

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH POLICY

Introduction

1. The University of Buckingham is committed to taking positive steps to eliminate discrimination in its policies, practices and procedures by creating an inclusive environment for all students, promoting mental well being and to support students who experience mental health difficulties. These difficulties may be a long term mental illness, an emerging mental health problem or temporary emotional difficulties which are impacting on a student's ability to study. ***This document should also be read in conjunction with the University Equality and Diversity, the University Drug and Alcohol Policy and the University Disability Policies, as well as the Implementation in Schools document detailing Personal evacuation procedures.***

2. The University of Buckingham aims to create an environment where students feel at ease to disclose past or current mental health difficulties. The University respects people's rights to privacy and will treat all information concerning an individual's mental health with appropriate confidentiality, in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018, the University's Confidentiality Policy and the University Data Protection Policy.

3. Widening participation, increasing student numbers and in particular, changes to disability legislation have all led to a greater awareness and a notable increase in the numbers of students with mental health and emotional difficulties entering higher education.

4. The purpose of this policy is to set out a framework for working with students experiencing mental health difficulties.

Context and Legal Framework

5. In 2011 the Royal College of Psychiatrists published a critical report on the mental health of students in higher education.¹ This report made clear that students were a disadvantaged population when it came to access to mental health services in the community.

Royal College of Psychiatrists (2011). *The Mental Health of Students in Higher Education*. (Council Report CR166). London: Royal College of Psychiatrists

6. The Disability Discrimination Act(s) (DDA) 1995 and 2005, and the Special Educational Needs Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 as amended by the Equality Act 2010 places a duty to make "reasonable adjustments" for the individual with a "mental impairment" and to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to ensure that the student is not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to other students.

7. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 placed a duty on the University to publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES). Among its actions, the DES proposed to make staff disability awareness training mandatory, as well as to improve facilities and services for disabled students and staff. This duty has been amended by the Equality Act 2010 and the University will incorporate these actions into the University's Single Equality Scheme objectives.

8. This policy has been implemented in response to and in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk>

The aims of this policy are to provide:

‘A clear, transparent and practical policy framework relating to mental health issues for potential students, students and staff supporting these students at the University of Buckingham, as well as a basis for a consistent approach throughout the University to the way we respond to the needs of students experiencing mental health difficulties’.

Terminology

9. Under the Equality Act, a disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment which has a "substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". "Substantial" means more than minor or trivial. "Impairment" covers long term medical conditions and fluctuating or progressive conditions. A mental impairment includes mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or depression.

Roles and responsibilities of staff

10. Staff should be ready to offer support to students within the professional limitation of their role but are not expected to assume responsibility outside the parameters of their professional role for resolving a student's mental health difficulties. Staff will be well informed about the appropriate University services for students experiencing mental health difficulties. Security staff should be contacted out of hours if there is a mental health concern with a student (see Appendix 2).

11. Staff must be sensitive to the use of the language of mental health. Negative stereotypical language promotes a climate in which people with mental health difficulties are stigmatised.

Roles and responsibility of students

12. Students need to take responsibility for communicating their needs and accessing support services within the University to enable the University or recommended external services.

13. Students are encouraged to take care of their own mental health, for example ensuring that they get adequate rest, take prescribed medication and access support including the Drug and Alcohol Team if this is deemed to be the most appropriate service. Illegal or non-prescribed drugs can cause severe mental health problems. It is the responsibility of all students to read, sign and comply with the University's Drug and Alcohol Policy.

14. Students should be aware that any behaviour which impacts negatively on fellow students, staff, or patients in the case of medical students, or is in any way disruptive or offensive, is not acceptable within the University community and may be subject to University Student Disciplinary Procedures or to Fitness to Practise in the case of a medical student on the MB ChB programme. Concerns about any student being drawn into extremist or terrorist behaviour will be addressed in accordance with the University's Prevent Policy.

15. Students concerned about a fellow student's mental well-being or behaviour should be aware of their personal limitations and should encourage their fellow student to seek specialist support at the earliest opportunity. If this is difficult they themselves should seek advice in confidence from the Student Welfare department or Student Support Team for MC ChB students. They can also contact the University's Counsellor (see Appendix 1).

16. This policy applies to all current and prospective students.

Admissions and Entry

17. The University welcomes enquiries and applications from prospective students who have a history of mental health difficulties. All applicants will be assessed on their academic merits, with no discrimination on the grounds of mental wellbeing, however the University may request evidence of the disability. For students applying for the MB ChB programme details of any disability will be requested and the Medical School and Occupational Health Service will advise in accordance with the GMC guidelines and Fitness to Practise.

18. At application, prospective students living with mental health difficulties are encouraged to disclose this information. Admissions staff will inform the Student Welfare team, Student Support Team for the MB ChB and the University Disability Officer who will contact the student to discuss the student's support requirements and inform them of the support and services available. For students applying to the MB ChB programme, the Medical School and Occupational Health Service will reassess the impact of the disability for a doctor in training and any necessary reasonable adjustments provided.

19. Students should be given specific advice about the support available to them, including advice about the Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA), if appropriate. Any information disclosed will be kept confidential and only disseminated with the student's written consent in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018 and the University's Confidentiality Policy and Data Protection Policy. With consent, a notification will be sent to the student's School and other relevant staff alerting them to the student's particular support requirements.

20. Mental Health problems should not be a barrier to full participation in student life. All necessary adjustments, where reasonable, will be made to enable students living with mental health difficulties to access and participate in all aspects of their course and to ensure that they are not at a disadvantage compared to other students.

During the course of study

21. If a student experiences mental health difficulties during their course of study advice and support are available from the Student Welfare department, Student Support Team for MB ChB, University Disability Officer and the University Counselling Service.

22. If a student experiences mental health difficulties out of University hours, they should contact their GP. Students will also have access to the Big White Wall an online service where they can access professional help 24 hours a day.

23. Student Personal Tutors who are located within schools provide pastoral care, practical advice and guidance for all students who experience barriers to study.

24. The University has a Counselling Service staffed by a professional counsellor. This service offers free and confidential counselling to all students. Counselling can be short or long-term depending on the needs of the individual. Students are encouraged to self-refer. St Andrew's Mental Health Charity offers psychology appointments if required following referral by a GP, Student Welfare Department or Student Support for the MB ChB.

25. The Disability Officer provides staff with advice and guidelines on supporting students with mental health difficulties. He will liaise with each students' school, as appropriate to ensure that an individual student has all the support necessary to participate fully in the student experience and fulfil their potential.

26. Other support networks information is provided in *Appendix 1*.

Examination Arrangements

27. The University will put in place appropriate individual exam arrangements for students who provide medical evidence that they have a mental health difficulty, to ensure that such students are not placed at a disadvantage to fellow students when undertaking examinations. Medical students will have an assessment of their condition prior to an exam and the personal tutor will monitor and discuss any reasonable adjustments at this time to ensure the student does not have any mitigating circumstances.

Mitigating Circumstances

28. If a student is unable to complete a piece of work or feels that their performance in a piece of work or an examination has been adversely affected by a mental health difficulty, where the medical evidence requires such an adjustment to be made, they are entitled to submit an application concerning mitigating circumstances. This will be considered by the student's appropriate Examination Board. Student Welfare staff may provide supporting statements for students making a case for mitigating circumstances. For Medical Students, refer to the Mb ChB Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Code of Practice for assessment in relation to the fit-to-sit policy.

The MB ChB Mitigating Circumstances panel will review any relevant circumstances prior to the Examination Board.

Fitness to Practise

29. A student's performance could be compromised by mental health difficulties, thus impacting upon their fitness to practise. Where a student is studying on a programme of study which leads to a professional qualification and which is subject to a fitness to practise concern or termination of training proceeding, any serious mental health concerns should be referred to the Student Support Lead in the Medical School.

Interruption of Studies

30. The University will respond flexibly to any request to suspend studies on the grounds of mental health and it is usually possible for a student to make a request to suspend his or her course of study to enable a period of rest and recovery. An appropriate period of recovery can be negotiated, after which the University might require medical evidence to confirm that the student is fit and able to cope with the academic demands that will be placed upon them. The Medical School will decide on the suspension of studies for medical students in accordance with GMC guidance and appropriate assessment with the Occupational Health Service.

31. If a student feels that a suspension of study may help them they should discuss this option with an appropriate member of staff from their school such as their personal Tutor, Programme Leader or contact the University Disability Officer within Student Welfare or Student Support for medical students.

32. If a student's performance is being adversely affected by a mental health difficulty, the Personal Tutor may encourage the student to consider requesting some time out to recover with the agreement of the School. A student will not be disadvantaged on the resumption of his/her studies by reason of agreed suspension due to mental health difficulties.

33. It is important that before making the decision to make a request to suspend studies the student seeks advice about the financial implications of so doing from Student Services.

34. There may be instances in which a student's mental health causes them to behave in a disruptive manner. If University staff who come into contact with this student believe that the student's mental health may have been a contributory factor in the behaviour, or if the student themselves or their peers disclose this information, careful consideration should be given to the way in which the incident or behaviour is treated. The University may consider recourse to the University Student Disciplinary Procedure to be inappropriate in the first instance. If so the following procedure will be adopted

(i) Initially the student should be referred to the Student Welfare Department or the Counselling Service who, working in conjunction within the relevant School and student, will: identify the issues, devise an action plan in conjunction with external agencies if appropriate, put additional support in place if required; confirm this in writing to the student and monitor their subsequent progress. For medical students, referral to the Mb ChB Concerns group is recommended. The Concern's Group will assess the behaviour and any incidents relating to this and will work in a supportive and non-judgemental manner with the Medical School and University support services to mitigate the behaviour.

35. In the cases where the above procedure is not appropriate and the student's behaviour continues to give cause for concern it may be necessary to recommend that the student suspends their studies. When such circumstances arise the University endeavours to balance the needs and rights of the student concerned against the need to protect the well-being of fellow students and staff. In some circumstances, if a student refuses to accept a recommendation that they suspend their studies or refuses offers of support there may be implications for that student's progress or referral to fitness to practice proceedings for medical students.

36. The procedure that will be adopted is as follows:
- (i) Only the Vice Chancellor, or in exceptional circumstances, Vice Chancellor's nominee acting on behalf of the Vice Chancellor can suspend a student's studies at the University. In these circumstances a case conference will be called, chaired by the Head of Student Welfare (or his or her nominee). This group will make recommendations to the Vice Chancellor. For Medical School the Fitness to Practise Committee will proceed in accordance with the GMC regulations as required.

Equality Impact Assessment

37. The University of Buckingham is committed to the promotion of equality, diversity and a supportive environment for all members of our community. Our commitment to equality and diversity means that this policy has been screened in relation to the use of plain English, the promotion of the positive duty in relation to the protected characteristics of race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity and paternity.

38. All University policies are subject to periodic review under the Equality Impact Assessment Process.

Monitoring and Review

39. This policy will be monitored annually to judge its effectiveness and updated in accordance with changes in the law by the Disability Advisory Group who report to the Equality and Diversity Committee.

Related Policies

Equality and Diversity Policy

Disability Policy

Drug and Alcohol Policy

Data Protection Policy

Admissions Terms and Conditions

Dignity at Work and Study policy and procedure

Mitigating Circumstances Policy

Students Charter

Personal Tutor System Code of Practice

Harassment Adviser Network

Whistleblowing Policy

Note Please refer to MB ChB specific policies and Codes of Practice for Selection, Personal Tuition, Fitness to Practise, Mitigating Circumstances and Whistleblowing.

Dissemination of and Access to the Policy

40. This policy will be published on the University of Buckingham's website to be available to all staff, students, visitors and contractors on www.buckingham.ac.uk

41. The University will ensure that all appropriate staff including academic staff, professional services staff and those staff who provide a service to or support students are trained on this policy and any associated guidance.

Appendix 1

Sources of support for staff in assisting students with mental health difficulties:

People seek counselling with a range of concerns varying from short term personal, social, family or academic worries to longer term more complex psychological problems. Some may attend only once or twice, others may use counselling for regular meetings over a period of several months.

The Counselling Service offers a confidential, professional service to students. Students can make an appointment to see the University Counsellors by calling into Student Welfare or by ringing 01280 820200

The Personal Tutors are based in each School of Study and are available to provide confidential advice and support, and offer opportunities to develop a student's study skills.

University of Buckingham contacts:

Disability Adviser

Student Welfare
18 Hunter's Street
Buckingham
Tel:01280820348
Email:
Lionel.Weston@buckingham.ac.uk

Student Counsellor

Wellness Centre
Contact Student Welfare to book an appointment on 01280820200
Email:
betty.ridley@buckingham.ac.uk

Organisations external to the University that may provide a source of support:

Alcohol and Drug Abuse SMART

Albion House Albion Street Aylesbury HP20 1RD
Tel: 01296337717

Alcohol and Drug Services Oasis Partnership

Tel: 01296338008

[Email: Hannah.bridges@oasispartnership.org](mailto:Hannah.bridges@oasispartnership.org)

Alcoholics Anonymous

Helpline

Contact details: 0845 769 7555 help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

FRANK (Drugs service) Department of Health 0300 1231002

Citizen's Advice Bureau

8 Easton St High Wycombe 0844 499 4108

Mental Health Services Aylesbury

Early Intervention Team

01296 565220 or 01296 565567

Out of Hours 01296 5665000

SAMARITANS

Contact 116 123

Big White Wall – The Support Network For Emotional Health

www.bigwhitewall.com

Healthy Minds

Buckinghamshire Primary Care Wellbeing Service

Floor 2, Prospect House Crendon Street

High Wycombe HP13 6LA

01865 901600

Healthy.minds@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

www.healthymindsbucks.nhs.uk