



RCSI

Fitness to Study Policy

RCSI DEVELOPING HEALTHCARE LEADERS WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE WORLDWIDE

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1. Introduction

RCSI is committed to supporting our students and assisting them to participate fully and safely in their chosen professional healthcare training programme. The University accepts its duty of care towards all students to facilitate them in achieving their academic, clinical and professional goals. This includes providing the necessary supports, resources and opportunities to demonstrate competence and to enable students to effectively manage their personal well-being and maintain the required professional standards linked to their status as healthcare professionals in training.

RCSI acknowledges its equal duty of care to RCSI staff, students, the public and, in particular, the patients and clients RCSI students will come in contact with as part of their training.

For the vast majority of students, progression to graduation is relatively uneventful. Sometimes, this is not the case and some students require additional support and assistance. In certain circumstances, students may experience significant difficulties and/or distress in the course of their studies requiring a formalised co-ordinated response to their needs.

Occasionally, despite additional support, the progression of an individual student is so adversely affected as to make continuation impossible. This may be because it is detrimental to the individual; presents a risk to their own or others' safety; or because it is likely to interfere unreasonably with the learning, working or living experiences of others.

These Fitness to Study (FTS) regulations are expressly intended to be supportive of individual students who may be incapable of meeting the core academic, clinical and/or professional practice requirements of their programme, including clinical placements, due to personal circumstances, and having been provided with reasonable opportunity to do so.

2. Fitness to Study

A student is deemed 'fit to study' if they are progressively developing the necessary skills, knowledge, behaviour and character, and maintaining the necessary personal health and well-being to allow them to complete their chosen programme safely and effectively. Fitness to study is more than the ability of a student to pass examinations and progress academically, clinically and professionally in terms of their chosen programme of training. It includes also a student's fitness to participate and to function effectively in University life. This means being able to function independently, competently and safely within the academic,



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residential, community, clinical and professional contexts of their programme of training, including placements, and not causing undue disruption to the learning, working or living experience of others.

This Fitness to Study policy sits under the umbrella of the RCSI Codes of Conduct and should be viewed in conjunction with all other student policies and procedures.

Fitness to Study regulations are needed to ensure that, in addition to having achieved the required academic and clinical standards to undertake a programme that permits graduates to practice in a profession, students also:

- i. Have the capacity to develop and demonstrate the core competencies of their programme of study;
- ii. Conduct and behave themselves so as not to harm their patients/clients or put their patients/clients at risk;
- iii. Conduct and behave themselves so as not to harm their fellow students or RCSI staff or put fellow students or RCSI staff at risk;
- iv. Conduct and behave themselves in a manner likely not to harm the reputation of their profession;
- v. Be free from any health problems that would prevent them from being able to pursue their studies safely and practice their profession competently.

3. Core Competencies

Core competencies are developed progressively and are specific to each RCSI educational programme. Core competencies include academic, clinical and professional competencies and behaviours associated with the specific programme of professional healthcare training being pursued. At all times, students are expected to demonstrate the competencies and behaviours appropriate to their stage of study and meet associated programme requirements. A failure to demonstrate these core competencies and meet requirements safely and effectively or where there are reasonable grounds to assume a student may be unable to do so may give rise to a fitness to study concern.

4. Purpose

These regulations are in place to:

- 4.1.** identify and support students whose progression, behaviour, well-being or welfare are of concern to themselves or others to such an extent as to give rise to concerns as to their fitness to continue in study or on clinical placement;

AND



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4.2. to ensure appropriate supports and procedures are put in place to enable and assist students to remain on the programme or, where advisable, to take a voluntary leave of absence;

OR

4.3. to determine if and how a student is to be required to take an involuntary leave of absence;

OR

4.4. in exceptional cases to determine if a student is to be permanently withdrawn from their programme.

5. Scope of Policy

These regulations apply to all circumstances where a Fitness to Study concern arises in relation to a student who is formally notified of this concern in accordance with the procedures identified.

6. Notification of Fitness to Study Concerns

A note of concern in relation to a student's fitness to study would **not** be raised for isolated or minor incidents. In such circumstances, a student can be supported locally and/or should be referred to the CoMPPAS unit for personal and academic support or to Registry Services for the appropriate regulatory/disciplinary process.

A note of concern in relation to a student's fitness to study might be notified by the student themselves or an appropriate third party e.g. member of faculty or other staff. Examples can include:

- Students already in receipt of University support services where a fitness to study concern persists or is serious or is the result of a recent deterioration.
- Students exhibiting concerning behaviour that has been attributed to, or could possibly be attributed to an underlying known physical and/or mental health difficulty.
- Students whose attendance, academic/clinical or professional competence or general progression are falling short for an unknown reason that needs to be determined.

Indicators giving rise to concerns could include the following:

- Deterioration in well-being, physical appearance, social withdrawal, mood, physical health or welfare.
- Unexplained deterioration in academic and/or clinical performance.
- Unusual or concerning behaviour which is out of character.
- Behaviour putting themselves or anyone else at risk or which is distressing to others; or behaviour that is at risk of negatively affecting the experience of fellow students or staff.
- While having the personal right to do so, a student has against medical advice unilaterally withdrawn from, or fails or refuses to engage with, prescribed or recommended treatment, including medication,



counselling and/or psychiatric treatment, and where withdrawal or non-engagement gives rise to a concern for their safety or well-being or that of others.

- A student failing to adhere to or engage with other assessments or services intended to assure the success, well-being and/or the safety of the student and others.
- Where the student fails to engage with or respond to University services and staff and their communications or to meet the requirements of a previously agreed personal progression plan, including conditions specified in any return to University agreement.

7. Fitness to Study Concern Responses

The RCSI Fitness to Study regulation operates on three response levels:

RESPONSE LEVELS	FORUM
Level 1	School Assessment and Local Remediation
Level 2	FTS Health & Well-Being Panel (HWP)
Level 3	FTS Health & Well-Being Panel(HWP)

Please note that in certain cases where it is determined that a significant and immediate risk may potentially exist to the well-being of a student or to the well-being of others, including patients or clients, the University reserves the right to escalate immediately to a Level 3 response. This may involve acute intervention actions prior to a review by a FTS Health & Well-Being Panel when dealing with urgent priority cases.

8. Exclusions

- 8.1.** With the exception of Principle 4 (§4.1) of the Undergraduate Student Code of Conduct, Principle 5 of the BSc Advanced Therapeutic Technologies Code of Conduct and Principle 4 of the Postgraduate Student Code of Conduct, this Policy generally shall not be invoked for circumstances where it is considered that a breach of the Student Code of Conduct and/or associated academic or disciplinary regulations has occurred;
- 8.2.** Isolated cases of non-attendance and/or academic or clinical or professional incompetence or insufficiency or failure to progress;
- 8.3.** Student circumstances deemed normally to fall within the scope of the RCSI Disability Policy and associated procedures.

Notwithstanding 8.3, however, where such students are in receipt of reasonable accommodations and fail to demonstrate the core required academic, clinical and professional competencies of their



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programme or elect not to engage with supports provided by the University, they may be referred for a fitness to study review under this policy.

9. Key Associated Policies and Regulations

9.1. Leave of Absence

The actions taken under these regulations shall be consistent with the requirements and procedures of the RCSI Student Leave of Absence Policy, including Return to University Procedures.

9.2. Child Protection

The actions taken under these regulations shall be consistent with the requirements of the RCSI Child Protection Policy and relevant legislation in this area.

9.3. Garda Vetting

The actions taken under these regulations shall be consistent with the requirements of Garda Vetting associated with RCSI professional programmes.

9.4. Academic Appeals

Where a Fitness to Study issue arises in the context of an academic appeal, the Academic Appeals Committee shall have the authority to address it through these regulations.

10. Review of this Policy

This RCSI Fitness to Study Policy shall be reviewed within the first year of operation and at least once every two years and any recommendations of this review to be considered for approval by the Academic Council.