

# GUIDANCE NOTES

The Role of the Chair and Panel  
members

Student Fitness to Practise Committee  
Student Complaints Panel  
Academic Cases Committee

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This guide serves to provide support to the Chair and Panel members of Hearings to enable them to fulfil this important role for the School. The guidance draws on School experience over the past decade, as well as and best practice across the sector. The purpose is to clarify the requirements of this role to ensure a consistent and rigorous approach. The safety of patients is of paramount importance to the Student Fitness to Practise Committee whilst at the same time being constantly aware of the support and welfare of all students. This need to balance both of these priorities applies equally to any Panel Hearing.

It is imperative that all Panel members are acquainted with the Regulations, Policies and Codes of Practice which contribute towards a student's studies at Hull York Medical School. These can be found at:-

<https://www.hyms.ac.uk/staff-and-students/regulations-policies-and-codes-of-practice>

The most important Codes for Panel Hearings are:-

- Code of Practice on Student Fitness to Practise
- Code of Practice on Academic Misconduct
- Code of Practice on Investigation and Determination of Student Complaints
- Code of Practice on Fitness to Study

## PURPOSE OF THE PANEL

A Panel is established for either the Student Fitness to Practise Committee Academic Cases Committee or following receipt of a Student Complaint.

**Academic Integrity** Learning in an academic environment requires mutual trust and responsibility from everyone involved. Underlying this is acceptance of a common set of values, often referred to as academic integrity. Elements of academic integrity include Honesty, Responsibility, Fairness, Respect and Trust. If a student breaches these values, which may include plagiarism, they are referred for Investigation.

**Student Fitness to Practise** – It is the School's duty to have a robust and consistent mechanism to ensure that all graduates applying for registration with a licence to practise are fit to practise. It is necessary for the School 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 make sure that do not graduate.

**Complaint** - it is the duty of the School to provide students with a transparent and accessible process by which they may raise concerns and complaints.

**Fitness to Study** – where concerns have been raised with regard to a student’s ability to engage appropriately with their programme of study. This process is led by the Academic Cases Committee.

## BEFORE A HEARING

- All documentation is circulated to the Panel by the Hearing Secretary prior to the Hearing date.
- Read all documentation and note any problems and inconsistencies.
- If the student has submitted any written evidence, you will need to consider what weight these may carry eg from a Doctor, a parent or peer etc.
- Prepare potential questions for the student and Investigating Officer based on the material presented.
- Be aware of the powers of the panel – this will depend on the Code of Practice that is being followed.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement arising from the papers
- Be prepared to do some research if necessary. Ensure you are familiar with all aspects of the appropriate regulations, codes, polices and GMC Guidance where appropriate.
- Be aware of who will be present at the Hearing – usually this is the student, their supporter, the Investigating Officer and Secretary to the Hearing.

## DURING A PANEL HEARING

- Ensure the proceedings are fair and proportionate - know and understand good practice of equality and diversity.
- The meeting is likely to be stressful for the student so any intimidating behaviour must be avoided. Ensure there is a box of tissues and water in the room if the meeting is held face to face.
- It is important that you are patient, polite and objective – always ask the student to notify the Chair if they need to take a break at any time.
- It is imperative to keep an open mind during the hearing and be willing to listen carefully to everything that is said. You may find it beneficial to take notes.

- Keep in mind the balance between patient/service user and public safety and the overall interests of the student with the need to maintain trust in the profession particularly with regard to PA and MBBS students.
- Be prepared to ask for appropriate expert advice especially in cases involving health or impairment issues.
- If at any time during the hearing of a complaint, the prospect of Informal Resolution emerges and the Panel considers that an Informal Resolution is appropriate, the consent of the student should be sought for that process to be re-opened.

## PANEL PROCEDURE

- The Chair and Panel members will need at least 30 minutes in advance of the student, supporter and investigating officer arriving. It is useful to use this time to identify questions and agree who will ask specific questions.
- Chair to introduce the Panel members and administrative staff to the student, and explain the powers of the Panel.
- Chair to ask the student to identify their supporter (if applicable)
- Chair to confirm that the student and Panel have received all documentation.
- If witnesses are to be called, ensure they are allowed an opportunity to be interviewed in the appropriate part of the agenda.
- The Chair will present the Reasons for the Hearing paper.
- Chair to ask the Investigating Officer to present a summary of the case.
- Allow the opportunity for Panel members to question the Investigating Officer
- Allow the opportunity for the student to question the Investigating Officer whilst ensuring there is a clear and relevant line of questioning.
- Chair to manage the questioning of the student by the Panel ensuring that it is the student who answers questions directly (supporters may support the student with answers but not present answers on the student's behalf).
- Enquire whether the student has any witnesses to present. Each in turn may be questioned by the Student, the Investigating Officer and the Panel.
- Give the student the opportunity to make a final statement.
- Give the supporter the opportunity to make any comments
- Chair to ensure that the Panel Members and student have nothing further to add.

- The student, Supporter and Investigating Officer are asked to withdraw whilst the panel consider the outcome from the Hearing. Any party can be called back in to the meeting if there any points that need clarification.
- Chair to facilitate deliberations by the Panel taking into consider the relevant Code of Practice and GMC guidance where applicable.
- Summarise the main reasons relied upon for the decision and record any minority decisions. If a vote is taken and is a tie, the Chair has the deciding vote. For MBBS and PA students – consider whether the decision made balances the need to protect patients and maintain public confidence in the professions. It is also vital that the panel are able to give clear reasons for taking the actions they are recommending and that the recommendations are workable, appropriate, reasonable and measureable.
- Ensure that all procedural steps have been taken in reaching a decision. The Panel may take advice as to the feasibility of their proposed recommendation.
- The student will not be informed of the outcome of the Hearing at this time. They will receive a summary of the discussion to confirm the factual accuracy and then a joint report will be issued by the Panel and Board of Studies with the decision.

**Note: be aware that the Hearing can be adjourned at any time should additional documents/information become available.**

**If the student fails to attend the Hearing, the Panel is entitled to reach a decision in their absence. The Panel should satisfy itself that all reasonable attempts have been made to inform the student of the Hearing, that the student has been given adequate opportunity to attend and that, as far as can reasonably be ascertained, the student has declined to attend.**

## **GUIDANCE ON THE DELIBERATION PROCESS**

In coming to a decision, the Panel may take into consideration some of the guidance below:-

- The maturity of the student and year of study
- Decide on the facts of the case
- The likelihood of repeat behaviour
- The level of insight and remorse displayed by the student
- Has the student acted dishonestly, fraudulently or any way designed to mislead or harm others.
- How well is it perceived the student would respond to support/remediation.
- Is the student's health or impairment compromising patient safety?

- Whether the student's behaviour has harmed patients or put a patient at risk of harm.
- Whether the student has shown a deliberate or reckless disregard of professional and clinical responsibilities towards patients or colleagues.
- Has the student abused a patient's trust or violated a patient's autonomy or other fundamental rights.
- Whether they are fit to engage with their programme of study
- Make a decision whether, on the balance of probabilities, at the time of the alleged event, fitness to practise was impaired
- Make a decision whether, on the balance of probabilities, at the time of the panel hearing, fitness is impaired
- For those students about to graduate, provide a decision as to whether the student is in good standing or not
- Has there been a case of academic misconduct

## **AFTER THE HEARING**

- it is the responsibility of the Chair and Secretary to produce the summary of the discussions to be checked for factual accuracy by the student and panel members. This summary will not include any reference to the decision or recommendations but will constitute a record of the discussions at the hearing.
- The student will be provided with a report agreed and jointly issued with the Board of Studies regarding the decision and recommendations made by the Panel. This report will be composed of two parts. The first part of the report will detail the decisions and recommendations made by the Panel. The second part will confirm any recommendations made by the Panel were accepted in full or in part by the Board of Studies. This will normally be within 10 working days of the panel. The student will also be informed of the appeal process.

## **GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS – AVAILABLE ON SCHOOL/GMC WEBSITE**

- Code of Practice on Student Fitness to Practise -  
Code of Practice on Academic Misconduct
- Code of Practice on Investigation and Determination of Student Complaints -
- Code of Practice on Fitness to Study
- GMC professional behaviour and fitness to practise



## GMC Achieving good medical practice

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