



## **Suicide Safe Policy 2023**

### **Introduction**

While every death is a tragedy, death by suicide has a particular impact on those closely associated with the person who has died. In a University community this will include housemates, classmates, friends, staff in Schools and in Professional Services, and those who have had prior experience of suicide.

Being involved in education is a 'protective factor', that is to say being an active learner, engaged in a learning environment, can have a positive impact on a student's wellbeing. However it is also true to say that from time to time some students can experience a range of factors in their lives which can lead to a heightened risk of serious self-harm and suicide.

Suicide is a complex societal issue requiring a multi-agency, whole community approach. However, suicide is preventable, not inevitable, and the University is committed to playing a role in this multi-agency approach to raise awareness and help reduce the risk of suicide.

This document sets out the University's commitment, working in partnership with the Students' Union, to awareness raising, prevention activity, training and support.

### **Aims & Objectives of a suicide safer policy**

The University seeks to take a whole institution approach to preventing student suicide, reducing risk through creating healthy living and learning communities, establishing suicide interventions, and ensuring that students and staff who are affected by suicide or attempted suicide have access to appropriate support.

Put simply – we want to see less students die by suicide, and we want to encourage more students develop help-seeking and harm-reduction patterns of behaviour to help reduce the risk of death by suicide. And we want to see students build lifelong habits to support positive mental wellbeing.

This will be achieved by working in partnership with staff and students as well as relevant local, regional and national agencies, specifically the NHS.

To achieve this we will;

- Talk about the issue
- Seek to tackle those root causes which are within the ability of the University to influence
- Raise awareness among our staff and student community
- Provide pathways of support, both internal and external
- Provide relevant training for staff and students

- Provide support for those impacted by the suicide of a member of our study community
- Advocate for specialist professional and medical support for those most at risk

## Myths and Facts about Suicide

According to the Northern Ireland Protect Life 2 Strategy<sup>i</sup>

*‘Suicide and self-harm are highly complex societal and personal issues that result from unique interaction between personal circumstances, wider societal issues, emotional resilience, adverse life events and biology which vary from one individual to another.’*

Suicide is however not inevitable. There are a number of myths surrounding suicide which are important to address;

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| Most suicides happen suddenly without warning.  | It is important to understand the warning signs of suicidal thoughts and to look out for them. Even though there are some suicides that occur without warning and/or were not engaged with mental health services and support, the majority have been preceded by verbal or behavioural warning signs. |
| Someone who is suicidal is determined to die.   | On the contrary, suicidal people are often ambivalent about living or dying. Someone may act impulsively and die a few days later, even though they would have liked to live on. Access to emotional support at the right time can prevent suicide.  |
| Once someone is suicidal, they will always remain suicidal.   | Heightened suicide risk is often short-term and situation specific. While suicidal thoughts may return, they are not permanent and an individual with previously suicidal thoughts and attempts can go on to live a long life.   |
| Only people with mental disorders are suicidal.   | Suicidal behaviour indicates deep unhappiness but not necessarily mental disorder. Many people living with mental disorders are not affected by suicidal behaviour, and not all people who take their own lives have a mental disorder.  |
| Talking about suicide is a bad idea and can be interpreted as encouragement.  | Given the widespread stigma around suicide, most people who are contemplating suicide do not know who to speak to. Rather than encouraging suicidal behaviour, talking openly can give an individual other options or the time to rethink their decision, thereby preventing suicide.                  |
| ‘Mental ill health’ is overused as a term and not everyone who says they have a mental health issue is actually ill | It is true to say that mental ill health can cover a wider range of issues from episodic stressors, to long term enduring mental ill health. Not everyone on this spectrum is suicidal however all people indicating that they feel mentally unwell  |

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|---|---|
|   | should be taken seriously and referred for help and support.  |
| People who threaten suicide are just attention seeking.   | People who die by suicide have often told someone that they do not feel life is worth living or that they have no future. Some may have actually said they want to die. While it's possible that someone might talk about suicide as a way of getting the attention they need, it's vitally important to take anybody who talks about feeling suicidal seriously. |
| If a person is seriously thinking about taking their own life, then there is nothing that you can do. | Suicide is preventable  |

## Issues specific to students

### What do we know?

The onset of mood, anxiety, psychotic, personality, eating and substance misuse disorders peaks in adolescence and early adulthood: 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14, and 75% by age 24 (Mental Health Foundation, 2017)<sup>ii</sup>.

It is likely that students experience similar rates of mental disorders as the wider age-adjusted population. It is known from other contexts that mental health affects performance, retention and engagement. This is a global issue. International higher education sectors are seeing the same pattern of increasing levels of distress, disclosure and demand for support.

The University is seeing a year on year increase in students entering University with a diagnosis of a mental health condition, or in the process of waiting of a formal diagnosis. There has also been much discussion about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of young people.

### What are the particular risk factors for students?

**Broader issues** – students have been impacted by a number of geopolitical and socio-economic changes in the world that could, for some, lead to a sense of hopelessness about their future, particularly securing a job post graduation.

**Life transitions** – moving into third level education, whether it is as an undergraduate or postgraduate student brings with it a range of academic and personal transitions as young people move into adulthood, and mature students potentially take a change in direction by returning to study. University is a time to explore identity issues but for some students, without the right support framework, this can be challenging in their new environment.

**Finance** – we know from the most recent OMNI<sup>1</sup> survey of our students that money, as well as the pressures from working while studying, have a significant impact on student mental health and wellbeing.

**Academic pressures** - moving to third level education, with a more independent style of learning, is a significant transition for undergraduates. Postgraduate taught students have

<sup>1</sup> OMNI Survey 2022 [All in for mental health | Omni 2022 \(gubsu-omni.com\)](https://www.gubsu-omni.com)

a more concentrated period to achieve their academic outcomes, and Postgraduate Research students have a very different and particular set of academic pressures depending on the nature of their research environment. Students on the wrong programme of study, or who may be doing a particular course to please a parent can be particularly unhappy at University.

**Study / work balance** - as noted above, a pressure for many students is having to manage work and studies. Time management and prioritisation of study can be very challenging particularly when students are working shift patterns that oblige them to choose between work and attending class.

**Social and Cultural pressures** including pressures internet and social media. The cultural pressure on young people is well known and documented. The important issue to remember here is that life is very different for young people now than when many University staff were studying and it is within a very different context that we seek to know and understand the world students live in, including the digital world.

**Media reporting** - following the publication of agreed guidance by the National Union of Journalists media reporting is less sensational and more discreet on the issue of reporting deaths by suicide. However, the death by suicide of public figures, celebrities and sportspeople does inevitably attract some attention to the issue of death by suicide.

**Prior experience of suicide** - it is not uncommon for the University Student Wellbeing Service and SU Advice to come across students who, when impacted by the death of a fellow student, to already have prior experience of suicide in their friendship group. This is a significant risk factor, and while not unique to students, is a less visible factor present in our student body.

Our whole University approach covers three areas;

- Prevention – awareness, training and help seeking support
- Intervention – direct support for those at risk of death by suicide
- Postvention - preparing for and responding to a death by suicide

## Prevention

| Issues             | Action   | Progress   |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Tackle root causes | <p><b>Research</b> - commit to regularly surveying our student body on the root causes of poor mental health while at University</p> <p><b>Money</b> – provide money management advice to students; make available jobs on campus, provide advice and guidance on managing study and work related pressures; provide support to financial assistance funds and other scholarships and bursaries</p> <p><b>Academic pressures</b> – ensure student wellbeing is embedded in curriculum design and delivery through Strategy 2030 Education Workstream</p> <p><b>Isolation / Community and sense of belonging</b> – actively promote community building activity both inside and outside of the learning environment</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>SU Money advice; Pantry; Online money management tool ‘Blackbullion’; promotion of student hardship and bursary funds; new mechanisms for instalment collection for fees</p> <p>Core to OMNI action plan 2023-24</p> <p>Strategy 2030 Education Strand includes ‘wellbeing at the heart of the curriculum</p> <p>Investment in Social prescribing resources in SU in 2023-24</p> <p>Continued promotion of community based activity throughout curriculum, School based activities, Peer mentoring schemes, University accommodation, SU Clubs and Societies and transition activity</p> |
| Transition support | <p>Provide information and guidance to applicants about preparing for life at University, including the need to be aware of the changes they will encounter and normalising seeking help. This can include Open Days, online material and Pre Semester engagement programmes</p> <p>Academic schools provide inductions to all students starting at the University which is supplemented by material on</p>  | <p>Review of transition support as part of the Transition and Retention sub group of Strategy 2030.</p> <p>Pre Semester programme including tailored events for specific cohorts. Offer holder events for students with disabilities, including mental ill health</p>  |

| Issues                           | Action   | Progress  |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
|                                  | <p>Canvas and induction work under taken by Professional Support Services, including University Accommodation</p> <p>Targeted transition support for those known to be potentially at higher risk including those not from Northern Ireland and those with disabilities</p>  | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>   |
| Awareness and destigmatise       | <p>Manage a regular awareness and destigmatising campaign – asking both staff and students to take part to help promote suicide awareness</p> <p>Enable staff and students to feel comfortable talking about suicide and self-harm</p>   | <p>Suicide awareness campaign for students to be undertaken in 2023-24.</p> <p>Mental Health E-learning modules launched in May 2023</p>  |
| Create compassionate communities | <p>Actively promote community engagement through SU Clubs and Societies, School Societies, community activity in accommodation and SU Volunteer to help students connect.</p> <p>Promote peer support including Peer Mentoring and student-led mental health awareness and prevention activities</p> <p>Promote community based activity within the curriculum</p> | <p>Continued promotion of community based activity throughout curriculum, School based activities, Peer mentoring schemes, University accommodation, SU Clubs and Societies and transition activity</p> <p>Mental Health Awareness included in the re launched Peer Mentoring training May 2023</p> |
| Skills training                  | Provide opportunities for students to be equipped with skills in problem solving, conflict-handling, and non-violent   | To be reviewed as part of Strategy 2030 Education strand – skills development for   |

| Issues                   | Action  | Progress  |
|--------------------------|---|---|
|                          | resolution of disputes and distressing life events in order to build capacity for dealing with challenging life events.   | students / health learners at the heard of the curriculum   |
| Healthy active lifestyle | <p>Ensure that physical wellbeing is promoted as a core part of mental wellbeing including Sports Clubs and use of Queen's Sport.</p> <p>Promote social prescribing of exercise as part of students Wellness Recovery Action Plans</p>  | <p>Core element of QUBeWell campaign; Active campus campaign ongoing; PEC membership referrals embedded in wellbeing support</p> <p>Social prescribing funding secured from the University – work to be rolled out in 2023-24</p> |
| Training                 | <p>Roll out E Learning module for all staff on the signs of mental ill health, and how to refer students to support services</p> <p>Increase training and awareness for staff.</p>  | <p>E Learning module and training roll out launched in May 2023</p> <p>Staff Health and Wellbeing Strategy developed in summer 2023</p>   |
| Target groups            | <p>Have planned and targeted activity for specific groups including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male students</li> <li>• Students identifying as LGBTQ</li> <li>• Students not from NI</li> <li>• Students declaring mental ill health on their application to Queen's</li> </ul> | Support for targeted groups to be embedded in the awareness and training campaigns  |

## Intervention

| Issues                      | Action  | Progress   |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Promotion of help seeking   | <p>Ensure that colleagues are aware of referral pathways for students about who they have a concern.</p> <p>Promote to students the multiple opportunities they have to access support, and the ease with which they can do this.</p>   | <p>Student Support Liaison Officer appointed to work with Schools on training and awareness in relation to student support – including pathways to support.</p> <p>Student Disability and Wellbeing Service management team have a rolling programme of engagement with Schools and seek to visit School Boards on a cyclical basis.</p> |
| Support Services (internal) | <p>Have in place skilled and experienced staff comfortable in risk management and de-escalation</p> <p>Develop a matrix of risk factors and data to be able to potentially identify students at risk</p>  | External review of risk management to be undertaken in July / August 2023  |
| Support Services (external) | <p>Inspire Counselling Services for short term solution focused counselling</p> <p>Lifeline / Samaritans for urgent help for those with suicidal ideation / risk</p> <p>Occupational Health Service to assist with support to study decisions</p> <p>Belfast Trust Student Mental Health Project for students who need specialist support</p> | <p>Monthly management meetings as part of each contract.</p> <p>Risk management of students being supported by third party providers to be part of the risk management review.</p> <p>Ongoing review of Belfast Trust Student Mental Health Project.</p>   |
| Out of hours support        | Undertake a review of Out of Hours support for students, and for staff supporting students  | Ongoing – discussions with a third party provider  |



| Issues              | Action   | Progress   |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Trusted Contacts    | Operate a 'trusted contacts' system so that students nominated trusted contact can be advised if the students wellbeing is in decline  | Position approved based on UUK / Papyrus guidance.   |
| Support for Studies | Review the current 'Fitness to Continue in Study' policy to ensure better and clearer use of the policy for students who are not currently well enough to study or participate in University life. | Completed – approved by ECQS May 2023. Renamed Support to Study Procedure and will be rolled out in 2023/24 with a training and support plan |

## Postvention

| Issues                                 | Action   | Progress   |
|--|--|--|
| Preparing for a death by suicide       | Implement a Postvention Support Plan in line with the UUK Guidance   | Postvention guidance reviewed and agreed June 2023 |
| Responding to a death by suicide       | Draft an incident response protocol that includes; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of immediate situation if it occurs on campus</li> <li>• Working with impacted staff and students</li> <li>• Working with Relevant Organisations / Multi-Agency Approach</li> <li>• Working with Affected Family</li> <li>• Working with the Communications Team</li> </ul> | Postvention guidance reviewed and agreed June 2023 |
| Follow up following a death by suicide | Implement a plan for supporting staff and students in the medium to longer term which could include advice and guidance on memorials, attending Coroners Courts, and key dates such as graduation  | Postvention guidance reviewed and agreed June 2023 |

Approved May 2023 Education Committee: Student Experience

## References

- [Protect Life 2](#) - NI strategy for reducing suicides and incident of self harm
- Papyrus / UUK [Suicide Safer Universities](#)
- Papyrus / UUK [Postvention Guidance](#)
- Papyrus / UUK [Trusted contacts guidance](#)
- OMNI [All in for mental health | Omni 2022 \(qubsu-omni.com\)](#)

## Further help

### Counselling & Crisis support

- GP or local Accident & Emergency ([Emergency Department](#)). The GP out of hours number for the University area is 028 9079 6220. [Out of Hours for other areas can be found here.](#)
- **Lifeline: 0808 808 8000** or the **Samaritans:116 123**
- **Inspire Student Helpline 0808 800 0016** (24 hours a day, 7 days per week)

### Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing

- **Talk Campus** - an online **24/7** global mental health peer support network available in **26 languages**. Download the [TalkCampus app here.](#)
- **Inspire HUB** - instant access to a range of information, and guidance specifically to help care for your individual wellbeing needs. Access the HUB [here](#) using the Use the pin: **QUBHUB!** to sign up.
- Inspire Counselling Helpline **0808 800 0016** (24 hours a day, 7 days per week)

### Physical Health

- GP or local Out of Hours GP. The GP out of hours number for the University area is 028 9079 6220. [Out of Hours for other areas can be found here.](#)
- Local Accident & Emergency ([Emergency Departments](#))

## Community and Campus Safety

**If you have been subject to a Criminal Incident** (*including hate crime, sexual assault, domestic violence etc.*).

Please report via the following options:

- **999** (in an emergency), or **101** (non-emergency)
- **24 hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline** on **0808 802 1414**
- You can report anonymously or with details using our [Report & Support](#) website. If you leave your details, we will follow-up with you on our return.
- If you are concerned about your **safety on-campus**, please call the **Security 24-hour number** on **028 9097 5099**.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/pl-strategy.PDF>

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/faculty/detels/PH150/Kessler\\_DSMIV\\_AGP2009.pdf](http://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/faculty/detels/PH150/Kessler_DSMIV_AGP2009.pdf)