

NFTS Mental Health Policy

Introduction

The aims of this policy are:

- To set out the framework in the which the School provides students with mental health difficulties the opportunity to reach their full potential
- To provide practical advice and guidance to staff responding to students with mental health difficulties (appendix 1)

Policy Statement

The NFTS aims to provide an accessible and supportive environment in which all students, including those with mental health difficulties, have the opportunity to realise their full potential and meet the academic requirements of their programmes of study.

The School aims to promote a culture in which mental health difficulties are recognised and supported. It will ensure that students are not disadvantaged, academically or otherwise, because of their difficulties in accordance with the School's Equality and Diversity Policy. The School has an important duty to ensure that all of its policies and practices are inclusive in relation to students with mental health difficulties and has a serious commitment to carrying out its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

The School expects all staff to act in accordance with guidance published by the Student Support and Wellbeing team in the support of students with mental health difficulties.

The School seeks to implement this aim by:

- Providing pastoral and wellbeing support services within the School, and access to specialist external services including counselling and mental health mentoring.
- Encouraging students with mental health difficulties to make these known to the School and to seek support both prior to their arrival and after they have started their course
- Take a proactive and collaborative approach in working with individual students to develop a support plan
- Provide guidance, training and support to staff involved in supporting students
- Building and maintaining links with specialist services to improve the provision of services to meet students' needs and referring students with mental health difficulties to services when appropriate.

Students are encouraged to engage appropriately and professionally with the support made available by the School, including external support where necessary. There are, of necessity, limits to the extent of the support that can be provided and it is not the responsibility of the School to replicate services that already exist within the wider community and within the NHS. The School cannot provide treatment for mental illness but aims to provide an environment and the resources to support students to maximise their sense of wellbeing.

Guidance for staff

The guidance provided in appendix 1 is concerned with the needs of and responsibilities to all students, regardless of whether they currently have or have previously experienced mental health difficulties. This includes students whose mental health difficulties inhibit their ability to participate fully in higher education, be it a long term mental illness, an emerging mental health difficulty, or a temporary but debilitating condition or reaction to life events.

Fitness to Study

In exceptional circumstances, where there are concerns about a student's welfare or that of other members of the School community and where the range of measures that the School may reasonably be expected to provide have been employed but have not satisfactorily resolved concerns, the School may need to invoke the [Fitness to Study Policy](#).

The School will ensure that policy and provision regarding student mental health are regularly evaluated, developed and enhanced in order to meet the needs of our current and future students.

Appendix 1- Guidance for Staff

Boundaries

1. In supporting students with mental health difficulties it is vital that staff understand that they are not expected to replace the professional care and support that are the responsibility of the NHS. Staff should never allow a situation to develop where an individual case places personal demands upon them, extends the boundaries of their role with students or compromises their privacy, safety or impartiality. In all cases, personal safety overrides confidentiality.

Confidentiality

2. Confidentiality is a key issue in mental health concerns. All staff within the School have a legal obligation under the Data Protection Act 2018 to treat a student's physical or mental health as sensitive personal data. It is important therefore that all staff recognise that they have a duty to maintain strict confidentiality within the School in respect of students and must not disclose information unless the student has given their consent or where in the reasonable opinion of the staff member it is in the vital interests of the student and/or the members of the university or wider community. It may be necessary to break confidentiality:
 - where the member of staff would be liable to civil or criminal proceedings if the information was not disclosed (for example if a crime had been committed);
 - where it is believed the student's mental health has deteriorated to such an extent that they have become a danger either to themselves or to others;
 - where a student is so ill that they lack insight into their condition and lacks the mental capacity to give informed consent.
3. It is always good practice to seek prior consent and/or to inform the student that such a disclosure is going to be made to a mental health professional or similar.
4. In cases where staff need to maintain confidentiality they can still access full consultative support from the Student Support and Wellbeing team and from the Registrar.
5. Staff may find that, when dealing with students experiencing mental health difficulties, they are contacted by concerned parents or other relatives requesting information about the student. Staff can offer a sympathetic ear and at times offer generic anonymised advice, but in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 personal information about a student must not be disclosed to anyone outside the University, including parents, without the student's prior permission.
6. If a parent or relative contacts a member of staff directly asking about a student, the member of staff should not confirm that the student is a student of the School but should take a note of the concerns being expressed and tell the parent or relative that

any appropriate action will be taken in response to the concern. Although some parents/relatives are unlikely to be happy with this response, it is important to remember that students have the right to privacy.

Record keeping

7. Staff should keep accurate, objective and succinct records of actions they take in managing students with mental health difficulties. Such records will demonstrate the support that has been offered to students and the basis on which any decisions or referrals have been made. All records are subject to the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Dealing with Emergency Situations

8. An emergency situation may include a student demonstrating suicidal tendencies/thoughts, an imminent risk of serious harm to self or others, serious physical illness, and may have mental health concerns that leave the student with no capacity to make an informed decision about their wellbeing. **In this situation, staff should dial 999 and call the emergency services.** If the emergency services are contacted, either the Registrar or the School's Director should be informed. Reception/Security should also be informed.
9. For a mental health crisis situation out of normal office hours, that does not constitute an emergency, the appropriate service may be:
 - The student's GP and the 'out of hours' number
 - NHS 111. You can call 111 when medical help is needed fast but it's not a 999 emergency
10. Further advice can be found on the Workplace pages of [Student Support and Wellbeing](#) and [NFTS staff](#), including details of local support services.

Non-Urgent Concerns

11. In some cases, the behaviour of a student may not present an immediate crisis but still causes concern. Department staff may become aware of students who they consider to be in slow decline and it is important to address this situation to avoid the possibility of it escalating into a crisis. The School encourages all parties to engage in early intervention and to take an active, collaborative and supportive stance. Staff may become aware that there is a problem when a student persistently misses scheduled sessions, fails to meet deadlines or their performance deteriorates markedly.

Students may exhibit uncharacteristic behaviours which cause concern such as:

- appearing persistently anxious, suspicious, depressed or fatigued;
- agitated, bizarre or aggressive behaviour;
- repetitive conflict with others, problems maintaining relationships or social withdrawal;
- obvious weight loss, being significantly underweight or wearing inappropriately warm clothing where staff suspect a student is significantly underweight;
- unkempt personal appearance or extreme inability to maintain living environment;

- visible untreated injury, cuts or recent scarring;
 - social media postings.
12. If a member of staff has particular concerns about a student it may be appropriate to ask colleagues if they share concerns about the student's wellbeing. Staff can also seek advice from Student Support and Wellbeing or the Registrar, who are happy to talk to anyone with worries about a student.
13. The first step in responding to a concern would normally be for the member of staff who has identified a cause for concern to speak to the student to try and find out more about their situation. Staff may discover that the student is already accessing appropriate support and this may allay concerns. If the student is not accessing support, they should be encouraged to speak to Student Support and Wellbeing. However, if the conversation with the student does not provide this reassurance and the student is reluctant to talk, the member of staff should seek further advice and guidance from Student Support and Wellbeing.

Support for staff

14. Supporting students with mental health issues can be challenging and at times, upsetting. Staff who would like to access support for themselves to help with this should contact the HR team who can advise on the available sources of help.