

fitness to practise

What to expect if you are called to a Fitness to Practise meeting

what is “fitness to practise”?

If you are on a course which leads to a professional qualification such as nursing, you will be expected to meet the standards of professional conduct expected of you by the professional body which validates the course you are on. In the case of nursing and midwifery, this is the NMC. If you study on an OT, PT, SLT, ODP or Paramedic course, the professional body that governs your practise is the HCPC.

If there are concerns that you may not be meeting these standards, your school will follow a process, called “Fitness to Practise” (“FTP”), to decide whether there is any evidence of:

- professional misconduct, or
- behaviour inconsistent with suitability for your profession

If you have long term or serious health problems (either physical or mental), this may also have an impact on your fitness to practise and trigger the process.

It is important to remember that consideration of fitness to practise does not always lead to a disciplinary process. In the first instance it is intended to find out whether there is a problem which needs to

be dealt with, and where possible to resolve that problem. Sometimes, a fitness to practise process does uncover misconduct which needs to be dealt with as a disciplinary matter. However, in most cases an issue can be sorted out by advice and support.

If you are unwell or worried about how things are going, one of the standards of conduct expected of you is that you seek appropriate help. Don't hold back from doing this. Your personal advisor, mentor and other sources of support are there to help you progress with your studies.

what can trigger the process?

The process can be triggered by:

- a written report, or ‘cause for concern’ of inappropriate behaviour or conduct being made about you via an official cause for concern form
- a ‘cause for concern’ being raised at work/placement or by a member of academic staff. This might be about your professional practise, or a concern about your welfare
- a referral about you from the plagiarism officer for your school
- a referral about your attendance or engagement.

Concerns may be submitted by members of the public.

Sometimes, before a decision is made about whether the FTP process should be triggered, the FTP lead will appoint an investigating officer to gather evidence, or you will be referred to Occupational Health.

If an investigating officer is appointed, they may interview you and other witnesses and report to the FTP lead who will then decide on the next step.

Remember, if someone raises a cause for concern about you, that doesn't necessarily mean that you are in trouble or that a Fitness to Practise process will be triggered.

I have received a letter calling me to a meeting to discuss my fitness to practise - what will happen next?

The meeting is your chance to explain what has happened, and whether there are any circumstances affecting you which may have led to problems arising. The letter you receive should:

- explain why you have been called to the meeting
- tell you when and where the meeting will be
- remind you that you can be accompanied to the meeting, if you wish, by a friend or an Advice Worker from the Union Advice service.

If you feel unsure why the meeting has been called, you can talk to an Advice Worker,

who may be able to help you understand the reason for the meeting or, if you need more information, can request it on your behalf.

It is important that you attend any fitness to practise meeting you are invited to. If you are unable to go to a meeting because of an important prior reason, you should contact the school as soon as possible to explain why you can't go and to ask if it can be re-arranged. Be prepared to show evidence of the reason you can't attend.

how should I prepare for the meeting?

The preparation needed will depend on the reason you have been called to the meeting, and an Advice Worker can help you with specifics, but in general:

- reflect about why this problem has arisen and be prepared to discuss it openly and honestly
- if the allegation made is true, or partly true, it is much better to admit what happened and to show you understand the reason why the incident is a matter for concern
- gather any evidence you can, for example copies of relevant emails, and take it to the meeting
- if the reason for the meeting relates to your health, think about what you can do to take care of your health in future and what support you can access to help you.

It is often a good idea to write a statement summarising what has happened from your point of view, to help you to make sure that you mention everything at the meeting that you want to explain. An Advice Worker can help you with advice on what to include.

what will happen at the meeting?

The meeting will be chaired by an academic member of staff/the FTP lead where possible. There will usually be two other members of the panel. One of these members would normally be expected to be a practising member of the profession.

The Chair will introduce everyone at the meeting.

The reason for the meeting will be explained to you and you will then be given a chance to give your side of the story. You may then be asked questions to clarify anything you have said.

If you have someone accompanying you, such as an Advice Worker, they cannot answer questions on your behalf. If you are uncertain about anything raised in the meeting, you can ask to take a break to speak to them privately to ask for advice during the meeting.

At the end of the meeting the Chair will sum up what has been said and tell you when you can expect to hear the outcome.

what are the possible outcomes?

You will be told the outcome of the meeting within 5 working days.

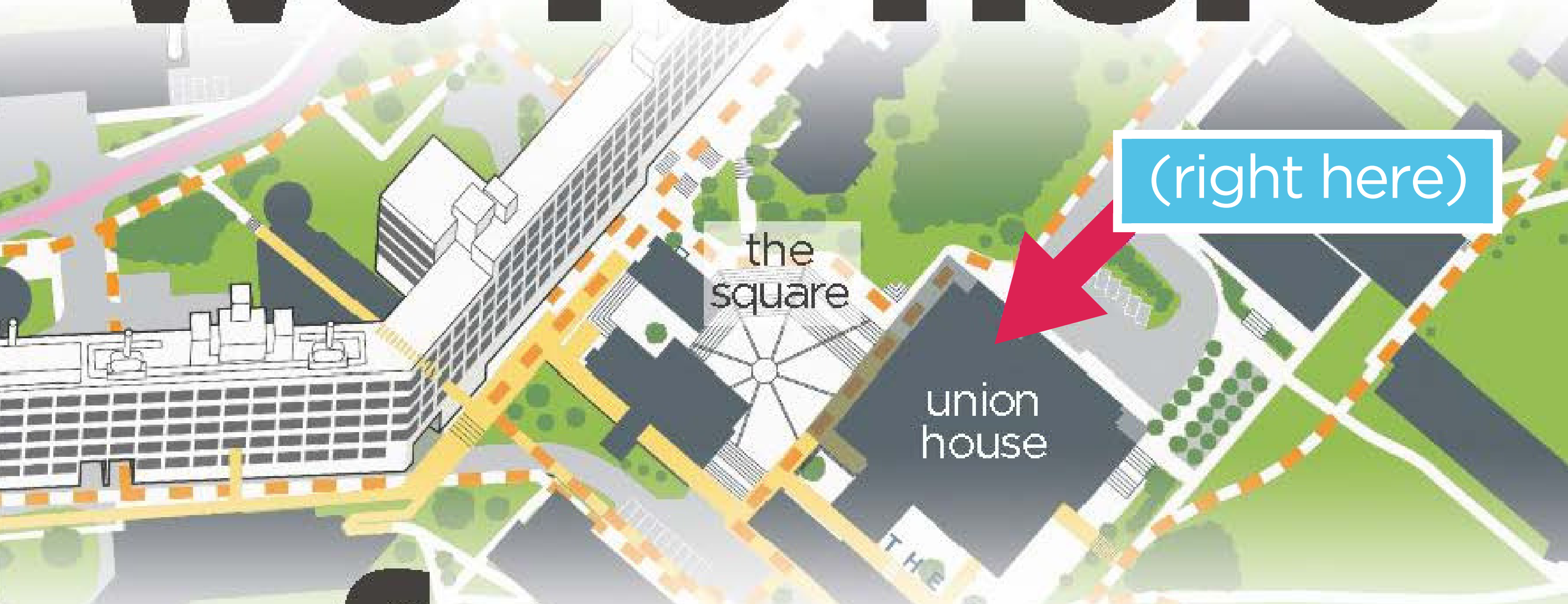
The panel may decide that:

- there are no fitness to practise concerns, in which case no record will be kept of the allegation or meeting unless it is required by the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body. For HSC

registered students, this will be NMC and HCPC

- no further action is needed but that you should be given a warning that action may be taken if you continue the behaviour
- you should be referred to support services such as DOS for more help and support
- you have not met the professional standards required of you and you will be withdrawn from the course
- you will be referred to the SSDC to consider whether you are guilty of misconduct
- you should receive a formal warning from the Head of School.

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