



Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art & Design

Royal College of Art

Support to Study Policy

(previously Cause for Concern
including Fitness to Study Policy)

Version	1.1 RCA Support to Study Policy (current) Previous versions: 1.0 Cause for Concern Policy and Procedures (2018)
Date	10.01.24
Reviewed	No less frequently than every 3 years.
Approved by	SMT, Senate
Previous versions	RCA Cause for Concern Policy and Procedures including Fitness to Study (2018)
Target audience	All students, All staff
Cascaded to	PSG, ASC, Student's Union, individual academic Colleagues, DPO
Policy Lead	Shaalinie Sivalingham
Owner	Deputy Head of Student Experience
Department	Student Experience

RCA Support to Study Policy (previously Cause for Concern including Fitness to Study Policy)

[General statement on anti-discrimination](#)

Related policies and guidelines

[Student Charter](#)

[Disability Policy](#)

[Misconduct Policy](#)

[Extenuating Circumstances Policy](#)

[Leave of Absence Policy](#)

[Student Experience Advice and Wellbeing Confidentiality Policy](#)

[Supporting Students Handbook](#)

[Suicide Prevention Strategy](#)

1. Purpose

The Royal College of Art is committed to the provision of a welcoming and safe environment for our community. The College recognises the importance of our students' health and wellbeing in relation to academic performance, progression, and engagement with the student experience. The Support to Study policy and procedures are used when a student's health, wellbeing, or behaviours are having a detrimental impact on their studies, their ability to live independently and safely, or is impacting the health, safety, wellbeing, or academic progress of others in the College community. The process is managed by the Student Support Advice and Wellbeing team.

The procedures in the policy consider precautionary action based on the College's responsibility to students and others in its community and sets out an escalation of response to student behaviours causing concern. It is designed to help where a student appears to be in difficulty and, for whatever reason, also appears unable to address these difficulties on their own. It is not intended for situations, however complex, where the student is successfully working to resolve and manage their difficulties. The aim is to provide an escalation in response appropriate to the identified concerns and risks.

There is a potential overlap between this policy and other College policies. The College reserves the right to suspend action under this policy and procedure if it considers that the matter would more appropriately be dealt with under another policy and/or procedure.

The Support to Study process is not a disciplinary procedure. The aim, where possible, is to support students in progressing and remaining on their programme with the appropriate levels of intervention to ensure their continued wellbeing and the wellbeing of others in the College community. It is recognised, however, in certain cases, this may not be possible. Some students may need to take a break from their studies, delay their assessments or, in more serious cases, withdraw from the College, when considered to be in their best interests.

Academic and Technical Services staff members will most likely identify that a student is experiencing difficulties and will be offered training, support and advice from the Student Support Advice and Wellbeing team to enable management of the initial situation. Before invoking this policy and its procedures, the student's academic team led by the Head of Programme should ensure that all relevant support mechanisms at the Royal College of Art have been considered and made available to the student, for example, but not limited to:

- Meetings with tutors and Student Support Advisers
- Referrals to the counselling service
- Access to disability advice and services such as Academic Skills and English for Academic Purposes

Staff are also advised to refer to Supporting Students' Mental Health guidelines should they interact with a student who is vulnerable or at risk.

Resources for staff to support them in their pastoral role are available on the HR training Hub in section 4, covering online and in-person workshops. Current workshops include Supporting Students, Mental Health Awareness and Becoming Disability Aware. Staff can also access the College's Employee Assistance Programme (currently CiC) for emotional support.

The College, through its partnership with [Spectrum Life](#), provides all students with access to a 24/7 Student Assistance Programme for in-the moment emotional support through clinician led decision making in times of crisis.

The College has also commissioned Imperial College Health Centre to provide all our students with GP registration if it is clinically appropriate. The Health Centre

team offers the College a route to discuss student concerns with a clinical team, including mental health experts.

This policy covers all students enrolled at the College, including shared programmes run in partnership with other Higher Education providers. It applies to any activity the student engages as part of a programme of study, including lectures, seminars, exams, participation in technical workshops, public exhibitions, field trips or other activities that give justifiable cause for concern. For research students, it also includes engaging with supervision and undertaking research.

There are 3 incremental levels of the policy and procedure, however action can be initiated at any stage, depending on the situation.

- Level 1: Initial or Emerging Concerns;
- Level 2: Continuing or Moderate Concerns;
- Level 3: Enduring and Persistent Concerns related to the suspected risk to a student's health, safety and wellbeing and the impact of their behaviour on others.

Students may access independent advice and support from Royal College of Art Student's Union (RCASU) throughout their engagement with the Support to Study procedures. They can be contacted at su-support@rca.ac.uk

1. Equity and Inclusion

The College will consider relevant legislation, for example the Equality Act 2010, the Mental Health Act 2007, the Mental Capacity Act 2005, the Human Rights Act 1998 and UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 when making decisions under this policy.

Equality and Diversity: This policy and the Student Disciplinary Procedure will operate within the context of the RCA Equality and Diversity Policy. The College's general statement on anti-discrimination can be viewed [here](#):

2. Confidentiality & Data Sharing

Under the Support to Study procedure, the College treats student data with confidentiality and in line with the Student Experience Confidentiality and Sharing Policy. This policy provides that information is used appropriately with

considerations for student confidentiality whilst ensuring the College duties are upheld in providing support to students

When handling student personal data, the College complies with current data protection legislation, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Information may be shared with external agencies, emergency contacts and trusted contacts in emergencies and exceptional circumstances.

The College collects emergency and trusted contact details from new and continuing students via an annual registration process to ensure the College has accurate and current personal details for an emergency contact.

The College will consider notifying the student's emergency or trusted contact in an emergency situation. An emergency includes: preventing serious physical harm, preventing loss of human life, responding to an emergency and safeguarding vulnerable people.

A trusted contact is similar to an emergency contact and can be the same person. Students engaged with our Counselling Service or the Mental Health Coordinator are asked to provide a trusted contact, giving consent for the College to liaise with a family member, friend or carer where concerns about the student's health and wellbeing could require urgent action to establish a support network.

3. Procedure for Considering Support to Study

When a concern about a student's health, safety or wellbeing is raised, a concerned staff member, student or a third party should liaise with the Student Advice and Wellbeing team. A student or prospective student may raise a concern about their own requirement for support to study under the policy.

This policy and its procedures advocate for early intervention and proactive collaboration with staff, students and third parties. Evidence points to early intervention and students accessing the support they need at the earliest point possible as having the most positive outcomes in relation to remaining on the programme and successfully completing studies.

The College has introduced a centralised student of concern reporting tool through the Report and Support platform. The reporting tool aims to provide staff with one location to pass on urgent or emerging welfare concerns for RCA students.

Senior Student Support Advice and Wellbeing team members receive the information submitted through the Report and Support portal. Action is initiated within two working days. As we begin to consolidate a whole-institution approach to mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention, the reporting tool is just one component in a wider movement to ensure that, as a community we are curious, open and use our skills to identify students who may not be thriving to intervene compassionately. A support to study process can be initiated through the Report and Support portal or by sharing concerns by email: student-support@rca.ac.uk

The policy and procedure may apply to a wide range of situations, including but not limited to:

- Students with complex circumstances relating to their mental health, physical health, wellbeing or disability support needs.
- Students who are not attending, not submitting work and repeatedly not responding to College contact for reasons thought to be connected to their mental health, physical health, wellbeing or disability support needs.
- Students who regularly submit extenuating circumstances claims, for example more than once a term, because of ongoing mental health, physical health or wellbeing concerns.
- Students who pose a risk to themselves or others, or whose health, demeanour or behaviour adversely affects the teaching, learning and/or experience of others.
- Students with support needs that fall outside the scope of the support and other services that the College can reasonably be expected to provide directly or indirectly.
- Students unable or unwilling to cooperate in managing their health or wellbeing.
- Offer holders with pre-existing health conditions who require enhanced support to enable their transition to the College.

4. Principles

- The College will seek to ensure that reasonable adjustments to the Support to Study policy and procedure is available to enable all students to engage fully and positively with the process.
- This policy and procedure advocate for early intervention and collaboration between students, staff, and third parties, if relevant, to ensure a consistent approach.
- There is an expectation that college community members will look out for others and respond to behaviours that raise concerns, namely, to notice, check, and share those concerns to ensure a safe, supportive, and positive environment for all.
- The College expects its students to be able to live and work with others and to conduct themselves in ways which do not have an adverse impact on other members of the community, as described in the Student Charter
- 'The balance of probability'—the civil standard of proof—is the standard of proof that the College will use for its Support to Study procedures. The balance of probability standard means that a Support to Study Panel is satisfied an event happened if, reviewing the evidence, the event's occurrence was more likely than not.
- Throughout the procedure, students may be accompanied by a friend, family member or an RCASU representative of their choosing. We are unable to permit representation by a lawyer acting in a professional capacity. This person will normally be another student, an RCASU student representative or a friend from outside the College.
- The College would need to see written consent for another person to represent a student (i.e. speak on their behalf) in a meeting or in any part of the Support to Study procedure.
- The policy and procedure also allow for conducting Return to Study meetings for students who have taken a break from studying because of their mental health or wellbeing.
- Where a student is unable or unwilling to participate in this procedure, the College will continue with the process where it is deemed necessary, particularly if risk involves the student, other students or staff.
- In most cases, students will continue their studies while the matter is assessed; however, where the College considers it appropriate, the case may be referred to the Academic Registrar, Vice Chancellor or nominee for consideration of a temporary suspension of studies or termination of studies.
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5. Stages

Level 1: Initial or Emerging Concerns

These are typically low-level risks that do not warrant immediate or specialist support but where the concerns raised are sufficient to warrant further attention and where the initial checking does not resolve the perceived difficulties.

A concern of this nature would require the student to meet with their academic supervisors or personal tutor, Head of Programme or Head of Doctoral Programmes in the case of a PGR student and a member of the Student Support Team for an informal review.

The student will be notified by email with at least three working days' notice that the meeting is being called under Level 1 of this policy. The purpose of the discussion is intended to explore the concerns raised and check out the welfare and circumstances of the student from a holistic perspective. It should be highlighted that the emphasis is on being open about the concerns for the student's welfare and the intention to explore potential solutions. Possible outcomes from this meeting may include one or more of the following:

- No further action
- Providing the student with information, advice or guidance to internal support services
- Agreeing to an action plan and subsequent review meetings. An action plan will be shared with the student and relevant staff members.
- Creating an Inclusion Plan to ensure reasonable adjustments are available
- Referral to specialist support agencies or statutory bodies
- A recommendation and/or support to transfer to another programme at the RCA
- Agreeing to a short-term leave of absence
- Requesting that the student moderate their behaviour and/or address the raised concerns, including any negative impact experienced by others.

If the student responds positively to this intervention, no further action would be required at that time. If the student cannot engage with the process due to extenuating circumstances, fails to respond constructively or refuses to engage with the process, escalation to Level 2 could be required.

To organise a meeting, the student will be contacted by email, usually the College email address. Normally, at least three working days' notice will be given for any meeting.

Any action agreed by the academic staff member and the Student Support Advice and Wellbeing Team will be confirmed in writing to the student following the meeting, usually within 5 working days.

Level 2: Continuing or Moderate Concerns

Where there are continuing or moderate concerns about a student's health and wellbeing that have not been resolved at Stage 1 or if the case is too serious to be handled informally, Level 2 of the policy may be initiated. The concerns are considered sufficiently serious and usually require a timely response from one or more services at the College or external support services. The student will be notified of the meeting by email with at least three working days' notice.

The purpose of the meeting is to require the student to meet with the Panel for a formal review to understand the student's perception of the issues that have been identified, including the impact their ill health and/or behaviour is having upon them and/or the College community. Minutes of the meeting will be kept and shared with the student and panel members.

Core members of the Panel will comprise of:

- The Head or Deputy Head of Student Experience or nominee chairing the proceedings
- The Head of Programme or Head of Doctoral Programmes or nominee
- The Mental Health Co-ordinator or nominee
- Optional members of the Panel may be invited from the Registry, Academic Development Office, Technical Services, the Research Office

The student should be informed of the circumstances or behaviours and the risks perceived by the College that are an issue of concern that has led to invoking the Support to Study procedures. The student's views should be listened to carefully and considered. There should be the opportunity to explore with the student any explanations for their behaviour that have caused concern.

Without the student present, the panel will aim to make a unanimous decision regarding appropriate action. If unanimous agreement is not possible, in the case of a majority decision—the chair will cast the deciding vote.

Possible outcomes may include:

- No further action
- A review of the initial meeting that took place at Stage 1, including the agreed actions, to ascertain what happened or what now needs to happen
- Formalising access to reasonable adjustments via an Inclusion Plan to the student's academic progress
- An agreement with the student to engage in support mechanisms to aid their wellbeing. This may include a referral to our internal counselling service, regular appointments with a Student Adviser, Mental Health Coordinator, Deputy Head of Student Experience, or external agencies/organisations, such as the student's GP, or Community Mental Health Teams.
- An agreement to adhere to a behaviour agreement
- An agreement to establish liaison with a family member or trusted contact
- A recommendation that the student defer their assessment
- A recommendation that the student take a Leave of Absence. Any such recommendation will take due regard to the impact on student visa holders, and the Panel will if necessary, seek further advice about this before confirming the recommendation.
- A recommendation that the student withdraws from their studies, agreed by the student or enforced by the College in line with College Ordinances. The decision to terminate a student's studies rests with the Vice Chancellor as set out in the College Ordinances. The Registrar or Chief Operating Officer will recommend suitable action to the Vice Chancellor to approve
- A recommendation that the case is referred to the next level of the procedure.

The outcome of the Panel meeting will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days.

Level 3: Severe and /or Enduring Concerns

These concerns may require immediate or emergency intervention. A concern of this nature would require the student to meet with the Support to Study Panel for a formal review.

The Support to Study Panel will comprise of:

- The Head or Deputy Head of Student Experience or nominee chairing the proceedings
- The Dean of the Student's Academic Department or equivalent nominee
- A member of the Registry Team
- A nominated staff member from the Student Support Team
- Student Union representative

The student will ordinarily be given at least five working days' notice. The student will be given the documents shown to the Panel. The student may submit additional documentation to the Panel at least two working days before the meeting. The Panel can invite others to attend to provide information or witness proceedings. A third party, chosen by the student, will be permitted to submit a supporting statement or evidence on their behalf.

The student should be informed of the circumstances or behaviours and the risks perceived by the College that are an issue of concern that has led to invoking the Support to Study procedures. The student's views should be listened to carefully and considered. There should be the opportunity to explore with the student any explanations for their behaviour that have caused concern.

Without the student present, the panel will aim to make a unanimous decision regarding appropriate action. If unanimous agreement is not possible, in the case of a majority decision—the chair casting the deciding vote. Minutes will be kept of the meeting and shared with the student and Panel members.

Possible outcomes may include:

- An agreement with the student to engage in support mechanisms to aid their wellbeing. This may include regular appointments with a Student Support Adviser, Mental Health Coordinator, Deputy Head of Student Experience, or external agencies/organisations such as the student's GP, or Community Mental Health Teams
- An agreement to adhere to a behaviour agreement
- An agreement to establish liaison with a family member or trusted contact
- A recommendation that the student defer their assessment
- A recommendation that the student take a Leave of Absence. Any such recommendation will take due regard to the impact on student visa holders, and the Panel will if necessary, seek further advice about this before confirming the recommendation.
- A recommendation that the student withdraws from their studies, agreed by the student or enforced by the College in line with College Ordinances. The decision to terminate a student's studies rests with the Vice Chancellor as set out in the College Ordinances. The Registrar or Chief Operating Officer will recommend suitable action to the Vice Chancellor to approve.

The outcome of the Panel meeting will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days and include information relating to an appeals process.

6. Temporary suspension of studies and temporary precautionary action

These will be implemented if the College considers an urgent actual or potential risk to any individuals in the College community arising from the alleged behaviour causing concern. The decision to temporarily suspend a student from their studies rests with the Registrar. The Head or Deputy Head of Student Experience will recommend suitable action to the Registrar or nominee to approve. The Academic Registrar, in assessing the risk to the student or to the College, can impose an immediate, temporary exclusion for a fixed period. This action would ordinarily be taken if:

- The student poses a serious risk to their own health, safety or wellbeing or to that of other students or staff, and/or;
- There is a risk to College property
- There is a risk to the overall reputation of the College

Any exclusion would normally be reviewed every 2 weeks in term time, and the review may include a recommendation to convene a Support to Study Panel.

Measures can include but are not limited to:

- Exclusion from all or part of College premises or use of facilities (including RCASU activities, facilities and premises)

The student will be notified by email and letter to the addresses registered with the College within two working days of any decision to suspend their studies. Accounts and card access will be suspended immediately following the decision. In such cases, key staff, including security, technical services, and academic staff, will be notified of the suspension.

Any temporary precautionary action does not mean that final conclusions have been drawn or a decision has been reached regarding the student's position at the RCA. Any decision to suspend will take due regard of the potential impact on Student Visa holders, and if necessary, seek further advice before confirming the suspension.

A student who is suspended from their studies may ask the Head or Deputy Head of Student Experience for temporary permission to attend the campus; for example, to

attend a counselling session or an exam. Such permission must be requested in advance and in writing. In considering requests for temporary permission to attend the College, the Head or Deputy Head of Student Experience may consult with those affected by the decision and undertake suitable risk assessments.

A suspended student may ask the Head or Deputy Head of Student Experience to review the suspension based on new medical evidence. Any such request must be made in writing and normally not made more frequently than once a month.

8. Case conferences

At any stage of the process, the Head or Deputy Head of Student Experience can call a case conference after consulting with relevant members of staff with responsibility for the student's welfare.

The case conference may comprise any individuals involved in the case, or who may need to be involved, to ensure a complete picture of the situation as possible is available. Depending upon the nature of the student's circumstances, they may be invited to make a written submission, including independent evidence, for consideration. Minutes of these meetings will be taken and shared with those involved.

The case conference will determine whether the student's ability to study is impaired and any actions to be taken. Such actions may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Reasonable adjustments being put in place for the student to engage with teaching and undertake assessments;
- An action plan setting out how the matter will be managed and any requirements to be placed on the student, along with details of relevant support services. A copy of this plan will be provided to the student and shared with relevant staff members
- Referral to any stage of the Support to Study procedure
- The student defers their assessments
- Temporary precautionary action including temporary suspension from studies
- A Leave of Absence agreed by the student or enforced by the College

9. Appeals

Students reserve the right to appeal a decision made at Level 3 of this policy. This will be conducted through the Support to Study Appeal Panel. The grounds on which an appeal can be made are:

- A significant procedural flaw or irregularity that compromised the fairness of the process.
- New material evidence which must be supported by an explanation of why it is being submitted at this late stage.
- An outcome being unreasonable or disproportionate.

A student who wishes to appeal against the final decision must put this in writing to the Support to Study Appeal Panel, stating their ground(s) of appeal, within ten working days of the decision being communicated to them. They must detail the nature of their appeal and submit any applicable information with supporting evidence. The Appeal Panel will acknowledge the appeal within seven working days. The Appeal will be considered based on the written papers unless it would assist the Panel's consideration or otherwise be in the interest of fairness to invite the student to attend an appeal meeting.

A third party chosen by the student, will be permitted to submit a supporting statement or evidence on their behalf.

The Appeal Panel will comprise of:

At least one Senior Academic (Assistant Dean or Dean) as Chair,

- A Senior Professional Service staff member unconnected to the case to date
- The Registrar
- An RCASU representative

It will be ensured that staff members who form the Appeal Panel are unconnected to the case and not involved in previous panel meetings. The panel will still proceed if the Students' Union chooses not to participate. All staff on panels are required to have completed the College's Unconscious Bias and Race Equity training modules situated on Moodle.

After considering the appeal, the Appeal Panel may:

- Affirm, set aside or vary any decision reached
- Refer the matter, or any part of it, back to the Stage 3 Panel for further consideration
- Dismiss the appeal for any of the following reasons:
- It is received after the deadline without a reasonable explanation why it could not be submitted on time

- It does not clearly state the grounds on which the appeal is being made
- It does not disclose any reasonable grounds for appealing the decision;
- It is entirely without merit
- It is vexatious or repetitious.

The decision agreed by the Appeal Panel will be confirmed in writing to the student following the meeting, generally within five working days.

If the student is not satisfied having completed the College's internal appeals policy and procedure, they will be entitled to request a review of the case under the rules of the scheme of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The College will issue a Completion of Policy and Procedures letter following the outcome of the appeal.

10. Return to Study

The College will only permit a student to return to study if it is satisfied it is appropriate for them to re-engage in studies. For example, if, after receiving medical advice, the College is confident that the student can study and comply with any conditions imposed on their return.

The Academic Registrar will determine whether to permit the student to return to study. In reaching their decision, they will consult with the Head or the Deputy Head of Student Experience and may consult with relevant programme staff, including staff previously involved in the process, and/or external professionals.

The Deputy Head of Student Experience, in consultation with staff holding clinical training, will request independent confirmation of the student's suitability to resume their studies. The evidence from a suitably qualified medical practitioner will form the basis of the evidence required covering how the student will manage the demands of studying, advice relating to treatment plans, previous and potential future, triggers for relapse or causes for concern.

Conditions may be applied to students returning to study, these may be:

- Stipulating the nature and behaviours of students' conduct, including any support they must seek
- Evidence of ongoing engagement with treatment

The Deputy Head of Student Experience, in dialogue with the Disability Adviser, Mental Health Coordinator, and other relevant staff responsible for the student's welfare, will consider any support or reasonable adjustments that should be implemented.

The student will be notified of what would be required to reconsider their return to study and the date of the next point at which they could potentially return to their studies.

When a student returns to their programme of study, regular review meetings must be organised for the student. The Student Support Advice and Wellbeing Team will manage and conduct these. It is recommended that no less than two meetings per term be continued until the College is satisfied with the student's longer term appropriateness studying at the RCA.

The College will work with the student to ensure that, if appropriate, a suitable Inclusion Plan is agreed and implemented.

Failure to comply with any conditions may give rise to further concerns regarding the appropriateness of the student remaining in study. It may lead to further consideration and action under these procedures.

If a student is unable to return or is prevented from doing so by the School, a further Leave of Absence may be agreed upon. No more than two interruptions will be permitted per programme of study for taught graduate students, with an exception to this stipulation agreed on discretionary grounds, with relevant supporting evidence, approved by the Academic Board of Concessions and Discipline.

PhD students on a Leave of Absence will only be permitted to enrol in accordance with the regulations for Research Degrees.

Appendices

Appendix A [Training opportunities](#)

Appendix B [Spectrum Life](#)

Appendix C Supporting Student's Mental Health and those at Risk guidelines

Appendix D [Report and Support](#)

Appendix E

Medical Evidence: [Return to Studies Form](#)