Student Mental Health
Wellbeing Policy

September 2015
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**EITHER**

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Tick as appropriate

Yes [✓] No

**OR**

For staff access only (intranet)?

Tick as appropriate

Yes [✓] No

For public access on request copy to be mailed

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Password protected

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Summary

What is this Policy about?
This Policy provides information to students of this University regarding availability and access to services that support student mental wellbeing.

Who is this Policy for?
The Policy is aimed at students of this University.

How does the University check this Policy is followed?
This Policy is reviewed in a three year cycle which includes consultation with stakeholders. The Policy should be reviewed following a serious incident or near miss to ensure it is current, accessible and reflects changes in structure of services or legislation.

Who can you contact if you have any queries about this Policy?
Bernie Topham, Chief Operating Officer, Lucy Sharp, Head of Student Wellbeing Services or Carolyne Jacobs, Director of DCQE. Alternatively, please email wellbeing@port.ac.uk.

1. Introduction

1.1 Starting at or returning to University involves major changes to individual lifestyles, many of which may cause anxiety. Most problems can be dealt with on a relatively informal basis, such as talking to family or friends, or by seeking assistance from tutors and other advisers.

1.2 However, some students may experience emotional or psychological problems that compromise their ability to engage fully with further and higher education without some form of professional support or adjustment to processes, and some of these problems may be described as mental health difficulties. These difficulties may take the form of a long-term or pre-existing mental illness or a temporary but nonetheless debilitating condition or reaction (Annex 1). They can have a serious effect on academic performance and progress and can also lead to behaviour that may impact negatively upon self and/or others.

1.3 Students with a long-term mental illness that has a substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities are defined as disabled under the Equality Act 2010. While the University owes a duty of care to all students, this legislation places a special duty on the University not to discriminate against students with mental health difficulties, either in terms of admission, courses or in the operation of education and support services.

1.4 In addition to this commitment to providing a non-discriminatory environment, the University is also committed to providing a supportive learning environment that aims to ensure that all its students realise their academic potential. The University consequently provides a network of pastoral care that includes immediate departmental support and a range of central support services that provide access to medical and non-medical support through the Student Wellbeing Service (SWS), the Additional Support and Disability Advice Centre (ASDAC), Chaplaincy and related services. The University also provides guidance and training to people involved in the support and care of students while ensuring that the availability of support is accurately and widely publicised to both prospective and current students.

2. Confidentiality

2.1 There are different levels of confidentiality across the institution since certain services (Student Wellbeing Service (SWS) and Chaplaincy) have their own professional standards of confidentiality in addition to overall institutional policy. In these contexts no information (including the fact of consultation itself) will be passed on to other bodies or individuals without the explicit written consent of the individual concerned.

2.2 Staff not bound by such professional codes are still required to respect student confidentiality. Current confidentiality provisions arise from the relevant legislation, and are set out in Annex 2.
3. Support and staff training

3.1 Wherever necessary and possible, the University will make reasonable adjustments to processes and procedures to help students with mental health difficulties engage fully in University activities and meet academic and course requirements.

3.2 The University also aims to promote positive mental health and wellbeing by encouraging students who have (or believe they may have) mental health difficulties to seek support at the earliest possible opportunity. This can be through a confidential approach within the departmental personal tutoring structures, or directly to central student support services (Annex 3).

3.3 However, it should be recognised that the University is primarily a place of learning and there are practical limits to the level of support that can be provided internally. In certain cases the University will need to make external referral to the appropriate agencies and, in some cases, the level of adjustments to processes needed may compromise the achievement and demonstration of required competency standards beyond what is academically acceptable. Students are always expected to comply with the expectations laid down in the Student Charter of the University found at www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/teachingandlearning/filetodownload,162599,en.pdf (section 6: Disciplinary processes of this Student Mental Wellbeing Policy refers) and any relevant professional or statutory body requirements. This may mean that some students will need to satisfy the University that, in respect of their health and conduct, they meet the requirements for professional fitness to practice or fitness to study policies.

3.4 The University aims to ensure that staff are able to recognise personal and professional limitations when offering support, know the appropriate procedures for referral, recognise when it is necessary to refer, maintain confidentiality and generally contribute towards the maintenance of a supportive and non-stigmatising environment.

3.5 To this end, appropriate information is provided in paper and electronic form and regularly reviewed (see Guidelines for Staff: Student Mental Health found at www.port.ac.uk/media/contacts-and-departments/student-support-services/asdac/downloads/Guidelines-for-Staff---Student-Mental-Health.pdf) and the opportunity to access mental health awareness training is provided through central staff development programmes.

3.6 The University recognises that it has a duty of care towards all students and that those with mental health difficulties are potentially at particular risk. Staff awareness training aims to ensure that staff are aware of the range of behaviours that might indicate the potential for such risk and the appropriate procedures to follow in such cases. The normal outcome of these procedures will lead to formal assessment by a mental health professional.

4. Particular issues

4.1. Reasonable adjustments

When a mental health difficulty falls within the scope of the Equality Act 2010, students are entitled to the full range of support available under the Act and provided by the University, primarily through ASDAC. Reasonable adjustments to processes and procedures will be determined on a case-by-case basis by staff in ASDAC and the student’s Head of Department, taking into account an assessment of the particular needs of the individual concerned. Medical evidence from the student’s GP, Mental Health Adviser, or other mental health professional will be required, and a second opinion may be sought before such adjustments can be made.

Students undertaking field trips and/or placements either in the UK or abroad are encouraged to discuss their support needs with academic staff and ASDAC in consultation with SWS where appropriate.

4.2. Fitness for practice

Certain programmes of study lead to a vocational qualification that is subject to fitness to practice and/or training procedures. The Code of Student Behaviour (available at www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/academicregistry/filetodownload,10393,en.pdf) sets out procedures for dealing with questions of fitness for professional practice and may lead to a student’s programme of study being terminated. If the University is made aware of a mental health difficulty that might compromise fitness for practice, and the course leads to the right to practise a particular profession or vocation as recognised by the relevant professional body, then the University and/or the student may have an obligation to inform the appropriate body on, or subsequent to, registration. Similarly, if the programme involves periods of placement then the University and/or the student may have an obligation to inform the appropriate body when making arrangements for placement. When the work placement performance provides an integral part of the overall course assessment and credit accumulation, a condition that precludes practice placement in a particular vocation will mean that the student will be unable to pass the course. This should be taken into account when applying for any such course.

4.3. Fitness to study

For advice, please contact the Head of Student Wellbeing Services in the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement.
4.4. Assessment

Adjustments such as the provision of additional time and special facilities in examinations can be provided as appropriate, and students seeking such adjustment should contact ASDAC either directly or through their School/Department. More generous deadlines for coursework submissions are not normally provided, although a structural rearrangement of the usual progress of the programme of studies can be established from the outset.

4.5. Interruption of studies

There is a separate regulatory framework for applying for specific consideration for extensions of submission time or deferral of timed assessments due to health and/or personal matters of a sufficiently serious nature (Examination and Assessment Regulations, section 8: Extenuating circumstances refers and can be found at www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/academicregistry/filetodownload,10383,en.pdf). This can exceptionally apply within the context of a recognised long-term condition or illness if an unforeseen worsening of the condition or symptoms leads to an interruption of the planned progression of the task or tasks.

However, repeated application for such deferral of assessment for a recognised long-term condition is not permitted. In such cases the adjustment is more likely to involve an indefinite suspension of studies until the student is able to proceed, or until a mutually satisfactory structural rearrangement of the programme can be arranged. In such cases the University would seek evidence from the student's GP or Mental Health Adviser regarding fitness to proceed and, if there is a degree of uncertainty, may seek a second opinion. If a student refuses to accept a recommendation to suspend their studies or refuses offers of support there may be implications for that student’s progress, with the Fitness to Study Policy being invoked.

5. Mental health advice

5.1. Mental Health Adviser

The Student Wellbeing Service has Mental Health Advisers who are registered mental health practitioners, one of whom is seconded to the University by arrangement with the NHS. External management and policy links are maintained through annual meetings of the Mental Health Steering Group, with management representation from both the University and NHS. Internal liaison and policy matters are similarly maintained through the Mental Health Working Group, with representation from the relevant support services.

The Mental Health Advisers provide the primary link between external services, such as mental health services, hospital liaison services and general practitioners. Referrals from the student should be directed towards the Student Wellbeing Service. Additionally, students who are concerned for a fellow student's mental wellbeing can seek a confidential appointment to discuss these concerns.

Once a referral is received by the service the student will be contacted and offered an appointment with a Mental Health Adviser, who will offer professional judgments as to the most appropriate route for further referral (Annex 3).

5.2. Crisis situations

A crisis situation may arise when a student contemplates suicide or is demonstrating behaviour that is causing acute distress to themselves or others. It may also include elements of self-harm.

All academic and support staff are required immediately to report crisis situations through existing departmental and Hall management structures. Local mental health services operate a 24-hour crisis service that can be accessed via the student’s GP in the first instance. Halls Managers, Heads of Department and services must be familiar with the crisis contact procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency. Contact information for students and staff seeking help or advice concerning mental health in both routine and crisis situations is freely available to all students through Schools and Departments, Student Support Services at Nuffield Reception and the SWS website, www.port.ac.uk/wellbeing.

6. Disciplinary processes

All students are subject to the University’s disciplinary procedures relating to misconduct (see Code of Student Behaviour at www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/academicregistry/filetodownload,10393,en.pdf, formerly the Handbook of Student Regulations), and this includes students with mental health difficulties.

If a situation escalates to a disciplinary panel, and the student has already disclosed a relevant mental health difficulty to the University, the disciplinary panel will seek advice and any necessary support and adjustments will be put into place after consultation with appropriate professionals and with the agreement of the student concerned. Whether the mental health difficulty is relevant to the particular circumstance will form part of the advice provided.
If the student has not previously disclosed any relevant mental health difficulty or has requested confidentiality, such support and adjustment can clearly not take place without further action in respect of disclosure or the appropriate amendment of previous confidentiality requests by the student concerned.

Should adjustments lead to a departure from or curtailment of normal disciplinary procedures (such as immediate suspension where it is necessary to stop serious disruption or a threat to the safety of others) a formal statement will be produced providing an explanation of and justification for that departure. Should adjustment lead to a departure from the normal disciplinary ‘penalty tariff’ a similar statement will be provided.

7. Related documents

Information for Disabled Students
www.port.ac.uk/students/additional-support-and-disability-advice-centre/

Recruitment and Selection Policy
www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/humanresources/filetodownload,108650,en.pdf

Equality Objectives
www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/equalityanddiversity/downloads/filetodownload,189685,en.pdf

Examinations and Assessment Regulations
www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/academicregistry/filetodownload,10383,en.pdf

Code of Student Behaviour
www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/academicregistry/filetodownload,10393,en.pdf

Guidelines for Staff: Student Mental Health

Admissions Policy and Procedures
www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/academicregistry/admissions/

Health and Safety Policy
www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/humanresources/healthandsafety/healthandsafetypolicy/

Student Drugs and Alcohol Policy
www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/directorate/filetodownload,190620,en.pdf
Annex 1

Mental health difficulties

Mental health problems encompass a range of conditions and can be viewed most usefully as a continuum of experience from wellbeing through to a severe and debilitating long-term illness. Problems can present in a wide variety of ways depending on the individual, and changes in mood and personality can be important indicators. Some of the more commonly encountered conditions that can be described as mental health problems can accessed via the MIND website at www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/.
Annex 2

Confidentiality

The University deals with significant amounts of personal and sensitive personal data on a daily basis and recognises student concerns about the uses to which this data could be put. The University's Data Protection Policy sets out the responsibilities of students, staff and the University itself in relation to processing this data. This Policy can be viewed online at www.port.ac.uk/accessstoinformation/policies/information/filetodownload,17472,en.pdf.

Further guidance on the types of data the University processes about students and the purpose behind this processing can also be accessed at www.port.ac.uk/dpa.

Legislation

The University is subject to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, which places a duty not to discriminate on the grounds of disability. Students with a mental illness that has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities are defined as disabled under the Act. Where this is the case, and in order to comply with the Act and ensure that appropriate support and reasonable adjustments are provided, students are encouraged to disclose any disability including mental health. This should preferably be at the pre-admission stage to ensure timely provision of appropriate arrangements and adjustments, but disclosure can take place at any stage in the student's time with the University.

There is no duty on a student to disclose a disability. Institutions are expected to take reasonable steps to find out if a student is disabled so that the appropriate action can be taken but the University cannot be held to have discriminated against a student by not taking such action if his or her disability was not known to it. The University is also subject to Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998, which provides for a right to respect for private and family life.

Data protection

To ensure student information is kept confidentially, protocols (consistent with the principles of Data Protection Act 1998) will apply. All personal data is obtained and used fairly and only used for the purposes the student is told it will be used for. Personal data is handled and processed securely and kept as up to date as possible.

Information relating to physical or mental health constitutes sensitive personal data. Under the Data Protection Act 1998, explicit permission from the data subject will be sought before this type of information is passed on to a third party, unless there is a legal obligation to provide the information. ‘Sensitive personal’ data will only be released within the University on a ‘need to know’ basis, and with the student’s explicit permission. The student will be informed why there is a need to disclose the information, who will have access to that information, and what the likely consequences are of giving or withholding consent.

Exceptional disclosure

The University has an equal duty to all students. Certain exceptional circumstances may require the release of sensitive personal data or the breaching of confidentiality requests. These include:

- Where there is an immediate and serious threat to the personal safety of the student concerned.
- Where there is an immediate and serious threat to the safety of others.
- Where there is a legal requirement to disclose that information (e.g. certain criminal activities or where it is covered by health and safety legislation).
- Where professional fitness to practice may be compromised.

In cases of exceptional disclosure the consent of the student will not be sought where it is likely to increase the level of risk to that student or to the third party.

Confidentiality requests

A student with a mental health difficulty has the right to request that the existence or nature of his or her difficulty be treated as confidential. In such cases the University will then take into account the extent to which making appropriate adjustments will compromise that request for confidentiality. This may result in the effectiveness of some adjustments being compromised or that reasonable adjustment cannot be provided at all.

If a student discloses his or her difficulty to a member of staff and asks for confidentiality, the disadvantages of not disclosing will be discussed. However, the decision not to disclose rests with the student and will be honoured if still required after such discussion. In such cases discussion will then move to consideration of ways in which reasonable adjustments can be made without compromising the confidentiality requirement. Written confirmation of the student’s request for confidentiality will be required.
Annex 3

Student mental health support structure

**Personal tutors**
All students have a named personal tutor. Personal tutors take responsibility for overseeing and/or providing general academic and pastoral support for their personal tutees and will maintain regular contact with them. Tutors are bound by the confidentiality constraints set out in Annex 2 and, within these constraints, will provide support, advice and referral arrangements with reference to the specialist central student services outlined below.

**Student Wellbeing Service (SWS)**
The team consists of practitioners who are counsellors, mental health advisers and wellbeing advisers who all work with a wide range of students of whom a number will be experiencing mental health difficulties, some of which will render them eligible for additional support through the Equality Act 2010. Having a private and confidential place to talk things over can, in itself, help in the management of mental distress.

Counsellors provide a variety of therapeutic responses and in the consultation session practitioners will discuss with the student the most helpful way forward. This may include self-help programmes, short-term counselling within the Service, or with external agencies for longer term counselling, liaising with others involved in supporting the student, or referring elsewhere as appropriate.

The Mental Health Advisers can offer individual support and monitoring to students. They will also provide a professional judgment as to the most appropriate route for further referrals and liaison with appropriate internal and external services. Referral and liaison options include:
- In-house self-guided or supported programmes or short-term counselling.
- The local Primary Care Psychological Therapies Service (Talking Change); this offers a range of specified psychotherapies, including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).
- The local Adult Mental Health Service (AMH); this may be appropriate for students with serious or chronic mental illnesses. AMH support can include ongoing outpatient appointments with psychiatrists, the administration and monitoring of anti-psychotic medications, allocation of a care coordinator and crisis resolution and home treatment support.

The Wellbeing Advisers are qualified or trained practitioners who provide guidance and support to students with personal and emotional support and healthy lifestyle guidance. Working in conjunction with the Five Steps to Wellbeing (Connect, Be active, Be mindful, Keep learning and Give) they offer a range of supportive programmes to students and guidance to staff across the University.

The service can be accessed by students, on or off campus, by contacting the Nuffield Centre on +44 (0)23 9284 3157 or emailing wellbeing@port.ac.uk.

**Additional Support and Disability Advice Centre (ASDAC)**
ASDAC provides additional support and advice for students and applicants with any chronic illnesses, sensory and mobility impairments, mental health difficulties and specific learning difficulties that may impact upon their ability to study at the University. ASDAC has qualified and experienced Disability Officers, and confidential case study interviews can be arranged either by appointment or ‘drop-in’. If an applicant has declared a mental health problem on application, ASDAC will be advised and will contact the student to arrange such an interview. Typical outcomes from these interviews will be liaison and communication with Departments over any special study and examination arrangements that may be appropriate, advice on eligibility for the Disabled Students’ Allowance, clarification of any particular confidentiality requirements and, where considered mutually appropriate, arrangements for referral to the Student Wellbeing Service.

**Chaplaincy**
The Chaplains are there to support students who may be concerned about their wellbeing or who need friendly support (which can be confidential) at the same time as receiving professional help. The Chaplaincy will, when it is required or helpful, work in partnership with other providers of help or support for students with mental wellbeing issues.

**General Practitioners**
The University has close links with local general practitioners, particularly the University Practice located within the University’s Nuffield Centre on the Guildhall Campus, and the Langstone Medical Centre on the Langstone Campus, which both provide a full GP service within the NHS. This facilitates liaison and referral between University services and Portsmouth’s Health Services in general.