

FACULTY OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES

GUIDELINE: MANAGING FITNESS TO PRACTICE IN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

Purpose	To prescribe the procedures for handling fitness to practice challenges in undergraduate programmes offered in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Stellenbosch University
Type of document	Guideline
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Owner of these guideline	Vice-Dean: Learning and Teaching
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Approved by	Faculty Board: Medicine and Health Sciences
Keywords	Fitness to practice

Background:

The Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences recommends that consistent action is taken on the training platform when students demonstrate behaviours that cause concern regarding their fitness to practice. Fitness to practice means having the skills, knowledge, character, and health to practise medical, health or nursing professions safely and effectively (HCPC, 2023). Action should be determined within each undergraduate programme respectively, through an investigation conducted by a Fitness to Practice Committee (FPC) that is constituted of the clinical supervisor, relevant module or clinical coordinator, and the undergraduate programme coordinator, as well as additional members in relation to the severity of the case.

At referral, the FPC determines at what level the matter will be dealt with. The level is determined by the seriousness of the behaviour. Actions taken are determined by the FPC, considering the individual circumstances of the student, and the extenuating circumstances related to the matter. The student must be supported to take ownership of the difficulties they are experiencing, and the active process to address the concerns.

The procedures described in these guidelines are intended to provide short-term intervention to support students in ensure the safety, dignity, and care of people on the training platform. These guidelines may run concurrently with any other guidelines or procedures approved by the faculty or the University.

1. The undergraduate programme committees may consider the following reasons for investigating the fitness to practice of a student:

- 1.1 Behaviour or performance related to impaired **mental and physical health**, including substance use (e.g., Interpersonal conflict, non-adherence to professional boundaries, insufficient endurance to complete required tasks)
- 1.2 **Academic misconduct** (e.g., Plagiarism, cheating)
- 1.3 **Professional misconduct** (e.g., Breach of confidentiality, discriminatory behaviour, false reporting of abuse, forging of signatures)
- 1.4 **Academic underperformance** that places clients and patients at risk (e.g., Not applying the reasonable precautionary measures, insufficient knowledge of the health condition to treat, mark of less than 30% achieved at mid-point of a module/ clinical rotation/ domain)
- 1.5 Other **equally serious behaviours or incidents** which affect the standing of the profession (e.g., arrest or conviction; allegations of sexual misconduct, racism or gender-based violence; reckless or deliberately harmful acts)

2. Level 1 – Management of Initial, Emerging or Minor Concerns

- 2.1 Behaviours that cause concern include, but are not limited to:
 - 2.1.1 Repeated failure to submit written work on time.
 - 2.1.2 Repeated inability to maintain clinical timetable/ planning.
 - 2.1.3 Repeated inability to maintain clinical record keeping.
 - 2.1.4 Demonstrating unprofessional behaviour.
 - 2.1.5 Repeated absence from clinical work, with or without supporting documentation, such that there is a risk that the student will not meet the learning outcomes of the clinical block.
- 2.1 The intention of action at Level 1 is to support and develop the student, rather than being punitive.
- 2.2 In the case that any behaviours causing concern are demonstrated, the following procedures apply:
 - 2.2.1 The student should be made aware of a potential referral to the Fitness to Practice process and be provided with an opportunity to immediately remediate the concerning behaviour. Any staff member may have this discussion with the student.
 - 2.2.2 The Head of the relevant Division/Department/Domain/Module, programme coordinator, and person raising the issue consult to determine the level of concern (Level 1, 2 or 3), and whether withdrawal from the platform is required (Levels 2 and 3 only).
 - 2.2.3 Any staff member may convene a Fitness to Practice Committee, chaired by a person not directly involved in the assessment of that student in that clinical block. The FPC may include the clinical supervisor, and/or clinical work coordinator, and/or the undergraduate programme coordinator, at the discretion of the Chairperson.

- 2.2.4 The student is emailed to inform them that they are required to attend a meeting. The student must acknowledge receipt of that email. Other forms of communication may be used in addition to email to ensure that the student is aware that a meeting has been arranged.
- 2.2.5 The FPC meets with the student to discuss, identify the underlying problem(s), and agree a plan of remedial action. The plan of action should be supportive and include referral to the most appropriate services.
- 2.2.6 The Chairperson completes a brief report that records who was involved, the nature of the complaint, and actions agreed. The report is signed and dated by the student and Chairperson.
- 2.2.7 The report is submitted to the Programme Coordinator or Head of Division/Department as appropriate within each undergraduate programme.
- 2.2.8 Action is taken at programme (MBChB) or Divisional (Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Dietetics and Speech-Language and Hearing Therapy) or Departmental (Nursing and Midwifery) level but should be reported to the Programme Coordinator or Head of the relevant Division/Department.
- 2.2.9 If the student fails to attend the meeting, the matter is escalated to Level 2.

3. Level 2 – Management of Serious and or Continuing Concerns

- 3.1 Behaviours that cause serious or continuing concerns include, but are not limited to:
 - 3.1.1 Failure to attend a Level 1 meeting.
 - 3.1.2 Initial, emerging, or minor concerns that are repeated across more than one clinical rotation / clinical block.
 - 3.1.3 Plagiarism and cheating
- 3.2 The intention of action at Level 2 is still to support students (as in Level 1), while ensuring the safety, dignity, and care of people on the training platform.
- 3.3 In the case that any behaviours causing serious or continuing concern are demonstrated, the following procedures apply:
 - 3.3.1 The Fitness to Practice Committee is convened in accordance with Sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.6 above. In this instance, the Chairperson is the MBChB Programme Coordinator or Head of the relevant Division/Department, or their designated authority.
 - 3.3.2 The report is retained on record by the MBChB Programme Coordinator or Head of the relevant Division/Department and is reported to the CUT as part of the Undergraduate Programme Committee report.
- 3.4 At Level 2, mandatory intervention may be required of the student. Mandatory interventions may include, but are not limited to:
 - 3.4.1 Behavioural intervention including time management or planning
 - 3.4.2 Medical assessment
 - 3.4.3 Clinical psychology
 - 3.4.4 Educational psychology
 - 3.4.5 Psychiatric assessment

3.4.6 Rehabilitation

- 3.5 The student may be temporarily withdrawn from the training platform until such time that the meeting and/or remediation has occurred, and evidence thereof has been submitted to and approved by the Chairperson.
- 3.6 Temporary withdrawal from the clinical platform may require the student to extend their studies – if remediation cannot be concluded in the specific academic year. Such cases will be handled ad hoc on merit and on a case-by-case basis.

4. Level 3 - Management of Critical and/or Persistent or Cumulative Concerns

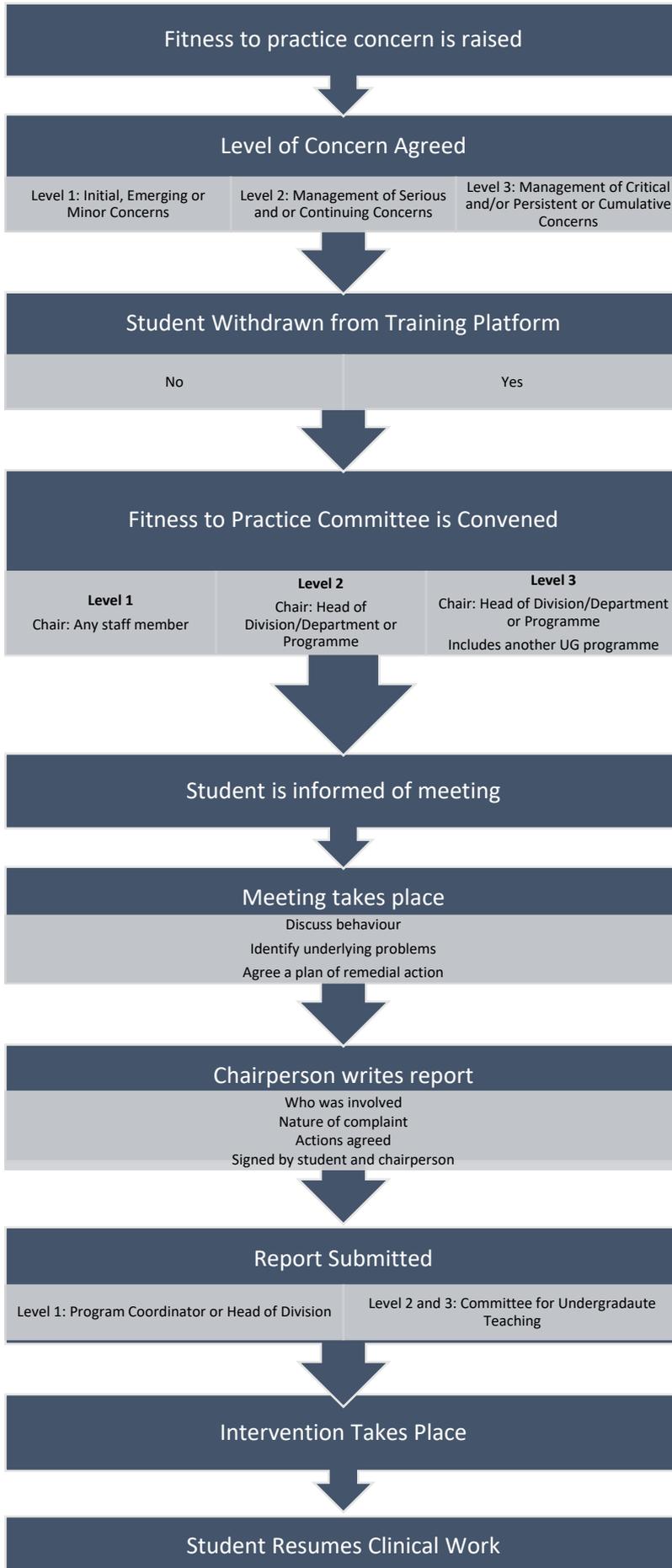
- 4.1 Circumstances that cause critical and/or persistent or cumulative concerns include, but are not limited to:
 - 4.1.1 Psychosis
 - 4.1.2 Known substance abuse.
 - 4.1.3 Professional negligence (e.g., not completing procedures, not following the rehabilitation process).
 - 4.1.4 Risk of doing harm to a patient due to a lack of knowledge / skills.
 - 4.1.5 Attendance at too few days within each clinical rotation or block to achieve learning outcomes (programme specific).
- 4.2 The intention of action at Level 3 is to prevent harm to people on the training platform.
- 4.3 In the case that any behaviours causing critical and/or persistent or cumulative concerns are demonstrated, the following procedures apply:
 - 4.3.1 The student may be immediately withdrawn from the training platform.
 - 4.3.2 The Fitness to Practice Committee is convened in accordance with Sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.6 above. In this instance, the Chairperson is the MBChB Programme Coordinator or Head of the relevant Division/Department or their designated authority. The Chairperson should not be involved in the assessment of the student. At least one representative must be from a different undergraduate programme, at the discretion of the Chairperson.
 - 4.3.3 The report is submitted to the Committee for Undergraduate Teaching as part of the Undergraduate Programme Committee report.
 - 4.3.4 The Chairperson refers the matter to other services and/or structures within the University as required (e.g., Student Health Review Committee, Centre for Student Discipline)
- 4.4 At Level 3, mandatory interventions must be required of the student as per 3.4 above.
- 4.5 Withdrawal from the training platform may require the student to extend their studies – if remediation cannot be concluded in the specific academic year. Such cases will be handled ad hoc on merit and on a case-by-case basis.

4.6 The student may be withdrawn from the training platform, fail the module, interrupt their studies, be suspended from the programme, or be expelled from the programme, depending on the seriousness of the circumstances.

5. Resumption of Studies

5.1 At Level 2 and 3, the student may only recommence clinical work once the mandatory interventions have been implemented to the satisfaction of the Fitness to Practice Committee.

Fitness to Practice Process Flow



**STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES
Student Meeting Record Form**

Date:

Present:

Level: 1 2 3

Aims of the Meeting

1.

2.

3.

Points of Discussion

Agreed Actions

Additional Comments / Conclusions

Staff Name and Surname	
Designation	
Signature	
Date	

Declaration

I, _____, registered in the _____ programme

hereby declare that I agree to the above remedial and supportive actions instituted by the Fitness to Practice Committee.

I acknowledge that by not adhering to the above actions it may result in

1. Me being withdrawn from the training platform, failing the module, interrupting my studies, being suspended from the programme, or being expelled from the programme depending on the seriousness of the circumstances;
2. Withdrawal from the clinical platform/placement may require me to extend my studies – if remediation cannot be concluded in the specific academic year. Such cases will be handled ad hoc on merit and on a case-by-case basis;
3. my participation in the programme's clinical modules/rotations being suspended until the mandatory interventions have been implemented to the satisfaction of the Fitness to Practice Committee;
4. my case being referred to the relevant disciplinary bodies and/or the Student Health Review Committee of the FMHS; and
5. I acknowledge that the outcome of the Fitness to Practice Committee shall be recorded in the official records of the faculty's Governance Structures.

Student Name and Surname	
Student Number	
Programme	
Signature	
Date	