



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Accessibility: If you need this document in a different format, please contact Quality Assurance on qa@iis.ac.uk. If a student has difficulty at any stage of the procedure because of a disability, they should discuss the situation with Student Services as soon as possible.

The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Fitness to Study Policy

1 Introduction and scope

- 1.1 This policy applies to all validated provision at the IIS.
- 1.2 Agreements with external providers who administer part, or all, of a validated programme may specify alternative arrangements for academic appeals; in some cases, the policy of the external provider shall supersede this policy. Quality Assurance can provide guidance on how to access all the aforementioned documents (email: qa@iis.ac.uk).

2 Principles

- 2.1 The purpose of the policy is to empower staff to make a positive intervention at the earliest sign of concern about an individual student's wellbeing which affects their or others' ability to study. Each case will be considered on an individual basis.
- 2.2 It enables a wide range of staff, both professional and academic, to raise concerns and be confident that there is a process that supports action and safeguards the rights of students. Issues can arise in a variety of ways and across contexts, both in the Institute and at home. It is likely that first signs of mental health issues arising will present in the residencies or in contact with support staff.
- 2.3 The policy is not punitive but is designed to support students with health problems (most mental health and behavioural issues). This may be to put in place an action plan and support to enable the student to continue their studies. It may also be to suspend the student but with a clear plan of the conditions under which a 'Return to Study' can be considered.
- 2.4 This policy is 'preventative' in providing staff with the confidence to deal with issues early and therefore before they escalate to a crisis.

- 2.5 Students absenting themselves from the process will have an 'independent witness' allocated to attend the key meetings to protect their procedural interests and raise any concerns.
- 2.6 This process may be stressful for students and staff, and so all due care will be taken to recognise this and minimise its impact of those involved.
- 2.7 This policy applies only to cases where a student's ability to continue on their programme of study may be compromised, and does not therefore provide guidance on instances of temporary ill health or stress which may arise in the usual course of working and/or studying practices at Master's level (e.g. additional pressure around the time of deadlines; finding ways to coordinate multiple priorities). Support in tackling such issues can be provided by programme staff, and students may also find fellow students a valuable source of support for sharing ideas and strategies. However, where the pressure of studying does begin to present as a serious concern that may affect a student's ability to continue on the programme, the terms of this policy may be referred to.

3 Fitness to Study Policy

- 3.1 On occasions, a student's health, mental wellbeing or behaviour deteriorates to the point where it may become impossible for them to be able to continue their studies.
- 3.2 This policy outlines the appropriate response and action to be taken by staff where it is believed that the behaviour, or the mental or physical health of a student:
- a) May prevent them from gaining benefit from the educational provision at a particular time, and/or
 - b) Disrupts the teaching, learning or support of others students.
- 3.3 The IIS promotes positive behaviour among staff and students, with a view to helping each student tap into and grow from their own potential. Students enjoy a wide range of support besides teaching staff and the programme team (including our dedicated Academic Skills Support Team), namely Academic Advisers and specialist help and guidance with concerns related to mental health through Only Connect and UCL Psychological and Counselling Services (the latter is for STEP only). In this vein, students under this policy will be considered from a supportive perspective rather than a disciplinary one.
- 3.4 The Institute, however, reserves the right to invoke the Student Code of Conduct and/or Disciplinary Policy where students' health or behaviour poses a risk of harm to either themselves or others, or where students do not positively respond to more supportive interventions.
- 3.5 This policy has three stages, based on the seriousness of risk posed by the behaviour or health of a student. The three stages reflect the level of difficulty or disruption highlighted, as well as the response of a student to any intervention.

- 3.6 It is possible that concerns raised over the health, safety, conduct or mental wellbeing of a student are of such significance that these policies can be commenced at either Stage 2 or 3.
- 3.7 Should a student be unwilling to play a part in these policies, the process may continue in their absence, with the ultimate sanction being interruption from studies still being able to be invoked. In cases where the student absents themselves from the process, the Institute will appoint an independent witness to attend meetings in order to safeguard the student's interests.

Stage 1 – Emerging Concerns: Emerging or initial concerns about an individual student's health, safety, behaviour or mental wellbeing are raised.

- 3.8 These concerns should be reported to the Programme Leader, Student Services Manager or Academic Adviser (AA). The person to whom this is reported will then confer with the other two, i.e. if the Programme Leader is informed, they will confer with the Student Services Manager and the AA.¹ Jointly, they will recommend the appropriate person to approach the student to raise and discuss the specific issues with them in a supportive and understanding manner.
- 3.9 Emerging concerns may be identified and raised by both professional and academic staff. The context in which the initial causes of concern are raised will determine the most appropriate person to understand and address the issues with the student sensitively.
- 3.10 The nature of the concerns should be clearly identified to the student and they should be encouraged to discuss the issues (it is possible that they will not have realised the impact of their actions). If appropriate, information should be provided about sources of support within and outside of the Institute that the student can access (e.g. student counselling).
- 3.11 A record will be kept on the confidential Welfare Log of the 'emerging concern' and the actions taken or agreed to address the issues and by whom. These notes will be shared with the student, their AA, and the Senior Educational Programmes Officer so that the matter can be included for recording in the meetings of the Academic Management Committee (AMC) and relevant Programme Board(s).
- 3.12 All students have the opportunity to declare a physical or mental health condition at the point of entry. Students who do not do so at the point of entry can do so at any point during their programme. This involves the student registering with the Academic

¹ Where the Programme Leader and AA are the same person, the Academic Support Programmes Manager or Programme Leader for another programme may be consulted.

Skills Support Team (ASST), where their needs are assessed and support discussed and arranged as appropriate. In line with the principles of this policy, committed to supporting students, students may be encouraged to apply for reasonable adjustments and/or a Learning Support Agreement.

- 3.13 Should the student be able to respond positively then staff must discuss the situation with the Head of relevant department. It may then be an outcome that Stage 2 is invoked.

Stage 2 – Continuing or Serious Concerns: Continuing or serious concerns about an individual student's health, safety or mental wellbeing are raised.

- 3.14 In cases where a student is registered on a programme administered by the Department of Graduate Studies, the student will be invited to meet with the Programme Leader or Student Services Manager to discuss the issues (note-taker to be present). Together they can assess the student's perception of the impact that their ill health and/or behaviour is having on themselves and/or the Institute community. The student may bring a friend (this does not include a lawyer or legal adviser) to the meeting.
- 3.15 An Action Plan will be devised to put in place support for the student (where appropriate) and formally agree expectations for the student to observe. These may include academic as well as conduct-related expectations.
- 3.16 This Action Plan will have a review date from the outset, and the consequences of not adhering to the Action Plan will be made clear.
- 3.17 A record of the meeting will be made by the Senior Educational Programmes Officer (SEPO; note-taker), with a copy sent to the student and to the AMC. A copy of the agreed Action Plan will be submitted to the student's AA, the AMC and the relevant Programme Board(s). A brief record will be kept on the confidential Welfare Log.
- 3.18 In line with the principles of this policy, committed to supporting students, students may be encouraged to apply for reasonable adjustments and/or a Learning Support Agreement.
- 3.19 Should the student not respond positively then staff must discuss the situation with the Head of relevant Department. It is then likely that Stage 3 is invoked.

Stage 3 – Significant or Persistent Concerns: Significant or persistent concerns are raised about an individual student's actions or behaviour that are putting the health, safety, wellbeing or academic progress of themselves or other members of the Institute community at significant risk.

- 3.20 In cases where a student is registered on a programme administered by the Department of Graduate Studies the Head of relevant department will call a 'Fitness to Study Case Panel' to discuss the situation. A record of the meeting will be made by the relevant administrator.
- 3.21 The student will be invited to make a representation to the Case Panel in writing, having had sight of all relevant documentation a reasonable time before the representation is required for the Panel. The representation may include all relevant supporting evidence which may include information that has not previously been disclosed or that is the result of a recent diagnosis or event.
- 3.22 Those present at the Case Panel might include, depending on the nature of the issue:
- Programme Leader
 - Student services Manager
 - Academic Support Programmes Manager
 - Academic Adviser
 - GP or other relevant professional (with student's consent).

As well as fellow students or relevant staff from:

- Student Services
- Other relevant staff members (e.g. Victoria Halls Manager).

The Case Panel will determine an agreed action, either:

- An enhanced Action Plan, or
- Recommend an interruption of the student's studies.

- 3.23 The student will be invited to meet with the Head of the relevant department to receive and discuss the recommended actions from the Case Panel. The student will be invited to bring along a person to support them at the meeting. The student may bring a friend (this does not include a lawyer or legal adviser) to the meeting. Should the student elect not to attend the meeting then the Institute will ask a representative of the student body to hear the outcome and raise any issues relating to the procedural fairness of the process. Notes will be taken at this meeting by the relevant administrator. The final recommendation will be sent by post to the student at the address they have provided to the Institute and to their email account. The recommendation will include clear

information for the student of what process they will have to follow to be considered for 'Return to Study'.

- 3.24 If the Academic Adviser was not present, the relevant administrator will inform them of the outcome from the Case Panel and meeting with the student (or representative).
- 3.25 If the recommended action is that of an enhanced Action Plan, this plan will have a review date from the outset, and the consequences of not adhering to the Action Plan will be made clear. A copy of the agreed Action Plan will be submitted to the AMC, relevant Programme Board(s) and the student's Academic Adviser.
- 3.26 If the agreed recommended action is an interruption of studies, the AMC will temporarily suspend the student with immediate effect. The Student Services Manager will meet with the student to confirm this course of action and discuss implications and next steps. The SEPO will then inform the student in writing of this decision with regard to the interruption.
- 3.27 This stage of the process may be particularly stressful for students and staff, and so all due care will be taken to recognise this and minimise its impact on those involved. In cases of interruption the Cessation of Study Policy will be followed.
- 3.28 During a period of agreed interruption, a student would not receive the benefits of their IIS scholarship, which include IIS-provided accommodation and the stipend.
- 3.29 Any interruption in studies will be subject to periodic review by the AMC. Such periodic review will include consideration of medical evidence by the AMC and an appropriate external authority as necessary and academic advice from the student's AA, Programme Leader and relevant academic staff.
- 3.30 The Institute will provide the student with a Completion of Procedures Letter when the student has exhausted the Institute's procedures. Students who remain dissatisfied with the final outcome of their appeal may take their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) within one year of the issuing date of the Completion of Procedures Letter.

4 Return to Study

- 4.1 Following a period of absence from the Institute for recuperation, it may be appropriate for the student to resume studies. If this is the case, it will be necessary to ensure that the student is assisted in their return to the Institute. On return, the student should normally comply with the approved academic regulations, in particular the period of time of registration on a programme.
- 4.2 In cases where a student is registered on a programme administered by the Department of Graduate Studies, the following will apply: The student will be required to produce appropriate confirmation of their health and ability to resume studying. The AMC, assisted by external authorities as necessary, will review the content of reports

with a view to making a recommendation to the Co-Director to agree or reject a Return to Study. In making that decision, account will be taken of the Institute's duty of care to staff.

4.3 Members of the Academic Skills Support Team and Student Services will be available to provide assistance with drawing up a Return to Study Plan in consultation with the student and the Head of Department or relevant Programme Leader. This will address:

- Specific study-related support needs of the student in returning to education
- Support which is reasonably required in the short term
- Involvement of and liaison with external agencies
- Any longer-term support or adjustments that are reasonably required
- Any conditions that might apply to provision.

4.4 The Return to Study Plan should incorporate a risk-management plan which takes account of the experiences which led to the student initially leaving their programme and any other information which is known to be relevant. Any Return to Study will be subject to cooperation with this process and adherence to any agreements made.

4.5 Other members of staff (e.g. the AA) will be available to provide advice and support to facilitate the student's transition back on to the programme, particularly in relation to any action that might be required under the Disability Discrimination Act. This will be arranged with the direct involvement of, or in consultation with, appropriate external health professionals.

5 Data Protection

5.1 The Institute's policy on Data Protection contains guidance on the use of sensitive information (e.g. details about a student's mental health or condition) and must be consulted by staff.

6 Relationship with other Codes, Policies and Procedures

6.1 Student Code of Conduct

6.1.1 There are occasions where a student who suffers from a mental health difficulty may break aspects of the Student Code of Conduct. In such cases, they will not necessarily be exempt from disciplinary action and may face an investigation.

6.1.2 In the case of a student whose behaviour appears to be indicative of a mental health problem, the relevant stage of the disciplinary procedures may be adjourned to allow the student to seek advice and support. Following an assessment with a qualified medical professional, the student may present a confidential report from them to the

AMC for reference by the post-holder responsible for conducting that stage of the disciplinary procedures. The student would be allowed to retain a copy of the report.

- 6.1.3 The purpose of the adjournment would be to inform the disciplinary procedures of any psychological circumstances which may have affected or be currently affecting the student. It would also ensure that, as far as possible, a student who is not deemed to pose a risk to themselves or others but whose problems may be exacerbated unduly by formal investigation may be given the opportunity to seek help and the possibility of a resolution of the issue independently of the disciplinary procedures. A student referred to a medical professional should be strongly encouraged to take advantage of the offer. However, if the student refuses the offer, or fails to make an appointment to see a medical professional, the Institute reserves the right to continue with the disciplinary procedures.
- 6.1.4 The Fitness to Study Policy does in this circumstance provide a process for supporting students in this situation but retains the same sanctions to suspend.
- 6.2 *Accessibility Policy*
Staff and students must not confuse the Fitness to Study Policy with the Accessibility Policy, which includes information about reasonable adjustments and our process for initiating Learning Support Agreements. More details can be found on the Student Portal.
- 6.3 *Mitigating Circumstances Policy*
Staff and students must not confuse the Fitness to Study Policy with the Mitigating Circumstances Policy, which includes information about special exam arrangements. More details can be found on the Student Portal.
- 6.4 *Academic Progress Policy*
Staff and students must not confuse the Fitness to Study Policy with the Academic Progress Policy, which includes information about definitions for satisfactory academic progress, Academic Probation and withdrawal of the scholarship. More details can be found on the Student Portal.

7 Document Control

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