

POLICY ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

1. Introduction

The University of Bristol is committed to creating a non-discriminatory and supportive environment for our students. The Disability Discrimination Act places a duty on institutions not to discriminate against disabled students (including those with mental health difficulties), either in terms of admission to courses or in the provision of education and support services. Accordingly, and wherever possible, we will make reasonable adjustments to enable individual students to participate and engage in all aspects of university life. To help this process, students are encouraged to disclose any mental health difficulty to the University, preferably pre-admission, so that staff from Support Services and academic colleagues can work with the student to agree the types of adjustments that may reasonably be provided.

This policy sets out the overall process that should be adopted to support such students through the following stages:

- Support that can be provided in the first instance
- Agreed suspension of studies
- Case conference
- Emergency exclusion

2. Supporting Students

Where a student's performance or behaviour is being adversely affected by a mental health difficulty, that student should be encouraged to make use of available support services, such as Student Counselling or Student Health. The student should also be referred to the Access Unit where an assessment of support needs and of any funding that may be available to the student can take place. Academic colleagues should also consider any reasonable adjustments to modes of study and/or assessment that would enable the student to continue with his/her programme.

3. Agreed Suspension of Studies

In some circumstances, where it might be beneficial to the successful completion of the programme or otherwise appropriate, it may be necessary to encourage the student to agree to a suspension of studies to provide him/her with time away from his/her studies to recover. After expiry of the agreed period of suspension, studies may be resumed only after satisfactory medical evidence has confirmed that the student is fit and able to cope with the academic demands that will be placed upon him/her. The University will seek to provide appropriate and reasonable support to the student upon his/her return to study.

4. Emergency Exclusion

Where the health, safety or welfare of the student or of others is at immediate risk, and where circumstances indicate that this may be due to mental ill health, the University will issue a short-term exclusion in accordance with the Regulation on Suspension or Exclusion on the Grounds of Health, Safety or Welfare (see Annex A).

5. Case Conferences

Following the issuing of an emergency exclusion order or where a member of staff believes that a student's mental health is having an adverse impact on the student's performance or behaviour, or on other students or members of staff, a case conference should be convened. The Head of Department (who may delegate this responsibility as appropriate) is responsible for arranging the case conference. This will provide an opportunity for appropriate representatives from the academic department and Support Services to review the case and make recommendations, designed to support the needs and academic progress of the student. The case conference may recommend reasonable adjustments to enable continuation of studies, request additional medical evidence, or recommend a suspension of studies in accordance with the Regulation for the Suspension of Studies or Exclusion on the Grounds of Health, Safety and Welfare. Conditions may be attached to the suspension depending on the individual circumstances of each case. In advance of a student resuming his/her studies after an agreed period of suspension the case conference may reconvene to develop a Return to Study plan.

6. Voluntary or Involuntary Suspension

Students should be encouraged to accept any course of action recommended by a case conference. If at any point the student agrees to suspend study or withdraw from his/her programme, the matter shall be handled in the same way as any other suspension or withdrawal on the grounds of ill health. However, where the student does not agree to a suspension of studies as recommended by a case conference the University may take steps to suspend the student under the Regulation on Suspension or Exclusion on the Grounds of Health, Safety or Welfare.

In such circumstances staff should refer to the appropriate Undergraduate or Graduate Dean, who may then seek advice and assistance from the Secretary's Office.

7. Responsibilities

The Undergraduate or Graduate Dean is responsible for encouraging adherence to this policy at Faculty level. He/she is also responsible for informing the Secretary's Office of any referrals under paragraph 5.

The Equality and Diversity Manager is responsible for maintaining the policy and attendant guidelines on issues related to student mental health and should be notified when case conferences are convened. The Equality and Diversity Committee, in consultation with other relevant Committees, will monitor the policy and undertake periodic reviews to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

ANNEX A

REGULATION FOR THE SUSPENSION OF STUDIES OR EXCLUSION ON THE GROUNDS OF HEALTH, SAFETY OR WELFARE

1. Suspension or Exclusion

- 1.1 Where a student's behaviour represents a significant risk to the health, safety or welfare of him/herself or others and where circumstances indicate that this may be due to mental ill health he/she may be excluded, suspended or required to withdraw from the University by the Vice-Chancellor.
- 1.2 A significant risk to health, safety or welfare includes, but is not limited to, situations where the student's behaviour amounts to:
 - a. a significant obstruction of or improper interference with the functions, duties or activities of any student, member of staff or any visitor to the University; or
 - b. harm or potential harm to the health, safety or welfare of members of the University community, including the student who is the subject of the suspension, exclusion or requirement to withdraw; or
 - c. damage or potential damage to the property of the University or the property of a member or members of the University community;
- 1.3 Written reasons for the exclusion or suspension will be recorded and made available to the student.

2. Exclusion

- 2.1 A short-term exclusion order may be made at any time and with immediate effect.
- 2.2 A student who is subject to an exclusion order is prohibited from entering University premises and from participating in University activities. The exclusion may, exceptionally, be subject to qualification, such as permission to take an examination. The terms of the exclusion will be individual to each case and will be notified to the student in writing. An exclusion order may include a requirement that the student shall have no contact with a specified person or persons. An order of exclusion does not affect the student's status as a member of the University.
- 2.3 Where an exclusion order has been made the decision to exclude will be reviewed under Regulation 4 as soon as possible, normally within four weeks. The review may include a recommendation that a case conference be convened under the Policy on Student Mental Health.

3. Suspension

- 3.1 An order for a longer-term suspension may only be made by the Vice-Chancellor upon the recommendation of a case conference under the Policy on Student Mental Health.
- 3.2 A student who is suspended from the University may be prohibited from participating in University activities and may either be prohibited from entering University premises or have restricted rights to enter University premises. The terms of the suspension will be notified to the student in

writing. The terms shall also specify whether the student ceases to be registered for the period of the suspension and whether an additional period of study will therefore be required if he/she is permitted to return. Any such terms will depend on the individual circumstances of each case. An order of suspension may include a requirement that the student shall have no contact with a specified person or persons.

- 3.3 Where suspension has been made the decision to suspend will be reviewed under Regulation 4 as soon as possible, normally within four weeks.
- 3.4 Further reviews may take place at a time recommended by the case conference. Suspensions may be reviewed sooner than recommended if warranted by a change of circumstance.

4. Review

- 4.1 A review of an exclusion or suspension shall be conducted by the Vice-Chancellor, where necessary with the advice of a further case conference under the Policy on Student Mental Health.
- 4.2 The student is entitled to be present at any review and may be represented by an adviser, friend or other representative. Alternatively the student may send a representative to the review or make written representations.
- 4.3 The University may require the student to undergo a medical assessment by a practitioner it nominates before the Vice-Chancellor reviews any decision to exclude or suspend.
- 4.4 At the conclusion of any review the Vice-Chancellor shall decide on the future disposition of the matter. If a short-term exclusion becomes a suspension or a suspension continues, a decision will be made on when further reviews will take place. Further reviews must take place at least every six months and suspensions will not normally be continued for longer than 12 months. A final review will take place after 12 months when the Vice-Chancellor will decide whether the student should be readmitted to the University or be required to withdraw or, in exceptional circumstances, whether the order for suspension should remain in place for a further specified period.
- 4.5 If at any point the student agrees to suspend study or withdraw from his/her programme, the matter shall be handled in the same way as any other suspension or withdrawal on the grounds of ill health.

5. Appeals

- 5.1 The student may appeal to Council against a suspension or requirement to withdraw. A letter setting out the grounds of appeal should be addressed to the University Secretary, to be received within 21 days of the date on which the order for suspension or the requirement to withdraw was made.
- 5.2 The membership and procedure of an appeal committee will be the same as that set out under the Student Complaints Procedure.

6. Nominees

References in these Regulations to the Vice-Chancellor or the University Secretary shall be construed to refer either to the Vice-Chancellor or University Secretary or to their respective nominees.