

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy



Policy owner	Academic Affairs	Approval date and body	18/06/24 _ UMT
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1. Purpose

Mental health and wellbeing are essential to students' academic performance, capacity to learn, and ability to engage fully with and benefit from the wider social and cultural experience of higher education. The University recognises that a student's mental health and wellbeing can change throughout their studies and may be affected by many factors. The purpose of this policy is to articulate the University's commitment to providing an environment where all students have an equal opportunity to thrive and succeed. The policy establishes the principles that underpin, support and guide the University's *whole university approach* to student mental health and wellbeing and outlines the various roles and responsibilities relating to student mental health and wellbeing.

The aims of this policy are to

- promote and articulate a supportive, empathetic environment, which contributes to and fosters a culture of positive mental health and wellbeing for all students;
- promote and support a whole university approach, where the responsibility for mental health and wellbeing support is appropriately distributed and where all members of our community can contribute to a culture of positive mental health and wellbeing;
- provide clear information relating to sources of help and supports available to students;
- inform any supporting protocols that ensure clear and coordinated responses where students experience difficulties, distress or crisis.

2. Definitions

The definitions below draw on the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework, World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Mental Health Act, 2001 and the UCD Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy for Employees¹

2.1 Mental health

Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community. Most people experience mental health on a continuum ranging from good mental health to mental ill health and the support or interventions required will vary depending on where a person is on that continuum.

2.2 Mental illness/condition

Mental illness/condition refers to a person's state of mind, which affects their thinking, perceiving, emotion or judgement and which may impair their mental function to the extent that they may require care or medical treatment in their own interest or in the interest of others.

2.3 Mental health difficulty

Mental health difficulty and mental health issues are broad terms that describe mental distress that may or may not be temporary and/or be related to a diagnosable mental health condition.

¹ See *Note on Terminology*, page 5, [National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework](#); WHO mental health definition: https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/; Mental Health Act, 2001: section 3, paragraph.1 subsection 2: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2001/act/25/section/3/enacted/en/html>

2.4 Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a broad term that encompasses the overall health of a person, including but not limited to social, mental, financial, physical, spiritual and emotional health and which contributes to their feelings about their quality of life.

2.5 Whole University Approach

At UCD the *whole university approach* recognises that all aspects of University life can support and promotes wellbeing. The approach empowers all members of the University community to contribute positively to creating an environment where individuals are proactively supported and through effective structures, training and the provision of safe and accessible services².

3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all UCD students and staff of the University and provides specific guidance the staff who support student mental health and wellbeing. There is a separate [UCD Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy for Employees](#) which outlines how the University supports the mental health and wellbeing of employees.

3.2 The UCD student support services are available to students throughout their time at UCD. Services are intended to be complementary to, but not replace, those provided in the community or through the national Health Service Executive (HSE)³. Where students are already receiving support from mental health services prior to commencing their studies at UCD, they are strongly advised to maintain these supports. Students may require support during and after completing their studies and can only access UCD supports while registered as a UCD student.

4. Principles

The following principles are underpinned by the *whole university approach* and are informed by the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework.

4.1 The mental health of students is a shared commitment across the university community and all members of the community have a vital role and responsibility in relation to supporting each other's mental wellbeing.

4.2 The University's approach to student mental health and wellbeing will be driven by dedicated leadership to promote a culture of positive mental health and wellbeing for all students and to ensure student mental health and wellbeing is prioritised and incorporated into university strategic and operational planning, including policy development.

4.3 Recognising that mental health is a continuum, the University will promote and enable students' positive wellbeing and support students who experience mental health difficulties.

4.4 The University will work in partnership with staff, students and relevant external agencies, regarding the promotion, coordination, and enhancement of its approaches to student mental health and wellbeing.

² UCD whole university approach definition draws on [Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities](#), Universities UK.

³ The HSE provides Ireland's public health services, see [HSE Mental Health Services](#)

- 4.5 Considerations in relation to mental health and wellbeing supports will be cognisant of the diversity that exists within the student population, and seek to provide appropriate, relevant, accessible and flexible support to all students.
- 4.6 The University will provide students with a range of safe, effective, well-resourced and accessible supports suitable for supporting students with varying needs.
- 4.7 Student support services will be student-centered, inclusive and trauma-informed and will be continuously informed by best practice standards, training and evaluative student feedback.
- 4.8 The University will promote informed, constructive and empathetic attitudes towards student mental health and wellbeing issues through its policies, procedures and protocols and through its approaches to raising awareness and the delivery of training.
- 4.9 Staff will be supported in responding to students with mental health difficulties, distressed students and where students are in crisis through appropriate guidance and training. Related protocols will be accessible, student-centred, and trauma informed.
- 4.10 The University will provide a range of learning opportunities for students to develop wellbeing knowledge and skills.
- 4.11 The University is committed to ensuring the continued enhancement of this policy and its approach to student mental health and wellbeing through appropriate monitoring, evaluation and regular review.
- 4.12 The University respects students' right to privacy. All information shared by students will be treated with confidentiality. The only limitation to confidentiality is where it is deemed necessary to share information for the protection and safety of the student and others, particularly where it is believed that there is an immediate risk to someone's life or health⁴.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 UMT

The University Management Team will provide leadership in establishing a culture and environment, with enabling structures that are well resourced to support a whole university approach to student wellbeing.

5.2 All Staff

- Underpinned by the principle of a whole university approach, student mental health and wellbeing is a responsibility for all members of staff. It is acknowledged that students often approach a member of staff that they trust most, which could be any member of the University community. Regardless of specific roles, staff are expected to play their part in promoting an inclusive environment, which supports the promotion and protection of student mental health and wellbeing by making themselves aware of the University's strategy, policies, processes and

⁴ Other circumstances where information will be shared are: Where a disclosure may indicate a risk to children (under 18); where information is disclosed that indicates that a crime has been committed and where information is required by the Gardai or any other government or judicial body.

support services relating to student mental health and wellbeing. It is important that all staff are supported through appropriate guidance and training, to respond and signpost students to relevant supports. As such, all staff are encouraged to complete relevant training.

- Staff should be prepared and open to offering support to students. It is understood that they are not expected to assume responsibilities outside the parameters of their role and competence. Staff should be aware of wellbeing supports available to them and to students.
- Staff should be aware of their personal limitations and boundaries, particularly where someone may be in danger, or is potentially a danger to others. In this instance, staff should call the UCD Estate Services emergency number, 01 716 7999 when on campus, or off campus emergency services (999 or 112)
- Staff should have access to training that includes clear protocols and information about how to connect students to available resources and encourage them to seek support at the earliest opportunity.
- Where it is felt that a student is in immediate danger or is a danger to others on campus, staff should call UCD Campus Services emergency line (00353 1 716 7999) or the emergency services (telephone 999 or 112 if in Ireland) if off campus. The University's Distressed Student Protocol provides detailed guidelines for staff on responding to students seeking support relating to a mental health difficulty or students expressing or exhibiting signs of distress.

5.3 People Managers

People managers have a role in supporting staff and fostering a safe and supportive working environment. It is important that people managers are aware of both the potential impacts this work can have on staff members and all of the supports available to assist them. People managers will ensure that staff are made aware of support pathways for students as part of their induction process

5.4 Student Support Services

The University provides an appropriate range of supports accessible by students who are experiencing mental health difficulties. The type of support or professional service required will vary depending on the nature and extent of the difficulties being experienced. It is acknowledged that the needs of some students may fall outside of the scope of the University's campus services. In such instances the UCD Support Services will guide students to the appropriate pathway to access external, specialist support services.

Staff should engage with their line managers where appropriate. The responsibilities of those staff who are engaged in the delivery of the various student support services, in consultation with their manager, where appropriate include the following.

- 5.4.1 Undertaking training and professional development, which is aligned to professional practice requirements where appropriate.
- 5.4.2 Supporting and guiding the University in delivery of initiatives and activities aimed at promoting student mental health and wellbeing.
- 5.4.3 Contributing to the University's response to and alignment with relevant national guidelines relating to student mental health and wellbeing.
- 5.4.4 Working to continually enhance the University's approach to student mental health and wellbeing through appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the quality of services provided.
- 5.4.5 Using a collaborative approach, and participating in meetings convened to support individual students, where deemed appropriate.
- 5.4.6 Understanding and knowing how to refer students to appropriate services within the University.

- 5.4.7 Where a student's mental health difficulty or mental illness is impacting their student experience and that of other students or the working environment of staff, be aware of how to raise concerns including initiating procedures under the Student Fitness to Continue in Study Policy or other relevant university policies or procedures, where appropriate.

Disability Support - Access and Lifelong Learning

UCD Access & Lifelong Learning offers one-to-one meetings with students with disabilities, including mental health conditions, to determine appropriate exam and classroom accommodations, via a Needs Assessment process. They also provide a range of supports for students with disabilities including workshops, Assistive Technology provision and training, and one-to-one support.

Chaplains

The UCD Chaplaincy Team recognises the spiritual dimension as an integral part of human health for many. The team offers support, pastoral care and spiritual direction for students and staff. Based on a foundation of non-judgemental care, the team provides support to students experiencing personal issues or mental health challenges and who reach out for support. The Chaplains are available to support students of all faiths and none. In addition to providing supports to individual students they provide initiatives and organise events aimed at supporting student wellbeing including offering mental health and wellbeing courses.

Counselling Service

The UCD Student Counselling Service is confidential, free of charge and available to all registered students. The service provides one-on-one crisis counselling and short to medium term counselling interventions, as well as tele therapy, group programs focused on skill-development and issue-specific workshops for example mindfulness based approaches and bereavement and loss. The aim of the service is to provide easily accessible professional psychological support to assist students with personal challenges that affect their lives as university students. The model of care is flexible and brief. Students can refer themselves to meet a counsellor and staff can support referral by contacting the service. The counselling service works closely with all of the student support services to ensure students and staff are supported by information about how the service operates and offering consultation support to other support services. The service does not provide diagnosis or diagnosis specific treatments and if a student's needs fall beyond the remit of the service. We will endeavour to support the student about how to access the services provided by specialist services in the student's community e.g. the Health Service Executive (HSE). The counselling service also contributes to the university culture of support, by providing training and consultation for staff about supporting students who are experiencing mental health challenges.

Student Advisory Service

The UCD Student Advisory Service is often the point of contact for students who may be struggling with mental health difficulties. All academic programmes have a dedicated Student Adviser/Student Advisers who offer students time and space to explore issues of concern to them. They can assist students in finding pathways to deal with personal, social and emotional issues and can advise of appropriate UCD policies, procedures and other services. UCD Student Advisers also support faculty and staff who may be concerned about students. They work to encourage student engagement and they support students who may be at risk of withdrawal. The Student Advisers build community in the cohorts they support through various initiatives, including wellbeing events, talks and presentations, all of which serve to increase positive mental health promotion across the university.

Student Health Service

The UCD Student Health Service offers on campus medical care for registered students of UCD who experience mental health difficulties. Their team of doctors, nurses, a part-time psychiatrist and addiction counsellor provide medical and psychological care for students impacted by mental health problems. They can prescribe appropriate medication, offer psychological support and guidance and can signpost students to additional internal UCD mental health supports. Where necessary staff of the UCD Health Service will recommend referral to specialist psychiatric care in community psychiatry services external to UCD.

When students present with acute or severe and enduring mental illness, particularly if there is a potential suicide risk the Student Health Service has an additional pivotal role. In such situations, the

medical team will provide an urgent medical assessment in a timely manner. In liaison with the other UCD support services relevant protocols are implemented to manage the student's medical and psychiatric care, including arranging transfer to hospital for assessment and admission if appropriate.

5.5 Students

- 5.5.1 The University seeks to support students to take care of their mental health. Students experiencing mental health difficulties are strongly encouraged to come forward for advice and support as early as possible so that they can be connected to the appropriate supports.
- 5.5.2 Students with current, diagnosed mental health conditions are encouraged to seek support from UCD Access and Lifelong Learning. Reasonable accommodations can be put in place to reduce the impact of the mental health condition on the student's academic studies. Reasonable accommodations may include alternative exam arrangements, classroom supports, academic skills supports and assistive technology tools.
- 5.5.3 Where students are already receiving support from mental health services before coming to UCD, they are strongly encouraged to maintain these supports during their time at university to enable continuity of support both during and after their studies are complete.
- 5.5.4 Students may self-refer to any of the university support services provided. Clear information relating to how to access supports is provided by each service.
- 5.5.5 Students who are experiencing mental health difficulties or mental illness may benefit from taking some time away from their studies. Students are encouraged to talk to their student adviser or school or college staff to discuss their options.
- 5.5.6 Sometimes, a student's mental health difficulties or mental illness means that they are not in a position to engage appropriately with their study or university life. Students should proactively engage with relevant processes or support services to consider their options.
- 5.5.7 The whole university approach means that all members of the university community are encouraged to care for each other's mental wellbeing. Each student has the potential to make a positive impact and foster a culture of compassion in the university. This can be done by actively engaging in supportive behaviours such as listening to their peers without judgement or prejudice and being aware of the supports available so that they can encourage students experiencing difficulties to seek help.
- 5.5.8 Students should be aware of their personal limitations, particularly where someone may be in danger, or is potentially a danger to others. In this instance, students should call the UCD Estate Services emergency number, 01 716 7999 when on campus, or off campus emergency services (999 or 112)

6 Related Policies and Protocols

The implementation of this policy is supported by a number of other policies and operational protocols that facilitate the university in responding to and supporting students who are experiencing student mental health difficulties. These are outlined below:

Leave of Absence Policy

Students who are impacted by mental health difficulties may wish to pause their studies to ensure that they can focus on getting the support they need. The Leave of Absence Policy allows students to take some time out and re-engage with their studies without any academic penalty or the need to reapply.

Extenuating Circumstances Policy (under review, proposed title 'Additional Considerations Policy')

Students may encounter challenges that can adversely affect their ability to participate in studies, meet assessment requirements, or attend classes and other educational activities.

Students whose capacity to engage with learning and where their performance has been impacted due to a mental health or wellbeing difficulty may apply to have their circumstances considered under this policy..

Fitness to Continue in Study Policy

This policy facilitates the University in supporting students who may be struggling with their mental health to the point it is impeding their ability to perform activities associated with university life and impacting their student experience. It enables support and action plans to be put in place to help students to continue with their studies. Where the University feels it is in the best interests of a student to take time out from their studies the University can apply a temporary withdrawal of the student from the University to enable the student to receive the required support. The University will endeavor to support students to return to their studies when they are in a position to do so.

Student Fitness to Practice Policy

The University is responsible for ensuring that students with mental health difficulties are supported in undertaking professional placements and clinical practice requirements of their programmes and, in collaboration with the placement provider, assist the student in ensuring that the necessary supports are in place at the site of the placement. Where a student has disclosed a disability and engaged with the Needs Assessment process provided by Access and Lifelong Learning, reasonable accommodations and additional support may be provided to assist them to demonstrate the required learning outcomes and meet the requirements of their programme.

Responding to Distressed Students Protocol

The Distressed Student Protocol provides guidelines for responding to students expressing emotional distress. It provides information on indicators of distress, guidance on determining whether the distress expressed requires an urgent and immediate response, and information on referral to the relevant support service, or emergency service where required.

Student Death Response Protocol

The Student Death Response Protocol sets out the steps the University will take following a student death. It includes guidance for staff on supporting bereaved students and where a student death is by suicide, or suspected suicide, the postvention actions that should be taken to limit reduce the risk of further suicide through contagion are outlined.

7 Version history

Version 1	Approved by Academic Council 10 March 2015
Version 2	Approved by UMT 18 th June 2024