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Support and Information

How to contact us

If you have any queries around the content provided within the Student Mental Health policy or if you require this document in an alternative format, please [Contact Us](#) (visit www.open.ac.uk/contact), telephone us on +44 (0)300 303 5303, or get in touch with your Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student. To check the contact details for the Open University, please see [OU Offices](#).

- If you are studying an apprenticeship, please contact the Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on apprentice-support@open.ac.uk, or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121).
- Os ydych yn byw yng Nghymru, gallwch siarad gyda chynghorydd cymorth i fyfyrwyr yn Gymraeg trwy alw 029 2047 117. | If you live in Wales, you can speak to a student support adviser in Welsh on 029 2047 1170.
- Graduate School students can contact the Graduate School via email on graduate-school@open.ac.uk.

Help Centre Articles

Our [Mental Health Support page](#) provides a number of links to both internal and external resources for all students to manage their mental health whilst studying and support for students who may be having difficulties with their mental health.

If you are a Graduate School student, you can find further information on support available to you, via our [Student Wellbeing page](#) on the Graduate School Network.

Reporting Bullying and Harassment

The Open University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment where everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across The Open University will not be tolerated. We encourage staff, students, learners and visitors to report incidents of assault, bullying harassment, hate crime or sexual harassment through [Report + Support](#). This platform also provides information about what you can do if you or someone you know experiences such incidents, and where you can find support.

Introduction

The Open University is committed to helping students achieve their study goals and seeks to provide support throughout their student journey in accordance with the [OU Student Charter](#). The Open University acknowledges that for many people, the act of studying can contribute towards a positive sense of mental health and wellbeing.

The definition of mental health that is used within this document refers to “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community” ([World Health Organization](#), 2025). A person’s mental health will fluctuate over time and is affected by day-to-day experiences and life changes.

Mental health is a continuum that extends from good mental wellbeing to periods of stress, worry and low moods, and more impactful longer-term mental ill-health. Anyone can experience short-term fluctuations in mental wellbeing in response to everyday life challenges.

While some students can effectively manage a new or existing mental health condition alongside their studies, others may need help to continue effectively with their studies. Some students may not recognise the symptoms of low mental health or notice how this is affecting their ability to study and engage with others successfully.

This policy takes an inclusive approach to the wide spectrum of emotional and psychological challenges, mental health difficulties, mental health conditions and/or mental illnesses that an individual may experience, by referring to these collectively as ‘mental health challenges.’

Mental health challenges are a recognised disability within the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#), which is why The Open University sometimes uses the word ‘disability’ when recording student experiences in order to provide information, advice and access to support. Whilst a student may not personally view their mental health difficulty as a disability, they are permitted certain protections and additional resources under Equality legislation (see our [Mental Health Support page](#) for details).

Scope

What this policy covers

This policy applies to all Undergraduate Students, Postgraduate Taught Students and Apprentices registered on qualifications and modules; all Graduate School students; and students studying Open University Microcredentials. We use the term ‘student’ throughout this policy to collectively refer to all categories of learners, students and apprentices. This policy may also be of interest to enquirers.

This policy is applicable to students who are under the age of 18 years while studying with The Open University, but will be applied in conjunction with our [Safeguarding](#), [Advocacy](#) and [Admission of Applicants under the Age of 18](#) policies as appropriate.

We are committed to supporting the wellbeing of our community beyond graduation. All alumni continue to have access to our Mental Health resources via the HelpCentre. Whether you are navigating life after university or facing new challenges, we are here to help. Visit our [Mental Health Support page](#) to explore available services and support options.

What this policy does not cover

This policy does not apply to learners who are studying a vocational qualification, non-credit bearing courses or informal study routes (e.g. OpenLearn). Please refer to your Conditions of Registration or Terms and Conditions for information on the support that is available to you. Students studying with a partner, subsidiary or validated institution should refer to the institution's policies with which they are studying.

1. Student Mental Health Policy

This policy sets out The Open University's commitment to supporting mental health and wellbeing during your studies and outlines our responsibilities to you as a student, including our expectations of you to monitor and manage your own wellbeing where possible. It also sets out the action we may take where we have concerns about how your mental health is affecting your studies. Information on further support can be found on the [Mental Health Support page](#).

For the purpose of this document, we refer to mental health conditions, mental ill-health and/or mental health difficulties collectively as 'mental health challenges.'

Policy principles

- 1.1 We will promote a shared understanding that everyone has mental health which can fluctuate over time, without necessarily having an illness or disability.
- 1.2 We will create an inclusive and supportive culture underpinned by effective and timely support, systems and training that allows our students to maximise their potential and achieve success. We will:
 - promote a respectful and compassionate attitude towards mental health through inclusive learning spaces and communities, and the use of inclusive language;
 - continuously assess and reflect on our own behaviour, communication, and emotional responses to others.

- 1.3 We have a responsibility to ensure an inclusive environment that actively challenges stigma; where mental health is discussed with transparency and respect; and where we will treat each other with dignity and respect in line with the [Student Charter](#).
- 1.4 All sensitive personal information provided about mental health needs will be stored and held confidentially and accessed only by relevant staff or third parties to facilitate the provision of additional support, in line with relevant data protection legislation and our [Student Privacy Notice](#).
- 1.5 If we have a serious concern about a students' safety or welfare and have been unable to contact them to offer support, we may try to talk with a named emergency contact that they have provided to support their welfare.
- 1.6 We will follow our duty of care as set out in statutory guidance including the [Care Act 2014 \(in England\)](#) to ensure the wellbeing of our students where we believe they may be at risk of significant harm to themselves or others. This means we have a duty to share information with relevant external services which may include a local emergency support service such as an NHS mental health crisis team, a GP, or the emergency services. A full list of legislation and guidance for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales is set out in the '[Related Policies and Legislation](#)' section of this policy.
- 1.7 We will acknowledge and respect the limitations of our support as an educational provider. It is therefore important to state clearly that we cannot provide clinical, therapeutic or specialist mental health and wellbeing interventions.

2. Our responsibilities for supporting and promoting mental health and wellbeing

- 2.1 We will take action to ensure our learning and teaching approaches and environments are accessible to all, and that we do not directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, discriminate against anyone with a physical or mental health disability in line with UK equalities legislation, specifically the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) in England, Scotland and Wales, and the [Disability Discrimination Act \(1995\)](#) in Northern Ireland.

- 2.2 We will work towards creating an environment that actively promotes and fosters positive mental wellbeing. We will continuously reflect on the impact of our language and model a compassionate approach in all communications with students and staff.
- 2.3 We will exercise care and compassion when dealing with all students regardless of any mental health needs, and we will recognise and respond appropriately where there are indications that a student may be struggling with difficult mental health experiences, in line with this Policy.
- 2.4 Where students have told us about mental health challenges, we will (where appropriate) implement embedded adjustments and academic support.
- 2.5 We will seek to understand and address any barriers that you may have to sharing this information with us. We will only share your information on a 'need-to-know' basis to enable us to provide academic-related support and reasonable adjustments as per our [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#) and [Student Privacy Notice](#). This aligns with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation of only sharing minimal information, and the Data Protection Act (2018).
- 2.6 If (as a result of your mental health challenges), [distress or harm may be caused to others](#), we will respond in a compassionate and non-judgemental way that aims to support the wellbeing of all parties in line with our [Student Charter](#).
- 2.7 We aim to provide information on mental health and wellbeing support throughout your studies via our communications to you, including on the [OU Wellbeing app](#), and other resources listed on our [Mental Health Support page](#).
- 2.8 We agree to only work within the boundaries of our role, and signpost you to self-directed mental health information and digital resources, or external mental health support as appropriate. When we believe you or another student is at risk of immediate harm (as detailed in [Section 6](#)), we will take immediate action to contact the appropriate external organisation or emergency services, for the safety of the individual.

3. Supporting and promoting the mental health and wellbeing of our Students

- 3.1 Our [Mental Health Support page](#) details how you can promote your own mental health and wellbeing, and who to talk to for support. As an Open University student, we encourage you to carry out the following actions to promote and support your mental health.
- 3.2 We encourage all students to prioritise their own mental health and wellbeing. This includes finding a study balance that works alongside balancing personal and other commitments. Support is available if you need help in managing this through our [Mental Health Support page](#).
- 3.3 If you have any concerns about your mental wellbeing, you are encouraged to let us know by contacting your Tutor or [Student Support Team](#) at the earliest opportunity so that we can provide appropriate support and signposting to services within The Open University or externally. We strongly encourage you to keep us updated of any changes to your mental health during your studies so that support can be tailored to your needs.
- 3.4 If you find it difficult to communicate with us because of mental health challenges, you can appoint an Advocate (see our [Advocacy Policy](#)).
- 3.5 If you have concerns about another student's mental wellbeing, you should encourage them to seek independent support. They can do this by visiting our [Mental Health Support page](#) at their earliest opportunity, or by contacting their [Student Support Team](#); this is only if you feel in a position to advise them to do this, whilst prioritising your own personal wellbeing and boundaries. If you wish to inform us directly by speaking to your [Student Support Team](#), we will look into your concerns as far as possible with the information provided. You should also let the Student Support Team know if you yourself have been affected as a result.

- 3.6 You should take care to use respectful language with those you engage with. You are encouraged to actively challenge any stigma or discrimination around mental health and wellbeing where you are able to do so safely, or report this to us via [Report+Support](#) so that we can investigate these concerns and take appropriate action in line with our [Student Charter](#). Our [Dignity and Respect](#) policy also outlines how to raise concerns about behaviour that undermines dignity and respect, and how to address any unacceptable behaviour that you experience or witness.
- 3.7 If we need to explore [Fitness to Study](#) and [Fitness to Practise](#) with you, we ask that you engage with those policies when requested. This will be to encourage the best possible outcome for you with regards to balancing your mental wellbeing with studying. If you cannot engage with one of these policies when requested, we will take decisions based upon the information we have available at that time.
- 3.8 If you live in Wales, you can receive support from a student support adviser in Welsh on: 029 2047 1170.

4. Sharing information about mental health challenges with the University

- 4.1 Throughout your studies, we will actively encourage you to tell us about any disability or mental health support needs you might have and welcome you sharing this information with us at any point. This allows us to provide information on mental health and disability support associated with your studies, and to work with you to implement reasonable adjustments in line with your individual needs. We encourage you to share how we can best support you if you experience a mental health emergency (see [Section 6](#)).
- 4.2 If your mental health needs are making study more difficult, or you have developed a new disability or mental health support need, please talk with any member of Open University staff as soon as possible so that we can work with you to explore suitable options. We aim to provide an inclusive study environment. When you tell us about your personal needs, we are able to tailor our support to you more specifically.

- 4.3 We encourage you to share details of your mental health challenges with us, so that we can put support in place for you: if you make the decision not to share this information, we are not able to tailor support to your needs. If we think that you may be experiencing mental health challenges, we may reach out to you to explore this further and consider whether we can put any support in place.
- 4.4 Once you have told us about a mental health need, we suggest that you complete a disability support form. We recognise that you may not consider yourself to have a disability, however your mental health need may be considered as a disability under the Equality Act (2010). We use this term to help us recognise any short or long-term mental health or physical challenges that you may be facing. You do not need to be registered as disabled for us to support you.
- 4.5 The information you provide about a mental health need will be stored on your student record and made available to all relevant staff to identify any academic-related support and embedded adjustments you may need, and to provide appropriate support during your studies (see the [Student Privacy Notice](#) for information on how we use your personal data). The [Definitions](#) section explains the reasonable adjustments that might be available, depending on your circumstances. Your information will not be shared with anyone else, unless we are required to do so to facilitate formal reasonable adjustments provided by a third party (see our [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#) for details); or unless we become aware that you could potentially be experiencing a mental health emergency (see [Section 6](#)).

5. Support, signposting, and reasonable adjustments

- 5.1 A range of publicly accessible information, resources and support are listed on our '[Mental health, wellbeing and keeping safe](#)' webpage on the Help Centre. This includes information and direct links to free digital support services as well as other organisations who are working with us to support mental health and wellbeing.

5.2 When we become aware of your mental health support needs we can support your mental wellbeing in several ways, including direct support, signposting, offering anticipatory reasonable adjustments (such as flexibility around assessment), and more formalised reasonable adjustments (that may require supporting evidence; or be best supported via an application for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) funding, in line with the [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#)). Our [Mental Health Support page](#) details the types of support we can offer and how to access these (Graduate School students should visit the [Student Wellbeing page](#) on the Graduate School Network). These include:

- Reasonable adjustments as listed within our [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#). This includes embedded adjustments, on-request adjustments, and case-based supplementary adjustments. Please see the [Definitions](#) section for further information.
- Additional reasonable adjustments are available for Postgraduate Research Students. Please visit the "[Advice by stage](#)" webpage on the Graduate School Network for further information.
- Temporary pause or withdrawal from studies.
- Support plans.
- Implementing student policies. At times your mental health challenges can lead to behaviours that are not aligned with our [Student Charter](#). If this is the case, we will work with you through the [Fitness to Study](#) or [Fitness to Practise](#) process, and may encourage you to work with our Student Welfare team (which includes support from Mental Health Caseworkers if available and appropriate to your situation).
- Access to the [National Support Network](#) and [Hub of Hope](#) which signpost to support relating to your welfare and wellbeing.

- Signposting to external services where we feel these may support you beyond what we can offer, e.g. your GP or local support services.
- Welsh language services are available for students in Welsh, including myf.cymru.

6. Support for students experiencing a mental health emergency

- 6.1 **In an emergency, please contact the Emergency Services by telephoning 999 or 112 from outside the UK.** If it is urgent but not an emergency, the NHS 111 online service or by calling 111 (and choosing Option 2) can provide mental health support (please note, this is for UK-based students only). You can also reach out to the Samaritans at 116 123 for 24-hour emotional support. The [Lifeline Helpline](#) is available for students in Northern Ireland. If you are based outside of the UK you may also find help via the “[Find a helpline](#)” website.
- 6.2 We have a duty to safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of all students and staff. If we become aware that you could potentially be experiencing a mental health emergency, we will take reasonable steps to preserve your safety and wellbeing and, where necessary, that of others. For examples of what we consider to be a mental health emergency, please see our [Mental Health Support page](#).
- 6.3 As we are unable to provide emergency support services in the manner of government funded or statutory services, we may encourage you to seek help by engaging with appropriate external support services including the NHS (for UK-based students), or equivalent services in your country of residence if you are studying outside of the UK.

- 6.4 There may be times where we have significant concerns about your health, wellbeing, or safety. Student Support Services (or Graduate School for Postgraduate Research Students) will always try to contact you at least twice to offer you support. This contact could be via telephone or email and will align with your preferred contact method (if you have shared one). If you do not respond to these attempts, the Student Support Team (specifically the Student Welfare Team), or the Graduate School (for Graduate School Students) will make a decision about whether to talk with any personal contact that you have listed on your student record for emergency purposes, without your consent.
- 6.5 If we have continued concerns about your welfare and are unable to contact you after two days, we may contact the emergency services and/or social care in your area. This will be in exceptional circumstances. If you are also working with the Mental Health Casework Team, we may also hold other details such as your GP and may also contact them.
- 6.6 Examples of third parties that we may need to contact on your behalf include the Mental Health Casework and Advice Team, a local emergency support service such as an NHS mental health crisis team, your GP, or the emergency services.
- 6.7 We will only disclose your information to the third parties listed above in the absence of your consent in exceptional circumstances (in line with our [Safeguarding Policy](#) and duty of care). We may share information with third parties without your consent where this is in the public interest, i.e. where there is a risk of serious harm to either an identified individual(s), a group of people or a community. Examples of circumstances which may meet the definition of public interest include, but are not limited to:
- Where there is believed to be a risk of harm to a child (a person under the age of 18), or an adult at risk;
 - Where a serious crime has occurred or is planned;
 - Risk of suicide or where the suicide plan may involve a public location or public transport;

- Risk of psychological harm or trauma in relation to others witnessing self-harm or suicide;
- Where the student is on a professional practice course and their ability to practise safely and effectively may be compromised in line with our [Fitness to Practise procedure](#).

Please see our [Safeguarding Policy](#) for more information.

Definitions

Advocate

An Advocate appointed by an Open University student helps the student to say what the student wants, secure their rights, represent their interests, and obtain services that the student needs. This is different from 'power of attorney' in legal terms.

Discrimination

There are three main types of discrimination:

- Direct discrimination - when someone is treated less favourably because of an actual or perceived protected characteristic (e.g. refusing admission to a course because of disability).
- Indirect discrimination – when an action or practice is used that can put people with a protected characteristic at a disadvantage, compared with others who do not share that characteristic (e.g. providing application forms in a single format that may not be accessible to everyone).
- Discrimination arising from disability (e.g. not allowing a disabled person an outside break, as it would take too long to get to and from the area).

Fitness to study

The Open University has a [Fitness to Study policy](#). The purpose of this policy is to set out how we will work with students to help them participate positively with their studies, during and/or after a period of concern about their health, safety, and wellbeing, which has affected their academic progress or engagement with their study.

Harassment

This refers to any unwanted behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity, or creates a degrading, humiliating, hostile, intimidating or offensive environment. It includes unwanted physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct.

Mental Health Challenge

This refers to difficult experiences that make it harder for us to get on with our lives. They include the painful feelings and thoughts that we all have at times – including periods of sadness, hopelessness, and fear. This could be related to personal, work and life-related challenges, and the difficulties can be either short term and temporary, or longer term associated with a mental health condition (e.g. anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, personality disorders and eating disorders.)

Protected characteristics

The Equality Act (2010) defines the different characteristics protected by law:

- Age
- Disability (including mental health conditions and illnesses)
- Gender Reassignment
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Marriage and Civil Partnership

Reasonable adjustments

The Open University offers three types of reasonable adjustments, which are described within our [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#). These are 1) “embedded adjustments” which form part of your learning experience as standard and are available to all students without the need to ask us for them; 2) “on-request adjustments” which are commonly provided but usually need to be requested to ensure they meet individual needs; and 3) “case-based supplementary adjustments” which are tailored to individual circumstances and will require supporting evidence and additional time to implement.

Related Policies and Legislation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- [Advocacy Policy](#)
- [Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)
- [Fitness to Study](#)
- [Fitness to Practise](#)
- [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#)
- [Student Privacy Notice](#)

Relevant legislation and guidance:

- [Data Protection Act \(2018\)](#)
- [Disability Discrimination Act \(1995\) for Northern Ireland](#)
- [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) in England, Scotland and Wales

England:

- [Care Act \(2014\)](#)

Northern Ireland:

- [Health and Social Care Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#)

Scotland:

- [Carers \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#)

Wales:

- [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)
- [Health and Social Care \(Quality and Engagement\) \(Wales\) Act 2020](#)

Give Us Your Feedback

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please share this with us, by emailing SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.

Our Student Charter Values

[The Student Charter](#) was developed jointly by The Open University and the Open SU. It is a declaration of our shared values and the commitments we make to each other. This document has been developed with the Student Charter values as its foundation.

Our commitment to Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Our commitment to equality and inclusion is embedded in all that we do and reflects our mission to be open to people, places, methods, and ideas. We celebrate diversity and the strengths that it brings, whilst challenging under-representation and differences in outcomes within our institution. We promote and manage equality and diversity to meet both our strategic goals and our statutory equality duties. We achieve this in many ways, including the development of inclusive policy.

Welsh language standards

[Safonau'r Gymraeg \(Welsh Language Standards\)](#)

The Open University is one of several universities named in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This means that any students in Wales can expect to receive certain services from the OU in Welsh. These are outlined in what's called the [OU's Welsh language standards](#).

This means that you can speak to our student recruitment and support team in Welsh or contact the university in Welsh. You can find out more about your rights as a Welsh language user on the [OU in Wales website](#).

About this Document

This is a new policy document.

Document Information

Version number: 1.0

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Charity Statement

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England and Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.