talk
- Understand the situation from the student's point of view
- Be sympathetic and not dismissive
- Help the student to feel safe
- Be mindful of confidentiality
- Make appropriate referrals
- [Refer to Appendix 1 \(Supporting distressed students\)](#) for more detail and specific guidance about actions and referral agencies
- Be aware of appropriate boundaries
- Have knowledge of online resources and services

### **Safeguarding**

Safeguarding ensures that the College provides all young people under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults with a safe and supportive learning environment, where they are protected from harm, abuse and exploitation. Where there is a suspicion of or allegations of abuse (see [Safeguarding Policy](#) for definitions) staff should record information on Topdesk by selecting Self Service, then Safeguarding. This will be picked up by the manager with responsibility for Safeguarding and Head of Student Experience and they will keep in touch with the referring staff member regarding any actions taken.

[Click here for access to Topdesk Safeguarding form.](#)

### **Emergencies**

Emergency situations are rare. However, if an acute or dangerous situation presents itself and there is an immediate risk to the wellbeing or safety of a student or any other person then this information should be shared immediately and without hesitation. In the first instance this should be reported to the Police using 999 or 101 and then updated on Topdesk.

### **Fitness to continue study**

In situations where signs of illness, depleted mental health, emotional disorders or substance abuse have had an adverse impact on the ability of individual students to engage with their studies or has an impact on the wellbeing of others around them in College, staff should refer to [Appendix 2 Fitness to continue study guidelines](#). These guidelines can be applied as an alternative to disciplinary procedures in situations as described above. Face-to-face panel meetings will be conducted on Microsoft Teams in line with government guidelines regarding COVID-19.

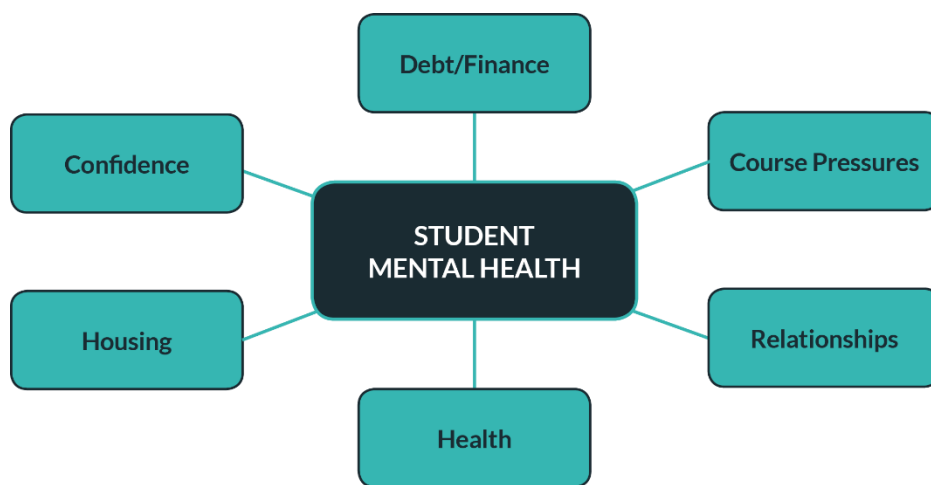


## 2. APPENDIX 1

### Supporting distressed students – a guide for staff

#### Introduction

Some students may experience emotional and psychological difficulties during their time at College. This may be as a result of past life experiences and/or current pressures related to academic and/or personal issues. Where this is affecting the student's progress and success or their wellbeing it is important to identify what action you may be able to take to help.



Most issues can be resolved with support from friends, family, teaching and wellbeing support staff. However occasionally a student experiences extreme distress and requires extra assistance. In their professional role at the College it is likely that at some time staff will be required to support a student who is distressed or vulnerable.

#### When to help

Students who are struggling usually show some outward signs they are dealing with personal concerns. Symptoms may be expressed via a change in emotion, behaviour or cognition. The following signs and symptoms may help staff decide if a student needs help.

#### Behaviours

- Changes in academic performance
- Deterioration in quality of work
- Repeated absences, procrastination

- Social isolation
- Alcohol/substance abuse or misuse
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Uncharacteristically becoming disruptive or quiet/withdrawn
- Sleeping in class
- Increase or decrease in energy levels, i.e. becoming agitated or lethargic
- Changes in appearance, personal care neglect
- Incoherent or disorganised speech
- Lack of engagement with online classes

### Emotions

- Assessment/exam anxiety and perfectionism
- Poor interpersonal relationships or skills
- Demonstrating anxiety or experiencing panic attacks
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness/powerlessness
- Anxieties relating to gender identity or sexual orientation, such as experiencing prejudice or worries about 'coming out'
- Low mood / mood swings
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Poor impulse control
- Increased irritability

### Cognitive

- Writing or creative works expressing extremes of hopelessness, isolation, anger or despair
- Confused or disorganised thinking
- Difficulty in focusing and concentrating

### How to help – guidance and support interventions

Responding to a distressed student can be seen as a series of stages:

- ***Listening to the student*** – this gives the opportunity to talk and gain the information you need. Having a sympathetic listener can be reassuring for the student and sometimes may be all that is required.

- **Assessing the situation** – this involves making judgements with the student about the urgency and severity of the situation and deciding what, if anything, you need to do.
- **Taking action** – action should be based on the information gained during the last two stages.
- **Following up** – making sure there are no loose ends and the student is aware of what has been done and who they can go to if they need further support

### **Listening to the student**

It is important to give the student the opportunity to talk and feel heard. Having a sympathetic listener can be enough to reassure the student that encountering difficulties is a normal part of student life and in most cases, further intervention is not required. Effective listening can be more challenging when engaging with a student remotely.

### **Listen in the right time and space**

- If the student appears to be very agitated or upset can a brief conversation be offered immediately?
- If you have an urgent deadline or imminent /unmovable commitment, say so, but offer a specific time later.
- Make clear how much time is available. Do your best to ensure that the time offered is free from interruptions and that there is a private space.
- If online, check with the student they are in a private or appropriate safe space.

### **Listen with purpose: what does this student need?**

- What seems to be the main issue?
- Is this the whole story or do you get a sense that there are other /underlying problems?
- How does the student think you can help?

### **Listen with skill**

- Use open questions and open body language e.g. questions that will elicit more information than a simple yes/no response such as 'how long have you been feeling this way?', as opposed to 'have you been

feeling like this for a long time'? Open body language includes things like posture, eye contact, avoiding looking at clocks/watches etc.

- Listen more than talk
- Reflect their words back to them to give a chance to clarify or expand on anything

### **Remember confidentiality**

Treat all personal information as confidential unless:

- You have the student's permission to talk to a colleague
- You have the student's permission to talk to their support network e.g. family, friends, GP, other health professionals
- You believe there is a real threat to the safety of the student or others. In this case confidentiality no longer applies and the appropriate emergency services and College staff should be contacted.

### **Assessing the risk, action and follow up**

Please refer to the [Wellbeing and Safeguarding flowchart](#) for guidance.

#### **Action**

- Listen to the student
- Encourage the student to disclose any issues affecting them
- Encourage the student to seek further professional help if already under medical supervision, or to make contact with GP if not
- Encourage the student to speak with family and friends
- Liaise with other faculty staff where appropriate, as well as internal support / wellbeing services
- Consider referral / report on [Topdesk Safeguarding](#) and Cause for Concern tab
- [Consider Fitness to Continue Study Procedure](#)

#### **Action**

- In case of immediate risk call 999 for Police or Ambulance, and contact appropriate member of management
- If no immediate risk contact next of kin/ emergency contact
- [Follow Action in Crisis or Emergency Procedure](#)
- Make a safeguarding report if there was a risk to life or concern

### Remember...

It can be upsetting and challenging hearing of students' difficulties, particularly if they are severe, so it is important to only do as much as is reasonable within your role, and to remember to take care of yourself. If you are significantly affected by any situation make sure you talk to someone about it, (while being mindful of confidentiality and protecting the student's identity unless you have their permission) a friend, colleague or line manager.

The College also offers employee support through PAM Assist details of which are on the Intranet and who can be contacted on this number **0800 882 4102**.

### Crisis Support

Support organisation	Contact Details
Breathing Space	0800 838 587
Nightline	0131 557 4444 (term time)
Samaritans	0131 221 9999 or 116123
NHS 24	111
Crisis Centre	0808 801 0414 or 07974429075
Mental Health Assessment Service (MHAS)	0131 537 6000 or go straight to the Royal Ed
Hopeline (under 35)	0800 068 4141 9am – 10pm weekdays 2pm – 10pm weekends 2pm – 10pm bank holidays <a href="https://papyrus-uk.org/hopelineuk/">https://papyrus-uk.org/hopelineuk/</a>
<b>Useful Websites</b>  <a href="https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/">https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/</a>  <a href="https://clearyourhead.scot/">https://clearyourhead.scot/</a>  Download free <i>Stay Alive</i> app - <a href="https://www.prevent-suicide.org.uk/find-help-now/stay-alive-app/">https://www.prevent-suicide.org.uk/find-help-now/stay-alive-app/</a>	

### 3. APPENDIX 2

#### **Fitness to continue study guidance**

In situations where signs of illness, depleted mental health, emotional disorders or substance abuse have had an adverse impact on the ability of individual students to engage with their studies or has had an impact on the wellbeing of others around them in College these guidelines will be followed.

#### **Principles**

Edinburgh College has a duty of care to respond appropriately to situations which cause significant concern about a student's mental or physical wellbeing, particularly where there is a possibility of adverse impact on other members of the College community, or a risk of harm to the individual concerned.

This guidance assists staff to address these issues with confidence and also promotes a positive attitude towards students who require support to help them achieve their educational goals.

These guidance notes should be used when there are serious and pressing concerns that a student's behaviour, caused by disability, mental ill-health or addiction is impacting on his or her capacity to study and engage in College life and presents an actual or perceived risk to themselves or others.

This guidance can also apply as an alternative to disciplinary procedures when behaviour described above is disruptive to study or presents an actual or perceived risk to themselves or others. Students working towards qualifications where Fitness to Practice criteria need to be met must declare or accept support with any physical or mental health issues that may pose a risk to patient/ public safety or their ability to carry out work placement activities safely. If students can demonstrate effective management of their health condition, there should be no impact on successful completion of the course.

#### **Objective of guidance**

The purpose of these guidelines is:

- To provide a consistent and coordinated approach to the handling of situations where it is probable that a student's behaviour is affected by their mental wellbeing, disability or health issues and should be managed rather than disciplined.
- To identify and implement reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

- To ensure appropriate support for staff and students affected by, or involved in interaction with students in these circumstances.

### **Emergencies**

Emergency situations are rare. However, if an acute or dangerous situation presents itself and there is an immediate risk to student or any other person then appropriate action should be taken ([Supporting Distressed Students Appendix 1](#)).

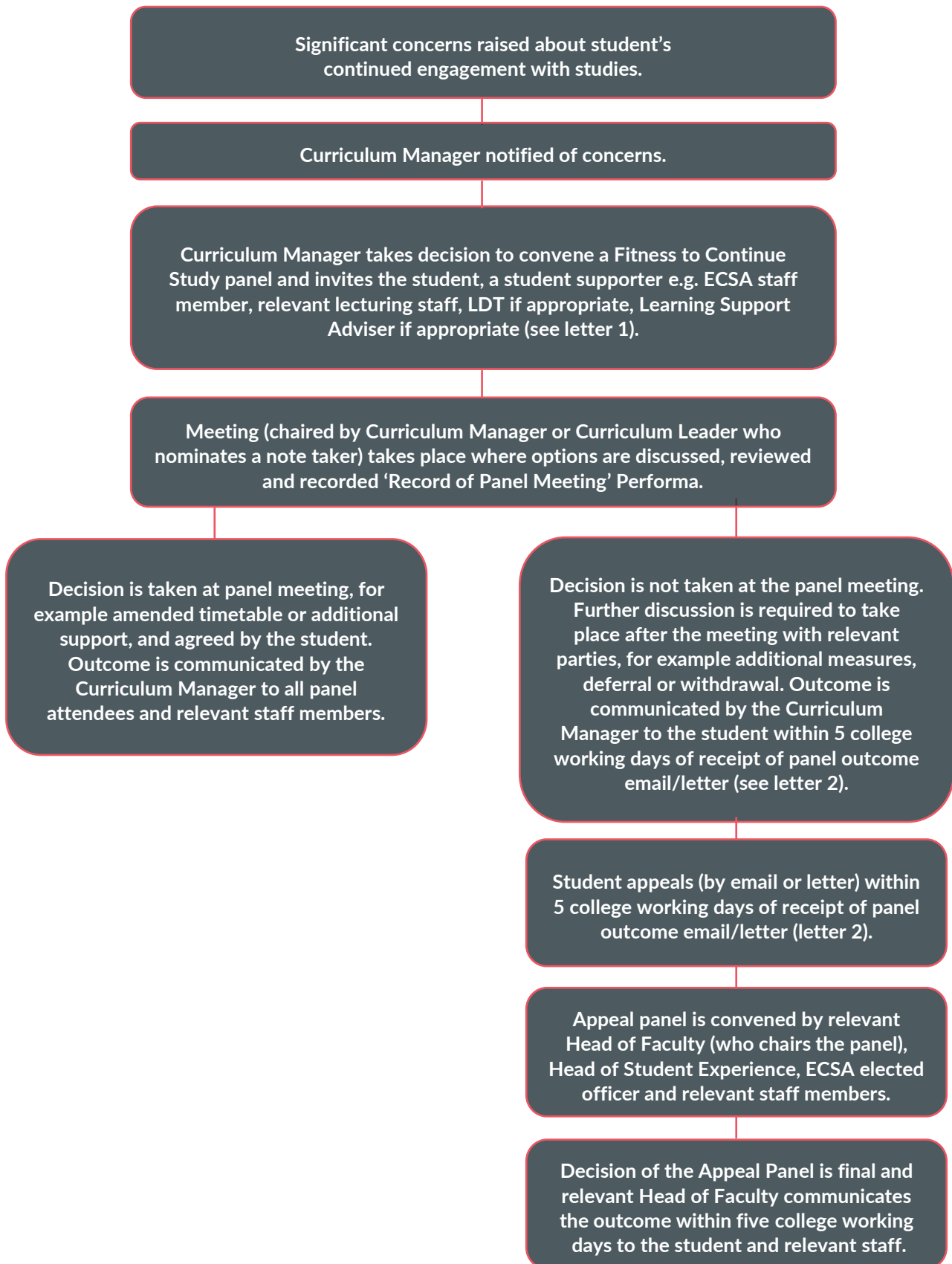
### **Intervention procedure**

Unresolved significant concerns about a student's continued engagement with their study linked to mental wellbeing, disability or health issues will prompt the formation of a Support to Study panel. This panel can meet online through Microsoft Teams to comply with current government guidelines.

- The decision to convene a panel will be at the discretion of the relevant Curriculum Manager or Curriculum Leader.
- The panel should include the student, appropriate lecturing staff, the relevant Learning Development Tutor and a member of the Learning Support team. The student has the right to be accompanied by a friend, or representative of ECSA to the meeting.
- The panel may consider various options, including recommending additional support strategies, suspension for a defined or undefined period or withdrawal from the course, all of which will be recorded in the Record of Panel Meeting document, which will be completed by the CM or CL and subsequently held securely by the Faculty Administrator.
- The decision of the Panel will be communicated to the student within five working days.
- Students have the right to a final appeal. The request, which should outline the grounds for appeal, must be submitted in writing (by email or letter) within five days of the receipt of the Panel outcome.
- An Appeal Panel consisting of the relevant Head of Faculty, Head of Student Experience, and the Learning Support Manager/rep from ECSA will review the outcome of the Panel and the evidence provided. The Appeal Panel has the right to invite any relevant person to attend.
- The outcome of the Appeal Panel will be conveyed in writing to all relevant parties within five working days.

The decision of the Appeal Panel will be final.

## 4. FITNESS TO CONTINUE STUDY FLOWCHART





## Fitness to continue study – Record of panel meeting

Date	
Student name EC number	
Course	
Staff members on panel  Designated note taker	
Learner contract	No / Yes  Please insert any relevant details
Brief outline of the concerns discussed	

Support services already accessed (e.g. college wellbeing /counselling service, GP, other external agency)	
--	--

Student comments	
Student action points	
Staff action points	

Any other information/comment	
Outcome (e.g., monitor and review within 2-4 weeks, further support measures recommended, reduction in timetable, deferral/withdrawal etc.)	



For the future you want

Recipient's Name  
Recipient's Address  
City  
Postcode

Date

Dear **Student Name**,

### Notice of Fitness to Continue Study Panel Meeting

I am writing in connection with recent concerns that have been raised around difficulties experienced with your progress on (course name) (details if/as appropriate)

In these circumstances we like to explore ways in which students may be supported to address the issues which are affecting college experience and agree a way forward.

I would encourage you to bring a friend, family member or representative from Edinburgh College Students Association to be present throughout the meeting. ECSA can be contacted by phone or e mail (0131 297 9500 - [contact@ecsa.scot](mailto:contact@ecsa.scot))

The decision of the panel will be communicated to you by me within 5 college working days. These are some of the possible outcomes which may be considered:

- Alternative study mode
- Adapted/flexible time table
- Additional study support
- Referral to or re-engagement with college counselling /wellbeing services
- Deferral of study
- Suspension or withdrawal from course

Yours sincerely,

Curriculum Manager  
[Your.name@edinburghcollege.ac.uk](mailto:Your.name@edinburghcollege.ac.uk)

**Granton Campus**  
350 West Granton Road  
Edinburgh  
EH5 1QE

**Milton Road Campus**  
24 Milton Road East  
Edinburgh  
EH15 2PP

**Midlothian Campus**  
46 Dalhousie Road  
Dalkeith  
EH22 3FR

**Sighthill Campus**  
Bankhead Avenue  
Edinburgh  
EH11 4DE

 0131 669 4400  
 [edinburghcollege.ac.uk](http://edinburghcollege.ac.uk)



For the future you want

Recipient's Name  
Recipient's Address  
City  
Postcode

Date

Dear **Student Name**,

I refer to the Fitness to Continue Study Panel which you attended on **(date)** where we discussed the recent concerns regarding your difficulties on the **(course)**.

At the panel you were given the opportunity to explore with us some possible outcomes, and you were informed the decision would be communicated to you. The decision of the panel is:

(outline of decision)

You have the right to a final appeal if you are not in agreement with this decision. If you wish to appeal please submit the grounds for the appeal by e mail or letter within 5 college working days of receipt of this letter. The appeal panel will be made up of the Head of Faculty, Head of Student Experience, an ECSA elected officer, and any other relevant person/s

Yours sincerely

Curriculum Manager  
**Your.name@edinburghcollege.ac.uk**

**Granton Campus**  
350 West Granton Road  
Edinburgh  
EH5 1QE

**Milton Road Campus**  
24 Milton Road East  
Edinburgh  
EH15 2PP

**Midlothian Campus**  
46 Dalhousie Road  
Dalkeith  
EH22 3FR

**Sighthill Campus**  
Bankhead Avenue  
Edinburgh  
EH11 4DE

**t** 0131 669 4400  
**w** [edinburghcollege.ac.uk](http://edinburghcollege.ac.uk)

## 5. ACTION IN CRISIS OR EMERGENCY

Emergency situations could include:

- Suicidal intention
- Violence or aggression
- Overdose
- Extremely erratic or disturbed behaviour

If there is an immediate risk call 999 for Police and/or Ambulance and make campus security staff aware so that they can contact the appropriate duty manager. Please see below for contact numbers:

Milton Road **0791 785 1113**

Midlothian **0781 469 4821**

Granton **0782 569 3996**

Sighthill **0773 976 1965**

- Never put yourself at risk
- Ensure the student is not left alone
- Reassure the student throughout and explain actions being taken
- As far as possible include the student in any decisions taken
- Ask the student if they would like anyone contacted
- Make notes as soon as possible about the event/incident

If no immediate risk to self or others then these contact options can be considered:

- The Wellbeing team
- GP
- Mental Health Assessment service at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital - MHAS (0131 537 6000)
- Crisis Centre (phone 08088 010414 or text 07974 42907)
- Breathing Space (08008 38587)
- Social Care Direct

Please see link for additional information

[http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20081/health\\_and\\_well\\_being/330/mental\\_health\\_help\\_and\\_support](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20081/health_and_well_being/330/mental_health_help_and_support)

As the responder you must ensure the event/incident is reported through Topdesk.

If a young person under 18 or a vulnerable adult has been involved, the Safeguarding form must be completed. Otherwise, use the Cause for Concern form.