

STUDENTS CAUSING CONCERN: STAFF GUIDANCE

October 2019

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Summary

What is this document about?

This guide aims to:

- provide practical advice to help staff respond effectively and appropriately to students who are a cause for concern and/or present with risk factors;
- raise awareness of the kinds of difficulties that students may experience;
- identify the most appropriate sources of advice and guidance for staff;
- identify the nature and scope of support available for students who experience mental wellbeing difficulties;
- provide clear guidance on the confidentiality of personal information provided by students;
- provide clear direction and referral processes for staff.

Who is this for?

Staff and students of the University of Portsmouth

How does the University check this is followed?

The Safeguarding Board scrutinises and has oversight of the application of this guidance.

Who can you contact if you have any queries about this document?

Lucy Sharp, Interim Director, DCQE

Executive summary

Everyone experiences varying degrees of mental wellbeing throughout their lifetime, with national statistics suggesting that one in 50 adults will suffer serious mental wellbeing difficulties. These can be best described along a continuum from good mental wellbeing to severe and debilitating long-term illness.

The University has specific legal responsibilities towards students whose mental wellbeing difficulties fall within the definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010. The definition is that *'if mental health difficulties have an adverse effect on the individual's ability to carry out day-to-day activities, these legal responsibilities will apply.'* Therefore, a number of students may now be regarded as disabled by reason of mental health difficulties.

Occasionally, a student exhibits behaviour that gives rise to very considerable concern. There may be evidence of: suicidal thinking, risk of serious harm to self or others, serious physical illness, alcohol or substance abuse or addiction, radicalisation, hearing voices or holding fixed irrational beliefs, a complete lack of functioning academically or in other areas of life, or disclosures of bullying, harassment, violence or discrimination.

In all situations, we remind staff to ensure their own safety and that others including the person involved are paramount. With this in mind, some of the following actions or behaviours may be useful:

- Do not avoid the situation or pretend nothing is wrong.
- Take threats of suicide and disclosures of bullying, harassment, violence and discrimination seriously.
- Remain calm, be sympathetic and adopt a non-threatening and non-judgmental approach.
- Do not approach the individual from behind without warning, stare or occupy a close physical space.
- Explain your actions before you act, reassure the student about what is happening without being patronising.
- If there is a risk to life and limb, immediately contact the University Security (internal extension 3333) who will call the Emergency Services and direct them to your location.
- If you have any anxieties about your own personal safety, make sure that you are not left alone with the student.
- Staff and students who receive information about forms of harassment, bullying, discrimination or violence are encouraged to report these incidents anonymously by using the Speak Up Step Up form by searching here <https://myport.ac.uk/>

If you are concerned about a student during usual working hours, please contact the Duty Practitioner at the Student wellbeing Service on 3466 or by email (wellbeing@port.ac.uk) for advice and guidance.

Outside of usual office hours the Residential Life team (+44(0)23 9284 3418.) offer support to all first year students living in halls or in the private sector. The Chaplains offer advice in emergency situations, they can be contacted via the security lodge on +44(0)23 9284 3418.

By Calling the NHS on 111 you will be able to speak with a mental health trained professional who will be able to offer advice and guidance.

In emergency situations such as the student reporting immediate and clear risk of suicide, self-injury or threats to harm others please contact the security lodge who will call the emergency services.

1. Introduction

Everyone experiences varying degrees of mental wellbeing throughout their lifetime, with national statistics suggesting that one in 50 adults will suffer serious mental wellbeing difficulties. These can be best described along a continuum from good mental wellbeing to severe and debilitating long-term illness.

The University has specific legal responsibilities towards students whose mental wellbeing difficulties fall within the definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010. The definition is that *'if mental health difficulties have an adverse effect on the individual's ability to carry out day-to-day activities, these legal responsibilities will apply.'* Therefore, a number of students may now be regarded as disabled by reason of mental health difficulties.

2. Aims of guidance

This guide aims to:

- provide practical advice to help staff respond effectively and appropriately to students who are a cause for concern and/or present with risk factors;
- raise awareness of the kinds of difficulties that students may experience;
- identify the most appropriate sources of advice and guidance for staff;
- identify the nature and scope of support available for students who experience mental wellbeing difficulties;
- provide clear guidance on the confidentiality of personal information provided by students;
- provide clear direction and referral processes for staff.

3. The student population

There is evidence from across the higher education sector of an increasing proportion of students who experience mental health difficulties, or encounter problems that are serious enough to have an adverse impact on their ability to achieve their academic and personal potential. This guide has been written to provide information and guidance for University of Portsmouth (UoP) staff who, in the course of their work, encounter students who are experiencing personal difficulties that at times may be serious.

Most of us experience difficulties of a personal or psychological nature at some time in our lives. These are usually an unpleasant but relatively normal aspect of human existence, but they can at times become so overwhelming that they impede our functioning. For students with deadlines to meet and crucial examinations to prepare for, such difficulties can have a very serious impact on their ability to sustain academic progress. The intensive periods of study required to successfully complete degree courses can in itself create its own particular pressure, leading to new, or an exacerbation of existing difficulties.

Students can become very anxious about the standards of work expected from them. They may find that they do not have the appropriate study or time management skills needed to be successful at university. Some students who have previously been high achievers may put themselves under considerable pressure to try to remain at the top in a more competitive environment.

Students may experience periods of physical or mental illness, serious family problems, bereavement or the breakup of close personal relationships. There may be students who find the transition to university and separation from family and friends particularly difficult. Students can get into difficulties through the use of alcohol or recreational drugs, or they may be physically or sexually attacked or abused, or have an unplanned pregnancy. Students may be vulnerable to radicalisation on and/or off campus.

4. Issues/concerns

(list not exhaustive)

Life

- Getting used to university life including personal health and wellbeing.
- Dealing with inadequate finances
- Making new friends, living with people you don't know and understanding loneliness
- Living in a new country and understanding cultural differences

Academic

- University, course and study issues such as independent learning, study skills, speaking in groups, management of time and priorities.
- Fulfilling expectations
- Studying in a new country with a different language

Self

- Coping with grief, sadness, anxiety, depression, panic attacks or mood changes.
- Experiences of racism, homophobia or discrimination of any kind.
- Dealing with concerns about drug and/or alcohol use.
- Concerns about past (traumatic) experiences.
- Dealing with family and relationship concerns

5. Identifying difficulties

The first time staff become aware that a student is experiencing difficulties can be when there is change in behaviours that impact on the student's learning experience and living arrangements.

There are also a number of other warning signs that may be apparent to anyone who comes into contact with a student. These include:

- absence from lectures or classes, fails to meet course deadlines and change in coursework marks;
- behaviour that indicates that a student is persistently tense, sad or miserable, loud, agitated or aggressive behaviour;
- very withdrawn or unusually quiet, erratic or unpredictable behaviour;
- unkempt personal appearance, significant weight changes or decline in personal hygiene;

- signs of fatigue, exhaustion and lack of energy;
- limited concentration and inability to make decisions;
- problems maintaining academic and social relationships;
- visible bruising, cuts or scars.

Some students will tell you that there is a problem, or may readily respond if you express concern. Others may conceal their difficulties so successfully that the nature of their problems is difficult to detect. Many students feel embarrassed about their problems or concerned about the consequences of telling someone in their department, or they may hope that their problems will just go away if they do nothing.

If you are worried about a student it may be appropriate to ask colleagues or the student's friends if they also have concerns about their wellbeing. You can also seek advice from the Student Wellbeing Service, whose staff, while they will not be able to breach confidentiality, are happy to talk in general terms to anyone with worries about a student.

If a student appears to have gone missing without reason or explanation and attempts to contact them draw a blank, you should contact the Head of Department.

6. How should you respond?

The first step would normally be to talk to the student in order to find out more about their situation. You may discover that they are already seeing someone from the Student Wellbeing Service, their GP, or other Student services staff and talking to the student and showing your concern may reassure him or her and allay your own worries. If you are not reassured by your conversation with the student, or you are unable to get the student to talk to you, then you need to consider how best to proceed. There are two main courses of action open to you: point the student to an appropriate source of help or offer support yourself.

7. Identifying sources of help including referral advice

The University has Student Support Services with different areas of expertise and responsibilities. If you talk to students about their concerns and you are aware of the range of provision available, you should be able to guide them to an appropriate service. These are:

- **Student Wellbeing Service** offers online self-help resources, face-to-face counselling, mental health and wellbeing advice. A duty service operates daily, details of which can be found via the search box at <http://www.myport.ac.uk> or by ringing EXT 3466
- **Additional Support and Disability Advice Centre (ASDAC)** provides advice, mentoring and support to disabled students with their study. Further information can be found via the search box at <http://www.myport.ac.uk/>.
- The **University of Portsmouth Students' Union Advice Service** offers confidential, impartial and non-judgmental support on a range of academic and university issues, helping students understand policies and procedures as well as supporting students in university meetings. <https://www.upsu.net/advice/>
- The **Chaplains** offer pastoral support, a quiet space for reflection and a listening ear. Further information can be found via the search box at <http://www.myport.ac.uk/>.
- **Faculty-based Student Wellbeing and Engagement Officers**

- **Safeguarding Cases Panel (Students).** This panel convenes weekly and is chaired by the Academic Registrar, membership includes; Director DCQE (Department Curriculum & Quality Enhancement), Head of Wellbeing, Residential Services Manager (Halls), Assistant Registrar, Information Disclosure and Complaints Manager and other colleagues (internal or external) by invitation.

The role of the panel is to be a central place where cases of students causing concern can be discussed, monitored and reviewed. The panel will offer guidance and support to staff who are concerned about a student, ensuring the case is managed in a coordinated way. The panel ensures the highest level of confidentiality whilst ensuring appropriate information is shared as necessary to safeguard the student and University Community.

Referral of cases to the panel can be done by contacting the Faculty AD(S) (Associate Dean; Students) in the first instance and then Head of Wellbeing (EXT 3466) or Director of DCQE (EXT 3568).

- The **Residence Life Team** are responsible for the day-to-day management of welfare and pastoral concerns of residents within all our Halls of Residence. Freshers living in private housing can also access our services at Guildhall Halls. Further information can be found via the search at <http://www.myport.ac.uk/>.

There is also a range of external support available for students including:

- **Talking Change** use talking therapies to treat a range of mental health conditions. www.talkingchange.portsmouth.nhs.uk
- **Portsmouth Abuse and Rape Counselling Service (PARCS)** offers information and support to survivors of sexual abuse. Services include telephone support, counselling, groups, training and consultation. www.parcs.org.uk/
- **Recovery Hub** are Portsmouth's drugs and alcohol support services. They are based at Campion Place, Elm Grove, Portsmouth and can be contacted on 023 9229 4573. For more information see <http://www.saferportsmouth.org.uk/drugs-and-alcohol/>
- **Pushing Change** are a Portsmouth based group using peer activities to support those recovering from alcohol misuse and drug addiction. <https://pushingchange.org/>

If you remain unsure, seek advice from the Student Wellbeing Service by contacting wellbeing@port.ac.uk, by telephone extension **3466** or by seeking the Student Wellbeing Service via the search box at <http://www.myport.ac.uk/>.

It is important to remember that our students come with a very wide range of backgrounds and experiences and their reactions to difficulties may not be those that you predict. They may also feel more or less uncomfortable about seeking help from particular people or services. For example, some international students may be uncomfortable about the idea of counselling and reluctant to seek help from the Student Wellbeing Service, even if it seems to you to be the most appropriate place for support. If a student has already established a good relationship with any of the key student services, this might provide the most appropriate initial referral point – each service is very experienced in cross-referral if this becomes necessary.

What is most important is that you encourage students to make contact with the service that is acceptable to them. You should encourage them to take the initiative by contacting the service themselves – those who seek help independently are more likely to derive benefit than those who are pushed into doing so. There may be times when a student finds it very difficult to make the first move, particularly when he or she is very depressed. In such circumstances it may be helpful to take a more active role by telephoning or emailing the appropriate service to ask for an appointment. It is important that the student gives you their consent for this to happen. Afterwards, you could check with the student that they attended the

appointment, and if, in the event, they did not feel able to attend, you could offer further encouragement and/or seek advice yourself about any other steps that might be appropriate.

8. Offering support yourself

When you have talked to the student about their problems, you may feel that you can offer the appropriate support yourself. In many cases, all that is required is to listen, provide reassurance and offer practical advice. Do not panic because a student bursts into tears: tears are a reaction to an intense feeling but do not necessarily indicate an urgent need for professional help or an underlying problem that is of very serious concern. A few minutes of your time with your reassurance and the offer to the student that they can come to see you again may be all that is required.

Providing emotional support to a student can be very demanding, so before you offer to help make sure that you have enough time, that you have the appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding and that you know to whom to turn for advice if you need it. It may be appropriate to offer support to help the student to manage their coursework, but also to make it clear that you are not able to offer help with their personal or psychological problems. It is often helpful to be clear about your own boundaries, such as; how much time you are able to offer, by what methods you are happy for the student to contact you and when you will be able respond.

We advise against giving students home contact details. If you feel that it might be important for a student to be able to contact someone out of normal office hours, the best number to offer is the Samaritans 023 9269 1313 or for more urgent concerns, the Out of Hours GP on 111. Students can also contact Chaplaincy out of hours via the Security Lodge on 023 9284 3333. For first year students living in Halls and private accommodation ring +44(0)23 9284 3789, +44(0)23 9284 4578 or +44(0)23 9284 3924

It is very important both for your sake and that of the student that you do not let yourself get out of your depth or lose sight of the boundaries of your role. Your help and support can be both valuable and very important in helping a student to overcome their difficulties, but you are neither a surrogate parent nor a student services professional. Student services staff members have the benefit of specialist training and very broad experience to guide students appropriately, and to support them in learning how to manage their own lives. Members of the Student Wellbeing Service may sometimes contact a student's tutor (normally with the student's permission) for information, or discuss with the tutor ways of helping a student to manage their academic work during an emotional crisis or period of illness. In many cases a partnership approach can be very effective, particularly if the student is willing for information to be shared in this way.

9. Friends and classmates

It is important to remember that a student's difficulties can have an impact on his or her friends, who may be carrying a significant burden, particularly if the student in question is seriously ill, self-harming or threatening suicide. You may be in a position to talk to the friends and to encourage them to seek help for themselves from the Student Wellbeing Service, Chaplains, Student's Union Advice Centre or The Residence Life Team.

Students who have episodes of mental illness can sometimes disrupt lectures or tutorials making it difficult for other students to concentrate. If this happens it is crucial to take prompt action to address the problem in order to protect all involved.

10. Responding to issues causing serious concern

Occasionally, a student exhibits behaviour that gives rise to very considerable concern. There may be evidence of: suicidal thinking, risk of serious harm to self or others, serious physical illness, alcohol or substance abuse or addiction, hearing voices or holding fixed irrational beliefs, a complete lack of functioning academically or in other areas of life, or disclosures of bullying, harassment, violence or discrimination.

In all situations, we remind staff to ensure their own safety and that others including the person involved are paramount. With this in mind, some of the following actions or behaviours may be useful:

- Do not avoid the situation or pretend nothing is wrong.
- Take threats of suicide and disclosures of bullying, harassment, violence and discrimination seriously.
- Remain calm, be sympathetic and adopt a non-threatening and non-judgmental approach.
- Do not approach the individual from behind without warning, stare or occupy a close physical space.
- Explain your actions before you act, reassure the student about what is happening without being patronising.
- If there is a risk to life and limb, immediately contact the University Security (internal extension 3333) who will call the Emergency Services and direct them to your location.
- If you have any anxieties about your own personal safety, make sure that you are not left alone with the student.
- Staff and students who receive information about forms of harassment, bullying, discrimination or violence are encouraged to report these incidents anonymously by using the Speak Up Step Up form by searching here <https://myport.ac.uk/>

11. When a student will not accept help

Except in the circumstances described above, there is little that can or should be done if a student is not prepared to talk to you about his or her problems, or to seek help from others. However, it is good practice to make sure that there is a note of your concerns in the appropriate departmental files, Personal Tutor platform and that relevant staff are aware that there may be a problem. It would also be helpful to remind the student about the services available to them (Section 7).

12. Dealing with confidential issues

The formal position regarding confidentiality is that there are different levels of confidentiality across the Institution as certain services (Student Wellbeing Service, Additional Support and Disability Advice Centre and Chaplaincy) have their own professional standards in addition to overall Institutional policy. In these contexts, no information will be passed on to other bodies or individuals without the explicit consent of the individual concerned. Staff that are not bound by professional codes are still required to respect a student's confidentiality. The University Data Protection Policy on this matter can be viewed online at <http://policies.docstore.port.ac.uk/policy-022.pdf>.

Further guidance can be accessed at <http://www.port.ac.uk/dpa>.

However, it is important to state that there are limits to confidentiality, such as Exceptional Disclosure. Certain exceptional circumstances may require sensitive personal data to be released. These include:

- immediate and serious threat to personal safety of an individual and/or others;

- where there is a legal requirement to do so (e.g. safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, certain criminal activities and 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 a third party.

13. Prevent duty

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a responsibility upon universities to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. This has become known as the 'Prevent Duty' and universities are expected to deliver this duty in a proportionate and risk-based way.

14. Potential signs of radicalisation

Radicalisation can be described as a process whereby individuals become engaged in or give support to terrorism or violent extremism. There is no typical profile for a person who may become radicalised but some research demonstrates that individuals begin the radicalisation process through three activities: i) ideology; ii) social relations; or iii) criminal activity. This process can be accompanied by changes in an individual's behaviour, which can be gradual or swift.

Whilst it is important to recognise that changes in behaviour can be the consequence of other changes in an individual's life or circumstances, there are a number of behavioural indicators that may justify concern that an individual is being radicalised:

- Notable changes in behaviour and mood.
- Advocacy and expressions of support for violence and terrorism.
- Expressions of extreme political or radical views.
- Seeking to influence or persuade others to hold extreme political or radical views.
- Changes of appearance.
- Significant change of friends and social circles.
- Spending excessive time alone.
- Possession of violent and/or extremist literature.

Radicalisation is most often led by personal face-to-face relationships, but there are some examples of recruitment into radical groups via the internet. A person may become part of an online community of people who share their views and radicalise others via a virtual environment.

Any member of staff or student who is either unsure or concerned that a fellow student or colleague is or has been radicalised should report their concerns to the Chief Operating Officer or the Director of Corporate Governance.

15. Responding to parents' concerns

Sometimes concerned parents make contact, asking for information about their sons or daughters. You may be able to offer a sympathetic ear but in most circumstances, personal information about a student must not be disclosed to anyone outside the University, including parents, without the student's permission. You can offer to talk to the student and encourage them to get in touch with their parents or offer to forward correspondence from the parent to the student

concerned. Some parents may not be happy with this response, but it is important to remember that students have a right to privacy and they may have good reason for not wishing their parents, close family members or partners to have information about themselves, or even confirmation that they are a student at the University of Portsmouth. In general, any offer to pass on information should come with the proviso 'if they are a student at this University'.

16. Related policies and guidance

- Safeguarding Cases Panel
- [Fitness to study](#)
- [Fitness to Reside](#)
- Fitness to Practice
- [Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults](#)
- [Student Drug and alcohol policy](#)
- [Student complaints procedure](#)

What to do: Guidance for managing students causing concern

Is the student expressing or showing signs of any of the following or any of these reported by a third party?

If yes, be prepared to meet with the student and listen as they may welcome a chance to talk about what is going on.

- Suicidal thoughts
- Plans to end it all
- Dropping of academic performance
- Low mood
- Radicalisation
- Reduced Attendance
- Overuse of alcohol and drugs
- Unusual, bizarre, hostile or aggressive behaviour
- Hearing voices
- Withdrawn
- Deterioration in self-care such as eating and personal hygiene
- Vulnerable to exploitation (including financial)
- Self-harm
- Harm to others

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<p>Student exhibits a mild level of distress or reports a friend in this situation</p>	<p>Student exhibits a moderate level of distress requiring proactive encouragement to use support services</p>	<p>Evidence to support that the student poses an imminent risk of harm to themselves or to others. Vulnerability.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"> </p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> </p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> </p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Yes –Enable self-help</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Yes –Proactive help</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Yes – Emergency Services</p>
<p>Encourage the student to talk with friends, family, personal tutor or Faculty Welfare and Engagement Officer if they feel comfortable doing so.</p>	<p>Let the student know that you are worried and inform them of the Student Services and the confidential nature of these. Suggest they speak with their GP.</p>	<p>In emergency situations such as the student reporting immediate and clear risk of suicide, self-injury or threats to harm others.</p>
<p>Also provide details of Student Services:</p>	<p>Encourage the student to make an appointment with Student Services and/or GP (out of hours on 111).</p>	<p>Call Security on 3333 and ask for the Police regardless of whether or not the student has given consent.</p>
<p>Student Wellbeing</p>	<p>Ask the student to attend and come back to you once they've attended.</p>	<p>Call 3333 and ask for an ambulance if the student has harmed themselves.</p>
<p>Service Nuffield Centre wellbeing@port.ac. uk 023 9284 3466</p>	<p>If the student hasn't done so and you remain concerned, inform the student that you will contact Student Services on their behalf. Discuss with AD(S) if Fitness to Study needs to be considered.</p>	<p>Do not leave the student alone until help has arrived unless you, or your safety, is compromised.</p>
<p>Chaplains Nuffield Centre chaplains@port.ac. uk 023 9284 3030</p>	<p>Write a brief summary of events in the student's record on the Personal Tutoring platform</p>	
<p>Students' Union Gun House advice@upsu.net 023 9284 3478 (reception number)</p>		
<p>(Fuller list in Section 7)</p>		

If you are unsure or concerned that a student or colleague is or has been radicalized then you should report your concerns to the Deputy Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer, or to the Executive Director of Corporate Governance.

University of Portsmouth

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