

Heriot Watt University Support to Study Policy

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1. Scope

This policy covers all on campus and online students.

There are some differences in the support that is available for campus based and online students, but ultimately the process for accessing help, acknowledging difficulties and potential disruptions to study, and then assessing fitness to study, will be the same.

The policy is separate from the University's processes around academic and non-academic misconduct.

2. Definition

The policy is designed to support students to study effectively.

The policy focuses on students who are struggling to maintain their academic engagement, or a level of conduct that is appropriate and conducive to study.

Many factors can contribute to such situations and a wide range of support is available through Personal Tutors, Information Services, Student Advisors, Student Wellbeing Services, Safeguarding, Careers, Residence Life, Student Representative Bodies, and external providers. Student success and effective learning are dependent on positive engagement, early intervention, and clear support options. The employment of Mitigating Circumstances and Temporary Suspension of Studies is key to supporting students during times of difficulty.

The policy clarifies the support route for students who have previously engaged with support and continue to face challenges, or who are affected by unexpected critical circumstances for which the usual support options are not suitable.

Actions taken under the policy, particularly where a break in study may be imposed by the policy, will have the aim, where possible, of facilitating the students' eventual re-engagement with their studies and University life.

The policy is not punitive and is designed to support students.

The Support to Study Policy can be applied to students in any of the following instances:

- A student is a risk to themselves, or others.
- A student is incapacitated or otherwise incapable of engaging effectively with their learning or university life.

- A student's behaviour is, or risks, adversely affecting the teaching, learning and/or experience of other students.
- A student's behaviour is, or risks, the normal activities or effective functioning of the University.
- The support needs of a student are outwith the scope of what can be provided by the University.
- The student's period of study has incurred several periods of disruption and is approaching the time limit for successful completion.

3. Process

Where any of the above points apply, and there is significant concern for a student's ability to engage with their studies, the student is likely to have been referred to Student Wellbeing Services. Students may already be engaging with internal support and/or external services and the escalation of their circumstances may necessitate progressing the formal processes of this policy. These circumstances are:

- The student fails to engage with appropriate support and continues to cause concern.
- The student's issues persist despite engagement with support.

In this situation, the student's case should be referred to a Support to Study Panel.

The convening of a panel can be requested by any member of staff supporting the student or with information indicating a continued cause for concern, as outlined in paragraph 2 above. The request should be made to the relevant Campus Head of Student Life and/or the Head of Student Wellbeing.

In such circumstances a Support to Study Panel is convened with the agreement of the Head of Student Life and the Head of Student Wellbeing.

Panel Purpose

1. To decide whether any of the six conditions in paragraph 2 still apply
2. To decide whether the student is sufficiently engaging with any support
3. To decide whether student's issues persist despite engagement with support.

4. Support to Study Panel

The panel will comprise the following panel members:

- The Chair will be either the Deputy Registrar (for students studying at the Scottish campuses or studying online), or the relevant Head of Registry & Support Services for students studying at the Dubai or Malaysia campus, as appropriate.
- The Head of Student Wellbeing (or nominee) and
- A Senior member of academic staff of the School responsible for the student's programme of study. This will normally be the Associate Executive Dean for Education & Student Life, or an appropriate nominee.

Only the panel members can make the final outcome decision.

In addition, other members of staff with knowledge of the student's situation or who are able to contribute to possible support for them should be invited to attend. This may include a student counsellor, mental health advisor, disability advisor, personal tutor, student advisor, or student conduct office staff.

The chair must arrange for a written record of the meeting to be made.

The student will be invited to the meeting at least five working days beforehand. They will be expected to attend. They can be accompanied by a member of the student representative bodies, a family member, or another individual to support them through the meeting. The student would be expected to notify the panel in advance of any person accompanying them.

In the event of the student being incapable of attending, or choosing not to attend, then the panel chair can decide to delay the meeting, or in the event of perceived risk, the meeting will continue in the absence of the student.

Format of Panel Meetings

1. Introductions and explanation of the purpose of the panel
2. A review of the student's current situation which will include the review of any relevant medical evidence or other documentation made available to the panel.
3. An opportunity for the student to respond and ask questions
4. A discussion on an action plan for the student

Outcomes of the Panel can include

- Continue studies with appropriate support as required, including timeframe for any further review if required.
- Suspension for a semester or academic year.
- A period of suspension to allow diagnosis, further investigation or treatment.
- Permanent withdrawal of a student.

Ongoing support of Student Wellbeing Services for the student during the period of suspension should be available, if appropriate

An action plan for supporting the student to return to study will be set out by the panel and will include the date of return to study (normally the start of a semester) conditions for return to study and any medical or other appropriate evidence demonstrating that the student is able to resume study.

The student will be formally notified of the panel's decision with a copy sent to the Global Director of Student Experience & Academic Registrar. Where the panel decides that the students should be have their studies suspended or be withdrawn, the chair will refer this recommendation to Director of Student Experience & Academic Registrar so this can be actioned.

5. Procedures for Support Students Returning to Study

The process to support a student's return to study will form part of the action plan produced by the panel.

This would normally involve the provision of any medical evidence stipulated by the panel, and a meeting with the Head of Student Wellbeing, or their nominee, to assess if a student is now able to return to study.

Return to study, with ongoing support, may be an option and the Head of Student Wellbeing or their nominee should liaise with staff as necessary to ensure this is in place.

The support provision from Student Wellbeing Services and external providers should be agreed with all parties and recorded prior to the start of the new semester.

6. Appeal Process

The student can appeal to an approved Appeals Assessor against a panel decision within 14 days of the formal notification. The appeal must be made in writing to the University Student Appeals Office (USAO). The USAO will liaise with the approved Appeals Assessor and send out the appeals outcome on behalf of the Appeals Assessor.

Grounds for an appeal are:

- **New evidence has been made available that could not be available at the previous consideration, and which is felt to have a material effect on the decision**
For such appeals, the appellant must provide evidence to demonstrate that they were not able to previously submit their evidence to the panel.
- **There was a procedural irregularity in the process undertaken**
Appeals on this ground which fail to refer to an appropriate or relevant regulation, policy or procedure will result in the appeal being dismissed without further consideration.
- **The decision reached was manifestly unreasonable**
For such appeals, the appellant must provide evidence of why the decision was manifestly unreasonable. Appeals on this ground which the students feels, in their opinion, that the outcome was unfair, will result in the appeal being dismissed without further consideration.

The Appeals Assessor would be responsible for making one of the following decisions:

- Where new evidence has been provided, and justifiable reasons provided, to refer the case back to the Panel for re-consideration;
- Where there is deemed to be an unreasonable decision made, to refer the case back to the panel with explanation why the appeals assessor believes the decision is unreasonable;
- Where the procedures have not been followed, or followed with due care, to refer the case back to the panel with an explanation of what procedures have not been followed, or followed with due care, and advise on how to address that matter;
- To reject the appeal without further consideration.

7. Appeals to the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO)

Following the conclusion of the procedures set out above there remains no further recourse to action through the internal University procedures. However, there is an opportunity for independent consideration of a case by the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO), which can investigate whether it has been handled appropriately by the University. A student will be advised, at the appropriate stage in the appeal process, of their right of referral to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO), providing the appellant with the SPSO contact details.