



Fitness to Study

1.0	POLICY OBJECTIVE
1.1	Mary Immaculate College (MIC) is committed to ensuring the safety, well-being and equality of its students throughout the duration of their study. This is enshrined in the College's mission and reflected in the College's <i>Strategic Plan 2012-2016</i> . This commitment is further evidenced in the number of high-quality supports available to MIC students, who may at times encounter difficulties. While it is true that in the majority of cases these services will offer appropriate support to the student, there are instances whereby the College will need to offer a more proactive, formal response in dealing with students who are experiencing high levels of distress, particularly if the student has a diagnosed/undiagnosed medical, psychological or emotional issue, and if their actions raise questions with regards to (a) the student's ability to continue in their studies or (b) whether their actions are likely to have a negative impact on their peers.
1.2	This Fitness to Study Policy is thus designed to offer support to both the student experiencing difficulties with their medical, psychological or emotional state, and the wider College community, by clearly outlining both the procedures that are in place to aid the student, and the steps that members of the community should take if they are concerned about a student's well-being and ability to continue through the rest of their degree programme.
1.3	The MIC Fitness to Study Policy is therefore intended as a device through which the College can support students whose ability to continue their third level studies is at risk as a result of concerns regarding their actions and/or behaviour towards either themselves or those around them, while also outlining a set of transparent procedures for those who are concerned about a student's well-being. Moreover, through the procedures enacted as a result of this policy, the College can ensure that MIC students are treated fairly and directed to appropriate supports. Further, this Policy provides a framework to consider whether a voluntary or forced leave of absence or withdrawal is necessary. This decision will ultimately be dependent upon the risk that the student poses to themselves and others as the College is intrinsically committed to supporting and safeguarding its students, staff and all third parties present on campus.

2.0	SCOPE OF POLICY
2.1	The MIC Fitness to Study Policy is aimed at addressing concerns that are raised regarding a student's ability to continue with their studies as a result of actions that can be perceived as owing to a medical, psychological or emotional issue or a un/diagnosed illness. In particular, it is designed as the preferred primary approach in instances where extenuating circumstances are clearly evident with regards to the student's motivations and actions, and whereby prompt and sensitive responses are needed by the College.
3.0	EQUALITY STATMENT
3.1	All policies, guidelines and protocols of Mary Immaculate College, will reflect the College's commitment to the promotion of equality and will be fully compliant with the provisions of prevailing equality legislation.
4.0	INSTITUTION'S COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING AND SAFEGUARDING STUDENTS, STAFF AND THIRD PARTIES
4.1	MIC is fully committed to supporting and safeguarding its students, staff and all third parties onsite by encouraging students with diagnosed medical, psychological or emotional issues to continue to see the appropriate professional support services. The Fitness to Study Policy is not designed as an alternative stance on the matter, instead it can be viewed as another facet in the College's commitment to supporting and safeguarding the College community by ensuring that, once a student in difficulty has been identified, appropriate steps are taken to help remedy or limit the potential damage the student and the College community are subject to, depending upon the severity of the issue at hand. It is also important that the student is made aware that in cases whereby the staff member is concerned about a student's well-being, confidentiality cannot be assured as other parties will need to be made privy to the information if the case progresses to stages two and three of the procedure. However, this is fully dependent upon the behaviour and actions of the student.
4.2	In matters relating to a student's fitness to continue in study, MIC is aware of its legal obligations and its duty of care to its registered students, staff and all third parties on campus and in these regards, MIC remains mindful of its obligations under both the <i>Equal Status Act 2000-2015</i> and <i>Employment Equality Acts 1998-2021</i>

5.0	FOCUS ON STUDENT EXPERIENCE
5.1	<p>MIC is committed to ensuring that the experience of all students subject to the procedures outlined in the Fitness to Study Policy is as sensitive, compassionate and straightforward as possible. Its focus is on ensuring the safety and well-being of all of the students who are subject to any of the stages and in helping those students overcome their difficulties in a safe and suitable manner. In addition, all students subject to the various stages of the policy will be supported by the College body in whatever way is deemed most appropriate and encouraged to continue to avail of the support services offered on campus, and by their medical practitioner. Please see Appendix A for Overview of the Student Support Services available at MIC. The decisions made at each stage of the policy will be influenced by the belief that that they are in the best interest of the student in distress/difficulty and/or the College community as a whole and students can appeal the decision made by the Fitness to Study Panel. In addition, the policy will be regularly reviewed by each Faculty Management Committee, <i>An Chomhairle Acadúil</i>, the Student Wellbeing Committee and the Equality Committee to ensure its viability and suitability at meeting its intended objectives.</p>
6.0	DEFINITION OF FITNESS TO STUDY- WHAT TRIGGERS THE POLICY AND ASSOCIATED PROCEDURE?
6.1	<p>Fitness to study can be defined as a student's ability to meet the emotional, academic, behavioural, social and welfare standards required to successfully undertake a period of study in a higher education institution (HEI).</p> <p>The different stages in the procedure outlined in the Fitness to Study Policy will be enacted if concerns are raised regarding a student's medical, psychological or emotional state as a result of their actions or behaviour, be it through a staff member's personal observations, a third party's concern or through the student confiding in a staff member themselves.</p> <p>Each stage is dependent upon the symptoms that the student exhibits and whether or not the symptoms persist and/or the medical, psychological or emotional state of the student in question deteriorates further.</p>

7.0	APPLICATION AND JURISDICTION OF FITNESS TO STUDY POLICY
7.1	<p>The Fitness to Study Policy is intended to be utilised in the minority of cases where concern is raised about a student's welfare as a result of their behaviour or actions and whereby the student's medical, psychological or emotional state is believed to be a determining factor in said behaviour. It will not be enacted, nor will the Fitness to Study Panel be convened, in cases involving academic or disciplinary misconduct unless a student's medical, psychological or emotional state is believed to be a predominant component in explaining the student's conduct. The Fitness to Study Panel will be appointed by the Dean of Faculty.</p> <p>The Fitness to Study Policy can be applied in the case of any student registered at MIC. This includes students who are studying in MIC as part of their Erasmus programme in conjunction with another College. Students experiencing medical, psychological or emotional issues who are studying in other universities as part of their MIC programme are encouraged to source appropriate support services near their host institution to ensure their ongoing well-being.</p>
8.0	REFERENCE TO ALTERNATIVE PROCESSES
8.1	<p>A student's fitness to study may be considered despite the fact that other College processes have been invoked. Examples of other relevant procedures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to make satisfactory progress in academic studies (dealt with under the appropriate Progress Regulations) or • Misconduct as normally defined by the College (dealt with under the student disciplinary procedure).
9.0	WHEN THE FITNESS TO STUDY POLICY SHOULD BE ENACTED
9.1	<p>Before the process outlined in the Fitness to Study Policy is initiated, an informal meeting should take place between the student and their lecturer/member of professional services. The lecturer/member of professional services should keep an agreed written record of the meeting and retain the note pending the subsequent constitution of the Fitness to Study Panel. No other written record, such as completion of an Action Plan, is required at this stage. At this meeting, the lecturer/member of professional services should outline their concerns, and give the student an opportunity to explain things from their perspective. Where possible, students experiencing difficulty should be referred to appropriate support within the College.</p>

	Fitness to Study Policy can be introduced if it emerges that concerns regarding the student persist/grow.
9.2	Please note that the Faculty of Education <i>Fitness to Practice Policy</i> addresses students' readiness for placement. It may operate in parallel with the Fitness to Study Policy but it also takes account of the responsibilities of students on placement, which may not be the same as responsibilities while on campus.
10.0	FITNESS TO STUDY PROCEDURE
	The relevant Dean of Faculty appoints a Faculty Fitness to Study Panel. The panel must be gender balanced and consist of a Chair as well as two full-time permanent members of Faculty who serve on the panel for a period of three years. The panel will be convened on a need's basis.
	If concern about a student persists, follow these STAGES:
10.1	STAGE ONE: Developing or Deepening Concern (where informal action is considered no longer appropriate)
	1 The Fitness to Study Panel initiates contact by sending a written expression of concern to the student
	2. Student is invited to a meeting to discuss concerns. Meeting to include a student representative (such as MISU or faculty ombudsman) and member of the Fitness to Study Panel/HoD/relevant line manager. The purpose of this meeting is to try to identify institutional supports and offer guidance, therefore it is important that a Plan of Action is agreed (See Appendix B);
	3. Identify a review date (2-4 weeks) after this meeting and following this meeting, either close the expression of concern or proceed to Stage Two.
10.2	STAGE TWO: Ongoing Concern
	1. The initial contact with the student in stage two is similar to that of stage one with a member of the Faculty Fitness to Study Panel formally writing to the student to explain the concerns that have been raised in relation to them;

	<p>2. A case-review meeting will be convened wherein the concerns that have been raised about the student's well-being will be discussed. The following may attend: Student, Student Representative and two members of the Fitness to Study Panel appointed by the Dean of Faculty. At this meeting, a plan of action, which may include referral to College approved medical personnel, will be initialised and further formal follow-ups will be agreed upon to monitor the situation and to ascertain whether or not the issue remains persistent beyond the plan that has been enacted. In cases where a student is referred to a Medical Practitioner, the student shall be obliged under this Policy to attend at such medical consultation and examination as required, and shall cooperate with the Medical Practitioner as concerned in the provision of a medical report to the Fitness to Study Panel which confirms that the student is medically fit to study. In cases where such a referral is necessary, a student may be required to take a temporary suspension pending receipt of the report by the Panel. In addition, the student may opt for a voluntary leave of absence or withdrawal from their studies.</p> <p>Failure to attend, or a failure, in the opinion of the Medical Practitioner, to cooperate with any such Practitioner, shall be deemed to be failure to comply with the College's procedures.</p>
	3. If the situation improves then the expression of concern can be closed and the student can continue in their studies.
	4. If a student does not choose to voluntarily undertake a leave of absence from the College and the situation deteriorates further, it is possible for the Panel to escalate the situation to Stage Three.
10.3	STAGE THREE: Persistent and Significant Concern. This stage is designed to deal with situations that are deemed/classified as of immediate concern whereby the College needs to determine if the student meets the criteria for those who are deemed Fit to Study.
	1. Once again, the student will receive a written notification from the appropriate Faculty Fitness to Study Panel about the concerns that have been raised.
	2. The result of this Panel meeting may include that (a) further meetings of the panel and further monitoring of the student is needed before a decision can be made, and/or (b) that, following the provision of a medical report received by the Fitness to Study Panel as initiated in STAGE Two, the student must take either a leave of absence or withdraw from their

	studies. The student and a student representative will be invited to attend and in the event that the student is not available, the Panel will continue in his/her absence with a student representative;
	3. The student will be notified of the decision reached at the Panel meeting by Chair of the Fitness to Study within seven working days following the Panel meeting;
	4. Students are permitted to appeal the decision reached by the Panel by communicating their appeal in writing to the relevant Dean of Faculty who will institute a review of the process. The appeal must be lodged within ten working days following the Panel meeting.
11.0	MIC FITNESS TO STUDY APPEALS COMMITTEE
11.1	The Vice President for Academic Affairs or his/her nominee shall appoint members of the College Fitness to Study Appeals Committee on a case-by-case basis to hear appeals arising from a decision of the Faculty Fitness to Study Committee. The committee shall comprise at least three members, one of whom shall be external to MIC and shall have academic or professional experience in the relevant or a comparable discipline.
11.2	No member of the Faculty Fitness to Study Committee that conducted the original hearing may be a member of the College Fitness to Study Appeals Committee. The committee shall not include staff members from the faculty of the student. The Vice President for Academic Affairs or his/her nominee shall appoint the committee's chairperson.
11.3	<p>The College's Fitness to Study Appeals Committee shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hear appeals from students on stated grounds in relation to outcomes arising from hearings of the Faculty Fitness to Study Committee 2. Ensure that a fair, clear and consistent approach is adopted in relation to appeals 3. Provide reports to the Academic Council or its nominated committee, as required
11.4	<p>The appeals process shall include the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The student shall be notified in writing that his/her appeal will be heard by the College Fitness to Study Appeals Committee. A period of 10 days' notice

should be provided to the student of the date and time of the meeting. However, the student may choose to waive this period should the College be able to convene the committee meeting earlier.

2. A copy of all the relevant documentation that has been supplied in respect of the appeal shall be provided to members of the committee and to the student in advance of the meeting.

3. The student should confirm his/her availability to attend the meeting and should advise in advance of the meeting if he/she intends to be accompanied by a friend, parent, Students' Union representative, academic advisor or other individual.

4. Members of the committee may request other relevant parties to attend the meeting to provide oral evidence and accounts of incidents or behaviour that have called into question the fitness of the student to study.

5. Members of the committee may ask the student questions in relation to concerns raised vis-à-vis his/her fitness to study.

6. At any stage in the proceedings, the committee shall be entitled to adjourn proceedings to seek further information or advice or for any other purpose as agreed by the majority of the members of the committee.

7. Having reviewed all of the oral evidence, documentation and the outcome of the hearing of the Faculty Fitness to Study Committee, the College Fitness to Study Appeals Committee shall make a decision as to whether or not to uphold the original decision.

8. Decisions of the College Fitness to Study Appeals Committee shall be taken by a simple majority. In the event of a tied vote, the chairperson shall have a casting vote.

9. The committee will rule, where necessary, on whether the original stated outcomes are commensurate with the concerns substantiated.

10. Hearings of the committee shall be minuted.

11. The decision of the committee shall be communicated verbally to the student at the end of the meeting.

	<p>12. A copy of the committee's decision and reason(s) for the decision in such form and content as is determined appropriate by the committee shall be sent within five working days after the hearing by email to the student's MIC email account and by registered post to the address notified by the student to MIC or by personal delivery by any employee or agent of MIC.</p> <p>13 The decision of the committee shall be communicated, where appropriate, to the relevant MIC personnel and offices.</p>
11.5	POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF AN APPEAL BEFORE THE COLLEGE FITNESS TO STUDY APPEALS COMMITTEE
11.5.1	<p>The following are the possible outcomes of an appeal before the College Fitness to Study Appeals Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The decision of the Faculty Fitness to Study Committee is upheld. 2. Dismissal of the case with no further action to be taken. 3. Permission granted to the student to continue his/her programme of study subject to review under certain specified conditions, such as mentoring by a named senior academic member of staff. 4. A requirement that the student undergo medical, psychiatric and/or psychological examination at the expense of the College to determine the course of action to be taken by the student before he/she is allowed to proceed with his/her studies. A student declining such an examination shall be required to withdraw until such time as he/she is certified by an appropriately qualified person as fit to proceed with his/her studies. The qualified person must have expertise in the health area concerned and must currently work in that area. 5. Suspension of the student from his/her programme of study until the student demonstrates to the satisfaction of the College Fitness to Study Appeals Committee that the requirements outlined in the course of action specified in point 4 above have been met. The student will be responsible for all costs associated with meeting the requirements outlined in the course of action. The student may provide his/her own treatment provider with a copy of any report arising from the examination undertaken with respect to point 4 above.

	<p>6. A requirement that the student undertake a second attempt at certain elements of the programme of study, without academic penalty.</p> <p>7. Termination of the student's participation in the programme of study with agreement to allow the student to transfer to another programme of study or avail of any approved exit programme strategy subject to receiving permission from the relevant course board and in compliance with MIC's transfer policy and regulations.</p> <p>8. Expulsion of the student from the College.</p>
12.0	FITNESS TO RESUME STUDIES
	<p>Any student who takes LOA, or withdraws, can apply for re-admission through the normal channels, that is through the Student Academic Administration Office. Please note that a student seeking re-admission may be referred by the Student Status Committee to a relevant healthcare professional, to include but not limited to a Consultant Occupational Physician, Consultant Psychiatrist and/or a Consultant Psychologist. The student shall be obliged under this Policy to attend at such medical consultation and examination as required and shall cooperate with the Medical Practitioner as concerned in the provision of a medical report to the Fitness to Study Panel which confirms that the student is medically fit to resume studies.</p> <p>Failure to attend or a failure, in the opinion of the Medical Practitioner, to cooperate with any such Practitioner shall be deemed to be failure to comply with the College's procedures.</p> <p>Please note that the Faculty of Education Fitness to Practice Policy requires that students returning to study, and who have been requested under the Fitness to Study Policy to undergo further medical examination as outlined above, may also be obliged to have medical approval to fulfil <i>Fitness to Practice Policy</i> requirements prior to embarking on a placement.</p>
13.0	POLICY REVIEW
13.1	<p>All cases considered under this policy will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis. In addition, the policy will be regularly reviewed by each Faculty Management Committee, <i>An Chomhairle Acadúil</i>, the Student Wellbeing Committee and the Equality</p>

	Committee to ensure its suitability in meeting its intended objectives.
14.0	ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS
14.1	If a student's symptoms appear more serious and in need of more immediate action at that initial meeting, or in any following meeting between the parties, for example, if the student is threatening to commit suicide, is agitated and/or very aggressive and the staff member is particularly concerned about the student's safety or the safety of other parties, then the procedure can be immediately progressed to Stage Two or Stage Three above.
14.2	Staff are encouraged to keep a record of all meetings with students who appear to be experiencing medical, psychological or emotional distress/difficulties, stating the date and time of the meeting, the nature of the meeting and of the advice that is given to the student. The student should be made aware that a record of the interaction will be made. Records will be kept for five years.

Revision	Document History	Reviewed By CA	Approved By UR
0	Initial Release	CA2023#03	---
	Review in 2028		

APPENDIX A: COLLEGE SUPPORT SERVICES AND USEFUL EXTERNAL CONTACTS	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIC Counselling Service: (Limerick) (061) 204948 or (061) 204919. • MIC Counselling Service: (Thurles) (0504)32033 or (087) 9088710 • MIC Chaplaincy Services: (Limerick) (061) 204331 or (086) 2550436 • MIC Chaplaincy Services: (Thurles) (086) 7714888 • MIC Medical Centre (061) 204343 • MIC GP Services (Thurles) (0504) 21155 • MIC Health and Safety Officer (061) 204914 • Student Academic Administration (061) 204921 • Arts Office (061) 204972 • Education Office (061) 204906 • Placement Office (061) 204307 • International Office (061) 774787 • Head of Post Primary Education (Thurles) (086) 1414633 • Campus Administrator (Thurles) (086) 1414350 • Academic Administrator (Thurles) (086) 1414634 • ICT Helpdesk (061) 774777 • MISU (061) 204907 • Health Promotion Office (061) 204756 • Director of Student Life: (061) 204917 or (087) 9910563 • Student Access and Disability Services: (061) 204927 or (061) 204510 • Academic Learning Centre (061) 204717 • Chaplaincy Drop-In (061) 204399 • MIC Student Parent Support Services: (061) 204347 • MIC Security: (Limerick) (061) 204982 or (061) 774736 or (086) 8502607 or (087)6594341 • MIC Security: (Thurles) (086) 7805027

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Services: 999 or 112 • University Hospital Limerick: (061) 234 850 • South Tipperary General Hospital (052) 6177000 • Shannon Doc: 1850 212 999 • Samaritans (Limerick and Tipperary): (061) 412111 or 116123 (free phone) • AWARE Support Service Line: 1890 303 302
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APPENDIX B: FITNESS TO STUDY: PLAN OF ACTION

This form is to be completed with the student by members of the Fitness to Study Panel/ lecturer/Head of Department/ Professional Services Staff Line Manager and can also be used to record steps taken, at the informal stage, stages one and two. Original to be filed by Fitness to Study Panel/lecturer/Head of Department/ Professional Services Staff Line Manager. To be copied as indicated below.

SECTION ONE: CONTEXT

Name of student:

Student ID Number:

Course/Year:

Faculty:

Date of meeting:

Meeting attended by:

Concerns raised by (name, position):

Brief description of concerns (how are student's difficulties manifesting, and what potential implications for studies, including adverse impact on fellow staff and students, if any):

SECTION TWO: IDENTIFICATION OF SUPPORT OPTIONS

Support options identified:	✓	Contact:
Mental health support and advice		MIC Counselling Service
Welfare advice (housing, financial, immigration etc.)		Student Academic Administration MISU
Disability support (including dyslexia and other learning differences)		Access Office
Change in mode of studies (e.g. LOA/Link in)		Student Academic Administration
Extension to coursework		Lecturer/HoD/ Assistant Dean/Dean
Academic support		Academic Learning Centre (ALC)
Exam adjustment (extra time, separate room etc.)		Student Academic Administration Access Office
Health-related concerns		Refer student to the MIC Medical Centre if between 9 and 5pm. ShannonDoc for out-of-hours. If medical emergency, follow protocol
Other, please document:		

SECTION THREE: ACTION AGREED WITH STUDENT

Action agreed	Who is responsible for taking this forward?	Date by when to be done

SECTION FOUR: FOLLOW UP

Follow up meeting to take place:	Dd/mm/yy:
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SECTION FIVE: FORM TO BE COPIED TO

✓	This form to be copied to:	Specify whether For Information or For Action
	Course Director/Co-ordinator	
	Faculty Chair of Fitness to Study Panel	
	HoD: Head of Department	
	Assistant/Dean of Faculty	
	DSL: Director of Student Life	
	Vice President Academic Affairs	
	Head of Student Academic Administration	
	Other: Please specify	

SECTION SIX: CONSENT

I agree for the above information to be made available as indicated above

Signed (student) _____ Date _____

Signed (staff member) _____ Date _____

Important Note (If Leave of Absence or Withdrawal is being considered): It is important to consider all possible financial implications of a leave of absence or withdrawal from a degree programme. There may be financial implications for a registration/tuition fee or grant if or when one return to third level at a later date. Further detailed advice can be obtained from the Fee Office at <http://www.mic.ul.ie/adminservices/finance/Pages/FeesOffice.aspx>