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1. Introduction

1.1 Students arriving at university for the first time or embarking on a new course may have to learn to adapt to significant changes, such as moving to a new area, separation from family and friends, establishing a new social network, managing a tight budget, combining academic study with family commitments, and, for international students, living in a new country and adjusting to a different culture. Students at Oxford also have to learn to adjust to a new style of teaching based on the tutorial system. For many, these changes are exciting and challenging and an intrinsic part of the attraction of going to university. They can also give rise to anxiety in some cases.

1.2 Most personal problems experienced at university can be resolved by talking to a family member or a friend or by seeking help from tutors or other advisors. However, a small number of students may experience emotional or psychological difficulties which are more persistent and which inhibit their ability to participate fully in higher education without appropriate professional support. These difficulties may take the form of a long-term illness or a temporary, but debilitating, condition or reaction. In addition, some students may arrive at university with a pre-existing problem, either declared or undeclared.

1.3 The University and each of the colleges have their own specific legal responsibilities towards students whose mental condition falls within the definition of "disability" under the Equality Act 2010. The Common Framework for Supporting Disabled Students sets out the principles that underpin the University's procedures, and aims to improve the sharing of information, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and the consistency of provision

http://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/A%20common%20framework%20for%20su

[upporting%20disabled%20students.pdf](#)). The Common Framework is accompanied by a comprehensive Handbook (<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/swss/disability/>).

2. Aims

2.1 By providing the opportunity to pursue social, cultural and sporting fulfilment in addition to academic excellence, the collegiate University aims to facilitate and promote positive mental health and well-being. It also aims to provide a supportive environment that will help students with mental health difficulties.

2.2 The collegiate University seeks to implement these aims by:

- providing a range of support services, both medical and non-medical, at college and university levels, including the college network of pastoral care, college doctors, college nurses, the Student Counselling Service, the Disability Advisory Service, and student-led mental health groups;
- encouraging students with mental health difficulties to seek help;
- supporting a culture in which mental health problems are recognised, not stigmatised;
- referring students with serious mental health problems, through college doctors, to the NHS;
- meeting the support and study needs of students with mental health disabilities;
- ensuring that the availability of support is accurately and widely publicised to both prospective and current students;
- providing guidance and training to people involved in the support and care of students;
- respecting the confidentiality of personal information provided by students with mental health difficulties; and
- referring students with mental health problems to the University Occupational Health Service where it is considered that the problem might affect the health and safety in the workplace for them or others.

3. Providing support

3.1 The collegiate University has an extensive and long established system of student support comprising the college network of pastoral care, college doctors, college nurses, student self-help, the Disability Advisory Service and the Student Counselling Service. Good communication between colleges and departments/faculties, subject to the requirements of confidentiality where appropriate, is essential to ensure that students are appropriately supported.

3.2 In colleges students may turn to a number of people for advice including tutors, personal tutors, chaplains, deans, graduate advisors, junior deans, JCR or MCR welfare officers as well as college doctors and nurses. If a student wishes to discuss a problem with someone outside their college they can approach the Student Counselling Service.

3.3 College doctors are independent general practitioners who are particularly experienced in the care of university students. They know the university system well and are integrated into university life. College doctors treat students with mental health problems and liaise with college officers over mental and physical health issues. They and other local general practitioners can refer students to other

agencies, including the Adult Mental Health Team; provide medical certificates e.g. in respect of examinations and to funding bodies if study is suspended or in support of disability-related funding; and advise on fitness to study .

3.4 College nurses can play a varied role in supporting students with mental health difficulties, including referring students to appropriate services and continuing to be involved with the student's care as it progresses.

3.5 The Student Counselling Service provides mainly short-term counselling, averaging just over four sessions per student. Whilst this is appropriate for most students in the context of short university terms, longer term counselling may also be considered. Most students self-refer and are seen individually, although group therapy, workshops and self-help resources are also available. The Service has counsellors specialising in particular problems including eating disorders and stress relating to academic work and examinations. The Service employs a Medical Consultant to carry out psychiatric assessments and, where appropriate, to refer students to local NHS services. (The Medical Consultant does not provide treatment himself/herself.)

3.6 The Service aims to see students for an initial assessment within an average of no more than ten working days of the student making contact and then to offer regular counselling where appropriate immediately after the assessment. Waiting times for a first appointment can be longer than ten working days at busy periods such as the beginning of the Michaelmas and Hilary terms.

3.7 The role of the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) (see <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/swss/disability/das/>) is to provide support and advice to current (including those who have suspended their studies) and prospective students with disabilities about study-related matters and to provide advice and information, and make recommendations to colleagues about reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities and work with students and staff to support their implementation.

Disability Advisers can assist students with making an application for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) or equivalent funds, which can be used to cover the costs of support arrangements. Specialist mentoring is the main type of support that students with mental health disabilities may be recommended. The DAS manages, in conjunction with the Counselling Service, a team of specialist mentors comprised of appropriately qualified mental health professionals (including psychologists, counsellors and psychotherapists). The focus of the mentoring work is on enabling students to develop strategies for managing their mental health disability in relation to their studies, thereby developing a more effective approach to study so that they have an equal chance of achieving their academic and personal goals whilst at Oxford.

3.8 The University Occupational Health Service provides a specialist assessment and advisory service to the University on the occupational health aspects of student mental health problems, for example if there are concerns regarding a student's safety to undertake hazardous work or to complete course that has vocational standards.

3.9 OUSU provides a great deal of written information on student health and welfare and runs the Student Advice Service (see <http://ousu.org/advice/student-advice-service/>).

4. Respecting confidentiality

Students with mental health difficulties may be reluctant to seek help without assurances that the information they provide will be treated confidentially and that it will not harm their academic standing. Doctors, nurses, counsellors and chaplains are all required to observe confidentiality in accordance with strict ethical codes. The University's 'Guidance on Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare' (https://www.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwoxacuk/localsites/studentgateway/documents/health/Guidance_on_Confidentiality_in_Student_Health_and_Welfare.pdf) provides advice for all staff on the issue of confidentiality in matters relating to student health and welfare.

5. Helping students in crisis

5.1 If a student is considered to be at serious risk of self-harm the college doctor should be contacted unless the risk is imminent in which case the emergency services should be contacted. As a GP the college doctor has the expertise and knowledge of specialist help that is required in the management of a mental health crisis. The Student Counselling Service does not provide an emergency service. Guidelines on managing student distress out of hours have been developed by the Oxford Student Mental Health Network (see <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/swss/counselling/>).

5.2 When students have been admitted to the John Radcliffe Hospital following self-harm they will routinely receive a psychiatric assessment and their GP will be informed. Where the GP is the college doctor they can be involved with the student's care plan on their return to college. If, additionally, a student is referred to the Student Counselling Service after assessment at the John Radcliffe Hospital the Service should receive the same discharge information as the GP.

6. Raising awareness

6.1 Information about the support available to students with mental health difficulties is provided on the Oxford Students website (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling>). Information is regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains accurate and appropriate.

7. Supporting those involved in student welfare

Specific information for staff appears on the Student Welfare and Support Services website (<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/swss/counselling/>). Student Welfare and Support Services and the Oxford Student Mental Health Network offer a range of training for staff in welfare roles and these and other opportunities are advertised in the Student Health and Welfare Bulletin.

8. Suspending Study

8.1 If a student is suffering from a serious mental health problem, withdrawing from the University may offer them the best chance of making a full recovery, and because of this, some students may decide to withdraw on their own initiative. Different processes apply to undergraduates

(<http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/undergraduate/status>) and postgraduates (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/status>).

8.2 In some cases the student's behaviour, arising from their medical condition, impacts adversely on the wider student body and for staff. Fitness to Study procedures focus on managing this impact in the least restrictive way possible, usually involving discussions with the individual student concerned which point out the negative effects of their behaviour on others.

8.3 The student's medical condition may be such that they are unable to meet course requirements, notwithstanding the support of the collegiate University and local medical services.

8.4 In the instances described in 8.2 and 8.3 it may be necessary to request that the student suspend study for a period. If the student does not agree to withdraw voluntarily it will be necessary to consider imposing a suspension. Procedures exist at both college and university levels for the suspension of students on the grounds of ill health. The University's procedures are set out in Council Regulations (<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/76-0812.shtml>).

8.5 Students who have suspended study for mental health reasons will be allowed to resume their studies when they are medically fit to resume study and there is appropriate educational and pastoral provision to support them.

9. Legislation

9.1 The Mental Capacity Act 2005 is founded on the principle that every adult has the right to make his or her own decisions and must be assumed to have capacity to make those decisions unless it is proved otherwise and that any decisions made on behalf of a person who lacks capacity must be made in their best interests. An adult will only be deemed to lack capacity to make a particular decision if, because of an impairment of, or a disturbance in the functioning of, the mind or brain they are unable to:

1. Understand the information relevant to the decision;
2. Retain that information;
3. Use or weigh that information as part of the decision-making process; or
4. Communicate the decision.

9.2 If university staff are concerned that a student's mental capacity is impaired they should involve a medical professional in accordance with this Policy.

9.3 The Mental Health Act 1983 allows individuals to be admitted to hospital, detained and treated without their consent, either for their own health and safety, or for the protection of other people. People can be admitted, detained and treated under different sections of the Mental Health Act, depending on the circumstances. If there are concerns that an individual is acutely unwell as a result of a mental health condition, university staff should call the emergency services as set out in this Policy.

10. Mental Health- related Policies and Guidance

Alcohol

http://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Policy%20on%20the%20misuse%20of%20alcohol.pdf

Confidentiality

http://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Guidance%20on%20Confidentiality%20in%20Student%20Health%20and%20Welfare.pdf

Data Protection

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/compliance/dataprotection/policy/>

Disability

http://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/A%20common%20framework%20for%20supporting%20disabled%20students.pdf

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/swss/disability/>

Drug Misuse

<https://www1.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/oxonly/drugmisuse/>

Requires single sign on

Eating Disorders

http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/aad/documents/Eating_disorder_guidelines_2012-13.pdf

Equality

<https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/universityofoxfordequalitypolicy/>

Factors affecting performance in examinations

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/2014-15/rftcoue-p13fapianexam/>

Fitness to Study

<https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/76-0812.shtml>

The University Regulation is in place but it is not yet the case that all departments have procedures in place to cover the preliminary stages.

Fitness to Practise (Medics and PGCE Students)

<https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/uohs/at-work/medical-students/practise/>

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/110-056.shtml>

<https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/111-056.shtml>

Harassment

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/harassmentadvice/>

Mental Health - Assessor's *Dealing with Student Mental Health Difficulties: Suggested Guidelines for Colleges, Faculties, and Departments* (2011) not yet published online

Oxford University Student Mental Health Policy



Mental Health - Oxford Student Mental Health Network Out of Hours guidance

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/swss/counselling/>

Reasonable adjustments in examinations

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgexaminers/>

Student Tragedies

Dealing with Student Tragedies: Suggested Guidelines for Colleges not yet published online and currently being updated

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