



University College
of Osteopathy

Fitness to Practise & Professional Behaviour Policy

Core Documentation Cover Page

Fitness to Practise & Professional Behaviour Policy

Version number	Dates produced and approved (include committee)	Reason for production/ revision	Author	Location(s)	Proposed next review date and approval required
V1.0	Sep 2010	To provide a clear policy for students regarding their Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour as pre-registration osteopathic students.	M.Ost FT Course Leader	J:\0 Quality Team – Core Documentation Intranet	Annually or in line with Professional Standards changes.
V2.0	Nov 2011	Updated to reflect changes in GOsC Standards.	M.Ost FT Course Leader	J:\0 Quality Team – Core Documentation Intranet	Annually or in line with Professional Standards changes.
V3.0	Aug 2015	Minor Amend to reflect current course and policy terminology.	Chair of Pre-Registration Portfolio Board	J:\0 Quality Team – Core Documentation Intranet	Annually or in line with Professional Standards changes.
V4.0	Aug 2017	Administrative Amendments to update institution name change from British School of Osteopathy to University College of Osteopathy.	Chair of Pre-Registration Portfolio Board	J:\0 Quality Team – Core Documentation Intranet	Aug 2017 or line with Professional Standards changes.

Equality Impact

Positive equality impact (i.e. the policy/procedure/guideline significantly reduces inequalities)	X
Neutral equality impact (i.e. no significant effect)	
Negative equality impact (i.e. increasing inequalities)	

If you have any feedback or suggestions for enhancing this policy, please email your comments to: quality@uco.ac.uk

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Section 1: Introduction

This policy relates to:

- the professional behaviour expected of students at the University College of Osteopathy;
- areas of misconduct and the sanctions available;
- the key elements in student fitness to practise arrangements.

As a UCO student, you have certain privileges and responsibilities different from those of other students. Because of this, different standards of professional behaviour are expected of you. The UCO is responsible for ensuring that you have opportunities to learn and practise to the standards expected by the UCO.

This policy considers your fitness to practise in relation to your behaviour alone and not in relation to your health. However, poor health can affect your fitness to practise either directly or by being a cause of misconduct.

The Health Policy for Pre-Registration Students (published here: http://intranet.uco.ac.uk/policies_and_procedures/) details how the UCO addresses students' health issues in relation to Fitness to Practise Procedures.

This policy has been informed by recent guidelines from the General Medical Council (GMC) and Medical Schools Council (MSC), who published similar policy statements for medical students (GMC, 2007). It also recognises that students preparing for registration and professional practice should be fully aware of their responsibilities to the profession and the general public. Therefore this policy has also been created with reference to the GOsC Osteopathic Practice Standards (2012).

All pre-registration students are expected to comply at all times with this policy.

It is also important to be aware that these guidelines have been created with UCO graduates in osteopathy in mind as set out in approved course documentation, and reflects the characteristics set down in the Benchmarking Statement for Osteopathy, developed by the QAA for all osteopathic institutions in the UK (QAA, 2007).

This policy is aimed at UCO students and anyone involved in osteopathic education, and outlines the processes of fitness to practise assessments, investigations and decisions.

Section 2: The Meaning of Student Fitness to Practise

2.1 Introduction

Osteopaths who are registered to practise must follow the Osteopathic Practice Standards published by the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC, 2012):

“The Osteopathic Practice Standards comprise both the Standards of Proficiency and the Code of Practice for osteopaths. This document presents all the standards of conduct and competence required of osteopaths to promote patients’ health and wellbeing and to protect them from harm.

The Osteopathic Practice Standards play a central role in the requirements for osteopathic training and the achievement and retention of registration with the General Osteopathic Council. The document outlines the safe, competent and ethical practice of osteopathy.” (GOsC 2012, p. 3)

Whilst osteopathic students cannot always be held to the same standards as registered osteopaths, the underlying principles are similar. It is important that if you have serious fitness to practise problems you should not be allowed to be in a position whereby patients, your colleagues or the public, are put at risk.

The GOsC first introduced the Standards of Proficiency in 1998 and subsequently revised them to produce Standard 2000: Standard of Proficiency (GOsC, 1999). These set out the core standards of competence and proficiency which it is agreed – within the osteopathic and other healthcare professions – are required to ensure patient safety and confidence.

The Standards of Practice have now been combined with the Codes of Practice (GOsC, 2005) to produce the Osteopathic Practice Standards.

It is assumed throughout these guidelines that the UCO’s admissions process and the design of the syllabus have taken full account of the requirements of the GOsC in relation to admission to the profession as outlined in the Osteopathic Practice Standards and the Osteopathic Benchmarking Statement.

It is the responsibility of the University College of Osteopathy to provide you with a reference to support your application to register with the General Osteopathic Council when you graduate. Any action taken under these regulations may have implications for this reference. Without this reference you may be unsuccessful in your application for registration.

2.2 The Threshold of Acceptable Behaviour

Osteopaths are primary contact healthcare professionals and the standards governing their practice are aimed at equipping osteopaths to operate effectively as part of the wider healthcare community.

In that respect, the Osteopathic Practice Standards (OPS) cover the full range of the osteopath’s responsibilities, from their legal obligations to patients to their duty to maintain competence through continuing professional development.

As a student at an osteopathic institution you are also expected to behave professionally at all times in line with the OPS, and with how they apply to student osteopaths.

Your behaviour will be measured against the principles set out in this policy and your course documentation. If your behaviour falls below these expected levels, the UCO will consider if this amounts to a student fitness to practise concern, and therefore warrants consideration through its formal procedures.

Your student fitness to practise may be called into question when your behaviour raises a serious or persistent cause for concern about your ability to continue on the course, or to practise as an osteopath after graduation. This includes, but is not limited to, the possibility that you could put patients or the public at risk.

In these circumstances, you will be considered by the formal student fitness to practise procedures contained within this policy. These procedures consider your behaviour’s impact on patient and public safety, and public confidence in the osteopathic profession.

2.3 Categories of Concern

The GOsC publishes Fitness to Practise reports annually. These reports include details of allegations established against osteopaths and the steps taken by the GOsC's Professional Conduct Committee in respect of those osteopaths. The UCO deems the high standards of conduct and proficiency required to maintain registration as an osteopath and the common areas of complaint to be very important in relation to our expectations of students' behaviour.

The two main areas that the GOsC continues to highlight as areas for complaints are:

- i. **Inadequate communication with patients.** This appeared as a regular feature in the complaints considered by the GOsC. The ability to communicate effectively becomes even more important when responding to patient concerns or complaints. There has been a marked increase in the number of complaints to the GOsC that have arisen as a result of the osteopath's not responding effectively or at all to the patient's concerns.
- ii. **Professional incompetence.** The number of allegations of professional incompetence has increased in recent years. Many of these were brought to the GOsC's attention because the osteopath had not effectively responded to the patient's concerns when initially raised with them. In some cases the patient experienced a reaction to treatment but there was no evidence to suggest that the osteopath had been incompetent. Effective communication during and after treatment would probably have resolved the issues and avoided the need for a formal investigation. The allegations of professional incompetence that were referred to the Professional Conduct Committee (PCC) were commonly related to the fact that the osteopath had failed to adequately assess the patient prior to commencing treatment. An absence of, or limited, neurological testing when the patient's symptoms had required this was a common feature in these cases.

The GOsC might also take action in relation to fitness to practise if an osteopath has:

- a) treated patients without obtaining consent or other valid authority;
- b) made serious or repeated mistakes in diagnosing or treating a patient's condition;
- c) not examined a patient properly or not responded to reasonable requests for treatment;
- d) misused information relating to patients;
- e) taken an inadequate case history or kept inadequate notes;
- f) behaved dishonestly in financial matters, in dealing with patients, or in research;
- g) made sexual advances towards patients;
- h) misused alcohol or drugs.

Several of these examples could clearly relate to the fitness to practise of osteopathic students as well as osteopaths.

[Table 1](#) below shows the types of concerns identified in student fitness to practise procedures at the UCO. Within each category, there is a list of examples of allegations that the UCO may consider to be so serious or persistent that they warrant the commencement of formal fitness to practise (FTP) procedures.

Decisions about the behaviour of students will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be based on whether your behaviour calls into question either your ability to continue on the course or your fitness to practise as an osteopath after graduation.

All students are required to follow the UCO's policies and procedures. Failing to do so may result in a FTP investigation being instigated.

Table 1: Areas & Examples of Misconduct

Code	Area of Misconduct	Examples (not exhaustive)
A	Unprofessional behaviour or attitudes towards patients and colleagues	Breach of confidentiality; misleading patients about their care or treatment; sexual harassment; inappropriate examinations or failure to keep appropriate boundaries in behaviour; persistent rudeness to patients, colleagues or others; unlawful discrimination; repeatedly failing to follow written policy relating to patient care and management (e.g. letter writing), failing to follow written policy on the practice of technique.
B	Unprofessional behaviour or attitudes towards academic study, staff and colleagues	Uncommitted to work; neglect of administrative tasks; poor record-keeping; poor time-management; non-attendance at UCO clinic or classes; failing to sign case histories; misuse of ICT; gambling on UCO premises; practising, or purporting to practise, as an osteopath, other than under the auspices of the UCO; inappropriate communication with others at the UCO; persistent rudeness to staff and colleagues; practising technique inappropriately.
C	Cheating or plagiarising	Cheating in examinations; passing off others' work as one's own.
D	Drug or alcohol misuse	Drunk-driving; alcohol consumption that affects clinical work or environment; dealing, possessing or using drugs even if there are no legal proceedings.
E	Aggressive, violent or threatening behaviour	Assault; physical violence; bullying; abuse, damage to or defacement of UCO property.
F	Dishonesty or fraud, including dishonesty outside the professional role	Falsifying research; financial fraud; fraudulent CVs or other documents; clinical dishonesty.
G	Criminal conviction or caution	Child pornography; theft; financial fraud; possession of illegal substances; child abuse or any other abuse; physical violence.

The examples in Table 1 are examples only and students are reminded to familiarise themselves with ALL policies and procedures published on the intranet in the following location:

- http://intranet.uco.ac.uk/policies_and_procedures/

Section 3: Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour at the UCO

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section of the policy is to advise you on the professional behaviour that is expected of UCO students in order for you to be fit to practise. It aims to guide you on how to define professional behaviour. It does not provide an exhaustive list but should encourage you to strive for high standards in your professional and personal lives.

Relative to your stage of development, restrictions will be placed on the clinical work you can do. As an osteopathic student, you must be aware that your activities will affect patients. Patients may see you as knowledgeable, and consider you to have the same responsibilities and duties as a qualified osteopath.

Your osteopathic education gives you the opportunity to learn professional behaviour in a supervised environment that is safe for patients. It is also an opportunity for the UCO to identify types of behaviour that are not safe and to take appropriate action to help students improve their behaviour; or if this is not possible or is unsuccessful, to ensure that this information is forwarded to the GOsC when considering their eligibility for registration.

You must be aware that your behaviour outside the clinical environment, including in your personal lives, may have an impact on your fitness to practise both at the UCO and when you are registered. Your behaviour at all times must justify the trust the public places in the osteopathic profession.

OPS D17
Professionalism

3.2 Student Support Mechanisms

There are mechanisms in place to support you during the course, whether you are encountering stress or emotional or academic difficulties. These will support your development of professional behaviour and fitness to practise.

- You are allocated an academic tutor to provide continuous academic, career and pastoral support throughout the course.
- If you do not feel comfortable speaking about your personal problems with people who are involved in your academic progress and require separate academic and pastoral tutors, then please speak to the Course Leader.
- We encourage students to learn about the principles of stress management and the importance of maintaining both a healthy body and mind in order to cope with stressful situations.
- You have easy access to an appropriate and confidential counselling service, which can provide objective support and advice, without fear of any impairment to your future career.
- The UCO advocates the development of the student mentoring scheme which allows new entrants to build supportive relationships with students at more advanced stages of the course.

3.3 Professional Behaviour at the UCO

3.3.1 Good Clinical Care

3.3.1.1 Being able to provide good clinical care is fundamental to becoming an osteopath. This objective should guide your behaviour in both your clinical and academic work. UCO students should reflect on how they can support and promote good clinical care as part of their osteopathic education.

OPS DI – 18
Professionalism

3.3.1.2 In order to demonstrate that you are fit to practise as a UCO student, you should:

- a) not exceed your limitations and ask for help when necessary
- b) not mislead anyone by misrepresenting your position or abilities
- c) make sure that you are supervised appropriately for any clinical task you perform including carrying out the treatment plan as agreed with your tutor
- d) respect the decisions and rights of patients and ensure that you seek consent for all that you do
- e) maintain clinical records that are an accurate and contemporaneous account of each patient seen within the clinic
- f) be aware at all times of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of your patients and their clinical records
- g) be aware that treatment should be based on the patient's priorities and the effectiveness of treatment options, and that decisions, made in conjunction with the clinic tutor, should be arrived at through evaluation and discussion with the patient
- h) not unfairly discriminate against patients by allowing your personal views to adversely affect your professional relationship or the treatment you provide or arrange (this includes your views about a patient's age, colour, culture, disability, ethnic or national origin, gender, lifestyle, marital or parental status, race, religion or beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, and social or economic status)
- i) behave with courtesy
- j) report any concerns you have about patient safety to the appropriate person
- k) be aware that you must acquire the knowledge, skills and professional attitudes required of osteopaths in order to register with the GOSc.

OPS D3 – Knowledge,
skills and performance

OPS A4 Communication
and Partnership

OPS C8
Safety & quality in practice

OPS D6
Professionalism

OPS C2 & C7
Safety & quality in practice

OPS D5
Professionalism

OPS D6
Professionalism

3.3.2 Recording and Maintaining Clinical Information

3.3.2.1 You are required to maintain clinical records that are an accurate and contemporaneous account of each patient seen within the UCO, in indelible ink, and should record each individual present during treatment. It is important that all records are legible and easily understood by colleagues and other professionals. Professional terms and language should be used in such a way that other clinicians who need to refer to the case notes are able to fully understand them. These notes constitute a legal document that may be referred to in the case of any concerns raised later.

OPS C8
Safety & quality in practice

3.3.2.2 In order to demonstrate that you are fit to practise as a UCO student, you should:

- a) ensure that all your patient records are completed during your clinic session;
- b) record all other communication with patients that take place (for example telephone conversations) that relate to the care of the patient and any subsequent follow-up;
- c) ensure that all members of the clinic team have signed the patient case notes as appropriate during your clinic session;

- d) refer to and follow all available policies and procedures that relate to the treatment and management of patients as appropriate;
- e) ensure that all patient records are maintained confidentially, and that they are returned to the clinic administration team via the appropriate routes for filing;
- f) be honest and accurate in the completion of historical information, letters, reports or other documents relating to the care of your patients or communication with other professionals.

3.3.3 Maintaining Good Osteopathic Practice

3.3.3.1 You must be aware of your responsibility to maintain your knowledge and skills. This principle should be fundamental to all aspects of your osteopathic education and to helping you to develop throughout your career.

3.3.3.2 You and your tutors may be required to participate in assessments and performance reviews throughout your careers.

3.3.3.3 In order to demonstrate that you are fit to practise as a UCO student, you should:

- a) attend compulsory teaching sessions or make other arrangements with the UCO;
- b) do not practise your technical skills in inappropriate places e.g. the student bar, nor work above the curriculum that has been delivered at your point of the course.
- c) complete and submit course work on time;
- d) be responsible for developing your own work and learning;
- e) make sure that you can be contacted and always respond to messages;
- f) reflect on feedback about your performance and achievements and respond constructively;
- g) be familiar with policy from the GOsC and other relevant organisations (Code of Practice, S2K, Benchmark Statement);
- h) respect the knowledge and skills of those involved in your education.

3.3.4 Teaching and Training, Appraising and Assessing

3.3.4.1 Osteopathic education has strong professional and academic aspects to it. You must engage with patients and gain experience in clinical settings.

3.3.4.2 You are expected to be honest and objective when appraising or assessing the performance of others, in order to ensure students and colleagues are maintaining a satisfactory standard of practice.

OPS D9 Professionalism

3.3.4.3 In order to demonstrate that you are fit to practise as a UCO student, you should:

- a) demonstrate basic teaching skills (e.g. communication with faculty, peers and patients; presentations; instructing patients);
- b) be aware of the principles of education in osteopathy;
- c) be willing to contribute to the education of other students (peer assessment/feedback);
- d) provide constructive feedback on the quality of your teaching and learning experience.

3.3.5 Issues of Safety Relating To Assessment

3.3.5.1 At the UCO, assessments are graded in broad bands rather than numerical marks. There are four pass grades (A, B, C & D) and three fail grades (E, F & G). A G grade can be awarded in the most serious of circumstances and should be connected with fitness to practise issues.

3.3.5.2 Across the institution a G grade can be awarded when either of the following conditions apply:

- a) In a practical assessment (including clinical assessment) the student makes a judgement or performs an action that is deemed to have a high risk of causing serious harm, unnecessarily

high levels of discomfort to the patient, or fails to identify a clear need to act (including appropriate referral) to benefit the patient.

- b) In a written or oral assessment, the student makes and defends a statement that, if applied clinically, is likely to cause serious harm either by omission or commission.

3.3.5.3 If you are awarded a G grade in an assessment, the first stage of the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Procedure will be initiated to investigate the reasons for awarding the G grade and to ensure you are fully aware of the issues raised. This is a supportive process to ensure that you are fully aware why what you are doing is a safety issue. The award of a G for more than one assessment or the same assessment more than once may be viewed more seriously.

3.3.5.4 Due to the professional and practical nature of the practical and clinical units, the G grade description has been elaborated to ensure clarity. The specific G grade descriptions for these units are contained in your Course Handbook.

3.3.5.5 Where Clinical Competence Assessment (CCA) / Mini Clinical Exam (MCE) grades are cumulative no re-sit exam will normally be held for students who fail the first CCA / MCE, regardless of their grade. The student will normally have the opportunity to redeem their fail grade with the second CCA / MCE.

3.3.6 Relationships with Patients

3.3.6.1 As an osteopathic student, you will have extensive contact with patients during your course. Although there are limits to these clinical encounters and you are supervised, patients may consider you to be in a position of responsibility, and so may attach added importance to your opinions or comments.

3.3.6.2 As an osteopathic student, you will be treating patients using the manual techniques taught on the course. Touch is a form of non-verbal communication between yourself and your patient. This aids you in developing the patient-practitioner relationship and the trust that the patient will put in you and your skills to get them better. You will have physical contact with your patients during treatment and this level of contact must be appropriate to the technique and treatment plan, devised in consultation with your clinic tutor. During these patient interactions, you will be therapeutically touching your patients and you must remain professional at all times.

It is essential that when you begin a consultation you explain the level of contact you will be using to your patient so they are aware of this before the treatment commences. If the patient expresses any concern in response you should ask your clinic tutor for guidance. You should not commence the proposed treatment unless the patient is clear about the level of touch and has given their consent.

3.3.6.3 The UCO requires you to build relationships with patients based on honesty, openness, trust and good communication, focusing on behaviour that respects patients and their carers (including children, young people and other vulnerable groups) as well as protecting their rights.

3.3.6.4 A good relationship is achieved by working in partnership with peers and tutors as well as with patients, for instance by encouraging patients to get involved in decisions about their care. Relatives, carers, partners and anyone else close to the patient should also be treated with consideration and be given support when needed. You are expected to maintain a professional boundary between yourself and your patients or anyone close to the patient. You must not use your professional position to cause distress or to exploit patients.

OPS D16
Professionalism

OPS A5
Communication &
patient partnership

3.3.6.5 The Osteopathic Practice Standards states that patients must give informed consent to any activity. This includes participating in teaching or research, as well as in any activity undertaken by an osteopathic student.

OPS A4
Communication &
patient partnership

3.3.6.6 The Osteopathic Practice Standards also states that patients have a right to expect information about them to be held in confidence. A patient's case must not be discussed, in a way that would identify them, with anyone not directly involved in their care or in a public place. Academic work that contains specific information about a patient must not identify the patient if it is to be seen outside the patient's care team (including peers and tutors).

OPS D6
Professionalism

3.3.6.7 In order to demonstrate that you are fit to practise, you should:

- a) respect patients and treat them with dignity;
- b) be aware of ethical issues in your professional behaviour towards patients;
- c) be open and honest when dealing with patients, their carers, relatives, partners or anyone else close to them;
- d) make sure that patients have consented to a student being involved in their care;
- e) make sure you are clearly identified as a student;
- f) dress in an appropriate and professional way and be aware that patients will respond to your appearance, presentation and hygiene.
- g) make sure you follow the Osteopathic Practice Standards (located on the GOsC website) on consent and confidentiality (GOsC, 2012).
- h) ensure that if you are qualified in another profession or trade, e.g. as a lawyer, you are able to distinguish between your role as a student osteopath and the responsibilities therein (not least with respect to your scope of practice), and your position outside the UCO.
- i) avoid entering into any professional relationships with staff, other students, patients or members of the public working for or with the UCO where there is potential for the development of a conflict of interests, or where these relationships may bring the UCO or osteopathy into disrepute, nor should you conduct your business within the UCO.
- j) You are also prohibited from exploiting your position as a student at the UCO to solicit for business, or to conduct your business in a manner that implies that you are providing that service on behalf of or with the approval of the UCO.

OPS D16
Professionalism

OPS A4
Communication &
patient partnership

3.3.7 Working with Colleagues

3.3.7.1 You need to be able to work effectively with colleagues inside and outside of healthcare in order to deliver a high standard of care and to ensure patient safety. It is essential that you remain professional at all times when discussing your colleagues or members of other health care disciplines; you should refrain from publicly criticising them.

3.3.7.2 The Osteopathic Practice Standards requires osteopaths to develop skills to work in multi-disciplinary teams. This involves respecting the skills and contributions of colleagues and other professionals, and developing effective communication with other members of the team and with patients.

3.3.7.3 It is also important that osteopaths and students protect patients from harm resulting from another colleague's behaviour, performance or health. They should take steps to raise any concerns with the appropriate person. Please note the Duty of Care and Whistleblowing Policy (published here: http://intranet.uco.ac.uk/policies_and_procedures/), which has guidance on how to deal with issues such as these.

3.3.7.4 It is also important to remember as osteopathic students that when you are practising your technical and clinical skills, either on the UCO premises or outside, you must remain professional at all times. You should maintain professional handling of your model at all times and not take advantage of their vulnerability.

3.3.7.5 In order to demonstrate that you are fit to practise as a UCO student, you should:

- a) demonstrate skills that allow you to deal with uncertainty and change in the workplace;
- b) be able to work effectively in a team and to take on different roles as appropriate, including taking responsibility for tasks;
- c) develop and demonstrate teamwork and leadership skills;
- d) be aware of the roles and responsibilities of other people involved in delivering healthcare, e.g. administration staff;
- e) respect the skills and contributions of colleagues and other professionals and not unfairly discriminate against them;
- f) raise concerns about overall practice in a healthcare setting or about colleagues, including other students, osteopathic practitioners and other healthcare workers, with the appropriate person if patients are at risk of harm (please refer to the Duty of Care and Whistleblowing Policy).

OPS D7 & D9 Professionalism

OPS D9 Professionalism

3.3.8 Probity

3.3.8.1 Probity means being honest and trustworthy, and acting with integrity. The Osteopathic Practice Standards requires osteopaths to make sure that their behaviour at all times justifies the trust that patients and the public place in the osteopathic profession.

OPS D16 Professionalism

3.3.8.2 In order to demonstrate that you are fit to practise as a UCO student, you should:

- a) bring attention to any concerns about, or errors in, your clinical work;
- b) be honest, genuine and original in your academic work, including when conducting research, and take effective action if you have concerns about the honesty of others;
- c) be honest and trustworthy when writing reports and logbooks, and when completing and signing forms;
- d) be honest in CVs and all applications and not misrepresent your qualifications, position or abilities;
- e) not plagiarise others' work or use your own work repeatedly in a way that could mislead;
- f) be honest and trustworthy in any financial dealings, especially if you are managing finances, and make sure that any funds are used for the purpose they were intended for e.g. Students' Union, fundraising;
- g) bring to the attention of the UCO any changes in circumstances that may affect your Disclosure & Barring Service enhanced disclosure submission;
- h) co-operate with any formal inquiry by the UCO or other organisation into your health, behaviour or performance, or that of anybody else;
- i) comply with the laws of the UK and, where relevant, any laws that apply specifically in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland;
- j) comply with the regulations of the UCO.

3.3.9 Health

3.3.9.1 It is important that you are aware that your own poor health may put patients and colleagues at risk.

3.3.9.2 The Osteopathic Practice Standards requires osteopaths to seek and follow advice from a suitably qualified professional about their health. This is particularly important if they have, or suspect they have, a serious condition that could adversely affect patients, or if they are receiving treatment that could affect their judgment or performance.

OPS D10 Professionalism

3.3.9.3 For the protection and well-being of both patients and students, all students are strongly advised to be immunised against Hepatitis B, and to ensure that their immunisations against Polio, TB, Tetanus, MMR, Diphtheria and Varicella are all up to date.

3.3.9.4 In order to demonstrate that you are fit to practise as a UCO student, you should:

- a) be aware that your own health problems may put patients and colleagues at risk;
- b) seek medical or occupational health advice if there is a concern about your health;
- c) accept that you may not be able to assess your own health, and be willing to be referred for treatment and to engage in any recommended treatment programmes;
- d) not rely on your own or another student's assessment of the risk posed to patients by your health, and seek advice, when necessary, from a qualified clinician or other qualified healthcare professional;
- e) be aware that you must let it be known if your health poses a risk to patients or the public.

3.3.9.5 The Health Policy for Pre-Registration Students (published here: http://intranet.uco.ac.uk/policies_and_procedures/) deals explicitly with student health issues which may lead to fitness to practise issues.

3.3.10 Attendance

3.3.10.1 You are required to attend all classes regularly and punctually. If the following requirements are not met, you may be suspended from the respective class or classes and may be re-admitted only with the approval of the Principal.

3.3.10.2 At least 70% attendance overall is expected of all students.

3.3.10.3 Attendance is monitored closely by the Student Attendance and Retention Group (SARG). 80% attendance at all practical and clinical classes is required over the first two terms. If your attendance falls below this threshold, supportive meetings will be arranged for you with a member of the SARG or your Academic Tutor to see if any issues have arisen that the UCO can help you with. If your attendance drops to below 50% overall at the end of the second term and you have not attended the supportive meetings or made contact with faculty regarding your absence, the Fitness to Practise disciplinary procedure may be initiated.

3.3.10.4 If you are unable to attend classes then please speak to the tutor concerned to ensure that you are up-to-date on the work. Ongoing attendance issues may result in your being required to attend an interview with the Course Leader and the Academic Registrar. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are marked present on the register.

3.3.10.5 Any unavoidable absence from a professionally relevant class (i.e. any practical or clinically related class) must be reported as detailed in the UCO's Attendance Policy (published here: http://intranet.uco.ac.uk/policies_and_procedures/)

3.3.10.6 Any unavoidable absence from Clinic sessions will need to be redeemed by arrangement within the relevant year of study.

3.3.10.7 Senior pre-registration students (M.Ost Full-Time Year 2 or 3 / M.Ost Part-Time Year 4 or 5 / Msc Osteopathy (Pre-Registration) Year 1 or 2) students owing more than 40 hours of clinic time will not normally progress to the next phase of the course, and final year students owing more than 60 hours of clinic time will normally be required to complete these hours before being given their letter of referral to the GOsC.

3.3.10.8 For an unavoidable absence due to illness lasting more than 5 consecutive days of time-tabled commitments, a sickness certificate from a registered medical practitioner or osteopath should be handed in to Academic Registry staff upon return.

3.3.10.9 If you are absent for less than seven days and not seriously ill we assume that you can catch up with any work you have missed. If you are unable to meet assessment deadlines then you must obtain a doctor's note and speak to the Academic Registrar as soon as possible. If you are ill for more than five working days you are required to submit a doctor's note and speak to the Academic Registrar to make arrangements to catch up on missed work.

3.3.10.10 If your absence is giving cause for concern, you will be required to attend an interview with the relevant Unit Leader or the Student Welfare Advisor.

3.3.10.11 The Principal has the right to suspend you from attendance at any class or classes and may exclude you temporarily or permanently from the UCO or its precincts.

3.3.10.12 A student will only be permitted to swap groups, completely or for particular lectures, if they find another student to swap with. It is in the student's interest to attend their Group lectures as timetabled to maintain appropriate tutor:student ratios.

Section 4: Fitness to Practise Procedures at the UCO

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this part of the policy is to define the scope of the formal fitness to practise procedures of the UCO. These relate to students on all courses leading to eligibility to register as an osteopath and who are in contact with patients.

The UCO deals with only a small number of cases through its formal procedures so it is not practical to produce an exhaustive list of examples and outcomes. The behaviour of all students must be considered on a case-by-case basis by student fitness to practise investigators.

The main principles are as follows:

- The Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel is administered within the Academic Registry Department.
- Any concerns about a student's fitness to practise are to be disclosed either to the Course Leader or the Academic Registrar.
- Following receipt of a report of the investigation into the case, the Course Leader determines whether the case will be referred to the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel.
- Appeals are heard by the Appeals Committee, which is chaired by the Principal.

The UCO will provide support and confidential pastoral care to help you if you need to improve your behaviour. When student fitness to practise concerns are identified, the UCO may offer support before, alongside, or instead of using student fitness to practise procedures. However, this decision must be based on an assessment of the risk to patients and the public. Anyone who provides pastoral care will not also be involved in investigating or making decisions that could affect your future at the UCO.

Although health and behaviour can both affect your fitness to practise, this policy deals only with behaviour; but poor behaviour may result from underlying health problems.

4.2 Awarding of G Grade

This section is to outline the supportive procedures that are followed when a student is awarded a G grade in an assessment. The definition of and procedure for the awarding of a G grade are outlined in Section 3.5.

- a) When your assessment results are published and you have been awarded a G grade, the letter will request you to make an appointment to see the Course Leader.
- b) The meeting will ensure that you are aware of the reasons for your achieving a G grade.
- c) The meeting will outline supportive measures available to you, in an attempt to ensure that you do not repeat the same mistakes and are not awarded a second G grade.
- d) Notes from this meeting will be kept on your record for the duration of your education at the UCO.
- e) If a G grade is awarded again for the same assessment, the course leader may initiate the disciplinary stages of the Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy (see [Section 5.3: Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy - Disciplinary Procedure Stages 1-4](#)).

4.3 Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy - Disciplinary Procedure Stages 1-4

4.3.1 Stage 1: Notification of a Fitness to Practise Concern

1. Any member of staff or student who has reason to believe that a student has breached the Student Fitness to Practise Policy (hereinafter called the Complainant) should notify the relevant

Course Leader by completing the “**Breach of Student Fitness To Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy Notification Form**” ([Appendix 1](#)).

2. If a student is awarded a G grade in an assessment or practical exam, then the Course Leader will initiate an investigation and then appoint an Investigating Officer.
3. The Course Leader will acknowledge receipt of the form usually within five working days of receipt, and will appoint an Investigating Officer (normally a Unit Leader not involved with the case and who is an osteopath) to investigate the alleged breach of the Student Fitness to Practise Policy (hereinafter called the alleged offence).
4. The Course Leader will usually, within five working days of receipt of the allegation, notify the student who is alleged to have committed the offence that an investigation is commencing.
5. Implementation of the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Procedure is a serious matter, and any student brought within it is advised to seek assistance from the Students’ Union.
6. The Course Leader will initially appraise the gravity of the alleged offence against the Fitness to Practise Policy. If the Course Leader deems the alleged breach of policy to be highly serious s/he will recommend to the Principal that the student is suspended whilst the investigation is undertaken. If the Principal considers that the allegations justify the suspension of the student from the UCO, he/she must notify the student of his/her decision as soon as is reasonably practicable. The student may make a representation either orally or in writing to the Principal against the suspension at this point.
7. Where the conduct complained of seems likely to amount to criminal activity, the Principal may decide to ask the police to initiate their own enquiries, in which case the Principal may suspend the UCO’s own procedures pending the outcome of the police enquiry. If reference to the Principal is invoked at this stage, or if the student who is under investigation already has a current formal written warning on file, the Course Leader should inform the Academic Registrar, who will arrange for a meeting of the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel to be convened to meet at the completion of the Investigating Officer’s report, irrespective of the findings.

4.3.2 Stage 2: Investigation of the Fitness to Practise Concern

1. It is important to distinguish between the role of the Investigating Officer appointed by UCO and the role of the Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel. The investigator considers the initial evidence and recommends to the Course Leader if it is serious enough to be referred to the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel. The Panel’s role is to deliberate formally and decide whether the student is fit to practise, and what sanctions, if any, should be imposed. The Investigating Officer should consider only whether the behaviour is so serious or persistent as to call into question the student’s ability to continue on the course, or their fitness to practise as an osteopath after graduation.
2. The appointed Investigating Officer will determine how to conduct the investigation. The investigation procedures will normally include a formal interview with the student who is alleged to have committed the offence. It may include interviews with witnesses to the alleged offence, an interview with the complainant and scrutiny of documentary evidence if appropriate. The Investigating Officer may also call for written statements.
3. If the investigation is regarding a student’s lack of attendance, the Investigating Officer will be required to include the attendance statistics (from SARG minutes), any correspondence with the student (copies of emails/letters) and a statement from the relevant Unit Leader.
4. The student’s academic profile should also be included in the report for the investigation.
5. The Investigating Officer must act in a proportionate way by weighing the interests of patients, the public and colleagues against those of the student. It is important to consider whether the behaviour is better dealt with through student support and remedial tuition rather than through a formal panel hearing. However, if the Investigating Officer decides the behaviour is so serious or

persistent as to call into question the student's ability to continue on the course, or their fitness to practise as an osteopath after graduation, the case should be referred to the Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel despite any mitigating factors such as health problems.

6. The Investigating Officer will prepare a report of his/her findings and present the report to the Course Leader usually within ten working days of receiving the request to investigate. Any mitigating factors will be considered by the Course Leader when deciding on the appropriate outcome. The Course Leader will also ensure that any warning or sanction they decide upon is proportional to the behaviour and will deal effectively with the fitness to practise concern.

4.3.3 Stage 3: Investigation Report Outcome Meeting

1. On receipt of the Investigating Officer's report, the Course Leader will call a meeting to discuss with the student the outcome of the investigation and provide the student with a copy of the report. A fellow student or Students' Union Representative may accompany the student. The Course Leader will appoint a secretary for this meeting.
2. The purpose of the meeting will be to determine whether, having considered the Investigating Officer's report and discussed the Fitness to Practise concern with the student, there are grounds for a hearing or referral to the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel.
3. The possible outcomes to this meeting are as follows:
 - a) The Course Leader finds that there is no case to answer and closes the proceedings;
 - b) The Course Leader issues an oral warning concerning the student's future conduct and this will be noted on the student's record;
 - c) The Course Leader issues a written warning concerning the student's future conduct and this will be noted on the student's record;
 - d) The Course Leader decides that the case should be referred directly to a Student Fitness to Practise Panel;
 - e) The Course Leader may recommend to the Principal that the student should be suspended from the UCO whilst a Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel is convened.
4. If the student fails to attend the meeting with the Course Leader and produces no evidence of a justifiable reason for their non-attendance then the Course Leader shall recommend that a Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel is convened.
5. If a Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel is convened the student will be provided with guidance notes on the format of the panel and the possible outcomes by the meeting Secretary.

4.3.4 Stage 4: Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel

1. All Fitness to Practise cases to be considered by the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel will usually be processed within ten working days of the referral being made by the Course Leader.
2. The Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel will consist of:
 - a) A Vice Principal (as Chair)
 - b) A senior member of the academic staff, who is an osteopath, and who has no previous connection with the student alleged to have committed the offence.
 - c) A student who has no connection to the Fitness to Practise concern nominated by the Students' Union.
 - d) A Secretary appointed by the Academic Registrar

3. A student who is referred to the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel will receive a notice in writing giving a brief but clear specification of the charge and providing at least five working days' notice to appear before the Panel.
4. The student will be notified that he/she may call such witnesses in defence as he/she may think fit and must inform the Secretary of the Panel of the names of those witnesses in advance of the hearing.
5. The student will be notified that a fellow student or a Students' Union representative at the hearing may accompany him/her and that he/she should approach either the Secretary of the Panel or the Students' Union for advice as to the procedure.
6. The student may be accompanied by a third party from outside the UCO but must inform the Chair of the Panel in writing and have received confirmation of this before the hearing.
7. The Panel will, as a minimum, receive a written statement of the allegation, the Investigating Officer's report, any supplementary report (which the Chair may commission from another member of staff acting in a capacity comparable to that of the Investigating Officer), and a written statement from the student alleged to have committed the offence.
8. The student may admit the offence at any time prior to the day of the hearing by notifying the Secretary of the Panel. Any admission should be recorded in writing and should be signed by the student. The Panel will still convene to determine the penalty and the student may attend to address the Panel prior to the penalty being decided to offer a justification or mitigation for his/her actions. The Panel should take into account the student's prior admission when deciding the penalty.
9. Where the student has not admitted the offence prior to the day of the hearing, the hearing will normally take the following form:
 - a) The Panel will receive written and/or oral evidence from the Investigating Officer and his/her witnesses as to the nature of the alleged offence in the presence of the student and his/her colleague.
 - b) The secretary of the panel will ask the student if they would like to question the Investigating Officer before the panel is held. The student will need to confirm this in writing. If there is no response, the Chair of the Panel may call the investigating officer and the panel will convene as scheduled.
 - c) The student will then be invited to give written and/or oral evidence, and may call his/her witnesses. This may involve evidence of mitigation for his/her actions.
 - d) The Investigating Officer may ask questions of the student and the witnesses.
 - e) The Panel may ask questions of either party and of any witnesses.
 - f) After all the evidence is heard, both parties will be asked to withdraw, and the Panel will arrive at a decision.
10. If the allegation is proven on the balance of probability, the Panel will determine the outcome taking into account the student's disciplinary record. Possible outcomes of the Panel hearing are listed in Section 4: Outcomes of Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy Disciplinary Hearings below.
11. The secretary to the Panel will write to the student with its decision, usually within five working days of the date of the hearing.
12. The secretary to the Panel will inform the Academic Registrar of its decision and this record will be kept by the Academic Registrar.
13. The Course Leader will support the student in arranging conditions or sanctions and will monitor the student's progress.

14. The student will be notified in writing of the names of the senior management / faculty members who will be privy to the outcome(s) of the investigation.
15. The secretary to the Panel will collect any reports required from the student with regard to any conditions/sanctions and the Panel will reconvene at a pre-set date to review the student's report. This meeting will be documented and a record of it will be kept on the student's file in the Academic Registry.

Section 5: Outcomes of Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Hearings

1. Possible outcomes of Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Hearings include:
 - a. The student receives no warning or sanction.
 - b. The student receives a warning as there is evidence of misconduct but the student's fitness to practise is not impaired to a point requiring any of the sanctions listed below.
 - c. The student receives a sanction. Beginning with the least severe, the sanctions are:
 - i. Undertakings.
 - ii. Conditions
 - iii. Suspension from the course.
 - iv. Expulsion from the course.
2. All warnings or sanctions will be kept on the student's file until the student successfully registers with the GOsC. It will then be removed (unless requested by the student to keep the record on their file permanently).
3. If a warning or sanction is awarded, this may be noted in the reference letter provided by the UCO in support of the student's application to register with the GOsC but details of the investigation will not be disclosed unless requested by the GOsC.
4. Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panels should refer to [Section 7: Glossary of Terms for use by Disciplinary Panels](#) when considering outcomes of hearings.

Section 6: Appeal Procedure

1. Within five working days of the decision's being notified, a student may appeal in writing to the Academic Registrar against the outcome of the Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Hearing outcome stating the full grounds of the appeal.
2. If a student is issued with a warning from the Panel an appeal will not normally be considered.
3. If, in the view of the Academic Registrar, the grounds of appeal casts doubt on the validity of the panel's decision, they will convene an Appeal Hearing to re-examine the case in the light of any additional evidence provided by the student as follows:
 - a) Where the student was issued with a penalty other than permanent exclusion or suspension, the Principal (or his/her nominee) will hear the appeal. Unless it is deemed appropriate by the Principal, there will be no re-hearing of the matter.
 - b) Where the student was issued with a penalty consisting of either permanent exclusion or suspension, an Appeal Panel will hear the appeal.
4. The Appeal Panel will consist of:
 - a) Three Board Members of the UCO, nominated by the Chair of the Board, one of whom will act as Chair and at least two of whom will be external to the UCO.
 - b) A Secretary appointed by the Academic Registrar.
5. The Appeal Panel will normally sit within fifteen working days of the receipt of the appeal.
6. The student may be accompanied by a third party from outside the UCO but must obtain the written consent of the Chair of the Panel beforehand.
7. The student will be provided with a copy of the minutes of the proceedings of the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel hearing.
8. The Appeal Hearing will normally take the following form
 - a) A nominated member of staff appointed to answer the appeal will address the Appeal Committee.
 - b) The student, who may be accompanied by a colleague or a Students Union representative, will then address the Appeal Committee.
 - c) If additional witnesses are permitted then these will be called and will be liable for cross-examination.
 - d) The parties will be required to withdraw while the Appeal Panel considers its decision.
9. The outcome of the appeal will be communicated to the student by letter normally within five working days of the hearing and a copy of this letter will be sent to the Academic Registrar and held on the student's file within the Academic Registry.
10. Where a student's appeal is successful, the case will be referred back to the Student Fitness to Practise Disciplinary Panel, who will reconsider the case in the light of the Appeal Panel's comments and representation from the student.
11. Where a student's appeal is unsuccessful, whether or not the penalty involves suspension or dismissal, the UCO will issue a Completion of Procedures letter to the student, advising them of their right to refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

Section 7: Glossary of Terms for Use by Student Disciplinary Panels

7.1 Warnings

- a) Warnings are formal statements that indicate that your behaviour is unacceptable. Warnings will be given when your behaviour raises concerns but it is not so serious that your fitness to practise is impaired. Support will be provided for you to address any underlying problems that may have contributed to your poor behaviour.
- b) Any subsequent incidents may be considered in light of earlier warnings. Patterns of poor behaviour may give rise to more serious concerns about your fitness to practise.
- c) A warning means your behaviour does not merit a sanction. But it will remain on your record until you complete the course. Unless further warnings are issued, you need not declare it to the GOsC when applying for provisional registration.
- d) A warning may be deemed appropriate particularly when:
 - i. The behaviour in question does not involve dishonesty, offences of a sexual nature or a lack of insight or responsibility, and
 - ii. There have been no previous concerns about your fitness to practise.
- e) Panels might consider issuing a warning if:
 - i. There was no direct or indirect patient harm, and
 - ii. The panel is satisfied that you will take the warning seriously, and
 - iii. You have provided insight into why your behaviour was inappropriate, and
 - iv. The behaviour was serious enough to warrant formal recognition.

7.2 Sanctions

- a) The purpose of the four types of sanction is to ensure that students whose fitness to practise is impaired are dealt with effectively, including possibly being removed from the course. A sanction also gives you the opportunity to learn from your mistakes.
- b) Panels will consider whether the sanction will protect patients and the public and will maintain professional standards. If the behaviour involves dishonesty, offences of a sexual nature, or a lack of insight, lower-level sanctions are unlikely to be appropriate.

7.2.1 Undertakings

- a) An undertaking is a promise given by you in writing to the panel that you will not behave in a certain way in the future. This sanction applies when there is a finding that your fitness to practise is impaired. You will be asked to consent to disclose this sanction to the appropriate people and it may be declared to the GOsC at the point of providing a reference for registration.
- b) If you break the undertaking, you may be dealt with by other sanctions.
- c) Undertakings will be proportionate, workable and measurable.
- d) Panels may want to consider an undertaking if:
 - i. It will be sufficient to protect patients and the public, and
 - ii. It covers all the conditions the panel would otherwise have imposed, and
 - iii. The behaviour did not involve dishonesty or a sexual offences, and
 - iv. You have provided insight into the seriousness of the problem and are willing to respond positively to any interventions, and
 - v. You have apologised and expressed genuine regret.

7.2.2 Conditions

- a) Conditions are appropriate when there is significant concern about your behaviour. This sanction will be applied if the panel is satisfied that you might respond positively to remedial tuition and increased supervision. The panel will consider any evidence such as reports on your performance, health or behaviour.
- b) If a panel has found your fitness to practise impaired because of poor physical or mental health, the conditions should include osteopathic supervision as well as academic supervision. You will be asked to consent to disclose this sanction to the appropriate people and it must be declared to the GOsC at the point of applying for registration.
- c) Conditions will be proportionate, workable and measurable.
- d) Panels may want to consider conditions if:
 - i. Patients will not be put at risk as a result of your being allowed to continue on the course, and
 - ii. The behaviour did not involve dishonesty or a sexual offence, and
 - iii. You understand the seriousness of the problem and are willing to respond positively to any interventions, and
 - iv. You have apologised and expressed genuine regret, and
 - v. There is a realistic chance that you will positively change your behaviour.

7.2.3 Suspension

- a) Suspension prevents you from continuing with your course for a specified period and graduating at the expected time. Suspension is appropriate for misconduct that is serious but not so serious as to justify expulsion from the UCO.
- b) When you return from suspension, you are expected to comply with any further conditions. You will be asked to consent to disclose the suspension and conditions to the appropriate people and must declare the suspension and conditions to the GOsC at the point of applying for registration.
- c) The panel might want to consider a suspension if:
 - i. A less severe sanction is not appropriate, and
 - ii. The behaviour is unlikely to be repeated, and
 - iii. You have provided insight into the seriousness of the problem and are willing to respond positively to any interventions, and
 - iv. There is a realistic chance that during the period of suspension you will positively change your behaviour.

7.2.4 Expulsion

- a) The panel can expel you from the UCO if they consider that this is the only way to protect patients, carers, relatives, colleagues or the public. You will be offered support to enable you to transfer to another course if appropriate. However, the nature of your expulsion may mean that you should not be accepted on certain courses, or even on any other course.
- b) Expulsion, the most severe sanction, should be applied if your behaviour is considered to be fundamentally incompatible with continuing your studies or eventually practising as an osteopath.

Section 8: References and Appendices

8.1 References

General Medical Council (2007) *Medical Students: professional behaviour and fitness to practise*,
http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/undergraduate_policy/professional_behaviour.asp

General Osteopathic Council (2008) *Fitness to Practise Annual Reports*,
<http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/resources/publications/fitness-to-practise-annual-reports/>

General Osteopathic Council (2005) *Code of Practice*,
http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/uploads/code_of_practice.pdf

General Osteopathic Council (1999) *Standard 2000: Standard of Proficiency*,
http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/uploads/standard_2000.pdf

General Osteopathic Council (2012) *Osteopathic Practice Standards*

<http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/osteopathic-practice-standards/osteopathic-practice-standards/>

Quality Assurance Agency (2007) *Subject Benchmark Statement: Osteopathy*

8.2 Appendix 1: Breach of Student Fitness to Practise And Professional Behaviour Policy Notification Form

BREACH OF STUDENT FITNESS TO PRACTISE AND PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY NOTIFICATION FORM

This form should be used by any member of staff or student who has reason to believe that a student has breached the UCO's Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy.

Before completing this form, students should have read the UCO's Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy.

Information about the member of staff or student submitting the form:

Name in full:	
Correspondence address:	
Telephone number:	
Email address:	

Nature of the Breach of Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy

Please set out as concisely as possible the nature of the breach. In particular, it is important to know the names of any other persons involved (staff, students, or others), when the event or incident occurred and the exact circumstances of the event or incident. If you wish to give further details on a separate sheet please do so.

Important Note

You should be aware that some breaches of the Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy may give rise to disciplinary action against students. There may also be circumstances in which the police may be notified.

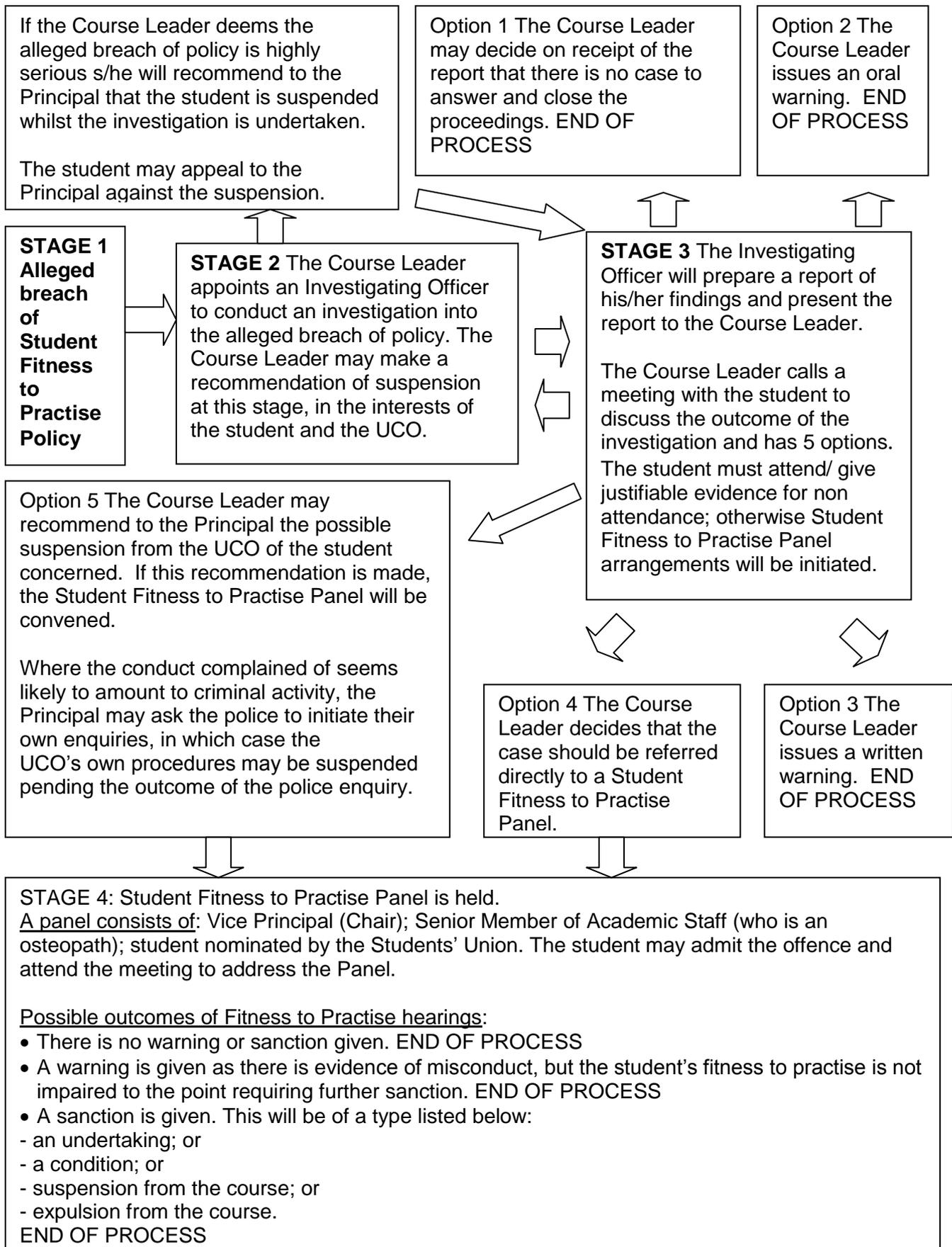
Declaration

I*/We* have read*/not read* the UCO's Student Fitness to Practise and Professional Behaviour Policy.

I*/We* declare that the information contained on this form is correct.

Signature:.....**Date:**.....

8.3 Appendix 2 - Allegation Process



8.4 Appendix 3 - Appeal Process

