

Student guidance relating to the concerns process

What constitutes a concern?

'Concern' is deliberately a broad term, referring to any situation that represents a potential risk or barrier to a student's long term success on the course. This encompasses a range of potential issues including academic weakness, health conditions that are impacting on practise*, as well as inappropriate behaviours, attitude or conduct. When a concern has been raised, it can be considered as a notification to the medical school of a potential risk or barrier to a student's successful study and/ or practise, or a referral for individual monitoring and support. Having a concern raised does not imply that any outcome or decision has been made and it is not a punishment or a fitness to practise referral.

* Please note that simply having a health condition that is well managed and not impacting on practise is not considered a concern. See full concerns policy and procedures documents for more information.

Purpose of the concerns process

The purpose of the concerns process is to identify students at risk of being unsuccessful in their progress through medical school and to support them to mitigate the identified risk. The condensed and intensive nature of the medical course means that it is important to identify problems and associated support needs for individual students as early as possible to minimise the impact of those problems and to maximise opportunities for development.

Who can raise a concern?

Concerns can be raised by anyone who is concerned about a student's ability to function appropriately as a medical student and/ or future doctor for any reason. This could include university or placement site staff, students (including the student themselves), healthcare professionals, patients, carers and members of the public.

What happens when a concern is raised?

- i) The medical student will be informed of any concerns, however will not be informed of who raised the concern unless this is clear from the concern text.
- ii) The concerns will be reviewed in light of the severity of the issue and any relevant previous concerns and will be allocated a category (academic, professionalism or health) and a level. A member of staff will be identified to manage the concern. Where there are contributing health and/or pastoral issues, these will normally be supported separately to any professionalism or academic issues wherever possible.
- iii) Students will normally be referred to relevant guidance and support and, depending on the nature and level of the concern, may also be asked to meet with a member of staff, engage

in training, write a reflection or develop an action plan relating to the situation or engage in other support and/or remediation activities.

- iv) The process is intended to allow for support mechanisms to be put in place as soon as a need is identified to reduce the risk of deterioration. Most concerns will usually be resolved within a short period of time once the recommended actions have been completed and will have no implications for a student's studies or future practise.
- v) Where a student has multiple concerns and/or more serious concerns, their broader concerns profile will be reviewed by a progress panel or full concerns committee until such time that all concerns have been remediated and the student is considered to be meeting expectations of the course overall.
- vi) Where problems continue or escalate, or where there are very serious concerns, there is the potential for a student to receive a warning, be referred to the student fitness to practise process and/or to the Dean.
- vii) To maintain student confidentiality, feedback will not normally be provided to people who have raised concerns beyond confirming that the concern has been received and it being acted upon.

Student Support

All students, whether in the concerns process or not, will have access to universal student support systems within the faculty and wider university (e.g., disability, welfare, pastoral, and academic support) and are encouraged to self-refer to relevant services whenever these may be beneficial to them.

The concerns process itself is intended to be supportive in nature and therefore students will be advised (and in some cases may be required) to access the relevant university support resources as part of managing any concerns that have been raised.

Additional pastoral support for students with concerns is available within the faculty via personal tutors and the universal support team. In addition, pastoral support that is independent of the faculty is available through the wellbeing skills and diversity team.

Declaration of concerns

Only concerns at the uppermost level (level 3, see definitions section below) are considered to have entered a "formal low level concerns process" for GMC declaration purposes. Students with level 3 concerns or who have previously been in the fitness to practise process may need to declare their concerns to the GMC on applying for provisional registration. Students may also need to declare concerns raised during medical school to their allocated foundation school via the STEP form. The specific criteria for these processes are published by external agencies to students and medical schools at the relevant time each year. The medical school will make efforts to alert students to relevant publications and criteria for these purposes, but it is the student's responsibility to ensure the accuracy of any information they declare to any external agency and that they meet the declaration requirements. Students with level 3 concerns or fitness to practise referrals are advised to check their insurance policies (e.g. with the MDU) to see if they need to be notified.

Relevant staff contacts:

Dr Emma Spikings, Student Support Lead (E: emma.spikings@buckingham.ac.uk)

Prof Greg Simons, Academic Support Lead (E: greg.simons@buckingham.ac.uk)

Dr Andrew Findlow, Professionalism Support Lead (E: andrew.findlow@buckingham.ac.uk)

Mrs Nikki Dean, Student Support Manager (concerns) (E: nikki.dean@buckingham.ac.uk)

Definitions:

Level 1 concern: This refers to a relatively low-level risk to the student’s long term success if improvements are made in the near future but there is a requirement for monitoring or supportive intervention by the medical school to prevent a longer term impact.

Level 2 concern: This refers to repeated and/or more extensive or complex adverse behaviours or outcomes that represent a more substantial or longer-term individual risk to success that is likely to require ongoing individual support and/or active remediation efforts.

Level 3 concern: This refers to more complex risks to success that are likely to persist in the medium to long term even with support in place. Successful remediation may require extensive or bespoke support and/or proactive efforts from students over a significant period of time. Concerns at level 3 are considered to have entered a “formal low level concerns process” for GMC declaration purposes.

Appendix: overview of process and escalation routes

