

Student Mental Health Policy

January, 2018

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Approval date:	January 2018
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Responsible Executive:	Academic Registrar
Responsible Office:	Registry Services

POLICY

**HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY
STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH POLICY**

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POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Across the Higher Education Sector institutions are seeing an increase in both the prevalence and severity of mental health difficulties that students present with. Mental health difficulties can be triggered by many factors. Stress, life events, past experiences and genetics all play a part in determining mental health. Student life exposes individuals to risk factors affecting mental health including debt, periods of transition, drug use, alcohol use, culture shock, and disconnection from previous supports.

The University has legal responsibilities towards students whose mental condition falls within the definition of "disability" under the Equality Act 2010.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline the University's commitment to mental health support for students and to outline the action that the University will take to respond to concerns.

3. OBJECTIVES

- To develop a co-ordinated global campus strategy for the promotion of the mental health of all students including suicide prevention initiatives
- To provide a co-ordinated approach to the management of students' mental health difficulties and to deliver effective management of cases where there is an emergency and/or serious risk of harm or suicide
- To provide effective and accessible support to students making reasonable adjustments as necessary
- To engage with external partners such as Health Providers to promote and improve access for students to community and specialist resources
- To ensure effective operation of relevant enabling policies for students with mental health problems including Equality and Diversity, Admissions, Mitigating Circumstances, and Temporary Suspension of Studies.

4. SCOPE

The policy covers all Heriot-Watt University students on all the global campuses. The University's Human Resources Directorate is responsible for the policy and procedure for dealing with staff with mental health problems.

The policy has been updated to reflect guidance issued to Higher Education Institutions by Universities UK and other sector reports such as the report by the Higher Education Policy Institute. The recommendations of these reports are addressed in the separate Student Mental Health Strategy.

The University has a duty to respect and respond to the rights and support needs of students with mental health problems. However, the University also has to balance the rights of students with mental health problems with the overall duty of care it has to all of its students and staff.

The University recognises that under the Equality Act 2010 people with substantial and long term mental health problems will require reasonable adjustments to be made by the Institution. In addition, the Act places a responsibility on the University to develop an 'Anticipatory Duty' and this requires the University to put general support mechanisms in place for all students who may have a mental health problem.

The Act also requires Higher Education Institutions to actively promote disability equality rather than merely reacting in response to individual student requirements.

5. LINES OF RESPONSIBILITY

On behalf of the University, the Deputy Registrar has responsibility for co-ordinating and implementing a strategy to achieve the objectives across all global campuses.

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring of this policy and actions will be reported through the Equality Committee and Global Student Liaison Committee.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

The Deputy Registrar is responsible for the implementation of the Policy.

8. RELATED POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND FURTHER REFERENCE

Mitigating Circumstances Policy
Equality and Diversity Policy
Temporary Suspension of Studies Policy
University Regulations 6.6.9

9. DEFINITIONS

Mental health encompasses the emotional resilience that enables us to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness, and an underlying belief in our own, and others' dignity and worth. It also allows us to engage productively in and contribute to society or our community.

A positive sense of mental wellbeing is for all of us to consider all of the time, as we might consider our physical, social and spiritual wellbeing. It is quite possible to have a good sense of mental wellbeing and yet be living with a diagnosed mental illness. Mental health difficulties, often following major life events such as the end of a relationship, close bereavement or leaving home, can impact significantly on how students feel about themselves and how they engage with the transitions of student life. Symptoms may beset anyone at any time, giving rise to ongoing conditions that could interfere with the student's university experience and have implications for academic study.

Mental illness – arising from organic, genetic, psychological or behavioural factors (or combinations of these) that occur in an individual and are not understood or expected as part of normal development or culture – can be acute or chronic, and may fall within the definition of a 'disability' contained in the Equality Act 2010. It is important for

institutions to bear in mind, however, that not all mental health difficulties will constitute a 'disability' under the Equality Act.

10. FURTHER HELP AND ADVICE

Contact Student Wellbeing and review the [Guide for staff](#)

11. POLICY VERSION AND HISTORY

Version No	Date of Approval	Approving Authority	Brief Description of Amendment
V. 03	02.12.2017	PSLB	

POLICY

Procedures

Student Mental Health

Procedures relating to:	Student Mental Health
Approving authority:	PSLB
Consultation via:	Equality and Diversity Group
Approval date:	January 2018
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Responsible Executive	Academic Register
Responsible Office:	Registry Services

**HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY
Student Mental Health**

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PROCEDURES

1. INTRODUCTION

Across all Higher Education Institutions there has been an increase in both the prevalence and severity of mental health difficulties that students present with. Mental health difficulties can be triggered by many factors. Stress, life events, past experiences and genetics all play a part in determining our mental health. Student life exposes individuals to risk factors affecting mental health including debt, periods of transition, drug use, alcohol use, culture shock, and disconnection from previous supports. People with past problems are likely to struggle more.

The University has legal responsibilities towards students whose mental condition falls within the definition of "disability" under the Equality Act 2010.

2. PROCEDURES

The Deputy Registrar along with the Head of Student Counselling and Support has the lead role in handling and co-ordinating the University's management of student mental health on our Scottish Campuses and act in an advisory capacity for staff at Dubai and Malaysia campuses. The Deputy Registrar will work closely with the Lead Clinician for Mental Health at the University Health Service in this process.

Whilst University staff do have a key role in responding to the needs of students with mental health problems, the University recognises that in Scotland external agencies have a statutory duty to carry out assessment and treatment of serious mental health problems or emergencies. Legal and cultural differences affect the service provided at Dubai and Malaysia but the principles and process are the same.

The University Data Protection and Disability Disclosure policies apply to the process of managing mental health concerns and sharing information about these concerns. However, it is important that staff are aware that the need to maintain confidentiality is over-ridden in the event of a mental health emergency, such as suicidal ideas, concern about the risk of self-harm or potential harm to others.

Recognising Mental Health problems

There may be multiple potential signs and symptoms that might indicate that a student has a mental health difficulty. These will vary by individual. Some signs to look out for include:

- changes in behaviour, such as becoming more withdrawn, aggressive or volatile
- physical signs such as cuts to wrists or a lack of energy
- changes in patterns of attendance
- Changes in academic performance.

Mental Health Emergencies

Scottish Campuses

Any staff member or student who is seriously concerned about the mental health of a student during office hours should contact the Deputy Registrar or Head of Student Counselling and Support to raise their concern. The University Health Service can also be consulted and a decision will be made between Student Wellbeing and the University Health Service about future action.

If a staff member feels unsafe or threatened by a student at a Scottish campus, Security should be informed. Security staff will then liaise with Student Wellbeing and the University Health Service.

Carol Murray
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C.J.Murray@hw.ac.uk 0131 451 3387

Vacant
Deputy registrar

Michael Sylvester
Mental Health Advisor
M.Sylvester@hw.ac.uk 0131 451 3613

OUT OF HOURS

Edinburgh Campus:

Edinburgh Crisis Centre 0808 801 0414
NHS Mental Health Assessment Services Edinburgh 24 hours 0131 286 8127

Mental Health Emergencies Scottish Borders Campus

Borders Campus: Orkney Campus:
NHS 24 call 111
Borders Crisis team 01896 827321

When an incident occurs Out of Hours at Orkney Campus

NHS 24 call 111

Mental health Emergencies Dubai Campus

Student Advisor, Dubai
StudentadvisorDubai@hw.ac.uk
+971 4 435 8796

Out of office hours contact the main campus reception on
+971 4435 8700

Mental Health Emergencies Malaysia Campus

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OUT OF HOURS

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Non-Emergencies

Case Conferences

The University recognises that it will at times be presented with dilemmas arising from the rights and needs of students with mental health problems and the responsibility of the University to protect and support the student community as a whole. The University is committed to carrying out a thorough consideration of the circumstances of each case, in line with other relevant University policies including Student Disciplinary policy and University Regulations (6.6.9).

Any member of staff who is concerned about the mental health of any student should contact the Deputy Registrar Head of Student Counselling and Support for a discussion and a decision will then be taken about whether a case conference is required.

The Deputy Registrar is responsible for organising case conferences to discuss the management of students whose mental health is giving cause for concern. The case conference will involve the student and relevant staff including medical or Psychiatric professionals (for Edinburgh Campus the University Health Service will be involved), other staff from Student Wellbeing Services and relevant academic staff.

The case conference will consider:

- The impact of the course of study on a student's mental health
- The impact of a student's mental health on their academic work and the work of others
- Re-admission following suspension of study
- Whether there is need for referral to the Student Conduct Officer
- Whether there is a need to impose a Temporary Suspension of Study under University Regulation 1 (6.6.9)

Where there are elements of non-academic misconduct a referral will be made to the Student Conduct Officer will compile a report for the University Discipline Committee for consideration under the University Discipline Procedures.

9. Admissions Procedures

Where an applicant declares in the relevant admissions process that he/she has a mental health problem, the Admissions Manager /or staff in the Schools should inform the Disability Service as soon as possible.

The Disability Service Manager has the lead role in arranging for an assessment of the student's study support and examination requirements and will advise on any special arrangements through the student record system. The Disability Advisor will involve Academic Staff and Professional Services staff as appropriate.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Deputy Registrar is responsible for reviewing and monitoring action taken under this policy and will provide a report to the Equality Committee and Global Student Liaison Committee on an annual basis.

3. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND FURTHER REFERENCE

Mitigating Circumstances Policy
 Equality and Diversity Policy
 Temporary Suspension of Studies Policy
 University Regulation 1 (6.6.9)

4. FURTHER HELP AND ADVICE

Deputy registrar (vacant)

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Michael Sylvester, Mental Health Advisor, 0131 451 3613, M.Sylvester@hw.ac.uk

Dr. Sue Cobbett, Lead Clinician, University Health Service 0131 451 3010

5. DEFINITIONS

Mental health encompasses the emotional resilience that enables us to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness, and an underlying belief in our own, and others' dignity and worth. It also allows us to engage productively in and contribute to society or our community.

A positive sense of **mental wellbeing** is for all of us to consider all of the time, as we might consider our physical, social and spiritual wellbeing. It is quite possible to have a good sense of mental wellbeing and yet be living with a diagnosed mental illness. Mental health difficulties, often following major life events such as the end of a relationship, close bereavement or leaving home, can impact significantly on how students feel about themselves and how they engage with the transitions of student life. Symptoms may beset anyone at any time, giving rise to ongoing conditions that could interfere with the student's university experience and have implications for academic study.

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6. POLICY VERSION AND HISTORY

Version No	Date of Approval	Approving Authority	Brief Description of Amendment
V. 03	01.18	PSLB	

APPENDIX 1 - Further information on Mental Health Problems and Support Services

Depression and Anxiety

Depression and anxiety are the most common form of mental health problems. Depression most commonly presents as a lowering of mood with poor concentration, failing grades, loss of outside interests and withdrawal from academic and social activity. It is sometimes accompanied by a risk of suicide and self harm. People who have become depressed may not recognise what is happening and only seek help when prompted by others. Depression can be treated by psychological therapies and/ or medication

Anxiety is a feeling of unease. Everybody experiences it when faced with a stressful situation, for example before an exam or an interview, or during a worrying time such as illness.

However, for one in ten people in the UK, anxiety interferes with normal life. Excessive anxiety is often associated with other psychiatric conditions, such as depression. Anxiety is considered abnormal when:

- It is very prolonged or severe
- It happens in the absence of a stressful event
- It is interfering with everyday activities such as going to lectures or socialising

Anxiety is usually best treated by psychological therapies such as anxiety management, graded exposure and education. Occasionally medication may be required.

Severe and Enduring Mental Health problems

Most severe and enduring mental health problems such as bipolar affective disorder (also known as manic depressive illness), and schizophrenic illnesses are treatable and would not in themselves mean that a student could not engage in academic studies.

Alcohol and drugs

Excessive alcohol use is likely to have an impact on students' mental health whether alcohol is being used as a way to cope with underlying mental health problems or whether it is having an adverse effect on the mood of the student. Recent research has shown that excessive use of cannabis can also cause mental health problems.

Eating Disorders

Eating Disorders such as anorexia or bulimia are often first noticed by family, flatmates or colleagues. There are many potential cause of eating disorders but they can be linked to low self-esteem and fears about poor academic performance.

Psychological treatment can often help and if weight loss is severe a medical referral is essential.

Self-Harming Behaviour

Self-harm can include cutting, burning, bruising and hitting. The reasons for self-harm are complex and can seem difficult to understand. For many it is a way of managing difficult feelings and experiences.

Autistic Spectrum

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people around them. Adults with autism have difficulties with everyday social

interaction. Their ability to develop friendships is generally limited as is their capacity to understand other people's emotional expression.

Asperger syndrome, is a form of autism used to describe people who are usually at the higher functioning end of the autistic spectrum.

Personality Disorder

The term 'Personality disorder' is used to refer to an individual who displays enduring patterns of behavioural and emotional responses to events that are maladaptive and cause suffering either to themselves or others.

Other Sources of Information

Mental Health Foundation

The Mental Health Foundation website [Mental Health Foundation](#) is an excellent source of information about resources in Scotland as well as further information on mental health issues in general.

Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland

The Mental Welfare Commission runs a Freephone advice line for service users, independent advocates and carers (call 0800 389 6809 during office hours). People who are concerned about their rights, or the rights of others who are receiving care and treatment, can contact the Commission using the Freephone number.

People who provide services can contact the Commission for advice and information relating to their responsibilities (call 0131 222 6111 during office hours). The Commission also provides information leaflets for service users and carers that can be requested over the phone or accessed from their website [Mental Welfare Commission](#)