

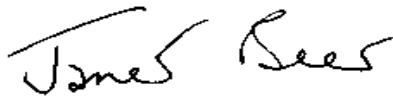
Framework for Developing a Suicide Safer University

Foreword

Every suicide is a tragedy. When a young person takes their own life the effect on families and friends can be devastating. It also represents a significant loss to society. At the University of Liverpool we recognise both that suicidal thoughts are common among young people and that it is possible for universities to make effective interventions. We welcome the national focus on student mental health and suicide risk. We will continue to engage with the sector contributing to and learning from good practice.

We also recognise that creating a Suicide Safer University requires a sensitive, planned, multi-faceted, whole institutional approach based on a supportive culture where staff have access to education, learning and development in relation to suicide and mental health. Student mental wellbeing is a strategic priority for our University and creating a Suicide Safer University is a vital part of this commitment. This Framework builds on our existing work in this area and sets out how we will approach the development of a comprehensive strategy.

Along with the University's senior leadership team I whole-heartedly endorse this Framework. I will review progress against the commitments set out below as my colleagues and I continue to learn and apply lessons of good practice from across the sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Beer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Janet Beer

Vice Chancellor

Introduction

Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people (University of Manchester, 2016) and, as institutions with large numbers of young people, universities are impacted directly by student suicide. By creating safer living and learning communities we can reduce the risk of student suicide and ensure that students and staff who are affected by suicide or attempted suicide have access to appropriate support. Creating a Suicide Safer University requires a range of interventions and approaches that need to be developed with stakeholders within the University and relevant local, regional and national agencies.

The 2018 Universities UK Suicide –Safer Universities Guidance (Universities UK, 2018) identifies three key elements of creating a Suicide Safer University: Prevention, Intervention and Postvention. This Framework sets out current activity in each of these areas and identifies areas for development. This is a complex area which requires engagement and consultation to create a strategy which meets the needs of the institution and is aligned with local work on this issue. This Framework sets out how we will develop a comprehensive Suicide Safer Strategy.

Scope

This Framework provides a road map of how we will develop a Suicide Safer University Strategy. It forms part of our Step Change Action Plan that looks at developing a whole University approach to student mental health and wellbeing in line with the Universities UK Step Change Framework (Universities UK, 2017). The actions within the Step Change Action plan are designed to create a University community where mental health and ill health can be openly discussed, where access to support is easily available and where we are seeking to continually improve practice. All of these elements contribute to suicide prevention as well as to broader mental health initiatives. This work is not duplicated in this Framework but is an important part of the context within which the Framework has been developed. Once approved the commitments in this Framework will be incorporated into the Step Change Action Plan.

National Context

There has been increasing concern both nationally and internationally about incidences of suicide and attempted suicide. This is reflected in a number of policies and strategies that have been released over the years including:

- National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England (Department of Health and Social Care, 2002)
- Preventing Suicide in England; A cross government outcomes strategy to save lives (Department of Health, 2017)
- Five Year Forward View for Mental Health (Independent Mental Health Taskforce, 2016)
- Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision (Department of Health and Social Care, 2018)
- Cross-Government Suicide Prevention Workplan (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019)

Specifically there has been a number of recent reports focussed on mental health in Higher Education as levels of mental illness, mental distress and low wellbeing among students are all increasing. Reports include:

- Reducing the Risk of Student Suicide: issues and responses for higher education institutions (Universities UK, 2002)
- Step Change in Mental Health (Universities UK, 2017)
- Suicide Safer Universities (Universities UK, 2018)

Today's generation of young adults (aged 16–24) are more likely to experience mental illness than previous generations of young adults (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2017). Approximately three quarters of adults with a mental illness first experience symptoms before the age of 25 and one in four young people will experience a mental illness in any 12 month period. Students can have an added risk of experiencing poorer mental health and wellbeing, due to a number of unique factors that relate to academic, financial and social pressures (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2011). This is evident in the high levels of mental ill health reported by students; over the past 10 years there has been a fivefold increase in the proportion of students disclosing a mental health condition to their university with 94% of universities reporting a dramatic increase in the number of students seeking counselling support (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2017).

Poor mental health can lead to increased risk of students dropping out of university, or in the most severe and tragic cases, death by suicide. Suicide rates rise steeply when people are in their late teens. Between 2007 and 2015, the number of student suicides across the UK increased by 79% from 75 to 134 (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Therefore, an increasing number of universities in the UK have been affected by at least one student suicide, with a small number of universities having experienced multiple suicides within a short period of time.

Local Context

The University of Liverpool has an established commitment to supporting student wellbeing and mental health. In 2019, we identified student mental health and wellbeing as a strategic priority and required all planning units to identify actions in relation to this when planning for the next three years. We have identified areas of good practice and are looking to share this across the University.

The Wellbeing Board provides oversight of wellbeing and mental health activity. We have an established Wellbeing Framework that is currently being reviewed after five years of operation. The Wellbeing Board also oversees the Step Change action plan which has been developed in response to the UUK Step Change Guidance about developing a whole institution approach to mental health. Creating a Suicide Safer University forms part of this action plan; a suicide safer university requires an underpinning commitment to student mental health. However, we also recognise that there are specific actions needed to reduce risk of suicide which is the focus of this document.

As part of the whole University approach, we provide a range of student services including Student Welfare Advice and Guidance, a Counselling Service and Mental Health Advisory Service. We have made significant investment in these services in 2018-19 in recognition of the increased demands from students in terms of numbers and complexity of presenting issues.

We are strengthening our links with the NHS and city council and sit on a number of key groups in the city in relation to student mental health including the local Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Partnership.

Stakeholder engagement

Senior leadership is essential but to create a suicide safer community we need to engage with staff and students from across the University as we develop and enhance protocols, procedures and policies. As we develop the Strategy we will provide informal and formal opportunities for consultation with staff groups, the student mental health forum, University leaders and trade unions. We will also consult with relevant groups as we develop individual activities that inform and contribute to the Strategy.

We will also engage with external partners to ensure our work is aligned to regional and national strategies and protocols. In particular, we will engage with the suicide and self-harm regional planning group and with Mersey Care. Developing effective pathways between the University and the NHS is one of the workstreams within our Office for Students funded project. We are currently the lead agency on one of 10 national projects funded by the NHS looking at improving student mental health and a partner agency on a national collaboration. We are working with NHS partners, Liverpool John Moores University and the Innovation Agency Academic Health Sciences Network for the North West Coast to develop new pathways for students to access mental health services including pathways for students experiencing mental health crises such as suicidal ideation.

Prevention

As already identified, adopting a whole University approach to good mental health is a key part of creating a suicide safer University. The activities identified under prevention are about creating an infrastructure that supports student mental health and access to support where staff can access appropriate training and resources and know how to refer students to appropriate support.

The fear that talking about suicide will increase risk persists in many communities and it is therefore important that we continue to talk about suicide risk as part of discussion about wider student support conversations and training events. There is also a need for specific suicide awareness and prevention training.

In place	Commitment/ Development
<p>Access to training for staff is key and we have been delivering mental health first aid training for four years.</p>	<p>Continue roll out of Mental Health First Aid (which includes suicide prevention) to staff and students including the Guild. We will train additional trainers to meet this commitment.</p> <p>Work with Liverpool’s suicide prevention lead to explore feasibility of delivering NO MORE Suicide Community Awareness Training developed by CHAMPS to university staff.</p> <p>Promote Mersey Care’s online Suicide Prevention to staff.</p> <p>Develop a set of skills-based trainings to complement Mental Health First Aid for staff.</p> <p>Develop online module for staff to support When to Refer Guide including information about referral routes.</p> <p>Continuing with the partnership with Charlie Waller Memorial Trust to develop a number of on-line training modules including Transitions and Students at risk or crisis. This training is aimed at academics but also those staff who are often overlooked but who</p>

	<p>have a lot of contact with students including library staff, cleaners, lab technicians and accommodation staff.</p> <p>Undertake training needs analysis for staff and further develop training framework.</p>
<p>Ensuring staff are aware of the specialist support which is available is critical and our When to Refer Guide which offers clear advice about what to do in a range of situations has been well received by staff.</p>	<p>Refresh When to Refer Guide and supplement with briefing slides for School based teams on range of support issues including suicide awareness.</p> <p>Develop What Happens When you Refer guide to provide staff with more information about the support which is available to students.</p>
<p>Each School has staff who are responsible for pastoral care for students and can refer students to specialist central services.</p>	<p>Enhance these links through Faculty Link Model within Student Services to strengthen referral routes and support for staff.</p>
<p>New students are provided with pocket guide to available services.</p> <p>Information about support services is available on the website.</p>	<p>We will work with students to understand how we can communicate most effectively with them, particularly when they are in crisis. We will ensure that our materials are accessible and culturally appropriate for our diverse student population.</p>

Intervention

Students talking about suicidal thoughts and feelings is not unusual. We are continuing to create an environment where students do not feel isolated but feel comfortable to have open and honest conversations about suicidal thoughts. The overriding requirement in these situations is that the staff member is able to listen to the student express these feelings calmly, and react appropriately. We recognise the importance of asking about suicidal thoughts and plans and will support all members of our community who ask these questions.

We recognise the importance of family and friends in supporting students who are experiencing suicidal thoughts. We have already reviewed the approach of Student Services to discussing sharing information with family and friends and now actively seek to discuss with students who express suicidal thoughts whether they have shared that information with family and friends, and if not why not. This approach allows us to engage with students about their specific situation whilst encouraging them to think about who forms part of their network of support. This approach has been welcomed by students.

University staff are an important first line of intervention with students who are expressing suicidal thoughts or who have attempted suicide. Student Services Staff with specialist knowledge and skills can provide support and advice to students expressing suicidal intention including developing safety plans and liaising with appropriate external services. However, we cannot respond to or manage these risks alone and it is important that we maintain strong partnerships with the NHS and third sector organisations. We will be developing these links further through our project Working in Partnership to Improve Student Mental Health.

In place	Commitment/ Development
<p>Daily combined Student Services drop in 11-3 provides single point of access to services and makes it easy for staff to sign post students to support</p> <p>Rapid access mental health adviser appointments mean students who are presenting with suicidal intentions or in mental health crisis can be seen quickly by a mental health adviser.</p>	<p>Implementing the Faculty Link model means that we will develop enhanced understanding of the needs of students in different departments and provide interventions at appropriate points in the academic year.</p> <p>We will continue to implement innovative ways to support students including the Counselling Service delivering Single Session Therapy. Single Session Therapy allows for students to access support at 'point of need', and should ultimately reduce the counselling waiting and will allow for those students with more complex needs to access longer term counselling. We will continue to shape our services moving forward by closely monitoring service data and evaluating student feedback.</p>
<p>Student Services staff have engaged in a range of internal and external suicide awareness and intervention training.</p>	<p>We will put in place a specific training plan for all Student Services staff.</p>
<p>Student Service have procedures in place for staff who are dealing with students in crisis including risk protocols and safety plans.</p>	<p>We will continue to develop these protocols, consulting with staff and students to ensure they are fit for purpose and are communicated effectively.</p>
<p>Links with Brownlow Health who can provide immediate access to NHS GP services for students in crisis.</p> <p>Links with specialist teams within Mersey Care, however these links needs to be strengthened and clearer pathways identified.</p>	<p>We are at the start of a two year project to improve collaborative working with the NHS to offer seamless referrals pathways and shared protocols supported by a clear risk management strategy which delineates that responsibilities of partner agencies. This will provide enhanced interventions for students at risk.</p>

Postvention

A student suicide impacts on family, friends, staff who had contact with that student and the wider University community. The aim of postvention is to support those people who have been affected by a student's suicide and to learn lessons to reduce risk and to prevent, as far as possible, future suicides.

In Place	Commitment/ Development
<p>Student Services staff provide support for students who have been affected by a student suicide. This takes the form of drop ins and where appropriate ongoing appointments.</p> <p>This support is augmented by chaplaincy support from a range of faiths for those who find this helpful.</p> <p>We also utilise debrief support from our Employee Assistance Provider who provide specialist postvention de-briefing and onward referral for staff and students.</p> <p>We also utilise the Employee Assistance Provider to establish a time limited 24 hour telephone helpline for those affected by suicide.</p>	<p>We are training counsellors and wellbeing advisers to implement critical incident stress debriefing for staff and students. This debriefing allows for staff to inform key people who have been involved in, or witnessed, a student suicide, within a structured, small group crisis intervention process. It is specific, temporary and supportive and focuses on building up a groups' resistance to traumatic stressors and focuses on the group's resilience after a traumatic exposure.</p>
<p>We have established guidelines for responding to student death and serious incidents. These guidelines have been reviewed to provide more detailed information for those involved in responding to events.</p>	<p>We will review and where relevant update the guidance related to critical incidents at least annually and will communicate this to relevant staff.</p>
<p>Following an apparent student suicide those involved reflect on the situation and consider any lessons learnt.</p>	<p>We will standardise this process to use a more formal structured approach and will also apply this approach to 'near misses.'</p>
<p>We publicise information about support following a suicide to students and staff who have been affected.</p>	<p>We will continue to review our approach to publicising this information to ensure that it reaches those who need it.</p>

Next Steps and Plans for Review

This Framework sets out our current approach to creating a Suicide Safer University and how we will continue to develop, embed and refine our approach. We recognise that Suicide Safer Universities require an ongoing institutional commitment and development of whole institutional approaches. The Framework sets out how we will develop an institutional Suicide Safer University Strategy; we will work with our staff and students to embed the developments and commitments set out in this Framework and to develop and refine appropriate Policy, Protocols and Guidance to formalise and embed our approach.

We will provide an annual update on the development of this work to Executive Board and to the Health and Safety Governance Committee.

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