

**CONNELL CO-OP COLLEGE  
FITNESS TO STUDY POLICY**

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## 1: Introduction

1.1 Connell Co-op College aims to tailor the education we provide to individual needs with a view to promoting inclusivity and equality of opportunity. This philosophy underpins how we constantly strive to make reasonable adjustments for any student. We have included in our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy the commitment that the promotion of equality for all members of our community is central to all aspects of our provision. All members of our diverse community can expect to be treated fairly and with respect, irrespective of their background. We are committed to working towards the eradication of any disadvantage that may occur from an individual's background. In doing so we fully comply with the Equality Act (2010).

1.2 It is important, however, to recognise what is reasonable and the limits to the individual support that can be provided in an educational setting.

Our staff provide outstanding care for all students; however there will be times when a student's physical or mental health is so affected that they are no longer able, despite support, within the College and/or externally, to maintain reasonable attendance and academic progress.

1.3 The following require consideration:

- Connell Co-op College is not a distance-learning College and, while it is reasonable for subject teachers and support colleagues to be flexible on a temporary basis, prolonged periods of absence cannot be sustainable
- There may be times when the nature of a student's ill health can require support beyond the expertise or capacity that we can reasonably offer
- Occasionally a student's ill health may present a health and safety risk to either themselves or those around them that is unmanageable in a mainstream educational setting.

There are therefore occasions where, for one or more of the reasons above, it will be our judgement that, in the best interests of a student, continuing at Connell Co-op College is no longer the best option.

1.4 The Fitness to Study Policy aims to provide:

- A framework to guide decision making in complex student welfare cases
- A set of parameters for the minimum acceptable level of academic progress
- A series of stages for reviewing a student's place at the College
- A list of minimum expectations of students who are offered the opportunity to restart at the College

1.5 Associated Policies, Procedures and Protocols:

- CAT Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy

## 2 Scope

2.1 The Fitness to Study Procedure applies predominately to 16-19 year-old students who are funded via the Educational Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

2.2 Specific accountabilities of parties are:

- The Principal holds ultimate accountability to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all students
- The Assistant Principal Student Services has responsibility to ensure that procedures and processes are in place to meet individual student need, reasonable adjustments are applied where appropriate and students do not continue in study programmes where this is unsuitable for their academic progress
- The Assistant Principal Student Services, Director of SEND and Directors of Student Progress have responsibility for applying processes and procedures associated with establishing fitness to study and identifying solutions that are in the best interest of the individual

## 3. Individuals joining Connell Co-op College

3.1 Applicants are encouraged to disclose any physical or mental health need as part of their application. This disclosure will not prejudice any decision regarding the application; on the contrary, it is used to establish how best the College can respond to the individual need and what reasonable adjustments can be made.

3.2 In cases where a complex or significant physical or mental health condition is disclosed, it may be appropriate that **further information is sought from health professionals supporting a student** to be able to decide upon the most appropriate supportive measures.

3.3 In addition, a transition meeting may be called to discuss and agree details of the support available, the appropriate programme to be studied and any reasonable adjustments that the College can commit to making.

3.4 At enrolment students will be given a further opportunity to disclose a physical or mental health need through the completion of a SEND form and the offer of a supportive meeting with the Director of SEND.

3.4 In some cases, the College will require formal medical paperwork to be provided and students will be allocated one-to-one support with the Director of SEND / Assistant Principal Student Services/Directors of Student Progress as appropriate.

3.5 Any student who joins the College with agreed support will have this reviewed at least four times per academic year by the Director of SEND / Assistant Principal Student Services/Directors of Student Progress as appropriate and consent will be sought to share with subject teachers, and the Progress Tutor, the key relevant information so that they can best make adjustments. Without this consent, we are unable to commit to providing reasonable adjustments in all aspects of College activities.

#### 4. Students Studying at Connell Co-op College:

4.1 If a student **does not disclose a pre-existing physical or mental health condition on application**, then it is **unlikely that s/he will receive support or reasonable adjustment** until the condition becomes clear to a College member of staff.

4.2 A student's Fitness to Study may be brought into questions as a result of a wide ranges of circumstances. These include, but are not limited to:

- a) Poor attendance. All students must be at benchmark of 90%.
- b) Serious concerns about the student emerge from a third party (e.g. friend, multi-agency partner, parent) which indicates that there is a need to address Fitness to Study)
- c) A student has told a member of the College's staff that they have a problem and/or has provided information which indicates that there is a need to address their Fitness to Study
- d) A student has not engaged with study for a period of time causing concern from subject teachers and/or progress tutor
- e) The student's disposition is such that it indicates there may be a need to address an underlying mental health issue. For example, if a student has demonstrated mood swings or unusual behaviour, an inability to attend lessons, shown signs of depression, become withdrawn/aggressive/distressed/irritable, or is becoming intimidating to others
- f) Behaviour, otherwise dealt with as a disciplinary matter, which is considered may be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem
- g) The student's academic performance, physical behaviour or demeanour is not acceptable and this is thought to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health problem

4.3 Early disclosure of issues is therefore vital to allow staff to assess how best to accommodate students and also to avoid exacerbating the issue through a lack of knowledge on the part of their subject teachers, Wellbeing Team and Progress Tutor.

4.4 The College will always seek to provide appropriate support to any student with ill health, whether the condition was pre-existing or commences during study at the College.

4.5 Students are made aware of the range of student services available at the College, both at induction and as part of the on-going Tutorial Programme.

4.6 All members of staff at the College have a duty of care to students and can be approached with any concern, however small.

4.7 The individual member of staff consulted will seek consent from the student to share the key relevant information with the Wellbeing Team, subject teachers and the progress tutor so that they can best make adjustments. In **exceptional circumstances, where there is a safeguarding concern, confidentiality may need to be broken** without the student's consent. In these circumstances the student will always be informed.

4.8 If the nature of the condition requires support or reasonable adjustment is required to a student's studies, Director of Student Progress, or Director of SEND will meet with and assess the student.

4.9 This meeting will lead to supportive measures being agreed and other colleagues in College, such as the Wellbeing Team, becoming involved in providing support and setting targets.

4.10 Consent will always be sought from the student to involve parents and carers, if applicable, in these decisions; however in certain extreme cases confidentiality will need to be respected if requested by the student.

4.11 The supportive measures may also involve referral to outside agencies, such as CAMHS or the student's GP. This will particularly apply where the health condition causes significant concern, since the expertise and capacity of the College in providing medical support is finite and the responsibility for medical support lies with the external services.

4.12 In crisis situations, where there are immediate and grave concerns for a student's health or well-being, colleagues will judge how best to provide first aid and whether emergency services should be called. In these situations, and if applicable, colleagues will endeavour to contact parents and carers as soon as possible.

## 5. Limits to Support

5.1 Whether medical conditions are raised before a student joins, or whilst at the College, reasonable limits to the support that can be offered will be communicated to the student and the parent/carer where applicable. These include both the flexibility the College can offer regarding academic progress (attendance, punctuality and meeting assessment expectations) and the support (type, location and frequency) required for a student to remain at College.

5.2 Clearly it is difficult to set non-negotiable limits for academic progression and support and judicious professional judgement will be required in each case. Furthermore, physical and mental health conditions may be temporary or permanent, short or long term, stable or prone to remission.

5.3 As a guide, the following minimum expectations should be set:

- **Academic Progress**

Each case should to be considered on its merits, but it is clear that **a minimum level of attendance needs to be maintained** that will allow a student to realistically achieve. Academic success depends on engagement in classroom activity, so **excessively long periods of complete absence or very poor attendance will make a student's studies untenable.**

With regards to coursework and homework, **if students fall significantly behind with their deadlines, despite extensions being offered, then there comes a point at which catching up is not viable.** The specific expectations regarding attendance and assessment will be set in each case depending on the circumstances.

- **Support**

It is reasonable for teaching colleagues, on a short-term temporary basis, to liaise with students via email and online platforms. This cannot continue long-term. Connell Co-op College is not a distance-learning College and does not have the resources or expertise to provide distance-learning services.

The Wellbeing Team, Director of SEND, Progress Tutors and Directors of Student Progress can all provide pastoral support as appropriate within certain parameters. Referrals to external services and maintained liaison with those services will be implemented where appropriate.

The College **cannot provide, complex medical or psychiatric support**. This would be usually sought externally through the GP or other services. We will always seek to support students by making referrals to appropriate services or to our in-house counsellor. However, pastoral support is finite and needs to be available for all students.

## **6. Fitness to Study**

6.1 The College is committed to enabling all students to complete their studies successfully and achieve their potential. There are occasions, however, when physical or mental health issues are so complex or so significant that this is not possible. Clearly **each student needs to be considered on a case by case basis and the College needs to ensure it is fully aware of all the medical evidence and the wishes of the student and the parents or carers, if applicable.**

6.2 Ideally, a clear consensus would always emerge regarding the best way to progress, however, this will not always be the case. There will be occasions where the College believes that it has exhausted the support options available, it has made reasonable adjustments in all aspects of College life, but the student is unable to maintain his/her fitness to study. These situations impact negatively both on the student, since their welfare is at risk, and on the College, since there is an excessive demand on resources.

6.3 For the student, who has struggled to maintain their academic progress beyond expectations and for whom trying to maintain the structure of College life has been a positive factor in their rehabilitation, there comes a time at which endeavouring to catch up after a lengthy absence with deadlines long gone is actually **more stressful** and therefore **more of a negative impact on their health than withdrawing from studies.**

6.4 The time required to work with individual students to complete missed work, liaising remotely via email and online platforms for absent students and arranging meetings and support for students is a finite resource and cannot unreasonably impact on the learning of other students at the College.

6.5 If the College reaches a decision, after consultation with the student, parents / carers (if applicable) and medical professionals, that a student should withdraw then this will be actioned. In these situations, the College would always assure students and their parents or carers that the best interests of the individual student and their welfare are at the centre of decisions.

6.6 Where there is no consensus that withdrawal is the most appropriate outcome, then the stages below will be followed:

- **Stage 1**

- Director of Student Progress will feedback on any legitimate FTS cases that have been referred to them that week in the weekly Safeguarding meeting.
- Safeguarding team will decide 3 appropriate targets for the students in the categories:
  - (1) Attendance
  - (2) Academic performance
  - (3) Evidence required. (see **Appendix 1**)A final fourth target in all cases will be: 'You are required to attend a review meeting every 10 days with a suitable professional, as specified by your initial point of contact (*insert name*), and this regular review will continue until you have met your initial targets for a continuous half term (30 working day) period.'
- Safeguarding team will select and notify a suitable **point of contact/support** for the student and email over the aforementioned targets.
- Point of contact will phone parents to inform them and then arrange a meeting with the student (and parents if they request this).
- Point of contact will then send a stage 1 letter home outlining concerns and providing the targets.
- The situation is reviewed 10 working days later, and where the targets are not met, progression to stage 2 occurs. Where the targets are met they are reviewed twice more after each 10 day window.
- If after 3 reviews all targets have been met satisfactorily then the case is a dormant FTS concern, unless issues begin to occur again in the future, at which point, stage 2 will occur.
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- **Stage 2**

A Stage 2 letter is sent home firmly outlining concerns and resetting targets. Parents will be asked to attend a Stage 2 meeting, as above the situation is reviewed 10 working days later.

- **Stage 3**

A case conference (Wellbeing Team, individual teachers and Directors of Faculty and anybody else as appropriate) reviews the situation and provides guidance to the Assistant Principal Student Services, who will adjudicate on the feasibility of the student's continued place at college. The student and parents/carers will then be notified of the decision. The College will always provide advice and guidance on alternative progression routes at this stage.

- **Appeals**

Students/Parents/Carers will have the opportunity to appeal against the decision. In order to make an appeal they must notify the College in writing within one working week of the case conference decision. Appeals should be directed to Chris Butterfield, PA to the Principal. A meeting will be arranged with the Principal who will make the final decision regarding the student's position in College.

Note: It is crucial to recognise that, on occasions, the College is advised by medical specialists, that it is unsafe for students to attend. This advice will always supersede the



College Fitness to Study Procedure and the student will not be able to attend until we are notified of their fitness to do so by the relevant authority.

## 7. Restarting at Connell Co-op College

7.1 In certain situations it may be appropriate to offer a possible restart at College. **Students can only ever restart once.** They must restart their studies in the following academic year and before they turn 19. (due to ESFA funding).

7.2 Where the student withdraws from the college of their own accord, has evidence (see appendix 1) that they have put in place robust medical support outside of College and has time before the restart to respond to this support (typically 6 months), then the restart has a good opportunity of success.

7.3 Where there is no clear evidence (see appendix 1) to demonstrate commitment to following prescribed medical support or professional mental health support and there is less time to respond to this support, then the restart is much less likely to be successful. Therefore, the College is less likely to allow a restart where a student was required to leave at Stage 3 (section 6).

7.4 Where the College offers the opportunity of a restart, the onus is on the student and parents or carers, if applicable, to ensure to the best of their knowledge that they are recovered sufficiently for the restart to be successful.

7.5 When the student withdraws from studies, **guidance will be provided, both on the support that may be appropriate to ensure fitness to study on return, and importantly on what evidence will be expected at enrolment or re-enrolment to evidence this.** Students will be added to the restart list. In this case, the student will be offered ongoing support, will be monitored closely and if necessary Fitness to Study Stage 1 will be issued.

7.6 In July of each year the Assistant Principal Student Progression will write to all parents or carers, if applicable, of students on the restart list confirming the date and time of re-enrolment and specifying the medical documentation required. The letter will also request formal written confirmation that the student still intends to restart.

### RESPONSIBILITY

<b>Responsible Staff</b>	Jane Hopcroft / Alicia Grady / Rhian Brady
<b>Policy administrator</b>	Christine Butterfield.
<b>Approving body</b>	Governors
<b>Review date</b>	November 2020
<i>All policies are available to stakeholders either on the College website or upon request from the College Office.</i>	

## **Appendix 1**

### Fitness

- GP note/s on letter headed paper that is signed and dated.
- Counsellor appointment cards.
- Medical records/appointments.
- Prescriptions.
- Any other relevant documents.

### Wellbeing

- Gym membership
- Volunteering which has been referenced.
- Part time work – referenced.
- Work completed.
- College work completed and evidenced.
- Re - entry assessments decided and allocated by teachers if appropriate.
- Any other relevant information.

Other than in exceptional circumstances we will not accept parental accounts as the sole source of evidence. However It Is useful in addition to official documents.