Introduction

1. Students in the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education are required to demonstrate certain qualities in general attitude and behaviour towards other students, staff of the University and in practice areas towards clients, carers and the general public as endorsed by the appropriate codes of practice/values and principles related to Social Work, Education and Community Education. Students are obliged to learn, accept and demonstrate the responsibility and accountability increasingly demanded of practitioners in education and social care services. A student who fails to demonstrate appropriate standards, in relation to either their conduct or due to health issues, may be deemed to be professionally unsuitable.

2. Other programmes and modules of study at post registration and postgraduate level also lead to recordable qualifications. These same qualities and professional standards will be expected of individuals participating in such programmes.

3. In looking at aspects associated with a student’s fitness to practise, the School will be considerate of issues relating to disability, wider access and additional support needs, and would not, therefore, inhibit progression on this basis.

4. The Committee would only get involved in a case after all the normal and appropriate progression procedures have been exhausted and, therefore, the Committee will be used in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort where University Ordinances and Statutes may not be able to adequately deal with the case in hand.

Fitness to Practise Committee

5. The brief of the Fitness to Practise Committee is to consider individual students on matters of health and conduct, for example: criminal conviction, drug misuse, or other psychiatric or physical conditions which may pose a risk to service users or prevent effective professional practice; and/or other conduct inappropriate for a social worker, teacher, community education worker or other professional.

6. The Committee will indicate to the student under which heading they are being called, as a matter of health or conduct.

7. Membership of the Committee will include: the Dean as Convener, the Vice-Dean, a senior member of staff from another discipline area and an external representative from the relevant professional discipline. The School Secretary will also be in attendance.

8. The Committee will meet on an ad hoc basis, as and when a need is identified and at the request of the Dean.

9. The Head of Department will forward to the School Secretary details of a case which the Department considers should be reviewed by the Fitness to Practise Committee.

10. The School Secretary will liaise with other relevant individuals to gather initial evidence and substantiate the grounds for referral. The information will be presented to the Convener.

11. The route of referral of cases to the Committee should be through the Convener. Standard protocol for the Committee will be: (a) to meet for a preliminary hearing of any case that the Convener wishes to bring to the Committee (without the relevant student being there) and (b) if the Committee feels at this preliminary hearing that the case needs to be taken further, then one of its members will be nominated to investigate the case in some detail and report back. The Committee will reconvene and, on the basis of this report, will decide whether to dismiss the case at that stage or to take it forward to a formal hearing.

12. Specialist advice may be sought in relation to individual cases/issues.
If a case comes before the Fitness to Practise Committee then the student’s results will be withheld until the outcome is known. Therefore, a student may not be eligible to progress or graduate until the Dean has made a decision following consideration of the recommendation from the Committee.

Every effort will be made to ensure the process is carried out within a reasonable timescale.

Students whose cases are being reviewed by the Committee will be advised to seek guidance from the Student Health Officer, the Student Counsellor, the Student Advisory Service, the University Chaplain and/or the President of the Students’ Association. Students’ are at liberty to invite a representative to accompany them at the meeting with the Committee, e.g. trade union or professional organisation, DUSA representative or friend.

The Convener will ensure that members of the Committee and the student have copies of all relevant documents relating to the case and are aware of the proceedings to be followed.

The Convener will invite the student to provide copies of supporting evidence and related documentation in advance of the meeting, for circulation to members of the Committee.

The student (and, where relevant, the student’s representative), members of the Committee, and any members of staff or the student body invited by the Convener, will assemble for the meeting.

The Convener will introduce by name and explain the functions of the members of the Committee, the staff and any others present. The Convener will invite the student to introduce their representative.

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The Convener will introduce by name and explain the functions of the members of the Committee, the staff and any others present. The Convener will invite the student to introduce their representative.

The Convener will explain the powers of the Committee.

The Convener will invite the Programme Leader (or nominee) to make an opening statement.

The Convener will invite the student and members of the Committee to ask questions.

The Convener will invite the student (and/or representative) to make a statement. The Convener will explain that wherever possible the Committee will wish to hear directly from the student in his/her own words. The student is given every opportunity to present their case, but is at liberty to maintain their silence and need not present any testimony, unless they wish to do so.

Members of the Committee will be invited to ask questions.

The Convener will invite any other person(s) called to attend the meeting to make a brief statement, and will then invite the student and Committee members to ask questions.

The Convener has the discretion at any stage to allow reciprocal questioning by the various parties.

Once the Convener is satisfied that the Committee has completed questioning and the student and anyone else present has had a full opportunity to convey information to the Committee, all non-committee members will withdraw.

The student, Head of Department and Programme Leader (or nominee) may be invited to wait until the Committee has reached its decision.

The Committee will discuss, in private, the case and make its decision.

When appropriate, the student, Head of Department and Programme Leader will be asked to return to the meeting room and the Dean, on behalf of the Committee, will advise of the Committee’s decision.

The Committee has the following possible outcomes available to it:

(i) no action,
(ii) appropriate corrective action (which may include an extension of studies),
(iii) termination of studies and referral to the relevant professional body.

It is important to note that this list is not comprehensive and the Committee has freedom to make appropriate judgements following a formal hearing.
33 Where a decision is taken to terminate the student’s studies and the student is studying on a programme which has been accredited by a professional or statutory body (PSB) (e.g. SSSC, GTCS, CeVe) the relevant contact person in the PSB will be notified of the outcome of the Committee. Where relevant the PSB will also have been consulted during the process. The University will wait 10 working days after the decision of the Fitness to Practise Committee has been relayed to the student before contacting the relevant PSB.

34 Any student judged unfit to practise by the Committee will have the right of appeal. The Fitness to Practise Appeals Committee will be convened by the Academic Secretary (see below for further details).

35 The outcome of cases considered by the Committee will be reported, without breach of confidence, to the School Board in the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education.

School Fitness to Practise Appeals Committee

36 Any student judged unfit to practise by the Committee will have the right of appeal. The student will have 10 working days after they have received the decision of the Fitness to practice Committee, to submit an appeal or to notify the Academic Secretary of the intention to appeal.

37 The Fitness to Practise Appeals Committee will be convened by the Academic Secretary and shall include in its membership: an external representative from the relevant professional discipline, one senior School member (who has not previously been involved in the decision of the Fitness to Practise Committee) and a member of the School Quality Assurance Committee. The School Secretary and University’s Legal Counsellor will also be in attendance.

38 The student will be invited to provide evidence and related documentation in support of the appeal, which will be issued to members of the Appeals Committee in advance of the meeting.

39 The student can bring to the meeting a representative, e.g. trade union or professional organisation, legal counsellor, DUSA representative or friend.

40 The Convener of the Committee will introduce by name and explain the role and function of each member of the Committee and any others present.

41 The Convener will ensure the student and members of the Appeals Committee have received copies of all related documentation and is aware of the proceedings to be followed.

42 The Convener will explain the powers of the Committee and invite the student to make the opening statement of appeal.

43 Members of the Committee will be invited by the Convener to ask any questions of the student.

44 The student will be given the opportunity to ask any questions in response and to make a final summary of the case.

45 The Committee members will retire to make a decision, the student may be invited to wait for their decision.

46 If any point requires clarification the student may be recalled

47 The Committee will come to its decision and convey this to the student and the Dean.

Revised January 2006
Prepared by representatives of each Department in the Faculty of Education & Social Work, Dean and Faculty Secretary. The Academic Secretary has also commented on the document.
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