

University of Edinburgh

Code of Practice on Student Mental Health

1 Introduction

This Code of Practice sets out guidance for helping, supporting, or referring students who may have mental health difficulties or illness at the University of Edinburgh. It should be read in conjunction with the leaflet '**Helping Distressed Students, a Guide for University staff**', which takes staff through a step by step process and approach both if the situation is urgent or if it does not require immediate action. It also provides a brief guide to a range of University support services that can also help students with mental ill health.

This guidance can be found at: -

<http://www.disability-office.ed.ac.uk/guidelines/distressedstudents.cfm>

2 Context

Mental health difficulties can occur at any time of life, and have the potential to affect any student's ability to fulfill the requirements of his or her course. The University of Edinburgh is committed to providing a positive academic experience and equality of opportunity for all students, and encourages those who feel that they are encountering mental health difficulties to make these known to the University.

3 Confidentiality

Information regarding a student's mental health will be treated with respect and the University will seek to ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are put in place. Information will not be shared more widely than necessary to provide support for students. In many cases the student will have given explicit informed consent for University staff (e.g. Directors of Studies and staff at Accommodation Services, the Student Counselling Service, the Disability Office, the University Chaplain, GPs and the Advice Place) to liaise when appropriate. If in doubt confidentiality should not be offered or guaranteed, for example if a member of staff is concerned that a student is at risk of self harm or may harm others. This is particularly important for staff members who are unable to carry the responsibility of being the only person who knows.

Students with mental health difficulties are protected by the Disability Discrimination Act.

4 Roles and responsibilities

The aim of the University's policy is to assist staff to support students, but staff should recognize that there is no expectation that they themselves are

responsible for any mental health diagnosis. Staff should be clear about their specific responsibilities relating to their role, to ensure that students are suitably supported and referred on as appropriate. Members of staff who have a pastoral role should be encouraged to attend any relevant training offered to assist them in their role.

In general, students should be involved in all decisions affecting their welfare; however, this may not always be possible because of the nature and degree of their illness. The University will endeavour to postpone any decision about the student's academic study until he or she is able to participate in an informed way in discussions. In extreme circumstances, however, the University reserves the right compulsorily to suspend the student without his or her permission under: <http://www.aaps.ed.ac.uk/regulations/CodeofDisciplineJune2004.htm>

4.1 *Initial concerns about a student's mental health*

If a member of staff is concerned about a student's mental health, the student should in the first instance be advised to seek help from any of the support services listed below depending on the nature of the concern.

- The student's own GP or the University Health Service www.health-service.ed.ac.uk
- The Disability Office www.disability-office.ed.ac.uk
- The Student Counselling Service www.student-counselling.ed.ac.uk
- The University Chaplaincy www.chaplaincy.ed.ac.uk
- Accommodation Service www.accom.ed.ac.uk
- Crisis centre www.edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk
- Royal Edinburgh Hospital Psychiatric Emergency Team (PET) 0131 537 6000

Members of staff should be aware that The Advice Place and the University of Edinburgh Students' Association are able to offer independent advice on the University procedures and services, and some information on external agencies assisting with mental health difficulties, but students should not be referred here in the first instance. www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/advice

The Helping Distressed Student Leaflet, <http://www.disability-office.ed.ac.uk/guidelines/distressedstudents.cfm> will guide staff through non urgent to urgent situations.

4.2 *On-going concerns about a student's mental health*

Where the University is aware of an on-going situation relating to a student's mental health, and where the student has given his or her informed consent, the University will work towards the provision of co-ordinated support to encourage the student to fulfill his or her academic potential. This co-ordination is vital since a student with mental health difficulties may be accessing a range of support services within the University at the same time. It will normally be the case that a relevant member of academic staff will form

part of this co-ordinated support. It is expected that the member of staff who becomes aware of the need for co-ordinated support initiates the joint response.

4.3 *Emergency situations*

Any member of staff who encounters what he or she considers to be an emergency situation relating to a student's mental health should contact whichever of the following will be of most immediate help.

- the student's GP or the University Health Service
- Security (2222) <http://www.ed.ac.uk/emergency.html>
- the police (who will probably summon the duty Mental Health Officer)

Where possible, another member of staff should also be contacted, since staff must consider their own safety and that of the student. After taking emergency action, the member of staff should ensure that the student's College Office, especially the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Dean (as appropriate), is informed. If the student is a tenant of University accommodation, the College Office should keep Accommodation Services informed of any action and progress. The College Office, after consulting the student's medical advisers, and Director of Studies or Postgraduate Supervisor, should consider who else should be informed. Such a decision need not be taken in a hurry. When a student is admitted to hospital, staff there will take responsibility for contacting the student's next of kin.

4.4 *Support for members of staff*

Staff working with students who have mental health difficulties should consider what support they need to do this competently. Professional consultation from the student services should be sought and managers informed where there is cause for concern where a student at risk of self harm or is a risk to others. Staff members are encouraged to attend relevant training sessions, where available.

Additional Resources – on understanding mental health

<http://www.healthscotland.org.uk/smhfa/>

<http://www.edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk/>

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/>

www.healthmatters.ed.ac.uk

Counselling for staff:

www.humanresources.ed.ac.uk/Counselling/Counselling.htm

Other relevant regulations, codes of practice and guidelines can be found at <http://www.aaps.ed.ac.uk/regulations/>

Appendix 1

Action in the Longer Term

Longer term measures to deal with any student who displays disruptive behaviour which may be caused by mental illness should be based upon the results of medical assessment and should be consistent with the interests of the student concerned and those of the University community as a whole.

(i) Remaining enrolled at the University with no conditions

The University may take no action. The College Office should seek advice from the student's G.P., Director of Studies or Postgraduate Supervisor and any other appropriate person. The College Office may then confirm that the student is permitted to remain enrolled at the University with no treatment. This decision should be reported to the Registry and, where relevant, to Accommodation Services for information.

(ii) Remaining enrolled at the University subject to conditions

The University may require the student to meet certain conditions if he/she is to remain enrolled. It may require the student to seek appropriate medical advice and it may, alternatively or in addition, impose conditions with regard to the student's behaviour over a specified period of time. Such conditions here and in 4(iii) below could include, for example, stopping disrupting classes, permission to sit examinations only if special accommodation arrangements are available or a requirement that an individual graduate *in absentia*.

Failure to comply with the conditions may result in the student's case being reported to and reviewed by the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Dean, or by the nominee of the Head of College. Continued failure to comply with the conditions could result in action being taken under the Code of Student Discipline against behaviour defined as misconduct under the General Statement on Discipline. Such action would be taken only where it was necessary to stop serious disruption to staff and students, or if there was any threat to the physical safety of the ill student, other students, or staff.

(iii) Remaining enrolled at the University subject to conditions but with eligibility for University-owned residential accommodation reviewed

The University may require the student to meet certain conditions as outlined in (ii) above. Under certain circumstances, where other students' living and learning environment is very likely to be disrupted by the ill student's behaviour, Accommodation Services will have the option of allocating alternative and more suitable accommodation (if such is available) or of terminating the accommodation agreement.

(iv) Suspension of study

A student choosing to suspend studies will be suspended from the University under the normal University policy governing suspensions (for postgraduate students) or leave of absence (for undergraduate students). This is a temporary arrangement, and will be for a fixed period of time. It assumes that the student is away from the University. The right to use University of Edinburgh computing and library facilities will be temporarily withdrawn. The initial period of suspension/leave of absence will normally be to the end of the academic year. There will be the potential for renewal to a maximum period of two years, after which, if the student is unable to resume studies, he/she will be required to withdraw from the University or will be formally excluded from further study in the School.

With certain exceptions, no student may be suspended from the University without his/her consent unless under the provisions of the Code of Discipline. The exceptions are students in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine and the Moray House School of Education and students in the College of Humanities and Social Science on certain placements. Such students, if they display disruptive behaviour which may be caused by mental health, can be suspended from the University by the relevant Head of College with or without consent.

On receiving notification from the College Office that a student has suspended studies, the University normally has a responsibility to report this to sponsors. For undergraduate students, the Registry reports leave of absence to the appropriate LEA/Awards Agency, but not to any other sponsor. For postgraduate students, the information on a suspension should be passed on by the College Office. Undergraduate grant funding would normally be temporarily suspended until further notification is sent confirming that the student is fit and has resumed studies.

When a student living in university-owned accommodation suspends studies, Accommodation Services should be informed by the College Office and may review their contract with the student. If the student suspends studies for more than 6 weeks, such a review will be automatic. In some cases, the review will lead to a recommendation from Accommodation Services that the accommodation contract should be terminated. If the student does not leave the accommodation willingly, a Notice to Quit will be issued by Accommodation Services.

(v) Emergency removal of a student from the University

Exceptional situations may occur in which a student may be judged to be out of contact with reality and unaware of the consequences of his/her actions, and/or where a student is potentially harmful to him/herself or others. Action to remove the student from the University may be taken by one of the following:

- The University Health Service/ student's own G.P. or
- The Psychiatric Service based at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital or

- The police

in accordance with the procedure outlined in para. (ii) above.

Re-admission following suspension of study or leave of absence

When a student has suspended studies on medical grounds, voluntarily or involuntarily, the College will require medical certification before re-admission of the student can be considered by the University. The College will need to be satisfied that the mental illness has been brought under control.

Colleges will not be able to guarantee that a particular course would still be available, although every effort will be made to help a recovered student and to offer a suitable alternative course. The decision to readmit the student will be taken by the College, usually by the Dean of Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies or their equivalents. The College should then notify the student, the school, the Registry and if appropriate the LEA/Awards Agency or other sponsor to say whether or not re-admission has been granted.

Students who are re-admitted following a suspension of their studies may apply for a place in University-owned accommodation. Accommodation Services will endeavour to be as helpful as possible, giving support as practicable. They should review each case individually, according to its special needs, and they should do their best to provide such students with their first choice of accommodation.

Withdrawal by students

The following steps will be taken in processing all withdrawals due to mental illness and/or disruptive emotional behaviour:

1. Students who have withdrawn have no right to remain in University-owned accommodation. Accommodation Service staff will check students who were staying in University accommodation out of their rooms and will receive their room keys.
2. Withdrawals should be processed by the College, who should inform the Registry, the Computing Services and Library in order to cancel the student's user rights, and should receive the student's University card. The student's record will show that the student has withdrawn from studies "for health reasons".
3. Any references concerning academic progress and results to date should be handled in discussion with the Dean of Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies of the College concerned (or their equivalent or nominee), the Registry and, if appropriate, the Head of School or Director of Studies or Postgraduate Supervisor.