



University
of Glasgow

STUDENTS' REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW



Student Mental Health Policy

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1. Introduction

This Policy is designed to provide advice and guidance to:

- Students who experience mental health difficulties or a mental health condition¹ throughout their studies on what support and assistance they can expect from the University.
- University staff who have a role in advising and supporting students with mental health difficulties.
- Students who have concerns about the mental health of another student.

Accompanying this Policy are Guidance notes offering practical advice to all staff supporting students.

2. Scope of the Policy

The policy covers any current or prospective student with a mental health difficulty or condition and outlines the University's and individuals' responsibilities in these circumstances. It should be noted that the terms "mental health difficulty" and "mental health condition" applies to students with both fluctuating and long standing issues around mental health. This policy attempts to provide a non-exhaustive list of scenarios and lists the steps both students and staff should follow.

3. Policy Statement

The University believes that no student should be disadvantaged from succeeding in their studies due to mental health difficulties or conditions. The University is committed to providing flexibility in order to facilitate students' success, as laid out in this document and its crossover with other University policies (i.e. the Student Absence Policy). The University is committed to creating a stigma-free environment that promotes a holistic, co-ordinated approach to mental wellbeing that aligns itself with the Royal College of Psychiatrists "bio-psycho-social-spiritual" model.

4. Rights and Responsibilities

This section covers rights and responsibilities for students, staff and the University.

4.1 For students

Rights

- All students at the University have a right to attend and study without being subject to prejudice or discrimination as a result of their mental health difficulties or conditions.
- All students experiencing a form of mental health difficulty or condition have a right to support from the University with this, taking into consideration the limits of provision the University offers.

Responsibilities

- Students who are currently experiencing mental health difficulties or conditions should, where possible, inform the University of this at the earliest opportunity in order to receive advice and assistance. Depending on the student's particular difficulties or condition it may be appropriate for them to notify their Adviser of Studies, the University Counselling Service and the Disability

¹ The two terms 'mental health difficulty' and 'mental health condition' are both used by HESA to describe two types of mental health. 'Condition' refers to depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder and 'difficulty' is a more general term.
http://www.hesa.ac.uk/component/option,com_studrec/task,show_file/Itemid,233/mnl,11051/href,a%5E_%5EDI_SABLE.html/

Service. It should be noted that there is no obligation on students to disclose any difficulty, condition or disability they may have.

- Students experiencing this type of difficulty or condition should refer to the Student Absence Policy² and the “Incomplete Assessment resulting from Good Cause” regulations located at section 16.45 of the University Calendar³.
- All students have a social responsibility to assist the University in working towards a stigma-free environment with regards to mental health difficulties.
- All students should endeavour to recognise their own personal limits with regards to any mental health difficulties or conditions they are experiencing and seek advice and assistance at the earliest possible opportunity.

4.2 For staff

Responsibilities

- Staff should ensure that they treat all students in the same manner, however it may be appropriate for student’s experiencing mental health difficulties or conditions to be provided with extra support at times. In line with the Equality Act (2010) and the University’s guide for staff on supporting disabled students⁴ reasonable adjustments should be made for students where required.
- Any disclosure made by a student experiencing mental health difficulties or conditions to a staff member should be treated as completely confidential unless the student’s (or indeed any other person’s) immediate personal safety is at risk.
- All staff have a responsibility to ensure that they work towards a University which is free from stigma with regards to individuals with mental health difficulties or conditions.
- Staff should remain aware of their personal limitations when assisting students with mental health difficulties or conditions and should refer to the **Student Mental Health Policy Guidelines for staff supporting students** (see appendix) for more details on referring students to appropriate specialist services.

4.3 For the University

Responsibilities

- The University has a responsibility to promote their **Wellbeing Strategy** which envisions creating a campus where mental wellbeing is valued and encouraged based on a holistic approach.
- Where a student declares a mental health difficulty or condition to the University they have a responsibility to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to prevent the student being unduly disadvantaged by this difficulty.
- The University has a responsibility to students to provide services which supply the best level of support possible in specialist areas such as Disability and Counselling.
- The University has a responsibility to disseminate the information and guidance relating to the **Mental Health Policy** to all staff and provide training and updates where appropriate.
- The University has a responsibility to review and develop this policy dependant on student feedback and changes in the wider area of mental health support.

² http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_129312_en.pdf

³ http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_238045_en.pdf

⁴ http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_190029_en.doc

5. Guidance

Guidance for staff supporting students can be found in the appendix.

6. Sources of information

General information and advice

Advisers of Study

The student's adviser is responsible for overseeing and supporting academic progress, and is the first port of call in the event of any difficulties, whether course related or personal. Students can find out who their adviser is by logging into MyCampus and clicking on 'Student Centre'.

Chaplaincy

The Chaplaincy provides spiritual support for students and staff. It is open to students and staff of all faith/non-faith backgrounds and denominations.

0141 330 5419

chaplaincy@glasgow.ac.uk

Counselling and Psychological Services

Counselling and Psychological Services offer a confidential space for students and staff to explore and reflect on these issues without being judged, and to help develop ways of overcoming difficulties or conditions.

Some of the services provided:

- Mental health and wellbeing drop-in
- Self-help materials
- Individual counselling
- Psycho-educational groups
- Group counselling
- Three-session counselling
- Clinical psychological services

0900-1700, Monday to Friday

0141 330 4528

studentcounselling@glasgow.ac.uk

Disability Service

The University encourages students to disclose any disability or medical condition to their Disability Service to ensure that appropriate support can be arranged. This could include access, examination and study arrangements.

All information disclosed to the Disability Service about disabilities or medical conditions will be treated as "sensitive personal data" as defined by the Data Protection Act (1998), and will not be passed on to a third party without explicit signed consent.

0900-1700, Monday to Friday

0141 300 5497

disability@glasgow.ac.uk

SRC Advice Centre

The Advice Centre is an advice, information and representation service provided by the SRC for all Glasgow University students. The Advice Centre offers free and confidential advice on wide range of subjects.

1130-1600, Monday to Friday
0141 330 5360
advice@src.gla.ac.ukHalls of Residence

Fully trained Wardens and Senior Residents are available to provide emotional support to students living in halls of residence outwith office hours. To contact a Warden or Senior Resident students can find their contact number on the phone contact list in their room. Alternatively the contact for Wardens or Senior Residents are held by Residential Services on 0141 330 4743 or at accom@gla.ac.uk (office hours only).

Crisis Team⁵

Staff may contact the Crisis Team if they find themselves facing a student crisis situation, such as if they are very worried about a student and feel that there is a risk of suicide. An experienced team will provide advice and/or help manage the situation.

Security are contactable 24/7 and they can ensure that one of the team are contacted.
Ext 4444 (internal) or 0141 330 4444

Samaritans

The Samaritans are just everyday people who volunteer for Samaritans. They've been through months of thorough training to qualify as a Samaritan, so they really know what they're doing, and how best to help, no matter what the issue is.

They are there to support through all kinds of situations feelings and thoughts. What one person can take head on, may lead another person to struggle to cope.

You don't have to be feeling suicidal to get in touch. Only 1 in 5 people who call the Samaritans feel suicidal at the time.

0141 248 4488, 24/7
jo@samaritans.org

Registering with a GP

Students should register with a local doctor whilst at University. There may be difficulty in getting medical attention if you are not registered. To find out more about how to register go to:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/students/support/health/#tabs=1>

⁵ http://www.lib.gla.ac.uk/media/media_221403_en.pdf

Appendix

Guidance for staff supporting students

Context

The literature on mental health suggests that 1 in 4 people experience mental health difficulties at some point during their life. Within student populations, research has shown this figure increases with a higher incidence of mental health problems amongst students compared to the general population. The number of students accessing higher education counselling services across the UK appears to reflect this picture. 63% of Universities and Colleges report a steady increase in student referrals. During the 8-year period spanning 2004-2012, the University of Glasgow alone saw a 283% rise in the number of students registered with Counselling & Psychological Services. By implication, it is of paramount importance to ensure that the mental health needs of students are supported during their time at University. With a population of over 20,000 students from over 100 countries, there is rich diversity in the ethnicity and culture of the student body at the University of Glasgow. The institutional approach should aspire to:

- reach the student population and promote awareness of, and access to support services
- tailor support to individual needs, sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity
- reduce stigma associated with mental health difficulties
- preserve dignity and adhere to professional codes of confidentiality
- educate staff on mental health amongst students and how to respond to their needs

Aim of the guidelines

The following guidelines are intended for use where you have prior knowledge of or growing concerns that a student is experiencing emotional or psychological distress. This may have been brought to your attention by (i) the student themselves; (ii) direct observation on your part; or (iii) a third party who has made you aware of the situation e.g. your colleague or a friend of the student.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

The University works within Data Protection legislation and maintains the confidentiality of personal and sensitive data as outlined in the "Policy on Confidential Data in the University"
(http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_180727_en.pdf)

In general principle, personal information on a student must not be shared within the University or to an external body without the student's consent. All staff must operate within strict standards of confidentiality and comply with this policy. Therefore, information about a particular student should not be shared with colleagues, relatives or other students without prior verbal or written consent from the student. In this instance there should be agreement between the member of staff and the student about the scope and purpose of information sharing before disclosure to a third party is made. When working with students in a supportive role, outlining the confidential nature of the interactions is key in building the student's confidence and allowing them to seek support.

There are however, some circumstances when it is necessary to overrule the general principle of confidentiality. These are as follows:

By compulsion of Law: there can be circumstances where information about a student may have to be disclosed by order of the police or to a court of law without the student's consent. If this does arise, you should first consult the 'Police Requests for Personal Data' policy
(<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/dpfoffice/a-ztopics/policerequestsforpersonaldata/>) and seek advice from

a data protection officer. The disclosure is not automatic, and the procedure must be followed first.

Risk – suicide or violence: if there are significant concerns relating to the safety of a student (suicide risk) or the safety of someone else (violence risk), then disclosure may be required without the student's consent, for example, when contacting the emergency services.

Fitness to practice: Depending on course of study, there may be a need to consider a student's fitness to practice. This occurs when the student is undertaking a qualification that involves interaction with the general public in a professional capacity, e.g. medics, nurses, teachers etc. Should concerns of this nature arise, guidance should be sought from the Senate Office.

Fitness to study: In other degrees where there is no fitness to practice policy, an assessment could be made by the students' GP regarding the students' fitness to study.

There may be times when you need to discuss a student's mental well-being with a senior colleague to seek advice on how to proceed. In these circumstances, you can discuss your concerns without revealing the identity of the student.

If you have concerns about a student's mental health, you may ask for a telephone consultation with a staff member at Counselling and Psychological Services (CaPS), or for more urgent cases, with the University Crisis Team. In these instances, you can similarly discuss your concerns without disclosing the identity of the student and therefore retain confidentiality. If further action and disclosure is required you will be advised of this and of the steps that need to be taken. If in doubt about whether to breach confidentiality, seek advice from CaPS or the Crisis Team.

Possible indications that a student may require support

Emotional and psychological fluctuations are natural processes that occur throughout the lifespan. They are often triggered by life events, both typical and uncommon, and there is individual variation in the extent and nature of responses.

Irrespective of whether a student's distress is a typical reaction to a challenging life event or suggestive of more serious, underlying pathology, spotting the signs early and taking action if necessary is advisable. The signs of distress can vary from person to person and at times can be difficult to identify. One of the main indicators is noticing a change in the student's behaviour which may have been brought to your attention by the student themselves or you or a third party have observed. Typically, these changes may include:

- Tearfulness
- Loss of interest in activities
- Drop in academic performance
- Mood swings that are rapid or out of character
- Evidence of self-harming behaviour, such as cutting
- Change in eating habits (binge eating, over-eating, not eating)
- Sleep problems (not sleeping, sleeping much more)
- Increased anxiety, seeming agitated or jumpy, panic attacks
- Loss of energy, and being tired or lethargic
- Increasing social isolation (socialising less, uncharacteristically missing lectures, avoiding friends etc.)
- Dramatically increased energy, going out much more, needing very little sleep, rapid speech, over

- excitement or euphoria etc.
- Hearing, seeing or believing things that are a distortion of reality (hallucinations or delusions)

This is not an exhaustive list, and may not in isolation of context indicate that the student is emotionally distressed or experiencing a mental health problem. Speaking with the student discreetly will help you establish if further support is required and referral to CaPS is indicated. If in doubt, you can contact CaPS and seek advice.

Responding to student mental health needs

Prior to meeting with a student

- Be prepared to set aside a reasonable amount of time to listen to a student's concerns
- When answering students' emails, keep the content of your response to a minimum
Students can and do sometimes send lengthy emails about their circumstances when they are feeling distressed or in a state of desperation. Empathy can be conveyed within one or two sentences before advising the student of the next steps e.g. *"I'm very sorry to learn that you're feeling overwhelmed right now. It sounds as though things have been difficult of late therefore it's important that we get you the support you need. If you would like to come in and chat with me in the first instance we can discuss the best way forward. I'm available (suggested dates/times)"*
- If avoidable, do not respond to student emails out with working hours
- You may be concerned about a student's mental health, however the student themselves has not approached you for help. Using an innocuous reason to meet with the student e.g. arranging a meeting to discuss general progress is an easy route in to check on their well-being
- Be aware that topics may come up in your discussion with a student that attract controversy or divided opinion e.g. religion, sexual identity, drug and alcohol use, deliberate self harm etc. It will be important that you remain as non-judgemental and neutral as possible irrespective of your own private belief systems
- A student may discuss something that resonates with your own personal experiences e.g. they are worried that they have bi-polar disorder and you or someone in your family has this diagnosis; they are recently bereaved having lost a close friend to cancer, and this is something you have experienced. Ensure that you choose a time to meet with the student when you will be feeling calm and composed i.e. not immediately after a difficult meeting or at the end of the day if you are at your best in the morning, as this scenario is unpredictable and usually occurs without prior knowledge. If you do know beforehand that a student's concerns relate to your own experiences and are worried you may become upset or react in a certain way, it is more than acceptable to request that another colleague meet with the student instead

During your meeting with a student

- Convey empathy (verbal and non-verbal)
- Be mindful of your body language
- Avoid asking intrusive questions and respect their privacy if they do not wish to discuss their difficulties
- A student will likely feel nervous about disclosing personal information relating to their mental health, and will be sensitive to both your verbal *and* non-verbal reactions. Be mindful of your communication style to minimise the likelihood that a student will feel embarrassed, ashamed or unsupported during their discussion with you.
- Your role in this capacity creates a significant power imbalance in your favour. Consider how you could reduce the power imbalance so that the experience is as comfortable as possible for the student e.g. sit on the same side of the table as the student, or away from your desk; adopt a more informal manner than you may be accustomed to (for instance as in teaching roles)

- If it becomes apparent that the students' difficulties may benefit from mental health support, advise the student that you can signpost them onto Counselling and Psychological Services. In addition, providing a copy of the 'Support Services' handout will help them consider various resources both within and out with the University
- All that may be required is an opportunity for a student to offload their concerns without further need for support.
- Stay within the time frame you have implicitly or explicitly allocated to your appointment with the student
- Avoid being drawn into giving advice about any mental health difficulties other than empathising with their situation and signposting onto mental health support
- Sit in the chair closest to the exit. This is advisable irrespective of the known or perceived cause of a students' distress. In the unlikely event a student becomes aggressive and your physical safety is at risk, you will have a clear passage to the door without needing to circumvent the student. In situations where you have prior knowledge that a students' behaviour has escalated to potential or actual physical aggression, this is imperative. If the room you are using does not allow for this layout, speak with your line manager to find alternative arrangements.

Where you are concerned about suicide or violence risk

- (i) The safety of the student (suicide risk)
 - Don't panic. Talking about suicide does not increase the risk of suicide
 - Reassure the student that support is available
- (ii) The safety of someone else (violence risk towards others)
 - Reassure student that support is available
 - Leave the room if you feel that your personal safety is under threat and inform/contact necessary others e.g. colleagues/security

In both instances

- Contact the police if a student leaves and has disclosed an intention to take their own life/harm others (imminently)
- Contact CAPS for advice (Crisis team for out of hours)
- Pass on any relevant information (e.g. awareness of weapons the student has in their possession, suicide note)

General points for consideration

- It is important that whilst the student receives appropriate support, boundaries are maintained. You may be the first person a student has approached for help and if they experienced you as understanding and empathic, they may become over reliant on your support and availability. Where there are limited or no informal sources of support available to the student this issue may become pertinent.
- A student needs to take responsibility for their own mental health therefore encouraging them to access mental health support is all that you can be reasonably expected to do (with the exception of suicide/violence risk – see relevant section)
- Ensure that you attend to your own well-being. Seek the opportunity to de-brief with a supportive colleague or line manager. Alternatively, CAPS are available for phone consultations during working hours and regularly take calls from concerned parents, members of staff or external agencies concerning a student's mental well-being
- If in doubt about any issue relating to a student's mental health, contact CAPS for advice