3. Overarching Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures

3. Overarching Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures

Introduction

This section establishes ELI Schools' overarching quality assurance policies and procedures that apply across all aspects of provision and all locations. These policies address fundamental issues of fairness, due process, student protection, and standards of conduct that underpin the entire Quality Assurance Framework.

Purpose and Scope

- The policies in this section are "overarching" because they:
- Apply to all students across all programmes and locations
- Apply to all staff in their interactions with students
- Establish principles and procedures that cut across multiple areas of activity
- Provide essential protections for students' rights and interests
- Ensure consistency, fairness, and transparency in decision-making

While specific quality assurance policies relating to functions (academic programmes, assessment, staff recruitment, child safeguarding, financial management, etc.) are addressed in dedicated sections of this manual, the policies in this section provide the foundational framework that supports all other quality assurance activities.

Coverage

This section addresses four critical overarching areas:

Complaints	How students can raise concerns or complaints about any aspect of their experience
Appeals	How students can appeal against formal decisions affecting them
Fitness to Study	Process for addressing situations where students' health, wellbeing, or behaviour affects their ability to study or impacts others

Principles Underpinning These Policies:

All policies in this section are founded on the following principles:

Fairness and Natural Justice	All students treated fairly and equitably. Decisions based on evidence, not assumptions
Accessibility	Processes accessible to all students regardless of language proficiency, background, or circumstances
Timeliness	Complaints and appeals handled promptly
Confidentiality	Information shared only with those who need to know. GDPR compliance.
Proportionality	Response proportionate to nature and severity of issue
Student Support	Students supported throughout processes and welfare considered.
Organisational Learning	Complaints and appeals analysed for patterns and systemic issues
Compliance	All procedures comply with relevant legislation

Relationship Between Complaints and Appeals

It is important to distinguish between complaints and appeals:

Complaints	Expression of dissatisfaction about service, provision, or treatment received Informal or formal. May relate to any aspect of student experience
Appeals:	Request for review of a formal decision that has been made Always a formal process Limited to decisions that are appealable (assessment results, expulsion, disciplinary sanctions, etc.)

Data Protection and Confidentiality

All complaints, appeals, and fitness to study cases involve personal data and are managed in accordance with:

- Data Protection Act 2018
- GDPR
- ELI Schools' Data Protection Policies (Section 10)

Key data protection considerations:

- Personal data collected only for legitimate purpose (resolving complaint/appeal/fitness matter)
- Data shared only with those who need to know
- Data stored securely with restricted access
- Data retained for appropriate period (typically 7 years for complaints/appeals, longer for serious cases)
- Student rights to access, rectification, erasure respected (subject to ELI Schools' legitimate interests in maintaining records)

Support for Students

Throughout this section, reference is made to support available to students. ELI Schools recognizes that navigating complaints, appeals, and fitness processes can be stressful and challenging, particularly for international students whose first language may not be English.

Support available includes:

- **Student Services Officer:** Provides advice, guidance, and emotional support
- **Programme Leaders/Academic Managers:** Can explain academic matters
- **Quality Officer:** Can explain procedures and policies
- **Interpreters/Translation:** Available if needed for critical communications
- **Written Information:** Procedures explained in clear, accessible language
- **Time:** Reasonable deadlines and extensions where needed
- **Accompaniment:** Students may bring a friend or supporter to meetings
- Students are encouraged to seek support early rather than navigating processes alone.

3.1 Policy for Complaints

QA Area(s)	• Documented Approach to Quality Assurance • Public Information and Communication • Governance and Management of Quality
Applies to	☐ Staff only ☑ Learners only ☑ Staff and learners
Policy Owner	Quality Officer

Purpose

This policy establishes ELI Schools' framework for receiving, handling, and resolving complaints from students, ensuring complaints are taken seriously, addressed fairly and promptly, and used to improve quality.

Scope

- This policy applies to complaints from:
    - Current students (enrolled and attending)
    - Recent former students (within 3 months of programme completion or withdrawal)
    - Prospective students (regarding recruitment, admissions, or pre-arrival experience)

Policy Statement

Right to Complain:

ELI Schools recognizes that students have the right to raise concerns or complaints about any aspect of their experience without fear of negative consequences. Students who raise complaints in good faith will:

- Be treated with respect
- Have their complaint taken seriously
- Receive a fair and timely response
- Not be victimized or disadvantaged for complaining
- Not have their academic progression or student status affected by raising a complaint

Commitment to Resolution:

ELI Schools is committed to:

- Listening to student complaints with open mind
- Investigating complaints thoroughly and fairly
- Resolving complaints wherever possible
- Providing appropriate remedies where complaints upheld
- Learning from complaints to prevent recurrence
- Using complaints to drive quality improvement

Accessibility:

The complaints process is designed to be:

- **Easy to Access:** Students know how to complain, and information is readily available
- **Clear:** Process and stages clearly explained
- **Supportive:** Students supported throughout process
- **Fair:** All parties treated fairly and impartially
- **Timely:** Complaints handled without unnecessary delay

Informal Resolution Preferred: Where possible, complaints should be resolved informally through direct communication and problem-solving at the earliest stage.

Confidentiality: Complaints are handled confidentially. Information is shared only with:

- Staff who need to know to investigate or resolve complaint
- External parties if legally required (e.g., regulatory bodies, legal proceedings)

No Retaliation: ELI Schools has zero tolerance for retaliation against students who make complaints. Any staff member who victimizes, penalizes, or treats a student negatively because they made a complaint will face disciplinary action.

While ELI Schools welcomes all legitimate complaints, complaints that are:

Vexatious	Repeated complaints about same issue after reasonable resolution, or complaints lacking a substance
Malicious	Made with intent to harm someone's reputation without basis

May not be investigated further or may result in restrictions on further complaints. However, this will only be applied in exceptional circumstances and with clear evidence of vexatious or malicious intent.

Types of Complaints:

Informal Complaints	Raised verbally with staff member Resolved through discussion and problem-solving No formal record (though staff may note resolution)
Formal Complaints	Raised in writing (email or complaint form) Require investigation and formal response Documented and recorded Used when informal resolution unsuccessful or inappropriate

Learning from Complaints:

All complaints (informal and formal) are valuable sources of information about student experience and quality of provision.

ELI Schools:

- Analyses complaints for patterns and trends
- Identifies systemic issues requiring attention
- Implements improvements based on complaint findings
- Reports complaint data to governance bodies (Academic Committee, Board of Directors)
- Uses complaints as driver of quality enhancement

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Related legislation, regulation or guidelines:

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI)
- Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of English Language Education to International Learners
- Consumer Rights Act
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR

3.2 Procedure for Complaints

QA Area(s)	• Documented Approach to Quality Assurance • Public Information and
Applies to	☐ Staff only ☑ Learners only ☑ Staff and learners
Policies this Procedure relates to	Policy for Complaints

Purpose

This procedure outlines the step-by-step process for students to raise complaints and for ELI Schools to investigate and resolve complaints fairly and promptly.

Procedure

Part A: Information And Accessibility

1. Making Complaints Information Available

Student Handbook:	Student Handbook includes section on "How to Make a Complaint"
Website:	ELI Schools website includes "Complaints" page
Induction:	During induction, students are informed they have right to raise concerns or complaints and how to complain
Physical Materials:	Posters or information sheets displayed

PART B: INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

2. Receiving Informal Complaints

Student Raises Concern Informally	Student approaches any staff member with concern or complaint "My classroom is too cold in the mornings."
Step 1: Listen	Staff member listens attentively without interrupting
Step 2: Clarify	Ask questions to fully understand the issue
Step 3: Resolve or Escalate	Take action or makes arrangements to resolve Explains what will be done and when Follows through promptly

Example Resolutions:

- Cold classroom → Contact maintenance to adjust heating, move class to warmer room
- Homework level → Teacher discusses with Programme Leader, adjusts homework to appropriate level
- Host family food → Accommodation Officer contacts host family to address issue
- Teaching explanation → Teacher provides additional explanation or resources

If staff member cannot resolve or issue is serious:

- Explains issue needs to be referred to [appropriate manager]
- With student's consent, refers to appropriate person (or advises student to contact them)
- Follows up to ensure student received help

Part C: Formal Complaints

3. Submitting Formal Complaint (Stage 1)

How to Submit:

Option A:	**Student Complaint Form**	
Option B:	**Email** Student sends email to Manager email assigned to their centre	
Option C:	**Letter** Student submits written letter to Director of Studies (Centre Manager)	

Receipt Acknowledgment: Within **2 working days** of receiving formal complaint

4. Stage 1: Investigation and Response

Assigning Investigator: Quality Officer or Student Services Officer assigns complaint to appropriate manager:

Academic Complaints	Director of Studies
Operations Complaints	Operations Manager
Accommodation	Accommodation Manager
Marketing or Content	Marketing Manager
General or Major	Managing Director

4.2. Investigation Process:

Step 1: Review Complaint	Read complaint submission carefully Identify key issues and allegations Determine what needs to be investigated
Step 2: Gather Information	Review relevant documents (student records, emails, policies, etc.) Interview relevant staff members May interview student complainant for clarification (meeting/phone/email)
Step 3: Assess Complaint	Consider all evidence objectively Determine facts: What actually happened? Compares to expected standards: Should this have happened? Does it breach policy/standard?
Step 4: Determine Remedy	What action should be taken to resolve? What remedy appropriate for student? What improvements needed to prevent recurrence?
Step 5: Prepare Response	Prepare a summary of complaint Prepare a summary of the investigation (who interviewed, documents reviewed) Explanation of decision (based on facts and evidence) Remedy offered (if applicable)

4.3. Response Timeline:

- Response sent to student within **10 working days** of complaint submission.

Example Remedies:

- Apology from staff member or ELI Schools
- Retraining or performance management for staff member
- Facility repair or improvement
- Process changes or policy clarification
- Fee reduction or refund (in exceptional cases)
- Academic re-assessment or grade review (if assessment-related)

Part D: External Complaint Routes

7. After ELI Schools' Internal Process Exhausted

7.1. If student has completed all three stages and remains dissatisfied, they may pursue external complaint routes:

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI):

- Students may complain to QQI about quality of provision or non-compliance with regulations
- QQI complaint form available on QQI website
- QQI may investigate and require ELI Schools to take action

Legal Action:

- Students may pursue civil legal action if they believe they have suffered loss or breach of contract
- Students should seek legal advice

Consumer Protection:

- Students may contact Competition and Consumer Protection Commission if consumer rights issue

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Related legislation, regulation or guidelines:

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI)
- Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of English Language Education to International Learners
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR

3.3 Policy for Appeals

QA Area(s)	• Documented Approach to Quality Assurance • Governance and Management of Quality • Assessment of Learners
Applies to	☐ Staff only ☑ Learners only ☑ Staff and learners
Policy Owner	Quality Officer

Purpose

This policy establishes ELI Schools' framework for students to appeal against formal decisions affecting them, ensuring fair procedures, independent review, and natural justice.

Scope

This policy applies to appeals by current or recent students (within 3 months of decision) against the following types of decisions:

Academic Appeals:	Assessment results or grades Progression decisions (failure to progress to next level) Examination Board decisions
Administrative Appeals:	Expulsion for non-attendance (see Section 14.2 for specific procedure) Expulsion for non-compliance with visa requirements Disciplinary sanctions Fee or refund decisions (where policy not followed)

This policy does NOT cover:

- General complaints about services or experiences → Use Complaints Policy (3.1-3.2)
- Appeals against safeguarding decisions → Separate safeguarding procedures apply (Section 15)
- Appeals against decisions made by external examination bodies (Cambridge, IELTS, etc.) → Appeals to examination body directly

Policy Statement

Right to Appeal:

ELI Schools recognizes that students have the right to appeal against formal decisions that significantly affect their studies, progression, or status. Students who appeal in good faith will:

- Have their appeal considered fairly and impartially
- Receive independent review of the decision
- Be treated with respect throughout process
- Not be victimized or disadvantaged for appealing
- Not have their current studies disrupted by lodging appeal (except in cases of immediate expulsion)

Commitment to Fair Process:

ELI Schools is committed to:

- Providing clear grounds for appeal
- Making appeals process accessible and transparent
- Ensuring independent review free from bias
- Reconsidering decisions objectively
- Upholding appeals where decision was flawed
- Maintaining academic and administrative standards
- Ensuring natural justice

Grounds for Appeal:

Procedural Irregularity:	Proper procedures were not followed in reaching the decision Policies or regulations were not applied correctly
Extenuating Circumstances	Circumstances beyond student's control affected their performance or conduct Student was unable to disclose circumstances before decision was made
Evidence of Bias or Unfairness	Decision-maker had conflict of interest Decision-maker demonstrated bias against student
Disproportionate Decision:	Decision was excessively harsh given circumstances Sanction or outcome was not proportionate to issue
New Evidence:	Significant new evidence has become available that was not available at the time Evidence would have materially affected the decision

ELI Schools distinguishes between:

Academic Judgment:
- Professional judgment of qualified academic staff about quality of work, appropriate grade, or student's academic progress → Generally not subject to appeal unless procedural irregularity

Procedural Matters:
- Whether proper processes followed, whether policies correctly applied, whether extenuating circumstances considered → Subject to appeal

Independent Review:

Where a complainant is still not satisfied with the result of the Appeals Board decision, they may refer the complaint and the Appeals Board decision to the **English Education Ireland Independent Review Panel**. This process is managed externally and independently of ELI Schools.

Timelines:

- **Submitting Appeals:** Students must submit appeals within specified timelines:
- **Academic appeals:** Within **10 working days** of receiving decision/result
- **Administrative appeals:** Within **5 working days** of receiving decision (expulsion, disciplinary sanctions)
- Late appeals only accepted in exceptional circumstances with valid explanation.

Processing Appeals: ELI Schools aims to process appeals within:

- **Academic appeals:** Decision within **20 working days** of appeal submission
- **Administrative appeals:** Decision within **15 working days** of appeal submission

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Related legislation, regulation or guidelines:

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI)
- Sector Specific (Independent/Private) Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI)
- Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013 (QQI)
- Principles of natural justice
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR

3.4 Procedure for Appeals

QA Area(s)	• Documented Approach to Quality Assurance • Governance and Management of Quality
Applies to	☐ Staff only ☑ Learners only ☑ Staff and learners
Policies this Procedure relates to	Policy for Complaints

Purpose

This procedure outlines the step-by-step process for students to submit appeals and for Appeals Board to review and decide appeals fairly and independently.

Procedure

Part A: Information And Accessibility

1. Making Appeals Information Available

Student Handbook:	Student Handbook includes section on "How to Appeal a Decision"
Decision Letters:	All formal decisions that may be appealed include statement in decision letter
Website:	ELI Schools website includes "Appeals" page

Part B: Submitting An Appeal

2. Student Decision to Appeal

Student Receives Decision:	Student receives formal decision Assessment result/grade Progression decision Expulsion notice
Student Considers Appeal:	Student considers whether to appeal: Disciplinary sanction Other appealable decision
Student may seek advice:	Do I have valid grounds for appeal? (not just disagreement)

Deciding to Appeal:

If student decides to appeal, must act within deadline:

- **Academic appeals:** 10 working days from decision/result date
- **Administrative appeals:** 5 working days from decision date

3. Preparing and Submitting Appeal

3.1. Appeal Submission Form:

Student completes **Appeal Submission Form**

3.2. Submitting Appeal:

Student submits completed form and supporting documents:

- **To:** Quality Officer
- **By:** Email: appeals@elischools.com
- **OR:** In person (to Quality Officer or Student Services Officer)
- **Before:** Deadline (10 or 5 working days from decision date)

3.3. Late Appeals:

If appeal submitted after deadline:

- Student must include explanation for lateness
- Quality Officer assesses whether to accept late appeal
- Late appeals only accepted if:
- Valid reason for delay (e.g., serious illness, emergency)
- Supporting evidence of reason for delay
- Not excessively late (typically maximum 5 additional days)
- Decision on accepting late appeal communicated to student within 3 working days

Part C: Initial Processing of Appeal

4. Receipt and Acknowledgment

Quality Officer Receives Appeal:	Within **2 working days** of receiving appeal: Quality Officer: • Reviews appeal for completeness • Checks appeal submitted within deadline • Assigns appeal reference number (e.g., APP-2024-001) • Records in Appeals Register
Acknowledgment Sent	Quality Officer sends a note to acknowledge the Appeal
Preliminary Assessment:	Quality Officer reviews appeal to determine: • Is appeal submitted within deadline? (or valid reason for lateness) • Is decision being appealed actually appealable? • Has student stated grounds for appeal?
If Appeal Ineligible or Incomplete:	Quality Officer contacts student: • If ineligible: Explains why appeal cannot proceed, student may submit complaint instead if appropriate • If incomplete: Requests missing information, gives student 5 working days to provide
If Appeal Eligible and Complete:	• Quality Officer proceeds to prepare case for Appeals Board.
Requesting Response from Decision-Maker:	• Quality Officer requests written response from person/body who made original decision
Scheduling Appeals Board Hearing	• Contacts Appeals Board Chair (independent external person) to schedule hearing • Schedules hearing date (aim for within 10-15 working days of appeal submission for administrative appeals, 15-20 working days for academic appeals)

Part D: Appeals Board Hearing

8. Conducting the Hearing

Hearing Format:	Appeals Board hearing is formal but fair process designed to: • Allow student to present their case • Allow decision-maker to explain original decision • Allow Appeals Board to ask questions and clarify issues
Step 1: Introduction (Chair)	Chair welcomes everyone and explains: • Purpose of hearing • Process to be followed • Roles of each person present • Confidentiality • Decision will be communicated in writing after deliberation
Attendees:	• Appeals Board: Chair (independent), Board member, senior staff member • Quality Officer (secretary, taking notes) • Student (appellant) • Student's supporter (if student brought one) • Decision-maker (Senior Academic Manager) or another
Step 2: Student Presents Appeal	Chair invites student to present their appeal: • Student explains grounds for appeal (procedural irregularity, extenuating circumstances, etc.) • Student presents supporting evidence • Student explains what outcome they seek • Student's supporter may assist but does not present on student's behalf • Chair and Appeals Board may ask clarifying questions
Step 3: Appeals Board Questions Student	Appeals Board members may ask student questions: • Clarifying facts • Understanding circumstances • Exploring evidence • Ensuring clear understanding of appeal
Step 4: Decision-Maker Presents Original Decision	Chair invites decision-maker to present: • Decision-maker explains how original decision was reached • Decision-maker describes process followed • Decision-maker responds to specific appeal grounds raised by student • Decision-maker presents any additional context or evidence
Step 5: Appeals Board Questions Decision-Maker	Appeals Board members may ask decision-maker questions: • Clarifying decision-making process • Exploring whether procedures followed • Understanding rationale • Addressing issues raised in appeal
Step 6: Student Final Statement	Chair invites student to make brief final statement: • Student may respond to anything raised by decision-maker • Student may emphasize key points • Student may not introduce new evidence at this stage
Step 7: Hearing Closes	Chair thanks everyone for attending: • Hearing is now closed • Student and decision-maker excused
Appeals Board Deliberation and Decision	Appeals Board deliberates in private (student and decision-maker not present)

10. Communicating Decision

10.1. **Written Decision Letter to Student:** Within **5 working days** of hearing (or sooner if possible)

10.2. **Notifying Decision-Maker:** Quality Officer sends copy of decision to decision-maker (Senior Academic Manager or Senior Operations Manager): Informs them of outcome

10.3. **Recording Decision:** Quality Officer: Files all hearing documentation

Part E: Implementing Remedy

11. Remedy Implementation (If Appeal Upheld)

11.1. **Responsibility for Implementation:** Quality Officer coordinates with relevant manager

- **Academic Remedies:** Senior Academic Manager coordinates implementation
- **Administrative Remedies:** Senior Operations Manager or Managing Director coordinates implementation

11.2. **Timeline for Implementation:**

Remedy implemented promptly:

- **Reassessment:** Within 10-15 working days (or next assessment period if that's sooner)
- **Grade change:** Within 5 working days (update records)
- **Reinstatement:** Immediately (student returns to classes)
- **Refund:** Within 10-15 working days

11.3. **Confirming Implementation to Student:**

Once remedy implemented, Quality Officer (or relevant manager) confirms to student:

Part G: Record Keeping and Analysis

13. Appeals Register -Quality Officer maintains Appeals Register:

Appeal Ref	
Date Received	
Student Name	
Decision Appealed	
Grounds	
Hearing Date	
Appeals Board Decision	
Date	
Remedy	
Status	

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Related legislation, regulation or guidelines:

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI)
- Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013 (QQI)
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR

3.5 Policy for Fitness to Study (addition to Code of Conduct)

QA Area(s)	• Documented Approach to Quality Assurance • Supports for Learners • Governance and Management of Quality
Applies to	☐ Staff only ☑ Learners only ☑ Staff and learners
Policy Owner	Senior Operations Manager

Purpose

This policy establishes ELI Schools' framework for supporting students whose health, wellbeing, or behaviour affects their ability to study effectively or impacts the safety, wellbeing, or learning of others, and for taking appropriate action when necessary to protect the student and/or the wider community.

Scope

This policy applies to all students at ELI Schools across all programmes and locations when:

- A student's physical or mental health affects their ability to engage with their studies
- A student's behaviour (arising from health, wellbeing, or other factors) poses risk to themselves
- A student's behaviour poses risk to others (staff, students, or public)
- A student's behaviour significantly disrupts the learning environment
- A student requires support or intervention beyond normal student support services

This policy is distinct from:

- **Code of Conduct:** Which addresses general student behaviour expectations and minor misconduct
- **Disciplinary Procedures:** Which address intentional misconduct or rule-breaking

Fitness to Study focuses on:

- Health and wellbeing affecting study
- Behaviour arising from health or personal difficulties
- Supportive intervention prioritizing student welfare
- Temporary measures while student receives support
- Enabling students to continue or return to studies safely

Policy Statement

Commitment to Student Welfare:

ELI Schools is committed to supporting all students to succeed in their studies and to providing a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment. We recognize that:

- Students may experience health or personal difficulties that affect their studies
- Mental health challenges are common and should be supported not stigmatized
- Early intervention and support can prevent escalation of difficulties
- Most students can continue studying with appropriate support and adjustments
- In rare cases, temporary withdrawal may be in student's best interests

Fitness to Study Defined:

"Fitness to Study" refers to a student's ability to:

- Engage meaningfully with their programme of study
- Participate in classes and learning activities
- Complete assessments and meet programme requirements

- Maintain their own safety and wellbeing
- Interact appropriately with staff and fellow students
- Not pose risk to themselves or others

A student may be considered "not fit to study" when:

- Their health or wellbeing severely impairs their ability to engage with studies
- They pose risk to their own safety
- Their behaviour poses risk to others' safety or wellbeing
- Their behaviour significantly disrupts the learning environment
- They require support beyond what ELI Schools can reasonably provide

Principles:

Support-First Approach:
- Fitness to Study process is supportive, not punitive
- Primary aim is to help student succeed in studies
- Support and reasonable accommodations offered wherever possible
- Removal from studies is last resort, used only when necessary for safety or when other options exhausted

Student Wellbeing Priority:
- Student's health and wellbeing prioritized above all else
- Decisions made in student's best interests
- Encouragement to seek help early
- No stigma or penalty for experiencing mental health or personal difficulties

Early Intervention:
- Concerns addressed early before crisis develops
- Supportive conversations preferred over formal process
- Multiple layers of support available
- Escalation only when necessary

Individualized Response:
- Each situation assessed individually
- Support tailored to student's specific needs
- Reasonable accommodations provided
- Cultural sensitivity and respect for student's circumstances

Proportionality:
- Response proportionate to level of concern
- Least restrictive intervention used
- Formal process only when informal support insufficient
- Temporary measures reviewed regularly

Confidentiality:
- Student's health and personal information handled confidentially
- Information shared only with those who need to know for student's welfare or safety
- GDPR and data protection compliance
- Student's dignity respected

Collaboration:
- Student involved in decision-making wherever possible
- Family involved with student's consent where appropriate
- External support services engaged where needed
- Multi-agency approach when necessary

Right to Return:
- Temporary withdrawal does not mean permanent exclusion
- Students supported to return when ready
- Return to study planned and supported

When Fitness to Study Concerns Arise:

Fitness to Study concerns may arise from:

Health and Wellbeing Issues:

- Physical health conditions affecting attendance or participation
- Mental health difficulties (depression, anxiety, psychosis, eating disorders, self-harm, suicidal ideation)
- Substance misuse (drugs or alcohol)
- Exhaustion or burnout
- Injury or disability affecting study

Behavioural Concerns:

- Significantly disruptive behaviour in classes or on premises
- Aggressive or threatening behaviour
- Withdrawal or isolation raising welfare concerns
- Erratic or concerning behaviour
- Hygiene or self-care concerns
- Behaviour suggesting crisis or distress

Risk Concerns:

- Risk to student's own safety (self-harm, suicidal ideation, severe self-neglect)
- Risk to others' safety (threats, violence, stalking, harassment)
- Risk to young learners if concern involves student working with children

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Related legislation, regulation or guidelines:

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI)
- Health and Safety at Work Act 2005
- Mental Health Act 2001
- Children First Act 2015 (where applicable)
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR
- Disability Act 2005
- Employment Equality Acts (reasonable accommodations)

3.6 Procedure for Fitness to Study

QA Area(s)	• Documented Approach to Quality Assurance • Supports for Learners		
Applies to	☐ Staff only	☑ Learners only	☑ Staff and learners
Policies this Procedure relates to	Policy for Fitness to Study		

Purpose

This procedure outlines the step-by-step process for identifying, addressing, and supporting students experiencing fitness to study concerns.

Procedure

PART A: EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT

1. Identifying Students of Concern

Warning Signs: Staff may observe:

Academic/Engagement Indicators:
- Significant decline in attendance
- Disengagement from classes or activities
- Deterioration in work quality
- Missing assessments or deadlines
- Difficulty concentrating or participating

Behavioural Indicators:
- Withdrawal from social interaction
- Uncharacteristic behaviour changes
- Agitation, aggression, or irritability
- Disruptive behaviour in classes
- Erratic or unpredictable behaviour
- Inappropriate or concerning statements

Health/Wellbeing Indicators:
- Visible signs of distress or exhaustion
- References to self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Concerning weight loss or eating patterns
- Hygiene or self-care concerns
- Evidence of substance misuse
- Physical injuries (particularly if pattern emerges)

Risk Indicators:
- Expressed intent to harm self or others
- Stalking or harassment behaviours
- Threats or violence
- Severe self-neglect
- Behaviour suggesting psychosis or severe mental health crisis

Information Sources:

Concerns may come from:
- Teachers noticing changes in student
- Fellow students reporting concerns
- Accommodation provider (host family) reporting concerns
- Student self-reporting difficulties
- Family contacting school
- External parties (police, hospital, etc.)

2. Stage 1: Informal Support and Intervention

Initial Response - Supportive Conversation:	When concern identified, staff member (teacher, Student Services Officer, Programme Leader) approaches student: **Listen with empathy:** • Student may disclose difficulties (health, family, financial, relationship, etc.) • Thank student for sharing • Validate their feelings: "That sounds really difficult" / "I'm glad you told me" **Offer Support:** • "We have support available that might help you." • "Our Student Services Officer can talk with you and connect you with resources." • "Would it be helpful if I connected you with [Student Services Officer]?" **Immediate Concerns:** • If student in immediate distress or mentions self-harm/suicide: Do not leave alone, stay with student, contact Student Services Officer or Senior Operations Manager immediately • If student in medical emergency: Call 999, stay with student
Referral to Student Services Officer:	Staff member refers student to Student Services Officer (with student's consent where possible): • Email or phone: "I spoke with [student name] who is experiencing [general description]. They would benefit from support. Can you follow up?" • If urgent: Direct introduction to Student Services Officer
Student Services Officer Support:	Student Services Officer meets with student: **Assessment:** • What is student experiencing? (physical health, mental health, personal circumstances) • How is it affecting their studies? • What support do they need? • Are they receiving any professional support? (GP, counseling, medication) • Are they safe? (risk assessment) **Support Plan:** Connect to appropriate resources: • GP registration (if not registered) • Mental health services (e.g., counselling, Pieta House for crisis, HSE mental health services) • Support groups or community resources • Financial or housing support if relevant Academic support: • Speak with Academic Manager about temporary flexibility • Extensions on assignments (extenuating circumstances) • Temporary modified timetable if appropriate • Ongoing check-ins: • Regular meetings with Student Services Officer • Monitoring of wellbeing and engagement **Documentation:** • Student Services Officer keeps confidential notes of support provided • Not formal fitness to study record unless escalated

Review:	• Student Services Officer monitors student's progress
	• Most students improve with support and continue studies successfully
	• If situation improves: Continue support but no formal process needed
	• If situation deteriorates or student not engaging: Consider formal process

Part B: Formal Fitness to Study Process

When to Initiate Formal Process	**Triggers for Formal Process:** Formal process considered when: • Informal support insufficient or situation deteriorating despite support • Student poses risk to self or others • Student's behaviour significantly disrupting classes or community • Student unable or unwilling to engage with support • Serious incident occurs (violence, severe self-harm, crisis) **Decision to Initiate:** Student Services Officer or Senior Operations Manager decides to initiate formal process: • Consults with relevant staff (teachers, Programme Leaders) • Gathers information about concern and efforts to support • Discusses with Managing Director if serious case • Decision documented
Notifying Student of Formal Process	
Written Notice to Student:	Student notified of Panel meeting with 15 days of notice
Precautionary Suspension:	In serious cases (high risk, serious incident), student may be temporarily suspended from classes pending Panel: • Not disciplinary - precautionary for student's or community's safety • Student may access Student Services Officer and support • Student may remain in accommodation if safe Reviewed at Panel meeting
Student Submits Response:	Within 5 working days, student may submit written response: • Explanation of circumstances • Current situation and support • What would help Any medical information or letters from healthcare providers

Fitness to Study Panel	**Panel Composition:** • **Chair:** Senior Operations Manager • **Member:** Student Services Officer • **Member:** Academic Manager or Programme Leader (academic perspective) • **Member (if needed):** External expert (psychologist, welfare professional, medical professional) • **Secretary:** Administrative staff (non-voting, takes notes) **Note:** If student has disability or known health condition, Panel should include person with expertise in disability/health support where possible.
Panel Meeting Scheduled:	Within **15 working days** of formal notice. Student notified at least **5 days** before meeting: **Panel Meeting Process:** **Different tone from disciplinary - supportive and collaborative:** • **Introduction:** Chair explains this is supportive process focused on student's wellbeing and ability to study • **Student's Perspective:** Student invited to explain situation, how they're feeling, what's been happening, what support would help **Panel Questions:** Panel asks questions to understand: • Student's current wellbeing and functioning • Whether student able to engage with studies currently • What support student receiving/willing to receive • Student's insight into situation • Risks and how to manage them

7. Panel Decision and Outcomes

Panel Decides:

Option 1: Continue Studies with Support Plan	Student continues studies with structured support
Option 2: Continue Studies with Conditions	Student continues subject to specific conditions
Option 3: Temporary Voluntary Withdrawal	Panel recommends temporary withdrawal, student agrees
Option 4: Temporary Compulsory Withdrawal (Suspension)	Panel decides student must temporarily withdraw Duration: Specific period
Option 5: Permanent Withdrawal (Expulsion)	**Extremely rare - only in exceptional circumstances:** • Ongoing serious risk to others that cannot be managed • Student refuses all support and engagement • Student's needs far exceed ELI Schools' capacity
Decision Letter:	Within **5 working days** of Panel meeting: Attachments: • Support Plan (if applicable) • Return to Study Plan (if withdrawal) • Support resources information

Part C: Implementing Panel Decision

Support Plan Implementation

If Student Continuing with Support Plan:	Student Services Officer:

- Meets with student to review Support Plan
- Ensures student understands expectations and supports available
- Connects student to resources (GP, counselling, etc.)
- Schedules regular check-in meetings
- Monitors student's engagement and wellbeing
- Programme Leader/Academic Manager:
- Briefed on student's situation (general terms, respecting confidentiality)
- Implements any academic adjustments
- Monitors student's engagement in classes
- Reports concerns to Student Services Officer

Conditions Monitoring

9.1. **If Student Continuing with Conditions:**

Student Services Officer (or designated person):

- Monitors compliance with conditions
- Documents student's engagement
- Regular check-ins with student
- Liaises with external services (with student consent) to verify engagement

If Conditions Met:

- Student continues successfully
- Conditions may be lifted after review period if sustained improvement

If Conditions Not Met:

- Student Services Officer alerts Senior Operations Manager
- Warning given to student
- If continued non-compliance: Panel reconvened to consider suspension

10. Temporary Withdrawal (Voluntary or Suspension)

Administrative Actions: Senior Operations Manager and Programme Leader coordinate:

Academic:	• Student withdrawn from classes • Attendance records note "Temporary withdrawal - Fitness to Study"
Financial:	• Refund processed according to terms and conditions • Student may be entitled to refund for unused portion depending on circumstances
Accommodation:	• If student in ELI Schools accommodation, arrangements discussed • Student may need to vacate or may be able to stay depending on circumstances and location • Safety paramount in decisions
Immigration (if visa student):	• INIS notified of temporary withdrawal • Student's visa implications discussed with student • Student may need to return home if visa affected

11. Return to Study

Student Wishes to Return:
- Student contacts Senior Operations Manager or Student Services Officer to express wish to return.

Return to Study Assessment:
Senior Operations Manager and Student Services Officer meet with student:
- Review student's situation since withdrawal
- Review medical clearance and evidence
- Discuss student's readiness to return
- Develop Return to Study Plan

Return to Study Plan includes:
- Date of return
- Any phased return (e.g., part-time initially, building to full-time)
- Ongoing support arrangements (check-ins, accommodations)
- Conditions for continued study (ongoing engagement with support)
- Review period (e.g., monthly monitoring for first term)

Decision on Return:
Senior Operations Manager (in consultation with Student Services Officer and managing Director if serious case):
- Decides whether student may return
- **If approved:** Student returns as per Return to Study Plan
- **If not approved:** Explained why (conditions not met, ongoing concerns), what further requirements needed, when student can reapply
- **If return denied:** Student may appeal decision.

Supporting Return:
Once student returns:
- Student Services Officer provides enhanced support
- Academic staff briefed (general terms, respecting confidentiality)
- Student reintegrated gradually
- Regular monitoring and review
- Support Plan continued or adapted

Part D: Emergency Procedures

12. Emergency Situations

Immediate Risk to Life or Safety: If student in immediate crisis:

Suicidal Crisis:
- Do not leave student alone
- Call emergency services (999) if immediate risk
- Contact Student Services Officer and Senior Operations Manager immediately
- Contact crisis services (Pieta House 1800 247 247, Samaritans 116 123)
- Contact student's family (with consent or in emergency without consent)
- Stay with student until professional help arrives

Medical Emergency:
- Call 999
- Administer first aid if trained
- Stay with student
- Contact Senior Operations Manager
- Contact family

Violence or Threat:
- Ensure safety of others (evacuate if necessary)
- Call Gardaí (999) if violence or serious threat
- Contact Senior Operations Manager immediately
- May require immediate temporary exclusion from premises

Immediate Temporary Exclusion: In emergency only:
- Senior Operations Manager (or Managing Director) may immediately exclude student from premises if:
- Immediate risk to others
- Serious violence or threat
- Severe crisis requiring emergency intervention
- Decision documented
- Family contacted
- Formal Fitness to Study process follows within 24-48 hours

Part E: Record Keeping and Reporting

13. Records

Confidential Records Maintained:	Quality Officer maintains secure Fitness to Study file for each case: • Initial concern reports • Student's response • Student Services Officer assessment • Medical information (if provided with consent) • Panel meeting notes • Decision letter • Implementation records (support plan, monitoring notes, return to study) • Appeal records (if applicable) **Highly confidential** - restricted access (Senior Operations Manager, Student Services Officer, Quality Officer, Managing Director only). Retention: 7 years minimum, longer if serious case.
Student Programme File:	Student's programme file includes: • General note that Fitness to Study process occurred (if formal) • Does NOT include sensitive medical/personal details • Return to Study Plan if relevant for academic staff

Part F: Appeals

Student Appeal	**If student wishes to appeal Panel decision:** • Appeal submitted within **10 working days** of decision letter • Appeal follows standard Appeals Procedure (Section 3.4) • Heard by Appeals Board Grounds: Procedural irregularity, evidence not considered, bias, disproportionate decision

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Related legislation, regulation or guidelines:

• Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI)
• Health and Safety at Work Act 2005
• Mental Health Act 2001
• Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR
• Disability Act 2005