

## STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL WELLBEING POLICY

**Policy Approved: January 2013**

**Reviewed: August 2015`**

**Next Review due: August 2016**

**NB. This policy has been largely superseded by the Fitness to Study Policy**

[Fitness to Study policy \(PDF !\[\]\(003082e50e3009141f59bd5df831749f\_img.jpg\), 455kb\)](#)

**A new Mental Health Policy will be written following the Student and Academic Services change programme in 2016.**

**Responsible post: Director, Student Support Services**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The University environment can be very exciting and stimulating, offering students a range of opportunities unrivalled at any other time of life. It also requires students to engage in a complex and intense community, meeting a diverse range of people, and to exert considerable personal discipline and self-motivation in successfully following their chosen programme of study. This offers a wide range of ways to engage in health enhancing activities, but also the speed and intensity of University life can put a strain on mental health and bring nascent difficulties to the surface. Through Colleges, the Students' Union and Graduate Students' Association and centrally organised programmes and events there are a wide range of activities intended to assist students to adjust to University life and make the most of the opportunities available to them. There are also welfare support structures and services in place that can be of help to students experiencing some level of emotional or mental health difficulty, from mild to severe. This creates a range of opportunities and support structures alongside any which may also be available through the community and any specialist services available to those living in and visiting the UK.

### **1.1 The term 'mental health'**

The term 'mental health' is in general use covering a broad spectrum of difficulties and issues ranging from promoting mental wellbeing through to describing those with severe and enduring mental illness. We therefore use the term broadly in this policy, whilst 'mental well-being' is used more specifically to describe a healthy, positive state of mind.

## **2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

The purpose of this policy is to articulate the framework within which mental health support is, and mental wellbeing development opportunities are, offered to students by the University and how the University support structures may sometimes link to community based services for students with more profound or acute mental health difficulties.

This policy covers all students currently registered with the University of York on a full-time or parttime basis. This policy does not address the mental health needs of staff, about which the University Human Resources Department may be consulted.

### **3. CONTEXT**

The University aims always to help support any needs of students experiencing emotional, psychological or mental health difficulties. It is noted that with a very few exceptions, students of the University are adults and therefore primarily responsible for themselves and their actions, with the right to determine whether they make use of support or advice available to them. (In relation to students under the age of 18, the University 'Safeguarding' policy \*see Appendix] is relevant.)

There are two pieces of legislation particularly relevant when considering how best to respond to the needs of students who are experiencing Mental Health difficulties:

#### **3.1 The Mental Health Act 2007**

The Act details how a person experiencing mental health difficulties should be treated, the circumstances in which people can be detained and their rights in such situations. The Act set up the Mental Health Review Tribunal in England to make decisions about the compulsory care and treatment of people with a Mental Disorder.

It is important to recognise that except where an individual has been detained under the Mental Health Act, those experiencing difficulties have the same rights and responsibilities as other people.

#### **3.2 The Equality Act 2010**

The Act replaced the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005.

The Equality Act recognises that people with substantial and long term mental health problems amounting to a disability require reasonable adjustments to be made by the institution they attend. In addition to this, the Act places a responsibility on the University to develop an 'Anticipatory Duty' and this requires that general support mechanisms are in place at the University for all students who may have such a disability.

3.3 The Data Protection Act and the University Data Protection Policy [see Appendix] are relevant when considering how information is gathered and how it may be used in response to concerns about the well-being of a student.

#### 4. POLICY OBJECTIVES

In order to help support the mental health of its students, the University aims to:

- 4.1 Continue to develop an appropriate co-ordinated approach to promoting mental health within the student population.
- 4.2 Provide a co-ordinated approach to the management of students experiencing mental health difficulties right across the University including Student Support Services, colleges, academic departments and student organisations.
- 4.3 Provide support in a straightforward, accessible and non-judgemental way.
- 4.4 Make clear the roles and responsibilities of staff towards students experiencing mental health difficulties.

#### 5. PROMOTING MENTAL WELLBEING

There is a wide range of factors that affects our mental wellbeing, including healthy nourishing diet, regular and sufficient sleep of the right quality, a supportive network of social relationships in which we are able to be appropriately caring towards others and sufficiently assertive about our own needs, balance in our activities between 'work' and 'play' including sufficient physical activity, the capacity to deal with stressful situations and a robust sense of self worth.

YUSU, GSA and Colleges provide a wide and diverse range of opportunities for students to involve themselves in exciting, interesting and stretching activities and improve important skills from cooking to speaking in public. Through academic programmes and centrally organised workshops students are encouraged to develop effective study skill strategies and deepen relationship skills and there are study aids and self-help materials to assist students to learn to deal with issues from exam stress to sleep.

For those who find themselves struggling with a specific issue 'The Open Door Team' is able to offer brief interventions to enhance strategies, improve skills, address emotional blockages and challenge self defeating beliefs.

For more information on making an *initial appointment*, *self-help guidance* or *improving well-being* see relevant links in the Appendix.

#### 6. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING EMOTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

##### 6.1 Admission Procedures

Prospective students are encouraged to indicate any disability they have at the point they are making their application to the University and a severe or enduring mental health difficulty may be classed as a disability for this purpose. The advantage to the student of so doing is that this starts a dialogue regarding their support needs at an early stage, making it more likely that appropriate support can be in place for their arrival. All staff who have contact with applicants should encourage

early disclosure of additional needs in order that this dialogue takes place. There is further information about disability admissions processes in the Appendix.

### 6.2 College Welfare

Most new undergraduates live in University accommodation in one of the Colleges and the welfare teams there can sometimes help identify those who are finding the early stages of University life difficult. The College Welfare teams, alongside the JCRC's (or GCR) are experienced in helping students form social relationships with other students and get over the initial uncertainties that many experience.

College welfare teams are also experienced in supporting students with low-level emotional, psychological or mental health difficulties and are normally available to do so outside the times when central support services are available. The welfare teams are encouraged to refer students to more specialist services when this is appropriate and liaise closely with the 'Open Door Team' when supporting students with acute or profound mental health difficulties, as set out in 6.3.1, below.

### 6.3 Supervisors and other departmental support

Supervisors and other staff within academic departments may play a significant role in identifying signs of emerging difficulty, typically through profound changes in patterns of attendance or academic performance. They may encourage students to seek appropriate support through University services or their general practitioner (doctor).

For students who do not have 'reasonable adjustments' in place (see 6.4.2) it may be appropriate for supervisors to encourage students who are experiencing mental health difficulties to submit appropriate evidence for mitigation of poor academic performance, particularly in assessments.

In situations where emotional, psychological or mental health difficulties are making it difficult for the student to follow their programme of study effectively staff in the department may be best placed to encourage the student to consider requesting leave of absence or suspension of studies. When doing so they may also advise the student to speak to others outside the department, for example in YUSU, GSA or Student Support Services, before coming to a decision.

Postgraduate research students who are experiencing emotional, psychological or mental health difficulties may wish to seek advice and guidance from central student support services in the first instance, given the particular academic significance of their supervisor's role.

6.3.1 If a supervisor or other member of staff is concerned about the well-being of a student they are encouraged to discuss their concerns with a member of the Open Door Team, or the Director or Deputy Director of Student Support Services. Such conversations should initially take place without disclosing the identity of the student, wherever there is a duty of confidentiality or a concern about privacy.

### 6.4 Student Support Services

Student Support Services is able to offer support to students experiencing difficulties ranging from troubling emotional experiences across a wide spectrum to those with quite profound or acute mental health difficulties.

There are two quite distinct ways in which staff in Student Support Services can offer support to students with emotional, psychological or mental health difficulties:

6.4.1 The Open Door Team offers an initial assessment with a target of seeing every student who approaches them within a few days. They follow that with a range of interventions, as may be appropriate, intended to meet the specific needs of individual students. This <sup>1</sup>currently includes access to self-help materials, brief (1-3 session) solution focussed intervention, 1-6 session counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy, referral to the Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds programme offered through the University Sports Centre, or one of a number of issue focussed workshops or groups. In addition they offer a 'case management' approach for students with longer term or complex psychological or mental health difficulties.

6.4.2 Disability Services are able to assist students with a diagnosed mental health difficulty (which is classified as a disability) to apply for funding for non-medical assistance which might include mentoring support, note-taking or library support. They can assist in arranging appropriate 'reasonable adjustments' to take account of a mental health condition. Such adjustments usually follow recommendations in an independent Assessment of Needs undertaken at an Access Centre, such as the Higher York Access Centre based at York St John University.

### 6.5 Student Organisations

Through YUSU and GSA there are many opportunities for students to seek out information or guidance about issues that are causing them concern as well as speak to their designated welfare officers. These include a range of student societies where the focus is largely on providing a meeting place for like-minded students or those with a shared interest in a particular subject.

Nightline has a particular role, providing a listening and information service, open from 8.00p.m. until 8.00 a.m., during the main undergraduate terms. It is a confidential service staffed by student volunteers who are trained to respond appropriately to a wide range of calls.

### 6.6 Leave of absence/suspension of study

There are occasions when the psychological or mental health difficulties of a student have significant impact upon their ability to undertake their programme of study, at that time. When this appears to be the case, it is important that discussion take place with the student, in a compassionate and timely manner, and the student be advised to consider requesting a period of leave of absence or suspension of studies. A Leave of Absence (LOA) request should normally be made by the student to their academic department. Depending on the length of the requested LOA and any request to repeat a period of study, the decision whether to approve the LOA will either be made by the Board of Studies in the department, or forwarded to the Special Cases Committee (SCC). SCC is a University committee chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Students with membership drawn from many academic departments. Applications are normally considered in closed meetings, but where there are major issues or a lack of clarity, a hearing may be held. A student may be asked to undertake an assessment with the Open Door Team, to assist the student to evidence their emotional,

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<sup>1</sup> The range of interventions available through the Open Door Team may change from time to time, depending upon current guidance on best practice, available resources and the skills and experience of practitioners.

psychological or mental health difficulties. Detailed information can be found at:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/students/studying/manage/plan/taught/loa-taught/>

If a student has been medically judged to not have the capacity to make such decisions it may be necessary to presume LOA has been requested, until the student is well enough to confirm this status.

It is important that Special Cases Committee is alerted to the situation by the appropriate academic department, once it is clear the student is not fit to continue their studies beyond the period of absence the department is able to authorise under University regulations.

#### 6.7 Fitness to practise

Professionally- oriented programmes (for example Medicine, Nursing, Social Work, Teaching etc) may have their own particular policies and procedures which are applied when a student may not be fit to undertake a professional placement as part of their programme or to progress towards or qualify in that particular profession, due to (for example) risk of harm to members of the public.

### **7. RECOGNISING ACUTE OR PROFOUND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS**

The University recognises that all individuals are unique and that there may be multiple potential signs and symptoms that can sometimes indicate that a student is experiencing a significant mental health difficulty. By way of general guidance, some signs to look out for may sometimes include:

- major changes in behaviour, mood, weight loss or gain, decline in personal hygiene
- physical signs such as cuts, burns or acute lack of energy
- excessive and frequent intoxication
- major changes in patterns of attendance
- significant deterioration of academic performance

Any member of staff who is concerned about the mental health of a student can contact 'The Open Door Team', for an initial discussion and advice. This discussion does not necessarily involve disclosure of the student's identity. Staff may find it helpful to undertake the interactive on-line training provided by the University at: [www.york.ac.uk/student-support-services/kognito/](http://www.york.ac.uk/student-support-services/kognito/)

Any student who is concerned about the mental health of another student is encouraged to discuss their concerns with a member of their college welfare team, their supervisor or a member of staff in Student Support Services (see 11 below).

### **8. MANAGEMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES**

Student Support Services will usually take the lead role in co-ordinating the University's management of student mental health difficulties, typically through the caseworker who is best known to the student in either 'The Open Door Team' or 'Disability Services'. Staff in both these

sections can work closely with departments, colleges, NHS and external services, as is needed and agreed by the student.

Whilst members of University staff may have a key role in providing appropriate and realistic levels of support to students with mental health difficulties, the University recognises that external agencies have a duty to carry out assessment and treatment of serious mental health difficulties or emergencies.

If a member of staff or student feels unsafe with a student, they should try to move to a place where they feel safe and contact Security. Security staff will take the steps they consider necessary to safeguard all involved, which could result in their involving Emergency Services, the 'Open Door Team' or the University Health Centre.

## **9. URGENT OR EMERGENCY SITUATIONS**

When it appears that a student is having mental health difficulties and their demeanour or behaviour is of such concern that it is felt by those responding that immediate intervention is necessary (usually because the student is very agitated or it is believed that they may pose a risk of harm to themselves or to others), then one of the following responses may be appropriate:

### **9.1 During Office Hours<sup>2</sup>**

If there is no immediate threat of harm to others, a practitioner from the Open Door Team can be asked to attend, or the student can be taken to the Open Door Team, if the student is willing to do so.

If it appears that there is a threat of harm to others University Security should be asked to attend immediately. Security will then determine next steps, in consultation with those involved.

### **9.2 Outside Office Hours**

When an incident occurs out of hours, Security should be informed and they will inform the on-call provost. The provost, sometimes in consultation with Security, will decide whether the situation can be contained until the following morning or whether emergency services need to be called, or the student conveyed to York Hospital. Security should forward the incident report to the Director of Student Services.

## **10 ADMISSION TO HOSPITAL**

Should a student require admission to hospital during office hours the 'Open Door Team' and University Health Centre will liaise with the relevant community and hospital staff to make the necessary arrangements.

Outside of office hours urgent admissions normally take place through Accident and Emergency at York Hospital.

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<sup>2</sup> Office hours generally means between 9.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. Monday-Friday (excluding bank holidays).



## **11 IMPACT ON OTHER STUDENTS AND STAFF**

The University has a responsibility to balance the needs of students experiencing mental health difficulties with the overall duty of care it has towards all of its students and staff. When someone is in a disturbed state of mind their behaviour may have a significant impact on other people.

If students are finding the behaviour of another student difficult or distressing it is important that they talk to someone about the impact the situation is having upon them. They are welcome to talk to relevant College welfare staff, their supervisor and staff in Student Support Services.

If staff are finding the behaviour of a student difficult or distressing it is important that they talk to their line manager about the impact the situation is having upon them.

It is always preferable to respond from a supportive perspective when someone is evidently experiencing difficulties. However, in some instances the student may not be willing to accept support that is offered, whilst continuing to behave in a manner that is very difficult for others. In such situations action under the student disciplinary regulations may be appropriate to safeguard all concerned.

## **12 CASE CO-ORDINATION MEETINGS**

When the mental health of a student is causing concern and there are complexities in effectively meeting the support needs of the student it is often helpful to bring together the various parties involved and the student, with the aim of agreeing the best way forward. Members of the Student Support Services management team have experience of facilitating such discussions, although College provosts or Departmental staff may also identify the need and take the initiative to convene such a meeting.

The case co-ordination meeting should usually involve the student and relevant staff, including those from the 'Open Door Team', Disability Service, University Health Centre, other staff from Student Support Services, key academic staff and where relevant a member of the welfare team from the student's College. A balance needs to be struck between having effective representation in order to address key issues whilst ensuring the numbers do not become too daunting, particularly for the student. The student will usually be asked to give their consent for this meeting to occur.

The purpose of a case conference is generally to discuss the best options going forward. Issues which may be considered include:

- The impact of the programme of study on the student's mental health
- The impact of the student's behaviour on their academic work and the work of others
- The impact of the student's behaviour on others in their accommodation, in particular if they are living in University accommodation
- Whether a student should take a period of leave of absence or suspension of studies.

Any staff member who is concerned about the mental health of any student should contact the 'Open Door Team', and a decision can be made as to whether a case co-ordination meeting is advisable.

The 'Open Door Team' will convene clinical meetings with students, mental health professionals (for example Community Mental Health Team or Early Intervention Team) and relevant medical officers with regard to the student's mental state, management of risk or complex difficulty.

Student Support Services monitor the security reports to identify cases where intervention may be necessary.

### **13 TRAINING**

The University staff training programme may include events to raise awareness and address specific issues in relation to mental health. This includes the interactive on-line mental health awareness training (Kognito) provided by the University at: [www.york.ac.uk/student-support-services/kognito/](http://www.york.ac.uk/student-support-services/kognito/). Further information about training opportunities can be found from the staff training website (see appendix).

It may also be possible for members of staff in the Open Door Team or Disability Services to provide training and general guidance on ways of supporting students with particular types of mental health difficulties.

### **14 CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION**

Every effort should be made to discuss with a student their preferences about what information about them may be given to whom and to keep them informed as to the use of their information and the decisions and action taken in respect to them. The University Data Protection Policies (and Student Support Services information policy, if relevant) then apply to the preferences of the student, which may normally only be over-ridden if there is judged to be significant risk of self harm or harm to others.

It is important to be aware that in relation to Sensitive Personal Data, which includes information about an individual's mental or physical health or condition, it is not normally sufficient for an individual to give their general consent that their personal information can be shared with other parties. They are required to specify what information may be shared, and with whom

Links to the Student Support Services information policy and University data protection policies can be found in the appendix.

### **15 MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

The Manager of the 'Open Door Team' is responsible for reviewing and monitoring action taken under this policy and will provide an annual report to the Director of Student Services of the actions under this policy of which they are aware.

## APPENDIX

### Useful links

Information provided by the Open Door team, including 'initial appointment', 'self-help guidance' or 'improving well-being' can be found: [www.york.ac.uk/opendoor](http://www.york.ac.uk/opendoor)

University Health Centre: [www.unityhealth.info/](http://www.unityhealth.info/)

MIND, national mental health organisation: [www.mind.org.uk/](http://www.mind.org.uk/)

Students against depression: [www.studentdepression.org/](http://www.studentdepression.org/)

Rethink, national charity providing support and information: <http://www.rethink.org/>

The University staff counselling service: [https://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/employee\\_assistance/](https://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/employee_assistance/)

Staff training: [www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/training/](http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/training/)

### Other relevant policies and guidance

Admissions process for students with a disability: [www.york.ac.uk/student-support-services/disability-services/disadmissions/](http://www.york.ac.uk/student-support-services/disability-services/disadmissions/)

University guidance on the Equality Act and Equality Duty: [www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/EqualityDuty.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/EqualityDuty.htm)

University Safeguarding Policy: [www.york.ac.uk/about/safeguarding/](http://www.york.ac.uk/about/safeguarding/)

Student Support Services information policy: [www.york.ac.uk/student-support-services/sssinfopolicy/](http://www.york.ac.uk/student-support-services/sssinfopolicy/)

University Data Protection Policy: [www.york.ac.uk/recordsmanagement/dpa/](http://www.york.ac.uk/recordsmanagement/dpa/)