


#	POLICY TITLE	POLICY AREA:	VERSION:	DATE ADOPTED :
	7.6 FITNESS TO STUDY STATEMENT	7) SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS	3.0	AUGUST 2020
<p>1. SNMCI COMMITMENT</p> <p>Saint Nicholas Montessori College Ireland (SNMCI) is committed to supporting learners while they are undertaking their studies. For many learners, progression to completion of their studies is uneventful, with little or no need for added or specialised support. However, this is not always the case. In certain circumstances there is a need for a formalised co-ordinated response to support a learner experiencing difficulties, which can be of a diverse nature.</p> <p>Occasionally, even with added support, the behaviour, welfare or wellbeing of an individual learner is so adversely affected as to make continuation in study difficult or impossible, and/or their continuation in studies is likely to interfere with the learning, working or living experiences of others to such an extent as to be deemed unreasonable and unsustainable.</p> <p>The procedures associated with this document will provide a supportive framework for SNMCI management to assess risks, and take appropriate action.</p>				
<p>2. TOLERANCE OF DIFFERENCE: EMBRACING AND SUPPORTING DIVERSITY</p> <p>The College has a long commitment to recognising and celebrating the rights of individuals to be different. The lived-experiences of one person are often very different than those of another. It is important that these differences be recognised and accepted, within the boundaries of legislation and acceptable conduct within the College. Occasionally, what may be at first sight interpreted as inappropriate and unusual behaviour, subsequently can be better understood and accepted in the spirit of understanding and appreciating difference and accepting diversity.</p> <p>SNMCI strives to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme and associated modules.</p>				
<p>3. PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT</p> <p>SNMCI supports individual students who may be in distress or difficulty whilst also recognising the right of the wider college community to study work and live free from undue duress/distress caused by others. The purpose of this document is to set out a framework in which specialised and tailored supports can be put in place to assist a learner in completing their studies where possible.</p> <p>Specifically, SNMCI acknowledges that there are students whose</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) behaviour, well-being or welfare are of concern to themselves or others, OR b) behaviour or actions, are impacting adversely on the learning, working or living experiences of others, to such an extent as to give 				

rise to concerns as to their fitness to continue in study.

Accordingly, the College provides supportive formal procedures to:

- enable students to withdraw/suspend their studies voluntarily on grounds of fitness to study;
- determine if and how a learner is to be required to take leave of absence on grounds of fitness to study;
- enable students to return to study where appropriate;

Of specific concern to SNMCI are its responsibilities and obligations to children, vulnerable persons, school principals and managers of early years' settings while students are on placement. This duty of care is taken very seriously by Programme Directors, who will ensure that all students are aware of their obligations during this specific time.

SNMCI is further committed to

- flexibility in the implementation of all procedures in order to permit more pro-active intervention where necessary;
- retention of clear, complete and concise records of any intervention, with due regard for confidentiality and data protection.

A complete file in relation to a fitness to study case is retained by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs/CEO / or Programme Director as appropriate.

In matters relating to a student's fitness to continue in study, SNMCI is guided by its quality assurance policies and wider legislation obligations as may be amended from time to time. These include the Equal Status Act (2000) and Health and Safety legislation.

4. SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

All registered students of SNMCI are subject to this Policy, including any learner visiting the college for a period of study or research under the Erasmus or other similar programme involving placement in SNCMI of a learner from another domestic or international institution.

All students subject to this Policy are required to accept the *Policy to Support and Determine a Student's Fitness to Continue in Study* requirements at registration and annually at re-registration. SNMCI students who are visiting another Higher Education Institution (HEI) for a period of study or research shall be subject to the host institution's rules and policies and procedures for the period of their visit. SNMCI will endeavour to support its students whilst registered at another HEI as part of their SNMCI programme, in association with the host HEI, where possible and practicable.

5. EXAMPLES OF CIRCUMSTANCES OF CONCERN AS TO A STUDENT'S FITNESS TO STUDY

There is a very strong tradition of support for students in SNMCI. Many students facing difficult and distressing circumstances will overcome adversity and develop and grow from these experiences with the help of support provided by friends, family, academic staff, and the administrative and professional support services in the College. It is very much in the interest of students and SNMCI that this tradition of support continues.

This *Policy* is intended to build on that supportive tradition, and to enhance it, by identifying steps to be taken when it is considered that the circumstances are such as to be unlikely to be resolved through the use of existing supports. The following are examples of such circumstances where there may be concern as to a student's support needs and fitness to continue in study. This list is not exhaustive. Each circumstance is considered on its own merits.

- a) The learner recognises that there is an issue of concern and discloses this to a member of the Institute staff.
- b) 3rd party reports of concern are disclosed. For example, these 3rd parties may be family members, classmates, flatmates, learner support services staff, lecturers or other College staff, work or research placement supervisors or even on occasions, members of the public. The concerns may be around a student's wellbeing, appearance, social-withdrawal, mood, physical health or welfare
- c) Unexplained deterioration in academic performance
- d) Behaviour which is very unusual or inappropriate
- e) Behaviour putting themselves or anyone else clearly at risk
- f) Behaviour which is significantly distressing to others
- g) Behaviour which is impacting significantly on the learning, working or living experience of others

The word 'behaviour' is intended to include behaviour which is face-to-face and in public as well as behaviour expressed through written or on-line communications. Communications includes those in print, in chat bars, on blogs and fora or social media, in text messages or by other electronic means.

6. ACTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

- In supporting a learner who is a cause of real concern and who may be significantly distressed, staff should act in accordance with the professional advice or information available from the Programme Director with support from the Learner Support Officer.
- This may lead to escalated engagement with counselling resources available within SNMCI.
- The appropriate course of action to be undertaken will often depend on the urgency of the situation.
- The course of action may also need to be reviewed if the situation alters.

- Actions taken should depend on the urgency of the situation and on an assessment of the risk to the safety of individuals.
- When a learner is significantly distressed, it may be appropriate to consider activating the *Procedure to Support and Determine a Student's Fitness to Continue in Study*.

7. TEMPORARY SUSPENSION ON GROUNDS OF CONCERN FOR FITNESS TO STUDY

The behaviour and actions of a learner may be a cause of concern for the safety of the learner and/or the safety of others, prompting consideration of the need to invoke a temporary suspension of the learner from SNMCI, pending further investigation and/or management of the situation. Where it appears, in the opinion of the Programme Director, that there are such grounds for concern, the Programme Director having sought any advice as he/she deems appropriate, is entitled to suspend a student. This is on the basis that the suspension is temporary and necessary to protect the SNMCI community and may also be to the benefit of the suspended student.

8. RETURN TO STUDY

Where a learner has been suspended from study, or has deferred study, arising from any provision under this policy, SNNCI is entitled to seek any advice, including medical and professional in order to have assurance of the student's well-being and fitness to resume studies.

9. EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

The safety of individuals is paramount. Occasionally, the behaviour or actions of a learner can put themselves or others in proximate danger. It is important that appropriate, timely actions are taken in response. SNMCI reserves the right undertake such action as deemed appropriate.

Policy Control Sheet

Policy	QA 7.6: Fitness to Study Statement
Version	3.0
Adopted/Effective	Aug 2020
Supersedes	2.0
Monitoring/ Next Review Date	Yearly/Aug 2021 Sep 2020
Responsible Officer(s) Designated Reviewer(s)	Learner Support Officer; DQAA; CEO
Scope	College wide

References

SNMCI Policy area	7) Support for Learners Vol 2
Developed with reference to	QQI (2016) <i>Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines</i> QQI (2016) <i>Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed for Independent/Private Providers coming to QQI on a Voluntary Basis</i> <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), May 2015</i>
Related SNMCI Policies / Forms	QA 7.5: Cause for Concern

Revision

Revision Number	Revision Description	Originator	Approved By
2.0/08/2020	General review for blended learning	Office of DQAA	AB