

NFTS Mental Health Policy

Introduction

The aims of this policy are:

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

Definition of Mental Health

Mental health can be defined not just in terms of the absence of mental disorder, but is a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. (WHO)

Mental health difficulties exist across a spectrum of states of mind and behaviours, from temporary responses to painful events through to more debilitating and persistent conditions.

Policy Statement

The NFTS aims to provide an accessible and supportive environment in which all students and apprentices experiencing mental health difficulties are offered appropriate support in order to provide them with the opportunity to realise their full potential and meet the requirements of their course or apprenticeship.

All references to 'students' in this policy should be read as including apprentices.

The School seeks to implement these aims by:

- Working towards creating a culture in which conversations surrounding mental health are actively encouraged and stigma is openly challenged;
- Making reasonable adjustments to policies and procedures which may otherwise discriminate against students with mental health difficulties;
- 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;
- Delivering effective support services which are easy to access and meet the needs of a diverse student body;
- Ensuring that the availability of support is accurately and widely publicised to students through effective communication;
- 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;
- Providing consultation, guidance and training to staff.

In seeking to implement these aims, the School recognises and understands its legal obligations including under the Equality Act in relation to students with mental health difficulties.

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.

Roles and Responsibilities

Staff

All staff are expected to:

- exercise their duty of care in their dealings with students; if a student shows signs of mental health difficulty, staff should offer or seek appropriate assistance, and refer to Appendix 1 (Guidance for Staff);
- recognise the boundaries of their role, understanding when, where and how to refer a student to a specialist internal or external service;
- familiarise themselves with this policy and the supporting guidance and apply it to their everyday work as appropriate;
- contribute to building an inclusive community;
- be aware of the principles of confidentiality and disclosure.

Students

- All students are expected to contribute to building an inclusive community;
- Those experiencing mental health difficulties are encouraged to inform the School at the earliest opportunity in order to receive appropriate support;
- Those who chose not to disclose should understand that this means that they may not be receiving all the support that is available to them;
- Those supporting friends and peers experiencing mental health difficulties should recognise their personal limits and know when to seek help and guidance.

The School

- Where a student discloses a mental health disability, the School has a responsibility to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made, including on a work placement, to prevent the student being unduly disadvantaged by this;
- The School has a responsibility to disseminate the information and guidance relating to this policy to all staff, and to ensure that individual staff members are made aware of their responsibilities;
- The School will ensure that appropriate training is provided to staff on recognising and supporting students experiencing mental health difficulties;

- The School recognises that supporting someone with a mental health difficulty can be distressing, particularly in a crisis scenario, and will ensure that support and debriefing is available to those affected.

Support and Services for Students

Students have access to individual advice and support from the Student Support and Wellbeing Service who can arrange referrals to a range of specialist services including counselling and mental health mentoring.

Students with disabilities, including mental health difficulties, have access to specialist support through the Disabled Students Allowance and students can be supported in their application through Student Support and Wellbeing.

Information, guidance and sources of support for students experiencing mental health difficulties are made available to students and staff through the Workplace page of Student Support and 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.

Extenuating Circumstances

Students whose mental health difficulty significantly affects their performance in an assessed piece of work, or affects their ability to complete an assessed piece of work or prevents them undertaking a piece of work or project altogether, may have this taken into account by the Final Board of Examiners using the School's [Extenuating Circumstances Policy](#).

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.

This Policy was revised in August 2024

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.
2. The School does not offer a crisis service and its services are not available 'out of hours'.

Confidentiality

3. Confidentiality is a key issue in mental health concerns. All staff within the School have a legal obligation under Data Protection legislation 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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 Data Protection legislation personal information about a student must not be disclosed to anyone outside the University, including parents, without the student's prior permission.

7. 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

8. 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 legislation and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Dealing with Emergency Situations

9. 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.
10. 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
11. 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

12. 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.
13. **Recognising students with mental health difficulties**
Everyone's experience of a mental health difficulty will be unique and different. Therefore the signs and indicators for someone experiencing a mental health difficulty will vary between individuals.
The indicators below do not directly mean that the student has a mental health difficulty. The indicators should only be used as a trigger to start a dialogue with the student about what they consider the problem to be. This will allow staff to offer support to the student where appropriate.

Any of the indicators below can affect anyone at some time in their life. However if a student is experiencing a number of these indicators over a period of time or there is an increase in their severity, it may be appropriate to offer support. Some general signs to look out for could include

Behavioural Changes	Cognitive Changes	Physical Changes
Withdrawal	Lack of concentration	Panic attacks
Changes in attendance	Mood swings	Noticeable weight gain/loss
Deterioration in academic performance	Loss of Confidence	Low energy
Acting out of character	Irritability	Decline in personal hygiene
Incongruent responses to situations	Feeling overwhelmed	Sleeping disturbances

14. 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.
15. 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

16. 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.

Appendix 2 - Useful external contacts

- **Student Assistance Programme (SAP)** - 24/7 helpline for NFTS students. Freephone 0800 028 3766. Support on mental health, financial difficulties, childcare support, legal advice, housing, student issues, relationship advice.
- **The Samaritans** Freephone 116 123 (Daily; 24 hours a day).
Web: www.samaritans.org.uk Confidential emotional support to anyone who is suicidal or despairing
- **Papyrus HOPEline UK (Suicide prevention charity)** – 0800 068 4141. Text: 07786209697. Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org (service is available from 9am- midnight everyday)

If you are having thoughts of suicide or are concerned for someone else, you can contact this helpline for confidential support and practical advice
- **Mind (Mental health charity)** -0300 123 3393 or text 86463 (service is available from Mon-Fri , 9am-6pm)

Provides information on types of mental health issues, where to get help, medication and alternative treatments and advocacy.
- **Film + TV Charity helpline** -0800 054 0000 (24 hour support line) Can provide advice about legal queries, mental health and wellbeing, financial troubles, family issues, bullying and discrimination, or your hopes and ambition

Crisis support and helplines

If you or someone you know is in mental health crisis and needs medical help fast:

- Ring 999 to contact emergency services
- Go to your nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department
(Nearest to A&E to Beaconsfield is Wexham Park Hospital. **Address** is Wexham Park
Slough, Berkshire, SL2 4HL. **Telephone** 0300 6145000)

To search for your nearest A&E please click on [Find Accident and emergency services services - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) and enter your postcode to where you live.

If it is not a medical emergency, but you still need urgent help:

- Ring 111 for professional health advice 24/7 and 365 days a year and guidance on where to access appropriate health services
- Make an appointment with your GP