

Suicide Prevention Framework

UPR EQ07 Appendix 1 version 01.0

Policies superseded by this document

This appendix is an addition to version 07.0 of UPR EQ07.

Summary of significant changes to the previous version

This is a new appendix and it should be read in full.

Glossary

A glossary of approved University terminology can be found in [UPR GV08](#).

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1 Statement of Purpose

- 1.1 The University of Hertfordshire recognises the tragic loss represented by any suicide, and its overwhelming and lasting effect on immediate family, friends, students, staff, and the wider university community.
- 1.2 We are committed to preventing student suicide, and the Board of Governors and Vice Chancellor’s Executive will ensure that positive mental health, wellbeing, and suicide prevention is considered in everything we do as a Higher Education institution.

- 1.3 Our suicide prevention approach aims to reduce the risk of student suicide through:
- **Prevention:** We will work to prevent suicide by encouraging students to declare hidden disabilities before commencing studies at the University, understanding our diverse student community and the challenges they face. Pro-actively promoting our support for students who have short- or long-term mental health challenges and work with local partners such as Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust, our on campus General Practitioner, the Student Assistance Programme, Occupational Health, academic success hubs and academic staff. We will deliver training for all staff and students.
 - **Intervention:** We will pro-actively engage and support students known to be at risk of suicide.
 - **Postvention:** We will respond to deaths by suicide sensitively and supportively.

2 Context

- 2.1 The University have been part of Hertfordshire's Suicide Prevention programme and created strong partnership links with the key stakeholders and the wider network to support the ambition of zero suicide in Hertfordshire.
- 2.2 There are 9 priority areas for the county, based on the national strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england>.
- Focus on men and boys.
 - Improve support for Mental Health patients transitioning between care teams.
 - Spot the Signs.
 - Access to Medicines.
 - Communications, Awareness & Media.
 - Signposting and referral.
 - Support for families bereaved by suicide.
 - Support for young people.
 - Learn Lessons and Performance Measures.
- 2.3 The University approach forms part of a 'whole university' response to supporting our students' wellbeing underpinned by the [University Strategic Plan](#) and is innately linked to our updated Education and Student Experience Strategy, we commit to adopting a sector leading approach to student engagement and wellbeing.

- 2.4 We have developed this strategy with a cross-university working group and members of the Hertfordshire County Council Suicide Prevention Group. It is informed by best practice guidance contained in University UK's [Suicide-Safer Universities](#).

3 Evidence

- 3.1 Office for National Statistics data shows the rate of suicide in the 12 months ending July 2017 for higher education students in England and Wales was 4.7 deaths per 100,000 students, which equates to 95 suicides.
- 3.2 The rate of suicide is lower amongst students when compared to the general population, where the rate is 10.1 deaths per 100,000, but increases over the past ten years are a substantial cause for concern.
- 3.3 Suicide rates are twice as high among male students, and slightly higher in undergraduates than post-graduates.
- 3.4 At the University of Hertfordshire approximately 1 in 5 students accessing our Student Wellbeing Service disclose issues with "self-harm". This includes suicidal thoughts and feelings, previous suicide attempts, physical self-harm, and recent suicide attempts. This corresponds with national data which suggests that nearly 1 in 4 young people will experience suicidal feelings at least once in their lives and 1 in 20 will try to take their own life.
- 3.5 Our greatest concern relates to students who are not known to university support services. National data mirrors this concern with only 1 in 3 people who die by suicide being known to mental health services.

4 Beliefs and Understanding of Suicide

- 4.1 The University of Hertfordshire believes that suicide is a substantial, but preventable, public health problem and we are committed to improving our understanding of the causes of student suicide.
- 4.2 We will seek to lead discussion and challenge common misconceptions about suicide, which can include:
- **“Talking about suicide encourages more people to consider it”**
Suicide is a complex subject but talking about it sensitively and offering support acknowledges challenging feelings and helps to reduce stigma.
 - **“You have to be seriously mentally ill to be suicidal”**
Suicidal thoughts are more common than people think and are not always connected to long-term mental health problems.
 - **“Suicides always happen without warning”**
The impact of suicide can be sudden and shocking, but there are warning signs, which training can help to raise awareness of.

- **“Once you've felt suicidal you will always be at risk of suicide”**
Suicidal thoughts are not permanent and can be addressed supportively.

5 Oversight

- 5.1 Delivery of this approach will be overseen by the Student Wellbeing Strategy Steering Group. This is a sub-group of the Student Community Committee.

6 Aim 1 – Prevention

- 6.1 We believe that the best approach to preventing student suicide is to pro-actively support the wellbeing of our students. Our [Safeguarding-policy](#), [Support-to-study policy](#), [Student Mental Wellbeing Policy](#) makes our commitment to this work clear. In the context of student suicide, it seeks to create a compassionate and mindful community, which is comfortable in acknowledging and addressing suicidal thoughts through meaningful in-house support, and strong links to external services.
- 3.3 The following Wellbeing Strategy priorities are targeted to support suicide prevention:
- Raising mental health awareness through proactive campaigns and reducing difficulties to accessing support.
 - Safeguarding and health awareness briefings for all students as part of induction.
 - Student Wellbeing Advocates to be appointed and trained in every School of Study.
 - Student Wellbeing working with Schools of Study and other professional SBU's, partners to identify and engage 'hard to reach' students who may be at increased risk of suicide.
 - Student Wellbeing to work with the Learning & Teaching Institute, Study Skills Teams to look at embedding wellbeing and resilience in the curriculum.
 - Collaboration with external stakeholders on local suicide prevention activity such as the Hertfordshire Suicide Prevention Network <https://www.cpslmind.org.uk/what-we-do/campaigns/stopsuicide/>.

7 Aim 2 – Intervention

- 7.1 Intervention and engagement with students at risk of suicide requires a whole institution response. The university's [Safeguarding-policy](#), [Support-to-study policy](#), [Student Mental Wellbeing Policy](#) shape the delivery of intervention and support, whilst also upholding boundaries which seek to safeguard all our students and staff.
- 7.2 Our Dean of Students Office oversee these procedures and the staff within Student Wellbeing oversee and manage the day-to-day risk assessment of students reporting suicidal ideation and/or intent. Maintaining this service requires sufficient resourcing and a consistent, university-wide approach to managing risk which is collaborative and supportive.

7.3 The following Wellbeing priorities are targeted to support Intervention:

- Maintaining appropriate levels of counselling/mental health staff capacity to ensure students can access the service.
- Mandatory role specific mental wellbeing training for staff, including suicide prevention training.
- Exploring opportunities to improve integrated care for mental health in cooperation with NHS primary and secondary care providers, the charity sector, and other local partners e.g., HPFT, GP Plus.

8 Aim 3 – Postvention

8.1 Our Death of a Student procedure defines the steps and individuals responsible for managing the university's response in the event of a student bereavement. This procedure seeks to support all affected and ensure a consistent approach across the University. We will also introduce a standing group of colleagues that swiftly review all serious incidents (including suicides), identifying and implementing any lessons learnt.

8.2 The following Wellbeing priorities are targeted to support Postvention:

- Establishment of a Student Incident Review Group (See Appendix A for proposed Terms of Reference and Membership).
- Regular review of our, [Student Mental Wellbeing Policy](#)
- Creation of a Student and Staff Wellbeing Strategy, associated Annual Action Plan, and Suicide Prevention Approach.

Appendix A - Serious Incident Review Group

Terms of Reference:

The Serious Incident Review Group will meet on a weekly basis to oversee three key areas of risk management.

- **Ongoing risk assessment** of any students who have been flagged via the [Safeguarding-policy](#) and [Support-to-study policy](#).
- **External escalation** to ensure the continued safety and support of individual students who are deemed to be a risk to themselves or others, fellow students, and staff. Typically, this is likely to entail a referral to a student's GP, single point of access, Blue Light services, or other appropriate service.
- **Review** of any 'near miss' incidents with clear and structured recording of lessons learnt and actions to be taken to mitigate against any similar occurrences in future.

Membership:

- Dean of Students (Chair)
- Deputy Director of Student Wellbeing
- Deputy Director of Safeguarding & Community
- Counselling & Mental Health Service Manager
- Students' Union Advice Centre Manager

Staff from other parts of the University will be requested to attend as and when appropriate. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Deputy Deans
- Head of Occupational Health
- School Safeguarding Leads
- Personal Tutor
- Programme Leader
- Head of Security & Resilience
- Security Services & Contracts Manager
- Head of Safeguarding & Compliance
- Residence Life and Safeguarding Manager
- Student Community and Safeguarding Manager

Data for each semester, and any actions requiring a university-wide response from the Serious Incident Review Group will be anonymised and shared at the Campus Community Committee, the University Security Advisory Group, and the Chief Executives Group.

Sharon Harrison-Barker
Secretary and Registrar
Signed: **1 September 2023**

Alternative format

If you need this document in an alternative format, please email us at governanceservices@herts.ac.uk or telephone us on +44 (0)1707 28 6006.