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.

(7) Concerns that relate to a student's professional practice (including in relation to work integrated learning), the Fitness to Practise Policy and Procedure may apply.

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.

(8) 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

(9) 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.

(10) 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;
c. Advise the student about the withdrawal process, referring to the Enrolment Policy;
d. Where the student's safety, or the safety of another person, is compromised or threatened in any way, contact CDU Security on 1800 646 501 and, if necessary, the emergency services on 000; and
e. Where the student's behaviour does not align with the Code of Conduct - Students, ensure the student is aware of which behaviour may have breached this and what expected behaviour entails. This should be reiterated in writing to the student to ensure understanding.

Level 2 – Referral to student support delegate

(11) 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. Where there are not immediate safety or wellbeing concerns, a period of 10 working days should be allowed for a student to engage with supporting information and notification before progressing to Level 2. If there are concerns about this time period, the employee should contact the Associate Director Student Support to discuss. Level of concern definitions are included in the Report a Concern form.

(12) Level 2 intervention involves the following steps:

Completing a report of concern form

(13) 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 (with evidence provided).

(14) Where appropriate and not compromising safety or wellbeing, students should be made aware of the information provided in the Report a Concern form to ensure procedural fairness.

(15) The completed form will be submitted to a student support delegate via email to equity@cdu.edu.au. The student support delegate will acknowledge receipt of the report within two working days of its lodgement and will assess the report to ensure it aligns with this procedure. If the report is appropriate to commence the process, the student support delegate will contact the student to discuss steps and provide advice regarding this procedure. If this report is not appropriate to commence the process, the student support delegate will contact the staff member who completed the form to advise and, where available, direct them to the appropriate pathway.

Determine appropriate actions

(16) 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 (and their parent/guardian if the student is under the age of 18), requesting information from the student's health professional to establish fitness to study;
c. in consultation with the student (and their parent/guardian if the student is under the age of 18), 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;
e. considering whether the concerns relate to a student's professional practice should be managed under the Fitness to Practise Policy and Procedure; and
f. 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.

(17) The student support delegate, in consultation with the Director Student Engagement and in consideration of both professional judgment and the collateral information provided by the student, may elect to proceed with the agreed upon actions without escalating to a Level 3 decision maker. Actions may include:

a. Access and Inclusion Plan developed with reasonable adjustments for study
b. Voluntary short period of intermission from studies to prioritise health and wellbeing
c. Voluntary reduction of study load
d. Regular engagement with student support delegate to ensure ongoing safety and wellbeing

Level 3 – Fitness to Study Concern

(18) The Level 3 decision maker is the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor.

a. In the case of students studying at CDU International College, the Level 3 decision maker is the Deputy Provost. In such cases, all references to Pro Vice-Chancellor in this document refer to the Deputy Provost.

(19) 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.

(20) When a matter has been referred to the Pro Vice-Chancellor, the Pro Vice-Chancellor or delegate must contact the student (and their parent/guardian if the student is under the age of 18) 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.

(21) 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.

(22) 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.

(23) 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

(24) 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.

(25) 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, which, dependent on their relationship with the student and matter at hand, 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

(26) 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.

(27) 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

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

(29) 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.

(30) 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

(31) 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

(32) 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

(33) 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

(34) 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 2025 and the Code of Conduct - Students.

(35) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure - Employees and Complaints Policy - Students.

(36) 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	26th June 2026
Review Date	26th June 2029
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	17th June 2026
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Louise King Provost
Implementation Officer	Sarah Fletcher Director Student Engagement
Enquiries Contact	Marnie Bruce Associate Director Student Support

Glossary Terms and Definitions

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

"Work integrated learning" - Defined by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency where structured and purposefully designed learning and assessment activities integrate theory with the practice of work. Work-integrated learning includes service learning, and activities normally involve students interacting with industry and community within a work context or similar situation. This may be simulated and generally allows students to learn, and apply/demonstrate skills and knowledge applicable to the course of study being undertaken (Adapted from ALTC, The WIL (Work Integrated Learning) Report, Patrick, et al, 2009).

"Reasonable adjustments" - Adjustments that can be made to enable a student with disability to participate in education on the same basis as students without a disability. An adjustment is reasonable if it successfully balances the interests of all parties affected and does not compromise the academic standards or inherent requirements of a unit or course.

"Procedural fairness" - Procedural fairness (also called natural justice) is a principle applied by CDU when making decisions about complaints, appeals, and conduct. Essential elements include: • Giving the respondent a reasonable opportunity to be heard. If the matter involves misconduct, the respondent should know what the allegation against them is in sufficient detail so that they can answer it; • Giving the respondent reasonable opportunity to respond before the decision is made; • Genuinely considering all the evidence without bias; and • Basing the decision on evidence that supports it.

"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.

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