

Student Mental Health Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the University of Manchester we¹ aim to create a culture of diversity within our community, providing a dynamic working and learning environment where all members are valued for their contribution and individuality.
- 1.2 This Policy applies to all our registered students.² It covers our approach to students' mental health: our support for students experiencing mental health difficulties; our approach to protecting their personal information; to whom and in what circumstances we may disclose information; the limitations that exist on the support that we can provide and how we will promote understanding and raise awareness of mental health difficulties.
- 1.3 Information on the practical application of this Policy is available from 'Student Mental Health Policy: Guidance for Staff' and 'Student Mental Health Policy: Guidance for Students' available online at <http://www.studentnet.manchester.ac.uk/crucial-guide/personal-life/health/mental-health/>
- 1.4 Many aspects of mental health difficulties are covered by the Equality Act 2010, entitling students to support and reasonable adjustments with respect to participation in a programme of study and as service users of the institution. These are usually conditions which are substantial, long-term and have an adverse effect on an individual's day-to-day life.
- 1.5 The support we provide to students experiencing mental health difficulties is informed by, but not limited to, the obligations imposed on us by the Equality Act. In order to provide some aspects of support with academic studies we will normally require appropriate documentary evidence.
- 1.6 Applicants are encouraged to declare mental health difficulties during the application process. Where students disclose mental health difficulties as part of their application, our Disability Support Office (DSO), which has the expertise to adjudge what assistance and adjustments a student may require, will contact them and offer them the opportunity to discuss their personal support requirements.
- 1.7 Some programmes of study require medical fitness assessment and have competency standards set by professional bodies. Applicants will be made aware of this through the admissions process. Students who encounter mental health difficulties which could affect their continuation on a programme of study may be referred, or may refer themselves, for assessment to the Occupational Health Service.

2. Support for Students Experiencing Mental health difficulties

- 2.1 As set out below, we have a number of sources of support for students who experience mental health difficulties.

¹ Throughout this Policy 'we' and 'our' refer to The University of Manchester or its representatives.

² Some elements of support are provided by the UK government and as such are not available to international students.

- 2.2 We provide a Counselling Service which is available to all students free of charge. The Counsellors are fully qualified professionals and the service operates to normal Counselling professional standards of confidentiality.
- 2.3 Our Disability Support Office (DSO) works with students and staff to develop and implement appropriate study support arrangements for disabled students. All students experiencing mental health difficulties may seek the support of the DSO which will support them in accessing resource such as the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and other support arrangements.
- 2.4 Our Occupational Health Service is available to both staff and students for advice regarding medical fitness to both begin and continue with a proposed course. This is usually undertaken in full consultation with any treating specialists and with the student's informed consent.
- 2.5 Both the DSO and the Occupational Health Service can provide advice to students and staff about reasonable adjustments which may be made to support students with disability.
- 2.6 All students have a named adviser in their School for support with their programme of study, with most Schools providing a student support office (a number of titles operate) which is a further source of advice and information.
- 2.7 We have a strong and active Students' Union which has its own independent Advice Centre, operates the student telephone listening service, Nightline, and runs campaigns such as the Mental Wealth Campaign.
- 2.8 Each Hall of Residence has a Warden and a pastoral support team which is available to residents 24 hours a day.

3. Study Support Arrangements

- 3.1 Our approach to supporting students in managing mental health difficulties in respect of their studies is to work with them to develop appropriate study support arrangements.
- 3.2 The DSO will work with the student (and their School in respect of complex cases) to identify and implement appropriate study support arrangements.
- 3.3 Schools will encourage students to register with the DSO or to attend the Counselling Service if they are experiencing mental health difficulties, and are able actively to refer them if this seems appropriate. If a student prefers not to use these services the amount of study support available may be limited. For example, many study support arrangements can only be authorised by the DSO.
- 3.4 Any member of staff is able to seek advice from the University's specialist support services on how to support a student experiencing mental health difficulties without divulging the identity of the student concerned.
- 3.5 Normally, agreed study support arrangements as adhered to by both the student and the University, will be intended to satisfy the requirement under the Equality Act 2010 for reasonable adjustments to be made for students with disabilities, although in some situations further issues may arise which cause a need for additional adjustment. Adjustments may include, but are not limited to, alternative forms of assessments or alternative arrangements for taking examinations.

- 3.6 Academic Schools have an active role in implementing study support arrangements and will ensure that appropriate individuals are aware of them and that any specific support which has been agreed is provided. Information will only be shared with staff on a 'need to know' basis.
- 3.7 Study support arrangements will be reviewed at intervals agreed with the DSO to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.
- 3.8 We will respond as flexibly as possible to a student's individual circumstances, but we will protect our academic standards. Our ability to be flexible and to make adjustments will take into consideration academic standards, professional needs and competency standards and the best interests, in terms of their academic life, of an individual student.
- 3.9 It is not possible to deviate from competency standards set by professional bodies.

4. Mitigating Circumstances

- 4.1 If the appropriate study support arrangements have been put in place we do not expect that students will need the application of the Mitigating (also known as extenuating or special) Circumstances Policy in respect of mental health difficulties, unless a situation has arisen which is, as described in the Mitigating Circumstances Policy, 'unforeseeable or unpreventable' and that could have a 'significant adverse effect on the academic performance of a student'.
- 4.2 Students whose mental health difficulties come to light during their programme of study, or who have new mental health issues and so do not have appropriate study support arrangements, will have their circumstances considered within the normal procedures as set out in the Mitigating Circumstances Policy, pending assessment by the DSO/Occupational Health and the implementation of appropriate study support arrangements.
- 4.3 Schools that receive an application for the consideration of mitigating circumstances on the grounds of mental health difficulties from a student who had not previously reported them will discuss these concerns with the student in order to make an initial assessment of their support needs. Where necessary, the student will be referred to the DSO, Occupational Health and/or Counselling Service to enable us to make appropriate support arrangements.

5. Requirement for Evidence

- 5.1 To access many study support arrangements and/or for consideration under the Mitigating Circumstances Policy, it will be necessary to provide documentary evidence of the consequences of the mental health difficulties. This is likely to take the form of a letter from a GP or other relevant healthcare professional. All information about a student's mental health is treated confidentially and shared only as necessary. (See Section 8).

6. Interruption or Cessation of Studies

- 6.1 The University will make all reasonable efforts to enable students with mental health difficulties to reach their full academic potential. However, in circumstances where we determine that it is in the student's best interests, we will encourage them to seek to either interrupt or withdraw from their studies and provide assistance and support in this regard.

7. Behaviour Which Gives Rise to Concern

- 7.1 If, during the normal course of our activities, we notice a change in a student's behaviour or performance, or other indicators which might give rise to concern, we will sensitively discuss our concerns with the student. We will signpost them to the relevant support services and

encourage them to seek help. If we feel it necessary, we will formally refer a student to the DSO, Occupational Health Service or Counselling Service.

8. Confidentiality and Disclosure

- 8.1 As with all matters of a personal nature, we will respect the confidentiality of the information a student provides us with unless we have good reason not to do so (as described in section 9 below), and will not normally disclose personal information about individual students to external agencies or third parties without the student's express permission. In normal circumstances, our definition of third parties includes a student's sponsor, family, friends, doctor or equivalent.
- 8.2 We would expect to share certain information within the University with those members of staff who need it in order to implement the appropriate level of support, and we will normally obtain the consent of the student concerned before we do so. Exceptionally, there may be circumstances in which confidentiality has to be broken and these are outlined below.

9. Disclosure Without Consent

- 9.1 If we make a decision to disclose information about a student without their knowledge or in the face of their refusal of consent, we will do so only either in circumstances when we judge that there is a risk of them harming either themselves or others, or when there is an obligation arising from the Fitness to Practise requirements of the relevant programmes of study, or in circumstances when we judge that disclosure is in their best interests. Such a decision will not be taken lightly nor, except in an emergency, will it be taken without consultation with senior members of University staff.
- 9.2 The interests of individual students will always be considered in the context of the interests of the community as a whole and there may be rare occasions when the interests of others take priority over the interests of individuals.
- 9.3 Some professional programmes of study have specific requirements in relation to Fitness to Practise and these may be affected by a diagnosis of mental health difficulties. The University will ensure that any student so affected is made aware of the issue and is supported in the consideration of appropriate options. Whilst we are able to consider reasonable adjustments to some aspects of course delivery, competency standards set by professional bodies cannot be deviated from. Fitness to Practise procedures most often result in appropriate support arrangements being implemented enabling students successfully to complete their chosen programme. In exceptional circumstances however they can result in the termination of a student's programme of study.
- 9.4 In some circumstances, it may be a condition of entry or continuation of studies that we are permitted to make limited disclosure to key individuals.
- 9.5 In Halls of Residence, key members of the pastoral team may be briefed about the implications of mental health difficulties disclosed by a student. Such information will be provided for the purpose of supporting the student and to enable staff to have due regard for the health and safety of others. Hall pastoral support teams will receive regular briefing sessions on matters such as protection of personal information, confidentiality and mental health issues.
- 9.6 When dealing with students experiencing mental health difficulties, we will endeavour to act in their best interests. Sometimes, this will mean taking difficult decisions, and, on occasion,

taking decisions with which an individual student may not agree. It is our intention that factors we have taken into account when making our decisions are both clear to the student and properly recorded.

10. Studying Away from the University

- 10.1 Whilst distance from campus may place some constraints on the support we are able to offer, students studying away from the University are still entitled to access the sources of support in this Policy and will receive support and advice within the spirit of the Policy set out here.

11. Conduct & Discipline

- 11.1 Mental health difficulties do not exclude students from the requirement to comply with the University's regulations on Conduct and Discipline.
- 11.2 In situations where a student's ability to participate in disciplinary procedures is affected by mental health difficulties, we will approach the situation with due sensitivity, ensuring that the student is fit to take part and is appropriately supported.
- 11.3 Violent behaviour will not be tolerated in any circumstances.

12. Employment & References

- 12.1 To enable us to advise and support them in their search for employment, students who are preparing to leave the University are encouraged to declare any ongoing mental health difficulties when using The Careers Service. Any such declaration will remain confidential (within the boundaries of confidentiality described above).
- 12.2 The decision of whether or not to disclose mental health difficulties to a potential employer will remain the preserve of the student. References supplied by the University will not comment on a student's health unless the student has specifically asked for it to be mentioned, e.g. as explanation for a period of absence or poor performance or to illustrate personal qualities, e.g. determination or the ability to overcome adversity.

13. Training, Understanding & Awareness

- 13.1 We will promote awareness of, and a positive and proactive approach to, mental health difficulties. We will seek to provide all staff that have a student-facing role with access to basic information which will enable them to signpost students to appropriate sources of support and specialist help. Staff are expected not to offer advice and support which goes beyond the limits of their responsibility or knowledge.

14. Publication and Review

- 14.1 We will publish this Policy and any associated advice and guidance annually to key postholders in Schools, Faculties and central Professional Support Services, make it available on our websites and promote it *via* our UG and PG Crucial Guides (Students) and our internal communication channels.
- 14.2 This Policy will be reviewed regularly and will be amended from time to time in accordance with legislative changes. When statutory law changes, the Policy is held automatically to have been amended by that change and it will be updated as soon as is practically possible.

Document control box: documents available online from: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/list.aspx	
Policy / Procedure title:	Student Mental Health Policy
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Next review date:	2013 - 2014
Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations:	Degree Regulations. Regulation XVII, Conduct & Discipline of Students.
Equality relevance outcome:	High
Related policies:	Equality & Diversity Policy, Dignity at Work and Study Policy, Admissions Policy, Mitigating Circumstances Policy, Data Protection Statement
Related procedures:	Referral of Students to University Support Services for Medical or Mental Health Reasons, Procedure for admitting applicants for courses requiring Medical Fitness Assessment, Procedure for applicants with a disability
Related guidance and or codes of practice:	Guidance for Staff Guidance for Students Guidance on writing references for students
Related information:	N/A
Policy owner:	Head of Student Support and Services (Pat Sponder)
Lead contact:	Student Experience Officer (Jenny Wragge)