School of Education and Social Work
Suitability for Professional Practice Procedure
Initial Teacher Education

Introduction and preamble

1.1 All approved initial teacher education courses are required to have in place procedures for assessing the suitability of their students for professional practice prior to admission to the course and throughout their studies. In addition, Universities are required to ensure that only those suitable for professional practice successfully complete their studies. All courses are, therefore, required to operate procedures that serve to review the suitability of individual students at any point during their training and to ensure that such procedures allow for the removal of students who are deemed unsuitable to continue with their professional training.

1.2 Students are required to maintain their suitability for professional practice by adhering to Part 2 of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) and Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2025) and remain responsible for informing the relevant person (usually the Course Lead) in a timely manner of any changes to their circumstances that may have any impact upon their ongoing suitability (this may include, but is not limited to, the acquisition of new cautions, reprimands or convictions, involvement in disciplinary proceedings or more personal issues).

1.3 Where a student is deemed unsuitable to practise as a teacher, the University may require the student to leave the University and terminate their course of study. The University's Ordinances and, Regulations (including Student Discipline Ordinance) and Examination Rules (as published via relevant handbooks) apply to all students.

1.4 Behaviour (or lack thereof) that leads to the Suitability for Professional Practice Procedure being invoked may arise at ***any time*** during ***any aspect*** of the student's course of study, regardless of the source or location of the matter in question and may relate to recent or historical issues and may arise from academic, practice or personal arenas of a student's life.

1.5 Note: Although this document refers to Part 2 of the Teachers' Standards, the procedure will also apply to any later published documents that replace those mentioned in this document.

1.6 Concerns about suitability for professional practice can be daunting to the applicants aiming to study, as well as the students enrolled on qualifying initial teacher education courses. This document incorporates the following processes and procedures required to support the students to meet requirements for professional practice or review their suitability for professional practice:

- Pre-course assessment of suitability (Section 2)
- Support plan process (Section 3)
- Cause for concern process (Section 4)
- Suitability for professional practice procedure (Section 5).

2. Pre-course assessment of suitability

2.1 All applicants invited to attend for interview are required to complete a pre-course 'suitability declaration' based upon the template recommended in national guidance for ITE admissions tutors. These declarations are submitted to the Admissions Tutor prior to the interview and will be discussed at the end of the individual interview so that candidates may provide an explanatory account of relevant factors where these exist. If candidates have concerns about what should be disclosed and how, they are invited to contact the Admissions Tutor directly.

2.2 Following the interview, interviewers will make a preliminary recommendation regarding whether the candidate should be offered a place on the course in relation to their performance at interview and in other elements of the selection process. Where the interviewers recommend that an offer for a place on a course should be made, this recommendation in addition to information regarding suitability related disclosures will be passed to the Admissions Tutor who will consult with the Course Lead regarding the applicant's suitability for teacher training. In many cases, the Admissions Tutor or Course Lead will need to seek further advice and this may include consulting on an anonymous basis with placement providers regarding the likelihood of obtaining placements in the given circumstances. Further references may be sought at this point if appropriate. Where Safeguarding concerns are raised, the Admissions Tutor should refer this to the Head of ITE (HoITE) and ESW Director of Recruitment and Admissions (DoRA). Where concerns relate to criminal convictions, cautions or formal warnings, no offer of a place on the course will be made (formally or informally) until the matter has been discussed and agreed by the ITE Safeguarding Panel. The Panel is made up of four members – the HoITE, the DoRA and two senior leaders from partner schools. Where the Panel agrees that an offer should be made, this will be subject to a standard disclaimer detailed in a letter to the applicant confirming that although the offer is based upon our assessment of their suitability, if we are subsequently unable to place them as a result of their offence history, there will be no liability on the part of the university where appropriate pre-offer checks have been conducted.

2.3 All offers are made conditional upon receipt of satisfactory Enhanced DBS Check (or later successor) and satisfactory health checks. Where information comes to light following these checks that was not included on self-declaration forms, the offer of a place will be withdrawn, regardless or not of whether the course has begun (students will have provisional registration only until all checks are returned and deemed satisfactory). Additional Enhanced DBS Checks and other checks may be carried out during the course of the students' studies at the request of a placement provider or following a change in the student's circumstance or where students take more than 3 years to complete their course.

2.4 Health checks for this course are required by our regulatory and professional bodies although in line with Equality Act 2010 requirements, we ensure that the nature of such checks is proportionate to the purpose. The health checks comprise of a self-declaration form where applicants are required to disclose details of health where this may have an impact upon their ability to study and practice safely. Where information disclosed requires further investigation, students may be referred to Occupational Health and/or further information from their GP or Consultant may be requested. In line with Data protection requirements, such disclosures are handled with care and sensitivity and consent to share will be requested when required.

2.5 The health checks referred to above may identify disabilities, but the purpose of the check is to screen for health issues that may affect the ability of the applicant to practice safely. Applicants disclosing disabilities will be encouraged to share this with the Student Centre so that reasonable adjustments may be considered in order to support the student during the course.

2.6 Students may be referred to Occupational Health at any point during their studies. This may be due, for example, to a period of extended sick leave, the development of a new health condition or to re-assess health needs prior to the beginning of placements. In addition, all students who are diagnosed with a disability (except SLDs) or a long term illness during their course may be referred for a new assessment in order to obtain up to date information and so that the impact and recommended adjustments for practice learning as well as academic work can be considered if the information from the student's doctor and/or SSU needs to be further explored.

2.7 It is important to note that individually, as well as collectively, staff in initial teacher education department are committed to enabling diversity and fair access to the profession. The processes and procedures outlined here are intended to safeguard vulnerable members of society and ensure our compliance with all statutory duties in relation to student selection and progression, but in doing so we remain mindful of our obligations under equalities legislation.

2.8 Suitability declarations will be completed each year upon enrolment and re-enrolment and students are responsible for informing the Course Lead of ***any*** changes that ***may*** affect their suitability in a timely manner rather than waiting until the next annual declaration takes place.

3. Support Plan Process

3.1 The Support Plan process is introduced to acknowledge that concerns that may arise about a student teacher's behaviour or progress at school or the university, will be addressed with additional support. Support from the Course Team - for example, the Curriculum Tutor, the Course Lead and/or the ESW Directors of Student Experience - may enable the student to ensure their suitability for professional practice is maintained. Examples include: first instances of academic misconduct (e.g. plagiarism for an assessment); attendance below the requirement of 80%, regular lateness when attending Course learning activities.

3.2 A support plan can be raised if the student teacher is not making appropriate progress in their university learning or on school based training. A support plan will be raised by the Curriculum Tutor and/or Course Lead in instances where the student teacher is not making sufficient progress in their university based learning, A support plan will be raised by the school Mentor and/or Professional

Tutor in instances where the student teacher is not making sufficient progress in their school practice.

3.3 A support plan will be drawn up by the university or the school which will identify targets, support mechanims and deadlines. Reasonable adjustments will be made in setting targets for students with declared disabilities.

3.4. The student teacher will be invivted to a Support Plan meeting, to discuss the concerns raised. The purpose of the meeting is to see how best to support the student to address any concerns and/or ensure their progression on the course. A support plan would usually require implementation for two weeks with targets reviewed at the end of the two week period.

3.5 If sufficient progess is made against the targets, the student teacher will no longer require the Support Plan. However, when there continue to be issues despite the provision of support, the student teacher will then move to a Cause for Concern.

4. **Cause for Concern Process**

If concerns remain and targets are not satisfactorily achieved, then the student teacher moves to the Cause for Concern Process. An action plan will be prepared by the Curriculum Tutor and/or Course Leads, targets re- established, and an external assessor's visit will be organised. An assessor will be appointed by the Course Leaders to observe the student teacher, review their files and lead a review meeting with the student teacher and the school based Mentor and/or Professional Tutor. The external assessor is an academic member of staff from the Department of Initial Teacher Education who has not been directly involved with the student teacher.

Following this process, the assessor will make a recommendation on whether the practice should be terminated.There may be circumstances when a student teacher fails the final stage of their Cause for Concern process.

At this point they will have three options:

1. The student decides to take permanent withdrawal from the course.

2. Request a re-sit for the failed placement from the Progress & Assessment Board (PAB)

3. Students who have failed the Cause for Concern process MAY be moved directly to stage 2 of the Suitability for Professional Practice Procedure.

Students about whom tutors express concerns, or who require additional support, often turn out to have other difficulties as well (e.g. personal problems). Students are strongly urged, therefore, to keep their Curriculum Tutors informed of any such circumstances, and liaise with the Student Centre, so that these can be taken into account where appropriate.

5. Suitability for Professional Practice Procedure

Where more serious professional concerns arise. the School will initiate the Suitability to Practice process (see Section 4).

The intention is always to conduct all aspects of the Suitability Process and Procedure in a constructive, respectful, and supportive manner.

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1. Qualifying initial teacher education courses at the University of Sussex follow the University-wide procedure available here. The University-wide procedure was developed by the University Academic Quality and Partnerships (Academic Standards) and reviewed in February 2021. This guidance includes amendments relevant for teacher education qualifying courses.

5.1.1 The University has a duty to ensure that a student is 'suitable for professional practice', where the course includes practical training in a professional role and the award of a degree from the University enables a student to register with an associated Professional and/or Statutory Body (PSB). The University procedure is designed to ensure that there are appropriate processes in place to consider any issues that arise across the University related to a student's suitability to practice in a professional setting. Such a procedure will be required by Professional and/or Statutory Bodies (PSBs) associated with courses provided by the University. Some Schools have their own procedure in place that meets the requirements of the relevant PSB. This procedure is designed for Schools that own courses that are, or will be, accredited by a PSB, where a School procedure is not already in place.

5.1.3 The ITE Suitability to Practice procedure is to be used where it appears that a student teacher is failing to maintain suitability for professional practice and is not complying with the requirements of Part 2 of the Teachers' Standards. Such circumstances may include, but should not be seen as being limited to, behaviour which is damaging or dangerous to service users, pupils other students or course providers; behaviour which creates an unacceptable risk to others or to the student themselves; serious breaches of the Professional Standards; the emergence of information about previous relevant matters not declared by the student.

5.1.4 This procedure may only be applied in relation to professional practice concerns and does not replace any existing University policies such as academic misconduct or disciplinary processes.

5.2 General principles

The following general principles apply:

- A concern may be raised by a member of University staff, a member of staff at a placement provider, a fellow student, a member of the public.A concern may be raised related to a student's conduct including cases where this may be a result of mental/physical health problems or drug/alcohol problems;
- All cases must be investigated in accordance with the approved procedure in order to ensure that a robust procedure is followed to maintain professional standards and to ensure that the procedures are transparent and provide equity in the consideration of cases;
- The procedure incorporates a process to conduct the early investigation when a concern is initially raised, referred to as Stage 1 in this document, and a process to consider cases referred from Stage 1 that cannot be easily resolved or managed;
- All Schools must nominate a single designated member of staff to act as Investigating Officer to conduct Stage 1 when a concern is initially raised. Investigating Officer for teacher education courses needs to be a qualified teacher, registered with the relevant Professional Standards and Regulatory Body, or an academic from another regulated profession.
- All cases must be considered promptly, wherever possible, to ensure that matters are addressed and that a student is notified of the outcome in a timely manner;
- The procedures are designed to ensure that the Panel members are neutral in order that both the School representative/s and the student are given a fair opportunity to be heard. Where a case is escalated to Stage 2, this means that the Chair and panel members must not have been involved in Stage 1 of the procedure. In addition, any of the parties involved in Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the process must declare if there is a conflict of interest. Where this occurs a suitable nominee must be found.
- Where appropriate, these procedures may be followed in parallel with another University procedure, for example academic misconduct.

5.3 Procedure for Stage 1

5.3.1 Schools are responsible for investigating and monitoring concerns raised regarding a student's conduct. Schools may vary the process for investigating and considering initial concerns raised, provided this is published in the course handbook and/or course web pages.

5.3.2 When the Course Lead is notified of concerns they will evaluate the information and take such further advice as is necessary. In the case of a student on placement, the placement agency, having consulted with the Course Lead may suspend the student from placement pending investigation and make a referral to the University to initiate it. The Course Lead may also refer the concerns to the Vice Chancellor who may, in consultation with the Head of School, decide that the student should be suspended from studies pending investigation in accordance with the Regulations of the University (Statute V.4)

5.3.3 Where the Course Lead believes the concerns may have substance, they will arrange to meet with the student in person to raise the concerns and ascertain the student's view/explanation. The student should usually receive at least 5 days' notice of the meeting, together with a copy of any documentary evidence relating to the concern. They will notify the student experience team of the concern.

5.3.4 The student's tutor or other member of course team will usually be invited by the Course Lead to attend the meeting, and in any event will offer advice to assist the student in understanding the procedure and accessing appropriate support. Administrative support will be provided where needed to produce a note of the key issues discussed and outcomes of the meeting. Where the Course Lead is also the tutor for the student concerned, temporary tutorial support will be provided by a different member of the course team until a conclusion is reached.

5.3.5 In planning for the meeting, the Course Lead will be mindful of any needs that may arise from any disabilities the student has disclosed to the university and will consider, in consultation with the student, how the process described here may reasonably be adjusted to reduce the impact of such disabilities upon the student's participation in this process. The University, as represented by the Course Lead, will be proactive in considering adjustments that may be required and will also determine the reasonableness of any additional adjustments requested by the student. The student experience team will be able to provide support with this.

5.3.6 The student will have the right to be accompanied by an advisor or representative, and to make a written submission prior to the meeting should they wish to do so. The student will, at least two days in advance of the meeting taking place, provide in writing to the Course Lead the following:

- Confirmation as to whether or not they will be accompanied, and by whom;
- Any supporting written documentation the student wishes to provide;
- Whether or not any additional adjustments for reason of disability are requested.

5.3.7 Following the meeting, the Course Lead may institute any further investigation deemed necessary, including meeting with the person who raised the concerns, to review the evidence and ascertain whether concerns remain or have been allayed. If concerns remain, the Course Lead will determine whether the concerns can be resolved at this stage without reference to a Suitability Panel hearing.

5.3.8 If the Course Lead, having consulted with the Head of Department or other appropriate person, considers the concerns are justified but could be resolved without progressing to a Panel investigation and hearing, they will set the student targets for change, together with specific criteria for their achievement within an appropriately short time scale (usually weeks). The Course Lead will usually review the situation at the end of the time period and if they consider that the targets have been met the student will be permitted to remain registered on the course. If necessary, the Course Lead may set a continued programme of targets, which will be similarly closely monitored by the Course Lead, in consultation with the student's tutor, either until no further cause for concern exists or there is reason to move to Stage Two. Where the Course Lead considers that targets have not been met, Stage Two will be invoked.

5.3.9 If the Course Lead, having consulted with the Head of Department or other appropriate person, considers the concerns remain and, in their professional judgment, are such that the concerns cannot be resolved at Stage One of this process, Stage Two will be invoked and the Chair of the Suitability Panel will be notified.

5.3.10 The outcomes of the Stage 1 procedure includes the following:

- No further action
- Programme for resolution including targets and deadlines
- Referral to stage 2
- Immediate suspension from study in consultation with the Vice Chancellor, pending investigation

5.3.11 The Course Lead will keep a record of all matters resolved within Stage One and will regularly provide the Qualifying Courses Management Committee with a factual report on such matters without sharing student names. The notes of the Stage One meeting and relevant correspondence will be stored on the student file until the end of their studies.

5.4 Procedure for Stage 2

5.4.1 When concerns have not been allayed or resolved during Stage One of this procedure, as in Section 5.3 above, the Course Lead will notify the student in writing that the case is to be referred to the Suitability Panel. Please note these meetings must be conducted in person.

5.4.2 The role of the Suitability Panel is to operate Stage Two of the Suitability for Professional Practice Procedure. It shall usually comprise the following members:

- Chair: the Head of the School of Education (or their nominee);
- the Head of Initial Teacher Education;
- the Director of Student Experience or nominee;
- One representative from local practice schools, who shall have had no previous involvement with the case being considered;
- One external panel member from a different faculty in the University.

The Panel may be observed and advised by any person with specialist expertise requested to attend by the Chair. The Chair will have administrative support for the Panel from the Student Experience Co-ordinator.

5.4.3 The Suitability for Professional Practice Panel terms of reference are:

- To use academic judgement in considering cases referred regarding the conduct of a student registered on a course that leads to a professional qualification which gives the right to practice a particular profession;

- To make determinations, proportionate to the conduct, with reference to the relevant PSB’s standard of conduct, performance and ethics, where such conduct may result in the student being unsuitable for practice in the relevant profession;

- Make a determination in relation to any health problem which may result in the student being unsuitable for practice in the relevant profession;

- Make a determination in relation to any previous matters not declared by the student;

- Reconsider cases following a period of review with agreed targets;

- Apply an appropriate outcome including requiring a student to be temporarily or permanently withdrawn;

- Report all outcomes to the relevant Progression and Award Board, School Education Committee and relevant placement provider Management Board.

- Report any outcomes regarding a resit opportunity to the Student Systems and Records office;

- Ensure that the principles of equality and diversity are applied in all decisions made.

5.4.3 Arrangements for the Panel hearing (including incorporation of adjustments to the process where this is appropriate due to needs arising from a student's disability) will be initiated and coordinated by the Chair, or nominee. The student will be given at least 15 working days' notice of a Panel hearing and the details of Panel membership. At the same time, the student and the Panel members will be provided with information about the Suitability for Professional Practice Procedure and details of the grounds for concern (the latter will be prepared by the Course Lead). The student will usually be provided with copies of any written reports and other relevant documentary evidence in the case at this stage.

The student should, by at least five working days in advance of the hearing, provide the Chair with the following clarifications and documentation:

- whether or not they intend to contest the case presented;
- whether, in what way and by whom they intend to be represented;
- any written response to the case presented, including any supporting evidence or witness statements
- the contact details of any witnesses they wish to be called.

The Chair (or nominee) will circulate these clarifications and materials to members of the Panel and to the Course Lead in advance of the hearing.

5.4.4 In any case where the student informs the Chair that they intend to be accompanied or represented by a right to be accompanied or represented by a legal advisor. The University will not usually agree to defray costs incurred by the student in seeking specialist or legal advice, by their representative or by witnesses called by the student. Where no legal advisor accompanies the Course Lead, they may be accompanied by a colleague with appropriate experience for support and/or guidance during the hearing.

5.4.5 The Chair shall have discretion to arrange for the Panel itself to have access to legal advice.

5.4.6 The Panel, to be quorate, must have at least two-thirds of its members present. If the student does not appear at the hearing, the Panel may either proceed to deal with the case in the student's absence or, in the light of any mitigating circumstances communicated, agree to reschedule.

5.4.7 The hearing will observe the following procedure. Those participating may not change, extend or distort the procedure or roles set out below, except by prior agreement with the Chair of the Panel who may agree such variation where doing so may assist the process of assessing suitability for professional practice in the specific case being considered In such cases, the student will be informed of this change and the reasons for this.

I. The Chair will ask members to declare any conflict of interest.
II. The Chair will summarise the nature of the case presented. The student will indicate whether they or their representative will speak on their behalf.
III. The Investigation officer will present the case to the Panel, and will then answer questions from the Panel and from the student.
IV. The Investigation officer may call witnesses. Witnesses called by the Course Lead may also be questioned by the student (or their representative) and by members of the Panel.
V. The student (or their representative) will make a statement of their case and then respond to questions from the Panel and the Course Lead. The student may call witnesses who may be questioned on their evidence by the student (or their representative), by the Course Lead (or their legal representative) and by members of the Panel.
VI. If required, either the student or the Course Lead may request a break to consult with their advisor.
VII. At the conclusion of questioning, the student (or their representative) and the Course Lead (or their representative) will be invited in turn to present a short summary of their respective cases.
VIII. The Panel may adjourn if, in their professional opinion, this is necessary. When an adjournment is required, the reasons for this and anticipated timescales will be explained to all parties.
IX. At the end of a meeting, all parties will be asked to retire while the Panel makes its decision in private in accordance with the outcomes available to it.
X. The Panel will reach its decision by simple majority vote, with the Chair having a casting vote if necessary.
XI. The Panel decision will not usually be communicated at the end of the meeting, but the Chair has discretion to provide an indicative outcome at the end of the meeting. Therefore, after deliberation the Panel will recall all parties to either provide an indicative outcome or to confirm that the Panel decision will be advised in writing.
XII. The Panel may also accept as evidence the outcomes of previous investigative procedures, for example the investigation of a complaint or misconduct that has clear relevance to the case before it.
XIII. The Panel may accept a witness's written statement in evidence where the student and the Course Lead agree that the witness need not attend in person, or where it is impracticable for the witness to attend, or where in the opinion of the Panel it is reasonable to do so in order to allow an assessment of the student's suitability for professional practice to take place.
XIV. The Panel will reach its decision by simple majority vote, with the Chair having a casting vote if necessary.

XV. The Panel may adjourn if, in their professional opinion, this is necessary. When an adjournment is required, the reasons for this and anticipated timescales will be explained to all parties.

5.4.8 The Panel members will use their professional and academic judgement in considering the case, the evidence presented and any exceptional circumstances presented, and establish whether or not the conduct took place and/or was intentionally dishonest. The Panel will bear in mind the PSB's code of standards, performance and ethics and the future requirements for conduct in the profession. The standard of proof used by the Panel is proof on the 'balance of probabilities'. This means that the Panel may establish a fact if it considers that it was more likely than not to have happened.

5.4.9 The Panel will reserve the right to request medical evidence, in which case the student will be asked to agree to medical reports or records being obtained. If the student refuses agreement, the Panel may draw an adverse inference.

5.4.10 At the end of a hearing, the parties will be asked to retire while the Panel makes its decision in accordance with the options available to it in section

5.4.11 The Panel's decision will usually be notified to the student and Course Lead in writing within 21 days of the hearing. This notification will outline key decisions and the basis for such decisions and will usually relate decisions to the Teachers' Standards.

5.4.12 Where it is feasible to do so, the Panel may offer an indicative, oral outcome at the end of the deliberation process. In such cases, the Panel will re-call the student (and representative) and the Course Lead (and their representative) to hear either: (a) its decision and summary rationale for that decision, or (b) that the Panel feels the need to consider its decision at further length.

5.4.13 The Panel will consider its decision in private. The options available to the Panel include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Decide that there are insufficient grounds for concern and dismiss the matter;

- Decide that there are grounds for concern that may or may not result in temporary withdrawal from the course of study (noting that this may result in the semester/stage being failed);

- Decide on a course of action proportionate to the concerns considered, for example, placing a formal warning on the student's record, providing advice and guidance and/or requiring close supervision, referral to a specialist (for example a counsellor), setting a resit for a specific part of assessment (even where the student has academically passed the assessment). Where a warning is given, the student must be informed of a rationale, expected duration and whether or not they will be referred back to the Panel.

- Decide that there are sufficient grounds to conclude that the student is unsuitable for professional practice and that the student's course of study should be terminated. In these circumstances the student may apply for a course transfer or the PAB may award a non-professional exit award (where this is available and the criteria met).

The above list of outcomes is not exhaustive and the Panel may agree other outcomes as appropriate to the individual case under consideration. The Panel decision must be proportionate and may not be more lenient as a result of exceptional circumstances.

5.4.14 The Panel will report its decisions to the relevant Examination Board, to the central Student & Academic Services division and to the Department for Education.

5.4.15 The Head of School will keep a record of all matters resolved within Stage Two and will regularly provide the Management Committees with a factual but anonymous report on such matters.

5.16 Where the decision is to terminate the student's course of study, the student will be advised by the Director of Student Experience (DoSE) where to seek counselling and/or careers advice, including advice on the possibility of arrangements for transfer to other courses of study.

6. Right of Appeal

6.1 The University provides an appeals procedure. This allows an appeal to be made against the Suitability for Professional Practice Panel decision where an appeal is submitted within 21 calendar days of the date of the notification of the decision and where one or more of the following criteria are met:

(i) that there is evidence material to the decision that was not considered by the Suitability for Professional Practice Panel and which could not reasonably have been presented to the Panel;

(ii) that there was a procedural irregularity in the Suitability for Professional Practice process of such a nature as to cause doubt as to whether the result might have been different had there not been such an irregularity;

(iii) that the Suitability for Professional Practice Panel failed to comply with the guidance of the relevant professional body.

6.2 A student will normally be notified within a maximum period of 90 days of the outcome of an appeal against a Suitability for Professional Practice Panel decision.