

**Norwich Medical School  
Faculty of Health**

**PROFESSIONALISM ON THE NORWICH MBBS  
Revised Guidance 2012/2013**

Background.....	2
Structures.....	3
Formal Warnings.....	5
Reporting thresholds .....	6
Concern forms.....	7
Attendance .....	8
Plagiarism and Collusion .....	8
MB/BS Code of conduct .....	8
UEA MB/BS Student Declaration and Agreement .....	11
Frequently asked questions about fitness to practise .....	11
Professionalism concerns and fitness to practise processes .....	13

## **Professional behaviour and fitness to practise structures for the Norwich Medical School degree programmes at the University of East Anglia**

Professional bodies' information on student fitness to practise should be read in conjunction with this guidance, e.g. the General Medical Council's document 'Medical Students: professional values and fitness to practise' (2nd edition: 2009).

### **Background**

The overall expectation of the public, students and professionals is that FTP procedures will be just, transparent, but ultimately protective of the public.

This guidance includes a clear code of conduct and direction as to the types of behaviour considered problematic. The School's students should parallel the behaviours expected of them as health professionals after graduation. The School's expectations of its students are supported by teaching and learning opportunities in its curriculums, and by tutor supervision and feedback. The mechanisms by which the School collates and reviews evidence relating to progress and fitness to practice issues are supported by the Norwich Medical School Professionalism Committee structure (previously the MB/BS Professionalism Committee from 2009/10); this will review problems linked to professionalism requirements, and will also recommend appropriate remediation and ensure support is in place. This committee can make the recommendation to the Head of School that formal procedures need to be undertaken if significant concerns emerge about a student's fitness to practise. Health issues, disciplinary problems, and attitudinal/behavioural problems are included, as well as criminal behaviours.

The structure and procedures include:-

- A 'Professional Development Lead' from senior Faculty, whose duties complement those of academic (Course Director) and pastoral care (Senior Advisor) leads.
- A Professionalism Committee which is chaired by the Professional Development Lead.
- Commitment to proactive and supportive efforts to educate and adapt when problems arise.
- Clear procedures and documentation thereof to establish evidence for decisions over a student's period of study.

- Clarification of threshold where formal procedures/'investigation' become active, and warnings given become declarable at GMC registration
- Linked into the University's Disciplinary Procedures e.g. consideration of professional misconduct and/or unsuitability issues by Senate Student Discipline Committee (SSDC).

## Structures

Membership of the Professionalism Committee:

- Professional Development Lead (Chair)
- Senior or Deputy Senior Adviser (to advise on health and related pastoral matters)
- Plagiarism and Collusion Officer
- Disability Liaison Officer
- MB/BS Course Director
- Up to 2 members of NHS staff (to contribute expertise and support review of students, and to include a Foundation doctor if possible)
- Learning and Teaching Coordinator for Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (Secretary)
- Others may be co-opted by the Chair for their specific expertise where appropriate.

In attendance:

- Minute Secretary.

**NB: To be quorate 5 members must be in attendance, including one member of NHS staff.**

**The responsibilities of the Professional Development Lead are:**

- Overview of the School's learning and assessment that supports professional development.
- Chair the Professionalism Committee.
- To liaise with the Admissions Office when professionalism issues are raised (for example, as the result of a CRB check).
- Assist Course Directors, his or her deputies, the Head of School and the Senior Adviser/Deputy Senior Adviser, in areas of student fitness to practise - can be called on to advise in event of a major problem with a student.

- Assist with issues related to FTP, and for medical students with GMC provisional registration.
- Liaise with the Plagiarism and Collusion Officer following cases of collusion and plagiarism; such cases to be reported to the Professionalism Committee.
- Liaise with the Senior Adviser/Deputy Senior Adviser on areas where health may affect fitness to practise, and be able to refer to UEA Occupational Health Service those where there are significant health concerns.
- Review relevant reports from UEA Occupational Health Service and action recommendations.
- Assist staff reporting to the Progress Boards and Boards of Examiners on FTP issues which need to be noted.
- Liaise with the Learning and Teaching Coordinator, Head of School, and the Investigating Officer to instigate formal investigations.
- Give account of previous findings when formal fitness to practise 'panels' are convened for major FTP issues.
- In consultation with the Learning and Teaching Coordinator, to be the academic lead for ongoing UEA Professional Misconduct and Unsuitability regulations and for medical students GMC requirements which may impact on the School's procedures and teaching.

**Remit of Professionalism Committee:**

To meet up to four times yearly,

1. September/October to ensure remediation plans are in place for all students identified as needing these
2. January – to monitor progress and consider any new issues
3. May – to monitor progress and consider any new issues prior to Stage Boards of Examiners and Final Boards of Examiners
4. July – to consider prior to Stage Boards of Examiners

#, This in order to:

- consider significant conduct issues, and recommend levels of action
- examine the evidence for instigating formal investigations, and make recommendations to the Chairs of Boards
- note the outcome of any investigations undertaken and the rulings of any 'panels', be these School, University or external bodies, which relate to Norwich Medical School student fitness to practise, and to consider any follow-up actions needed within the School

- review Norwich Medical School students where health concerns are affecting their performance  
[this will NOT include students with recognised chronic health issues or special needs unless reported; e.g. prolonged or repeated absence, difficulty in fulfilling professional requirements, causing staff concerns]
- receive and scrutinise students who have had problems notified below 'threshold' for warnings, to ensure remediation is under way.

## **Formal Warnings**

Only the Head of School (or their alternate) can issue Formal Warnings. Where possible the Head of School should not have been involved in detailed review of any case prior to considering a case. Recommendations to issue a Formal Warning will be issued in year (i.e. prior to the meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners) by the Professionalism Committee. In exceptional circumstances, where it is not possible to convene a Professionalism Committee in a timely fashion, this recommendation can be made by either the Professional Development Lead, the Course Director, or in their absence by a Deputy Course Director. The final decision to issue a Formal Warning rests with the Head of School. Should the Head of School decide not to issue a warning, this decision will be reported to the Professionalism Committee. Formal warnings are reportable to the General Medical Council on provisional registration.

At the end of each academic year, the Professionalism Committee will provide a report to each Board of Examiners to confirm whether each student should be allowed to progress or not.

### **Progression to warning**

Any student where the Professionalism Committee, Professional Development Lead, Course Director or Deputy Course Director believes a formal warning may be due would have their student record reviewed by a senior member of the Committee (normally Chair or Course Director). Whenever there is the possibility of a Formal Warning, or need for further information, the student concerned would be interviewed. A member of administrative staff will take notes of this interview and a report would go to the Professionalism Committee. The Committee would review this report prior to issuing a recommendation to the Head of School.

## **Exceptional behaviour and Professional Misconduct and Unsuitability regulations**

Students whose behaviour is an exceptional cause for concern can be immediately suspended from placements and professional practice elements of the programme under General Regulations for Students (14): Professional Misconduct and/or Unsuitability (PMU). Students whose behaviour does not warrant immediate suspension may still be subject to a PMU investigation where there are concerns about professional conduct and/ or suitability.

## **Reporting thresholds**

A Senate Student Disciplinary Committee meeting in Mode C to consider matters under Regulation 14 for Professional Misconduct and/or Unsuitability (referred to as Fitness to Practice Panels by the GMC) will be convened, usually, only where a second 'formal' warning has been issued and/or for serious misconduct. Before the meeting is convened an investigation will be carried out by a School appointed Investigating Officer who will submit a report to the Head of School. The Head of School will then decide whether there are prima facie grounds for referral to a PMU hearing. The decision whether to go ahead with a PMU hearing is taken by the Chair of the University SSDC. The Committee membership would include one member of clinical academic staff from the School (not connected with case to be considered) as well as a job-related health professional from the NHS.

### **Internal/Course Level reporting:**

#### **Tutor reports (from PBL Tutor/GP Tutor):**

- **One or more 'needs improvements' recorded on Tutor Report Forms:**  
This should be dealt with by the student and their Personal Adviser. It would be appropriate that this be flagged on the student feedback form as needing to be discussed, and the assumption should be that student and Personal Adviser should discuss these and take action in same way as they would do for any other assessment.
  
- **First 'unsatisfactory' Tutor Report:**  
Student reviewed by Course Director or Deputy Course Director. Note logged on student record system that student has received an unsatisfactory tutor report.  
Course Director or Deputy Course Director agree remediation plan with student and

the GP/PBL tutor, this is placed on student record. Student to review with Personal Adviser at next meeting and plan recorded.

In such cases the following year's PBL/GP tutor (as appropriate) should be notified to ensure that appropriate remediation can be continued between years. This is most likely to be necessary if the 'unsatisfactory' is recorded in an end-of-year final term tutor report.

➤ **Second 'unsatisfactory' Tutor Report:** (*Note: this is a second 'unsatisfactory' Tutor Report received at any time during a student's studies*)

Both of the reports and the original remediation plan to be reviewed by the Professionalism Committee. This review may lead to one of the following outcomes:

1. Notification of FTP issue to Head of School with recommendation to issue Formal Warning
2. Meeting between Professional Development Lead and student to discuss remediation. Action plan to be filed in student record. Letter sent to student (copied to Personal Adviser) explaining remediation expected. Student to review with Personal Adviser at next meeting.
3. Notification of this issue to the following year's PBL/GP tutor, as appropriate.

**Note:** whilst two "unsatisfactory" reports may (depending on severity) lead to a Formal Warning, a third "unsatisfactory" report would automatically lead to a Formal Warning.

## Concern forms

Concern forms can be submitted to the Learning and Teaching Service at any time concerning a student by anyone who has a concern about a student's health and/or behaviour<sup>1</sup>. These will be reviewed by the Academic Year Lead; if there are severe concerns the case will be referred to the Professional Development Lead or a delegated member of the Professionalism Committee, and usually will lead to further information gathering and student file review, followed by a meeting with the Professional Development Lead. Subsequently, one of the following actions will occur:

- No further action, but note added on student record

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<sup>1</sup> There is a parallel form which can be completed by students the 'student concern form': this form is available for them express concerns about incidents with staff or students, including concerns about patient safety.

- Remediation plan agreed, and note added on student record
- Review by Professionalism Committee

Students who have more than one student concern form submitted during the course of their studies will automatically be reviewed by the Professionalism Committee. Preceding this meeting they will meet with the Professional Development Lead to discuss the circumstances of the second (or subsequent) concern form.

## Attendance

Absence of junior doctors is causing considerable concern in some FY posts: similarly, student absence is having a detrimental impact on delivery of the MB/BS curriculum. Regulations on absence lead directly to FTP action. The MB/BS Attendance regulations can be found at: [LINK HERE](#)

## Plagiarism and Collusion

The **Plagiarism and Collusion Officer** has in place a set of criteria for the level of penalty for plagiarism and collusion: the Plagiarism and Collusion Officer's recommendations will normally be accepted.

If the severity of a problem or the frequency of less serious but persistent problems warrants it, the Professionalism Committee, Professional Development Lead, or the Head of School can instigate a formal investigation, which is the precursor of a formal warning if the investigation justifies this. The Investigating Officer will not be a member of the Professionalism Committee, as members of the latter are likely to be asked to provide evidence as to previous or recent problems with students. A major violation or recurrence after formal warning could lead to the student being considered by a Senate Student Discipline Committee. If it is felt that the incidence of Plagiarism and Collusion raises professionalism concerns then an Investigating Officer may be appointed by the School to investigate possible grounds for a PMU hearing.

## MB/BS Code of conduct

All students will be expected to abide by the MB/BS Code of Conduct. The UEA MB/BS is a professional qualification, and all our students need to develop themselves as professionals while they are undertaking the course. In general, we find our students to be excellent: they are hardworking, reliable, friendly, appreciative, and supportive of

others, try to improve things that could be better, and learn fast from any problems. We reward good progress in professionalism on an annual basis by a recognised 'pass' in this area, which can be declared in a CV, and exceptional achievement may also be recognised over time.

However, there are some areas where we have seen problems, and the following sets out examples and possible penalties. It is impossible to specify all the ways in which a professional code of conduct can be violated: the student must interpret the principles and make their own judgements, as will staff. However, the following examples of each principle indicate areas where medical schools have encountered problems, and are areas where students need to take care.

The students of the UEA MB/BS are expected to:

1. **Comply with the spirit and principles set out by the accrediting body, the General Medical Council**, in their documentation – in particular, 'Duties of a Doctor' and 'Medical Students: professional values and fitness to practise'

2. **Ensure patient safety and wellbeing in every way you can.**

**EXAMPLES:**

- Be on time for sessions where you are booked to see patients, ensure they are still willing to see you, check if there is anything they need your help with that you can do (e.g. pass on relevant information to staff).
- Be safe for practice – clean hands, clean clothes, healthy, not under influence of drugs, preventive immunisations in place.
- Do not exceed the limits of your competence.
- Do not develop personal relationships with patients: do not arrange to see them out of the NHS setting, without tutor knowledge, do not exchange personal details.
- Check out/seek help if you see patients distressed.
- Speak up if you see examples of poor practice which may be upsetting or dangerous for patients or staff.
- Maintain confidentiality, while sharing essential information for patient safety.

3. **Be honest and truthful in all areas of your interaction with staff, other students and patients**

**EXAMPLES:**

- Declare any cautions or criminal offences at the admissions stage, or as they occur during your studies.
- Declare any special needs or health problems that need to be known to staff in order to ensure student and/or patient safety (for example, an infectious illness, an identified occupational health risk, addiction, deteriorating mental health).
- Avoid plagiarism or citing other people's work without due attribution to them.
- Never falsify others' signatures.
- Ensure that staff and patients know that you are a medical student and not a doctor, and declare any limit to your competence.
- Use premises and resources only as allowed.
- Make staff aware of any unintended access to confidential material, by yourself or others; e.g. assessment papers, patient records.
- Be truthful and open about reasons for absence.
- Report absence in a timely manner.

**4. Be responsible about all formal requirements of the MB/BS****EXAMPLES:**

- Comply promptly with all occupational health requirements.
- Submit assessments and other compulsory paperwork by the deadline given.
- Complete course work and compulsory evaluations in a timely and thoughtful fashion.
- Attend all teaching provided OR notify lead staff promptly if illness or transport problems prevent this.
- Complete the annual declaration and student-held record promptly and fully.

**5. Be respectful of the needs and efforts of others****EXAMPLES:**

- Support peers and any staff members involved in your teaching and learning.
- Be polite and appreciative when staff and patients have put aside time and effort to arrange learning and assessment.
- Should criticism be necessary, do this with due consideration and focus on how to resolve the problem, rather than being rude or aggressive to the person.
- Ensure that patients are given due time and attention, that you make their comfort and safety your first priority, and thank them for their involvement with your learning.

- Avoid late arrival, chatting and telephone use during teaching and assessment sessions.
- Always consider the safety of other clinical staff (e.g. safe sharp disposal, ensuring you leave clinical areas clean and tidy etc.)

**6. Seek help when needed – it is your responsibility to be proactive about issues which may undermine your performance**

**EXAMPLES:**

- Declare extenuating circumstances BEFORE formal assessments.
- Meet with your Personal Adviser regularly (the minimum number of meetings expected for MB/BS students is two per year), including consulting on progress.
- Register with a GP, and attend if required, rather than using staff who are medically qualified for your own health advice.
- Make appropriate use of UEA student support services.

**7. Consider your own reputation and that of the School and University when you are outside the campus or NHS setting**

**EXAMPLES:**

- Dress appropriately when working as a medical student.
- Breaking confidentiality, drinking to excess, voicing unjustifiable criticisms of others not present to defend themselves, having major rows in public settings with other students, criminal acts such as stealing or illegal drug use or illegal drug dealing are all examples which can bring both you and the School into disrepute.

## **UEA MB/BS Student Declaration and Agreement**

All students will be expected to abide by the UEA Student Declaration and Agreement on arrival at UEA; this can be found at: [LINK HERE](#)

## **Frequently asked questions about fitness to practise**

***Do I have to declare issues that would come up in a CRB check?***

Yes – the School expects you to do this as any new problems arise. If you are found in retrospect to have an undeclared criminal conviction or caution, this will automatically result in a formal warning and review by the Professionalism Committee. A criminal

record is also a required declaration at registration with the GMC, as it is on our MB/BS admissions form.

***What is the 'threshold' for a formal warning?***

This is impossible to generalise: a student who is found to have committed significant plagiarism, broken patient confidentiality, abused privileged access to premises, or falsified information about reasons for absence or late submission would certainly be reviewed by the Professionalism Committee with a view to being issued with a Formal Warning. However, the GMC are also clear that students who repeatedly make more minor violations - such as unsatisfactory work in PBL, poor attendance, tutor concerns about attitudes, or failure to attend for occupational health screening – this could also lead to review by the Professionalism Committee and a Formal Warning may be issued. The reasons for this would be clearly set out, and the Professionalism Committee would submit its recommendation to the Head of School.

***Can I tell my side of the story?***

Yes – unless the initial review shows that there is no cause for concern.

***How do I get advice and support to improve?***

All students are expected to take any issues that have been raised with them during or at end of year to their Personal Advisers for help. Normally, they should think about such issues, decide how they can improve, and discuss their plan with their Personal Adviser. Other specific actions may be recommended by the School (e.g.; making up time if non-attendance has been the issue, resubmission of work if plagiarism has been found), and the student's agreement sought to confirm that they will undertake these requirements. Again, advice from Personal Advisers should be sought, and the members of the Professionalism Committee will also offer advice to staff and students as to how best to proceed if this is needed. Other specific support and advice can also be asked for as needed; e.g. from Dean of Students Office, School's Plagiarism and Collusion Officer, Senior/Deputy Senior Adviser.

***MB/BS students: What do I have to declare at provisional registration with the GMC?***

The GMC's checklist is self explanatory. Any formal warnings and enquiries of professional misconduct or unsuitability MUST be declared. However, declaring these does NOT mean that the GMC will NOT register you – data for 2007 showed that Medical Schools' fitness to practise declarations to GMC at provisional registration

totalled 225 out of 6,500 applications. All those with declarations were eventually registered.

## **Professionalism concerns and fitness to practise processes**

In terms of problem behaviours, these may be drawn to the attention of the School in a number of ways: whatever the source, a delegated member of staff will look into the reported problem, and may seek other evidence.

We shall aim to:

1. be accurate about the basis for our concerns
2. give the student our reasons for any concerns, and assist the student to improve
3. support students and staff when concerns are being investigated
4. gather relevant information in a respectful and thorough way, in order to have a full picture of the context of the problem and its reporting
5. make considered judgements within a group of staff, rather than individually
6. only implement formal investigations or formal warnings if specific events or cumulative concerns show sufficient severity
7. keep information confidential wherever possible to those directly involved in identifying, reviewing or exploring a problem.

The Professionalism Committee which will meet in advance of Board of Examiners to collate information and consider/ follow-up those students with significant problems. The business of the Professionalism Committee will include:

- Review of all students noted under FTP at Boards of Examiners at end of previous academic year, and checks that formal recommendations for remediation are now in place/have been taken
- Administrative concerns about student behaviours (late deadlines, debts, rudeness)
- Major attendance issues as described in the attendance regulations
- PBL/GP tutor concerns – two or more ‘unsatisfactory’ reports (during the five years of a student’s studies)

- Concern forms - where two or more concern forms are received (during the five years of a student's studies), these can be from staff or peers.
- Possible misconduct (under the guidance of the Head of School and relevant others)
- Other issues deemed to raise potential FTP issues, including major health problems where there is evidence that FTP issues could arise.

The following judgements can be made:

1. Considered (no action needed following review, situation resolved)
2. Noted (letter to student, may request or recommend an action)
3. Recorded (formal meeting required with e.g. Professional Development Lead, Plagiarism and Collusion Officer, Occupational Health Service)
4. Recommendation to Head of School to issue a First Formal warning
5. Recommendation to Head of School to issue a Second Formal warning
6. Recommendation to Head of School to initiate a Professional Misconduct/Unsuitability (PMU) formal investigation under clause (14), Professional Misconduct and Unsuitability, of the University's General Regulations for Students.

It is possible to omit stages depending on magnitude of problem – e.g., a criminal conviction might lead straight to a suspension pending a formal investigation under General Regulation 14 for professional misconduct and/or unsuitability. Similarly, a student with a previous problem is more likely to be dealt with at the 'next step' up if a further problem occurs, even if these are in different domains and are both relatively minor. However there is no intention that each ensuing incident WILL go to the next step. This depends on the judgement of the Professionalism Committee and the Head of School.