



# University of Plymouth

## Supporting students experiencing mental health difficulties

“Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” (World Health Organization, 2005, *Promoting Mental Health: Concepts, Emerging evidence, Practice*).

“Around 300 people out of 1,000 will experience mental health problems every year in Britain”.  
(Goldberg, D. & Huxley, P, 1992, *Common mental disorders a bio-social model*).

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## **1. Introduction**

The University of Plymouth values the mental and physical well-being of its students and we are committed to providing an inclusive and supportive environment for them within the university community.

We recognise that many people experience mental health difficulties at some stage of their lives (sometimes as a typical reaction to a life event). Though many students in this situation will continue to manage university life and study successfully, we also understand that mental health difficulties can often impact on a person's ability to function in the short or long term.

Some mental health difficulties may be classed as a disability. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA) defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The Act places a positive duty on the university to develop a proactive stance in promoting disability equality and eliminating discrimination. The university makes reasonable adjustments for disabled people, including those with mental health difficulties.

We are committed to supporting students as far as we are able to, whether or not the mental health difficulties they are experiencing are covered by the DDA.

## **2. The university's commitment**

In order to underpin our commitment to supporting students experiencing mental health difficulties, we will:

- Make assessments of the support required by students to enable them to fulfil their potential.
- Provide a level of support in the context of the university's role as a centre of learning. We will assist students in identifying support, through signposting and referral to appropriate services, both within the institution and in the wider community. We will work collaboratively with, but will not seek to replicate, the work of external services. Our interventions will be informed by our wish to support students towards self-reliance, empowerment and independence.
- Provide staff with appropriate support and guidance to enable them to understand the particular requirements of students experiencing mental health difficulties.
- Support staff in their interactions with students with mental health difficulties.
- Encourage and develop practices known to promote and sustain student mental well-being and

- Direct staff and students to relevant information and guidance on promoting mental well-being.

### **3. Relationship to other policies**

The university has a range of other policies and procedures which may be relevant in a specific situation. These include:

- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan
- Harassment and Bullying Policy
- Health and Safety Procedures
- Regulations on late coursework and extenuating circumstances
- Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure for students
- Fitness to Practise procedures (where in place)
- Students with Disabilities or other Temporary Injuries and Conditions - Guidelines on Provisions for Assessment
- Accommodation arrangements for disabled students (including those with medical conditions and mental health issues)

### **4. Sources of support and information**

Within the university:

- Disability Assist Services
- Counselling Service
- Occupational Health
- University Chaplaincy

Out of hours, or in case of emergency:

- NHS Direct [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)  
Tel 0845 4647
- Samaritans [www.samaritans.co.uk](http://www.samaritans.co.uk)  
Tel 08457 909090 (24hr helpline)

- Student's GP practice
- Accident and Emergency

Appendices 1 and 2 of this document give further guidance to students experiencing mental health difficulties and to staff working with them.

## Appendix 1 : **Guidance for students experiencing mental health difficulties**

### **1. Confidentiality**

Information that you disclose to the university about any mental health difficulties you are experiencing will be considered confidential and will normally only be disclosed to others with your consent. For example, in order to address your support requirements, we may need to inform your tutors of the impact of your difficulties on your ability to study. If you choose not to disclose information about your difficulties, or if you limit the extent to which you permit disclosure to relevant others, this will impact upon the university's ability to implement appropriate support for you.

There are circumstances where the university's commitment to confidentiality is overridden by other considerations. These are:

- When your health and safety, or that of others, is considered to be at risk.
- When you are considered to be at serious risk of abuse or exploitation.
- When disclosure is required by law.
- When your current behaviour or health requirements compromise the university's responsibilities to outside agencies, including practice placements and partner institutions.
- When your current behaviour or health requirements compromise the university's responsibilities to other students to the extent that those other students are being adversely affected to the serious detriment of their academic progress.

### **2. Seeking support**

If you are experiencing mental health difficulties, there are a number of university departments which may be able to help you. As a starting point you may wish to contact support services such as:

- Disability Assist Services (DAS)
- The university Counselling Service
- The Chaplaincy

- UPSU Advice

You might also find it helpful to talk to one of the following:

- Your personal tutor
- Your programme leader/Senior Tutor
- Your research supervisor
- Your Head of School

### **3. Impact on study or assessment**

In line with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, we will make reasonable adjustments for you in respect of access to learning, teaching and related services at the university. A reasonable adjustment is an action that helps to reduce the affect of a disability or difficulty that places a student at a substantial disadvantage whilst studying or being assessed.

The university encourages you to declare any mental health difficulties that you believe may be affecting your ability to study or your performance in assessments, so that your support requirements can be assessed and reasonable adjustments to help you can be put in place. These measures may include a Modified Assessment Provision (MAP).

Mental health difficulties may arise at any time during your time at university. The following advises you on what action you should take at various stages:

- **When you apply for admission to the university**

If you are applying to the university, we encourage you to declare any existing mental health difficulties on application so that we can assess your support requirements and put measures in place in good time to make your university experience more positive. If you advise us of longer term mental health difficulties (e.g. those that are likely to have lasted for three months or more at the time you start study with us, or are life-long) at the time you apply, we will ask you to meet with Disability Assist Services and your Faculty to discuss your support requirements at an information meeting, once you have been accepted on academic grounds. As part of this process, we may ask your permission for the Occupational Health service to contact your GP or consultant for further information about the impact of your difficulties. DAS will also advise you about applying for the Disabled Student Allowance (provided you are eligible for it).

- **If you develop mental health difficulties during your time at the university, or if your existing difficulties worsen**

Mental health difficulties may develop during your time at university, or existing conditions may become more serious or difficult to manage. If this is the case, you should:

Seek support via DAS

If you are diagnosed as having long term mental health difficulties (including those that are “episodic” in nature) after you commence study at the university, or if you feel that a previously manageable condition is worsening, you should contact DAS to discuss your support requirements in relation to your studies. As part of this process, we may ask your permission for the Occupational Health service to contact your GP or consultant for further information about the impact of your difficulties. DAS will also advise you about applying for the Disabled Student Allowance (provided you are eligible for it).

#### Seek support via Student Counselling Service

If you develop mental health difficulties during your time at university, or existing conditions become more difficult to manage, you might consider contacting the Student Counselling Service to explore the options available for therapeutic support. If time-limited counselling is assessed to be inappropriate or insufficient, and if the service is unable to offer longer term work, the service will assist you in identifying alternative support, through signposting and referral to other services.

We recognise that there can be considerable delays in receiving help from outside services and that once established, it may not be sufficient to help particularly vulnerable students in good time. In such cases, the Student Counselling Service will consider the appropriateness of providing you with some continuity of support during the referral process and beyond.

If you are already in receipt of therapeutic support, or have ongoing/long-term mental health issues for which you have regular input from statutory mental health services, the appropriateness of any additional input from the Student Counselling Service will need to be considered carefully and any relevant issues discussed with you.

#### Follow the Extenuating Circumstances: Chronic Ill Health procedure

In addition to seeking support via DAS, you may be advised to complete a Chronic Ill-Health Notification Form which you can obtain from your Faculty Office and submit it to your Faculty Registrar. You will need to provide supporting evidence from your hospital consultant, specialist or GP. The evidence will need to include confirmation that the condition which you are experiencing is chronic and must also include information on the prognosis, duration and a description of the symptoms you experience during an acute episode. The Faculty Registrar will notify your Programme Leader and Module Leader(s) and Disability Assist Services, if you have not already been in contact with them.

If you experience an acute episode which affects your study and/or assessment, you should submit an extenuating circumstances form to confirm which particular modules have been affected. However, you will not normally be required to submit further corroborative evidence. Additional evidence will only be required if there is a change in your condition (either a significant improvement or deterioration).

It may also be possible that the university identifies that you appear to be experiencing difficulties, such as:

- When you have submitted claims for extenuating circumstances for the same reason on two occasions.

- When you do not appear to be making effective progress with your studies.
- Where a member of staff or a fellow student becomes concerned that changes in your behaviour or your response to a particular situation might indicate that you are having problems.
- Where the consequences of your mental health difficulties are causing concerns for fellow students and staff.

If so, you will be recommended to see the appropriate professionals within the university (e.g. Occupational Health, Disability Assist Services). You will then be invited to attend a case conference to discuss your history and current difficulties and, with your input, to identify solutions. More information about how the case conference procedure operates can be found in the regulations on “Late Coursework and Extenuating Circumstances”, which you can access via the student portal. Sometimes, ongoing case conferences will be required to monitor and review these arrangements if you have continuing difficulties.

- **If you experience temporary/short term mental health difficulties**

Not all mental health difficulties are long-term conditions. If short term/temporary problems are interfering with your ability to study or complete assessments, you should use the extenuating circumstances procedure to report them. You will be required to provide supporting evidence of your difficulties (such as a letter from your GP or other support professional). You can obtain more information about this procedure via the student portal or from your Faculty.

You may also be able to access support for short term difficulties via DAS or from the Student Counselling Service and you are encouraged to contact the Services to discuss this.

#### **4. Interruption of studies**

However supportive the university environment may be, we recognise that there may be times when you are unable to study effectively. In these circumstances, the best course of action may be for you to interrupt your studies until your mental health improves.

There may also be times when the university identifies that interruption of your studies should be explored. If this is the case, we may refer you to the Occupational Health Service for an assessment. Occupational Health may, in turn, ask for permission to contact your GP or consultant for further information about the impact of your difficulties. We would then discuss this with you. The university would expect you to engage with this process, which will enable us to obtain professional guidance on your state of health and help identify ways forward. It may then be the case that the university would require you to interrupt your studies, but we anticipate that this would only happen very exceptionally and only if no other way forward were feasible.

## **5. Fitness to practise**

In a number of vocational programmes, the impact of mental health difficulties may be such as to compromise your fitness to practise. If there are concerns about the impact on your competence to practise, the university will need to explore these with you and, where appropriate, with other services such as Occupational Health or your medical advisers before a decision is taken on how your case will be taken forward.

## **6. Disciplinary issues**

All students are responsible for the consequences of their own behaviour. If you have told us about your mental health difficulties and your behaviour is having a disruptive impact or is detrimental to the health and well-being of other members of the University, you may be subject to the university's Code of Conduct for Students and Disciplinary Procedure, which is designed to ensure the safe and productive conduct of university business.

There may be individual circumstances where formal disciplinary action would be suspended so that we can offer guidance and support to assist you in moderating that behaviour or minimising its impact on your colleagues.

If the university believes that an undiagnosed/undisclosed mental health difficulty may be impacting upon your behaviour, we may refer you to the Occupational Health Service for an assessment. Occupational Health may, in turn, ask for permission to contact your GP or consultant for further information about the impact of your difficulties. It may be that any formal disciplinary action would be suspended so that you can be offered appropriate guidance and support to assist you in managing your behaviour. (USAR asked for advice re ultimate decision to take action under disciplinary procedure).

## **7. Field work/ Work placements**

If your programme involves field work and/or a period of work placement, you should contact DAS at an early a stage as possible so that a dialogue involving yourself, DAS and your programme team can be established to identify the support and reasonable adjustments which may be necessary in order to ensure your well-being and safety and that of others. DAS will also be able

to advise on support through a Disabled Student's Allowance (if you are in receipt of it or are eligible to apply). In certain circumstances, a referral to Occupational Health may be appropriate.

## **8. Employment**

The university understands the difficulties faced by some students with mental health difficulties in preparing applications for employment, particularly when studies have been interrupted or performance potentially affected by those difficulties. If you are in this situation, the Careers Service will be able to assist you in considering issues of disclosure, in discussing your career ambitions, and in presenting information in a realistic and constructive way. It is important that you discuss these issues well in advance of the time when you will be seeking employment.

## Appendix 2 – **Guidance for staff working with students experiencing mental health difficulties**

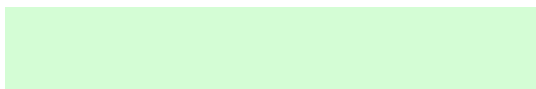
Staff should read the “Guidance for students experiencing mental health difficulties” (Appendix 1 of this document).


The university has also produced the following guidance:

- Guidelines for action: staff with concerns about a student’s well-being
- Guidelines for action: risk of serious harm to self or others

The 2009 version of these documents are appended, but staff should ensure that they familiarise themselves with the most up to date versions which may be accessed at: ([add web reference](#))

## Guidelines for action: staff with concerns about a student's well-being





If you are seriously concerned about a student's well-being and believe they are at risk of serious harm to themselves or others, or seem to be out of touch with reality, discussion with a professional, such as doctor, nurse or counsellor, is important to assess what action is needed.

- **The safety of the individual concerned and of those around them is paramount.**
- The Emergency Services should be called where there are clear indications that the student is in imminent and serious danger to themselves or others.
- Security should be contacted [**Security Emergency Line 3333**]
- Where possible, **the student should not be left alone.**
- Other staff and students should be asked to leave the area.

If time allows, the following may help you decide on the most appropriate course of action:

#### **CONTACT NUMBERS (PLYMOUTH)**

University Medical Centre	01752 222 341	
Gateway Psychiatric Services	01752 669 709	[Contact only if unable to contact GP and there is urgent psychological crisis]
Derriford Accident & Emergency	01752 792 511	[Students can self-present for a mental health assessment]
Home Treatment Team	01752 314033	[Contact if student has recently been in psychiatric unit (Glenbourne) or is already known to their service]

