

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

STRATEGY STATEMENT RELATING TO THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF STUDENTS

Introduction

The University asserts that people have as much right to mental health as they do to physical health and consequently affirms the necessity of promoting mental health within the whole community.

The term, 'mental health' is used in this document to refer to the spectrum of experiences ranging from the experience of feeling mentally well and maintaining habits that support mental wellbeing, to having a diagnosis of a serious mental health problem and not engaging in activities or habits that support and promote mental wellbeing. The University understands that many individuals recover from mental health problems and anticipates the probability of recovery for the majority of people.

All students and staff are encouraged to participate proactively and collaboratively in the promotion of mental health and to use the full range of University and community resources in order to support and maintain mental health and wellbeing.

The University takes its role seriously in providing the means to maintain and promote mental health. It aims to:

- **promote** mental health and wellbeing through its implementation and review of management policies, support services, information networks, mental health promotion and anti-stigma campaigns, and by liaising appropriately with students, staff and external agencies
- **provide** support and advice, appropriate and proportionate to the type and seriousness of difficulty experienced
- **nurture** a spirit of institutional positivity, and a culture of awareness and self-management, with an emphasis on the value of **resilience**, "the capacity to remain well, recover, or even thrive in the face of adversity"¹
- **encourage** in students and staff the ability to relativize difficult experiences, viewing them in context.

Scope

This strategy articulates the commitment of the University in relation to the mental health and wellbeing of students. It also offers guidance to staff who are concerned about the mental health of students with whom they work.

This strategy applies to all matriculated students studying at the University of St Andrews, on a full or part-time basis. It is noted that the majority of students are autonomous adults with the right to determine whether they make use of any assistance available. The strategy may also be invoked by the University where relevant with a prospective student who has accepted an offer to study at St Andrews.

The University Human Resources Unit is responsible for assisting staff with mental health difficulties.

Context

¹ Hardy, S., Concato, J., Gill, T.M., *Resilience of community-dwelling older persons*. J Am Geriatr Soc. 2004;52:257–262

The University is committed to providing an environment conducive to the academic, social and personal welfare and development of all students. Members of the University are therefore expected to work collaboratively with students in promoting and enabling mental health and wellbeing².

Nobody comes to university to stay the same. Students who engage in university study are usually aware that they will be studying at a more advanced level than before. In addition, moving to university often involves students separating from familiar environments, friends and family. Many students will, at times, experience negative emotional responses to being challenged academically within an environment where their support networks are only embryonic or still to be established. However university should also be an exciting time, facilitating the development of independent advanced learning, independent life skills, and opportunities to integrate with a diverse community of people.

The University of St Andrews provides a range of support and advice for students to assist them as they progress through transitions. We believe that students should be supported in taking responsibility for their own mental health and wellbeing and we encourage them to seek help from staff in Student Services, if they experience mental health difficulties. This support continues throughout the whole study programme as students extend their personal, academic and social horizons.

Actions under this Strategy

Mental health and wellbeing are the responsibility of all staff and students. Each person within the University community shares a duty of care to respectfully assist and support one another. However the university is additionally responsible for balancing the rights of individuals with the overall duty of care to all staff and students.

University staff have a key role in responding to the needs of students exhibiting mental health problems.

- Any member of staff who is seriously concerned for the welfare of a student should contact the Director of Student Services or her staff. The simplest way to make contact is by emailing theasc@st-andrews.ac.uk
- When a student's health or behaviour seriously affects the individual student and/or others then the University Fitness to Study Policy details the procedure to be followed.
- On an individual basis, assisting students cope with mental health problems will primarily be the responsibility of Student Services, but everyone has a role to play. Student Services aims:
 - to work collaboratively with students as they identify specific barriers to study;
 - to assist students in finding ways to overcome or manage these barriers;
 - not to diagnose or medicalize all mental health difficulties, but to assess each case as appropriate and proportionate.

More detailed information about these services and resources are contained within Appendix 1 of this Strategy.

² WHO definition of Mental Health http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/

- The university will provide non-medical support in emergencies throughout evenings and weekends. In cases of severe mental health difficulties, whilst staff will provide immediate support, they will, as swiftly as possible, facilitate referral of students to appropriate NHS medical care.
- If a member of staff feels unsafe or threatened by a student they should contact the University Security Manager (01334 463967), the Police (999) and Student Services. Out of Hours simply phone 01334 476161

Governance

The University's MHWS interacts with several of the University's established policies, most notably, but not exclusively, the following:

- The Health and Safety Policy
- Student Fitness to Study Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Fitness to Practice Medicine Policy
- Sexual Misconduct Policy
- Missing Student Protocol
- Procedures relating to student misuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances
- University Data Protection Code – Students
- Academic regulations and processes, including academic alerts, leave of absence and the Senate appeals process

The University's Duty of Care towards its students is ultimately determined by legislation, including, but not exclusively, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Data Protection Act 1998, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010, the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, the Freedom of Information Act (2000), and Special Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2000).

Internal interaction with specific University policies (e.g. on academic regulations and confidentiality) can be found in this strategy's attached Appendix 1, giving detailed information for students. Appendices 2 and 3 offer guidance on responding to students with mental health issues of, respectively, emergency and non-emergency situations.