



## **SCHOOL OF EDUCATION - FITNESS TO TEACH AND DISABILITY SUPPORT PROCEDURES FOR ITE PROGRAMMES**

The School of Education recognises the benefits that teachers with a disability can bring to education and actively welcomes applications from trainees with a disability. For teacher education courses, whilst needing to ensure that all applicants have the health and physical capacity to teach (Department for Education (DfE) ITT Criteria document), we are also mindful of the implications of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), the Equality Act 2010 and the Higher Education Occupational Health Physicians/Practitioners (HEOPS) – Trainee Teachers – Standards of medical fitness to train guidance (2014). The School of Education addresses disability positively and does not discriminate against applicants with disabilities. It strives to ensure that such applicants are given every opportunity to succeed with the support of its own staff, staff in partner schools and wider University support services.

### **Fitness to Teach and Disability Support**

It is important for applicants/trainees and ITE staff to understand the differences between the Fitness to Teach medical assessment and an applicant's rights under the Equality Act for disability support. Regular communication between the School of Education, the AccessAbility and Wellbeing teams and the Occupational Health assessment team ensures that all parties who might be involved in discussion with a disabled applicant/trainee are fully informed. To clarify, the Fitness to Teach assessment relates to a trainee's time spent in a school environment as a trainee teacher. Wider assessment from the AccessAbility and Wellbeing teams ensures that trainees with disabilities, medical conditions and/or learning difficulties are well supported during their academic studies.

### **Disclosing a disability on application or at interview**

All applicants are given the opportunity to disclose any disabilities or medical conditions at application and again at registration (and at any point during the programme thereafter) in order that appropriate support can be provided by the University.

When applicants are invited for interview, they are given the opportunity to request any reasonable adjustments they might need during the interview process. This information is passed to the Admissions Coordinator and appropriate arrangements are made. If an applicant declares a disability or medical condition on their application form or for the first time during the interview, the ITE Admissions Tutor should signpost the applicant to the AccessAbility/Wellbeing team (<https://www.exeter.ac.uk/students/wellbeing/prospective/>) for further information on support available and should also explain the Occupational Health/Fitness to Teach assessment process. They should also make a note of any discussions relating to support needs on the interview record, including if the applicant has any thoughts on how their training could be personalised for them.

If an applicant declares a disability on their application form and is subsequently offered a place, they will be encouraged to contact the University's AccessAbility/Wellbeing team before the start of the programme to book an appointment for a meeting with an AccessAbility/Wellbeing advisor who will then, if appropriate draw up an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) – see ILP section below.

Where an Admissions Tutor wishes to reject an applicant after interview and the applicant has declared a disability or requested adjustments to support their interview, the tutor is advised to run through their decision with a member of the ITE Leadership (InTEL) team before making a final decision to ensure that appropriate adjustments were made during the interview process.

### **Disclosing a disability at registration**

If a trainee declares a disability or medical condition during the online registration process, the Partnership Office will contact them during the first few weeks of the course to ask them for further details and permission to share this information with relevant university and school staff involved in their training. The trainee has the choice of giving consent, or not to relevant individuals.

If a trainee declares a disability or medical condition to a member of university staff at any other point in the year, they should be encouraged at that point to contact the AccessAbility/Wellbeing team direct to make an appointment to see an advisor.

### **Individual Learning Plans (ILP)**

Individual learning plans are produced by the Wellbeing team following an appointment with a Wellbeing Advisor. An ILP is a document that lets the academic department know of any recommended reasonable adjustments that should be put in place to support a trainee's academic learning. An ILP does not cover adjustments which need to be made during school placements – this is done via an Occupational Health report following a Fitness to Teach assessment (see below for more details). If an ILP is issued by the Wellbeing team, it will be circulated to university staff involved in the trainee's learning i.e. personal tutor, teaching staff, Partnership Office staff and relevant University Lead Mentor (ULM). They are not circulated to school placement staff but trainees are encouraged to share their ILP with their ITE Coordinator in school.

### **Determining Fitness to Teach**

All successful applicants are informed that the offer of a place is conditional upon being deemed Fit to Teach and they are required to complete a confidential medical questionnaire. This is returned, via a secure online portal to the Occupational Health assessment team, who make the 'Fitness to Teach' decision based on its information and if needed, a telephone interview and/or meeting with the applicant, in line with the guidance provided in the Higher Education Occupational Health Physicians/Practitioners (HEOPS) – Trainee Teachers – Standards of medical fitness to train guidance (2014) ([https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521730958HEOPS\\_Teaching\\_Students\\_fitness\\_standards\\_2014\\_v9.pdf](https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521730958HEOPS_Teaching_Students_fitness_standards_2014_v9.pdf)) . This will result in one of three decisions being conveyed to Admissions:

1. The trainee is Fit to Teach
2. The trainee is Fit to Teach with recommendations/adjustments
3. The trainee is not Fit to Teach.

Disclosure of relevant health matters and disabilities is a requirement of the fitness to teach process. Any information disclosed via the Fitness to Teach process remains confidential to the Occupational Health assessment team and is used solely for the assessment of fitness to teach.

Where adjustments are needed or recommendations are made, the Occupational Health team will signpost the applicant to contact the relevant University team to discuss support options. They will also write an 'OH report' detailing the adjustments/recommendations. They will send the applicant a copy of the report and seek permission from the applicant to share the report with relevant university staff. The applicant can negotiate the wording but if they refuse permission for the report to be shared with the University, they cannot be deemed fit to teach and will be unable to start the course.

Once permission is gained, the Occupational Health team will send the OH report to the Partnership Office who are responsible for ensuring that the adjustments are provided/facilitated in the relevant placement settings. The Partnership Office will share relevant extracts of the OH report with school and university staff involved in the trainee's training to enable the adjustments and/or recommendations to be facilitated. They will share the proposed wording with the trainee in mid October prior to the first placement. Agreed wording will then be sent to the relevant placement school staff, personal tutor and University Lead Mentor prior to each placement starting.

Sometimes, it may be necessary to seek further information before the Fitness to Teach decision can be made. In these cases, the Occupational Health professional, with consent from the applicant, will discuss any proposed adjustments with the Partnership Director to ensure that any such adjustments are reasonable within the teaching context. If necessary, this may result in an applicant needing to defer their studies (or interrupt if the trainee is already registered on the course) if the adjustments required are deemed reasonable but a suitable placement cannot be found within these constraints for the appropriate period of time.

### **Re-assessing Fitness to Teach once training has commenced**

Trainees are responsible for informing the University (via their personal tutor or other university members of staff involved in their training ) if their physical or mental health changes during the year. In this situation, the University, or the trainee, has the right to ask the Occupational Health assessment team for another Fitness to Teach assessment. The Partnership Director is responsible for requesting any Occupational Health Fitness to Teach referrals.

If an applicant fails to disclose a pre-existing disability or medical condition on the Fitness to Teach medical questionnaire which could have deemed them not fit to teach, the University has the right to reassess the trainee's fitness to teach and if necessary, require the trainee to undergo a Fitness to Practise investigation.

### **Assessing Fitness to Teach after a break in study**

If a trainee interrupts their ITE programme or fails and returns for a re-sit opportunity, a further fitness to teach assessment will be required on their return, regardless of whether the reason for return is connected to the trainee's health or capacity to teach.

## **Key Documents**

DfE ITT Training Criteria

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-criteria>

Higher Education Occupational Health Physicians/Practitioners (HEOPS) – Trainee Teachers – Standards of medical fitness to train guidance (2014) [https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521730958HEOPS\\_Teaching\\_Students\\_fitness\\_standards\\_2014\\_v9.pdf](https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521730958HEOPS_Teaching_Students_fitness_standards_2014_v9.pdf)

Equality Act 2010: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2001/10/contents>

The Education (Health Standards) (England) Regulations 2003:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/3139/contents/made>

University of Exeter Fitness to Practise procedure:

<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/otherregs/fitness/>

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## Fitness to Teach Process for ITE Programmes

