

Fitness to Study Procedure

If a person is in immediate danger, call emergency services on 000 or campus security on 1800 646 501. Follow the [Emotional Distress and Crisis Response Protocol](#) to guide anyone providing immediate support to someone in distress.

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) Charles Darwin University ('the University', 'CDU') recognises the diverse factors that may impact a student's ability to engage effectively in their studies. The University recognises its responsibility for maintaining a supportive and inclusive environment conducive to student success. The University supports students by offering comprehensive support services, early intervention, and transparent processes for managing concerns about student welfare.

(2) The University is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive environment that facilitates the successful reintegration of students returning from an involuntary leave of absence, ensuring that students are best positioned for academic and personal success.

Section 2 - Purpose

(3) This procedure commits the University to providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment that is conducive to student success by:

- a. Safeguarding student wellbeing;
- b. Promoting academic success;
- c. Ensuring fairness and transparency;
- d. Providing supportive interventions; and
- e. Upholding the University's values.

(4) This procedure:

- a. ensures student safety and wellbeing by adopting a preventative and supportive approach to safeguard the safety and wellbeing of University stakeholders; and
- b. supports students through involuntary leave by establishing a student-centred, supportive, and retention-incentivised process.

(5) This procedure should be read in conjunction with the [Support for Students Policy](#).

Section 3 - Scope

(6) This procedure applies to all enrolled students of the University and to all employees who teach or interact with students.

Section 4 - Procedure

If a person is in immediate danger, call emergency services on 000 or campus security 1800 646 501. Follow the [Emotional Distress and Crisis Response Protocol](#) to guide anyone providing immediate support to someone in distress.

(7) The University provides three levels of intervention for managing student wellbeing and safety concerns:

- a. Level 1: Initial wellbeing and safety concern;
- b. Level 2: Referral to student support delegate; and
- c. Level 3: Fitness to study concern.

Level 1 - Informal wellbeing and safety concern

(8) Level 1 intervention is required where there is a concern about a student's wellbeing and/or safety. Level 1 intervention is the responsibility of all University employees, including both academic and professional employees.

(9) Level 1 intervention involves the following steps:

- a. Refer to the [Emotional Distress and Crisis Response Protocol](#);
- b. Advise the student about processes to register with [Access and Inclusion](#) to receive reasonable adjustment; and
- c. Advise the student about the withdrawal process, referring to the [Enrolment Policy](#).

Level 2 - Referral to student support delegate

(10) Level 2 intervention is required where Level 1 has been completed and there is a serious concern for a student's wellbeing and/or safety. A referral can be made by any University employee who has undertaken Level 1 actions. Level of concern definitions are included in the [Report a Concern form](#).

(11) Level 2 intervention involves the following steps:

Completing a report of concern form

(12) The following details must be provided in the [Report a Concern Form](#):

- a. Details of the concern or incident that occurred, the reporter's relationship to the student, and whether it is an ongoing situation;
- b. Any actions taken under Level 1 and any known outcomes; and
- c. Any contact with the student.

(13) The completed form will be submitted to a student support delegate via email to equity@cdu.edu.au. The student support delegate will acknowledge the report within 2 working days of its lodgement and contact the student to discuss steps and provide advice regarding this procedure.

Determine appropriate actions

(14) The student support delegate will determine which outcomes or actions are appropriate to respond to the wellbeing and safety concern. Actions and outcomes will be documented and may include:

- a. confirming that the actions set out in Level 1 have been completed;
- b. in consultation with the student, requesting information from the student's health professional to establish

fitness to study;

- c. in consultation with the student, developing an action plan to manage the concerns;
- d. documenting the steps taken by the student to engage in support services in the wellbeing and safety assessment form; and
- e. referring the matter to a Level 3 decision maker. Documented information about the actions taken so far will be provided in the referral to a Level 3 decision maker.

Level 3 - Fitness to Study Concern

(15) The Level 3 decision maker is the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor. The Pro Vice-Chancellor may seek advice from the Provost and should refer to the previous steps taken by the student support delegate. In the case of a higher degree by research candidate, the Pro Vice-Chancellor may consult with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection and/or the Dean of Graduate Studies and may delegate Level 3 decision making to the Associate Dean Research. The decision maker must determine what actions and outcomes are appropriate to respond to the wellbeing/safety and or Fitness to Study concern.

(16) Any decision made by the Pro Vice-Chancellor or delegate will be guided by the Level 2 assessment information and may include:

- a. Requiring the student to submit to a medical assessment conducted by an external health professional. This should not be at cost to the student;
- b. Placing the student on a reduced study load;
- c. If supported by medical evidence, determining the student is unfit to study for a specified period and imposing an involuntary leave of absence, with conditions for the student's return to study;
- d. If supported by medical evidence, determining the student is unfit to study for the foreseeable future and enrolment in the program is cancelled; or
- e. Discussing the case with the Provost, for advice.

(17) An involuntary leave of absence may only be imposed if:

- a. medical evidence that indicates that the student is not currently fit to continue their enrolment has been provided; and
- b. no reasonable adjustments can be made; and
- c. the student is unwilling to engage with support services or access the withdrawal procedures; or
- d. the student's behaviour poses a serious concern for the welfare or safety of either themselves or others or is disruptive to the community in which they are learning.

(18) Any decision to place an international student on a student visa on a reduced study load or involuntary leave of absence must be advised to CDU Global.

Student notification and response

(19) When a matter has been referred to the Pro Vice-Chancellor, the Pro Vice-Chancellor or delegate must contact the student no later than 15 working days after the date that the matter was raised with the Pro Vice-Chancellor. The Pro Vice-Chancellor or delegate will notify the student in writing:

- a. that the Pro Vice-Chancellor has been alerted to concerns raised about the student's behaviour or action(s);
- b. the particulars of the student's behaviour or actions leading to the concern;
- c. that the matter has been referred for assessment;
- d. providing the student the opportunity to meet with the Pro Vice-Chancellor or delegate, informing the student of

- their right to respond to the concern in advance of the Committee meeting in writing, at the meeting, or both;
- e. informing the student of their right to notify the fitness to study officer that the student will be supported at the meeting by a Student Advocacy Officer or another named support person; and
- f. of this procedure.

(20) Students may:

- a. respond to the concerns communicated to them in advance of the meeting in writing, or at the meeting, or both; and
- b. bring a named support person who is an officer of the Student Advocacy Service and/or another named support person.

(21) Where the Pro Vice-Chancellor or delegate is unable to make a thorough assessment based on the information provided, they may choose to convene a Case Management Meeting, composed of:

- a. The Pro Vice-Chancellor or delegate;
- b. Provost;
- c. Associate Director Student Support;
- d. Director Student Engagement;
- e. Senior Manager Work Health and Safety;
- f. Manager Student Policy and Complaints;
- g. Course coordinator (for HE coursework), principal supervisor (for HDR), or VET Team Leader;
- h. If the student is First Nations – Manager First Nations Student Support;
- i. If the student is international – Director CDU Global;
- j. Where the student is a higher degree by research candidate – Dean of Graduate Studies;
- k. Other delegates deemed appropriate by the Pro Vice-Chancellor.

Appeal

(22) The [Complaints Policy - Students](#) governs the process of applying for an appeal of a decision and time limits for seeking an appeal. In accordance with the [Complaints Policy - Students](#) a student may apply for an appeal of a decision within 20 working days of notification.

Return to study provisions, supports and actions.

(23) The University is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive environment that facilitates the successful reintegration of students returning from an involuntary leave of absence, ensuring they have the necessary resources to thrive both academically and personally.

Individualised return plan

(24) Upon a student's return from an involuntary leave of absence, the University will develop an individualised return plan in collaboration with the student.

(25) A student support delegate will meet with the student to consider and explain the plan. The plan will outline the steps and support measures needed to facilitate a smooth transition back to academic life. The plan will be in place for a one-semester period. This may include:

- a. A return to study document completed by a health professional;
- b. Identification of any considerations such as reduced study load and course duration consideration; and/or

- c. Academic support.

(26) To support academic success, one or more of the following measures will be implemented:

- a. Modified Course Load: Where necessary, the student may be allowed or encouraged to take a reduced course load to help them adjust back to the academic environment;
- b. Access and Inclusion support: The student will be encouraged to register with [Access and Inclusion](#) to develop an Access Plan; and/or
- c. Wellbeing and Counselling Services: The student will have access to [student support services](#) to support their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Monitoring and regular review

(27) The Course Coordinator, in consultation with the Pro Vice-Chancellor, and the Student Support team will monitor the student's wellbeing with meetings scheduled at key points throughout the semester to evaluate the student's adjustment and address any emerging issues. A Learning Access Plan may be implemented to support this process.

Peer support and mentoring

(28) To foster a supportive environment, the student may be paired with a peer mentor who can offer guidance, share experiences, and provide encouragement. This will be facilitated by the Student Support team.

Communication and feedback

(29) Open lines of communication will be maintained between the student, faculty, and support services. The student will be encouraged to provide feedback on their return plan and the support they are receiving, ensuring the approach remains flexible and responsive to their needs.

Section 5 - Non-Compliance

(30) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the [Code of Conduct - Employees](#) or the [Code of Conduct - Students](#), as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures outlined in the [Charles Darwin University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2022](#) and the [Code of Conduct - Students](#).

(31) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the [Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure - Employees](#) and [Complaints Policy - Students](#).

(32) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the [Fraud and Corruption Control Policy](#) and [Whistleblower Reporting \(Improper Conduct\) Procedure](#).

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	18th November 2024
Review Date	18th November 2025
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	28th October 2024
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Fiona Coulson Provost
Implementation Officer	Sarah Fletcher Director Student Engagement
Enquiries Contact	Candice Smyth Associate Director Student Engagement 08 8946 6861

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Course Coordinator" - An academic staff member who is responsible for the academic management of a course.

"Faculty" - An organisational and academic unit in the University that delivers courses and conducts research.

"University" - Charles Darwin University, a body corporate established under section 4 of the Charles Darwin University Act 2003. The University is comprised of the various faculties, CDU TAFE, organisational units, and formal committees, including the governing University Council and Academic Board.

"Student support delegate" - A senior member of the Student Support team, such as the Associate Director Student Support, Team Leader Counselling, and Team Leader Access and Inclusion.