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## English Path Dublin: Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

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## 1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 The aim of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy is to provide a clear, transparent, and practical policy framework relating to mental health issues for students, potential students, and staff supporting these students at English Path (EP from now on). The policy also aims to provide a basis for a consistent approach to the way EP responds to the needs of students experiencing mental health difficulties. 1.2 The aims of EP, in respect of student mental health, are to:

- promote positive mental health wellbeing by providing information, advice, and support;
- provide advice and information on the support options available;
- enable those with mental health-related issues to self-disclose and seek help;
- offer guidelines to students and staff regarding their responsibilities;
- explain the legal context and responsibilities.

## 2. Definition

2.1 Mental health refers to the capacity to live in a resourceful and fulfilling manner, having the resilience to deal with the challenges and obstacles which life presents. Mental health difficulties exist across a spectrum of states of mind and behaviors, from temporary responses to painful events through to more debilitating and persistent conditions. 2.2 The primary focus of this document is those students who experience mental health difficulties. This term ‘mental health difficulty’ is used for the purpose of this document to describe students who experience:

- A temporary, but difficult response to stress or external pressures, a painful event, physical illness, or symptoms of drug or alcohol use. This response is likely to affect other areas of the student’s life.
- A long-term mental health condition which may have a significant impact on their day-to-day life (e.g., anxiety, depression, eating disorder, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder).

## 3. Supporting Legislation

3.1 The following legislation has helped to inform the guidelines and procedures within this policy:

- **The Mental Health Act 2001 (as amended).** This Act outlines the rights of those experiencing a mental health difficulty and under which circumstances they can be detained. It is imperative to be aware of the fact that people with mental health difficulties have the same rights and responsibilities as other people. The only exception to this is when an individual is detained under the act.
- **The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018.** These Acts outline that within the law, those with a significant and long-term mental health difficulty fall within the definition of disability. These students may require reasonable accommodations to allow fair and equal participation in their learning.
- **The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.** These are key in understanding how information is gathered and used.

## **4. Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy and Other Policies**

4.1 Other EP policies and documents that have a bearing on this mental health policy include:

- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Anti-Harassment and Anti-Bullying Policy and Procedure
- Student disciplinary procedure. These are all available for students and staff on EP's shared folder on Teams and the website.

## **5. Reasonable Accommodations**

5.1 The Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2018 place a duty of care upon higher education institutions to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities in relation to:

- provisions, criteria, or practices
- physical features
- auxiliary aids.

5.2 These accommodations apply where a person with a disability is placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to persons without a disability. It is important to note that an institution can treat a person with a disability favorably compared to a person without a disability, and this would not amount to direct discrimination of a person without a disability.

5.3 EP owes a 'duty of care' to students and staff. The following outlines what is covered by 'duty of care':

- Duty to take positive steps regarding students' 'wellbeing';
- Duty to exercise the reasonable skill and care of their calling in providing education and in identifying and/or meeting students' educational needs;
- Duty to act reasonably to protect the health, safety, and welfare of students and staff;
- Provision for support.

## **6. Roles and Responsibilities**

6.1 All EP staff are expected to:

- exercise duty of care in their dealings with students; if a person shows signs of mental health difficulty, staff should offer or seek appropriate assistance;
- treat each student with dignity;
- recognize the boundaries of their roles, knowing where, when, and how to refer on, uphold confidentiality, and exercise responsibility regarding disclosure;
- contribute towards building a non-stigmatizing community.

6.2 Students

- All students should help towards creating a non-stigmatizing community;
- Students with mental health difficulties are encouraged to avail themselves of the range of internal and/or external support services, and to inform relevant staff if

unable to fulfill academic commitments, so that EP can provide them with appropriate personal and academic support;

- Students who are supporting friends and peers experiencing mental health issues should take cognizance of their personal limits and know where, when, and how to refer on.

## **7. Support Available to Students**

7.1 All staff members have a responsibility to promote the mental health of students and each other. However, certain staff members have a specific role in the process. These are:

- Designated Safeguarding Lead: Kristina Bizjak – EP Dublin.
- Designated Safeguarding Officer: Noel Newell Guckian – EP Dublin.
- 7.1.1 The Safeguarding Team provides confidential, specialist advice and guidance regarding a wide range of mental health difficulties and conditions such as depression, anxiety, personality disorder, and PTSD. The Welfare Team is available to listen to students' concerns, offer support, and address issues that may impact academic and personal achievement.
- 7.1.2 One of the principal aims within the team is to try to identify students with difficulties as early as possible. Students have responsibility for being proactive in managing their own welfare and in seeking support as and when appropriate. Students must provide information about any situation or condition that will impact on welfare and for which they would like support.
- 7.1.3 Support for students can be offered through many different avenues such as reasonable accommodations, advice and information, monitoring of students with mental health difficulties, and where appropriate, liaison with external agencies. The Student Services Officer will refer students to more specialist services when this is appropriate. The Student Services Team may also assist, advise, and liaise with academic school staff on how best to support students' mental health or disabilities.
- 7.1.4 Students can seek advice from The Student Services Team if they have been diagnosed with a learning need or require support with learning assessments by emailing [Insert Dublin email Address here].
- 7.1.5 The Student Services team are the first point of contact in supporting students with low-level emotional, psychological, mental health difficulties or those struggling with the transition to higher education.

### **7.2 Academic Staff**

- 7.2.1 Staff within academic teams may play a significant role in identifying signs of emerging difficulty, typically through profound changes in patterns of attendance and academic performance. They can also support students by encouraging them to seek appropriate support through Student Service or their general practitioner (GP).

- 7.3 Admissions
- 7.3.1 Prospective students are encouraged to indicate any disability they have at the point they are making their application to EP. A severe or enduring mental health difficulty may be classed as a disability for this purpose. The advantage to the student of disclosing this information at this point is that this starts a dialogue regarding their support needs at an early stage, making it more likely that appropriate support can be in place for their arrival.
- 7.3.2 All staff who have contact with applicants should encourage early disclosure of additional needs in order that this dialogue takes place and to ensure that EP can meet the needs of the student.

## **8. Mental Health and Wellbeing Risk Assessment Processes**

### **8.1 General Principles**

8.1.1 Health and wellbeing are crucial ingredients to a successful and fulfilling student experience. EP aims to create an educational environment which supports and promotes positive mental wellbeing and are committed to taking reasonable steps to ensure the wellbeing of their students. However, EP recognises that difficulties with mental health and wellbeing are very common. A student's health and wellbeing may impact on their ability to study, reach their potential and make the most of their time at EP.

8.1.2 In specific cases as the expertise of EP lies in the provision of higher education there will be certain services that EP cannot and should not provide. Where EP do not provide a specific mental health service, students who are enrolled onto a programme will be encouraged to seek alternative mental health services that can be accessed.

### **8.2 Initial assessment: emergency and non-emergency situations**

8.2.1 If any member of staff is concerned about a particular student, perhaps because they observed one or more concerning signs, then the next stage is to decide how urgent or non-urgent and significant the concern is. It is recommended that more information should be gathered first. For example, it could be helpful to discreetly ask staff and students if they have noticed anything. In many cases it is sensible to have an informal, private conversation with the student to discuss any concerns and to ask them if they need any support.

8.2.2 It is important that all emergency and non-emergency cases are recorded and followed up according to the severity of the situation. Student Services will record all cases (see Appendix 2).

### **8.3. Emergency situations (at school, during office hours)**

8.3.1 The situation is an emergency if:

- There is an imminent risk of suicide, i.e., the student is actively suicidal and has the intention to act on it, or has already acted on it (for example by taking an overdose or cutting their wrists).
- If the student is likely to hurt other people, or there is a serious risk to their wellbeing.
- If the student is clearly mentally or physically ill and needs urgent help.
- If the student is very disturbed or aggressive to the extent that others feel threatened.

8.3.2 Any staff member who is seriously concerned about the mental health of a student during office hours should contact the Student Services.

8.3.3 If the student will accept help and if it is appropriate, staff member(s) could facilitate them making an emergency appointment with their GP or transport to an Accident & Emergency (A&E) department of a hospital. This might involve looking up the contact details for them and allowing them use of a telephone. This option would be appropriate if, for example, the student is experiencing suicidal thoughts and wants to act to prevent them getting worse.

8.3.4 If the student will not accept help, or if they are so ill that they would not be able to get themselves to a GP or to A&E, they should be informed that they need emergency help and that a staff member is going to contact emergency services. It is best if the student consents to this, but staff can call emergency services without their permission if there are concerns for the student's safety or that of other people.

8.3.5 Staff member(s) should stay with the student until emergency services arrive (unless it is dangerous to do so), and answer any questions that the emergency services have. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 permits the disclosure of sensitive personal information if it is in the 'vital interests' of the individual or another person (e.g., information that could prevent their death).

8.3.6 A factual account should be written down and sent to Student Services at EP who can follow up to see if any additional support is needed for the student or for other students who were involved. 8.3.7 The Head of School will be consulted and a decision will be made between the Student Services and the head of School about any future actions.

### **8.4. Suspension or Exclusion of a Student**

8.4.1 In some cases, the student will need to defer their studies to get appropriate help. A decision will need to be made by the Centre Manager, with advice from the Designated Safeguarding Lead, on whether the student should be advised to (or required to) take leave of absence from their studies at EP whilst appropriate means of addressing the situation are being considered.

8.4.2 In cases of suspension, EP should take this decision when there is sufficient evidence that the student is not functioning effectively and their behaviour is seriously disturbing or threatening others around them and/or themselves. The student should also be encouraged to access the support of an advocate from one of the mental health charities in Ireland, such as Mental Health Ireland or Aware.

8.4.3 It is important that the student is informed that the above procedure in the first instance is quite separate from EP disciplinary procedures. It should also be made clear that EP is recommending this course of action because the student's behaviour is disturbing others around him/her, or is of such a level that they are unable to successfully continue with their learning experience.

8.4.4 The student should be reminded that either support in dealing with this has been offered and declined, or that support has been put in place and the behaviour is still resulting in an unmanageable situation for the individual and/or EP.

## **8.5. Return to Study**

8.5.1 Following a period of absence from EP for recuperation, it may be appropriate for the student to return to resume studies. If this is the case, it will be necessary to ensure that the student is assisted in their return to their studies.

8.5.2 If a student has been formally suspended by the Dean, this suspension must formally be lifted before return to study. EP will require the student to produce appropriate confirmation of their health and ability to resume studying. This will ideally be provided by the student's Psychiatrist, but a GP's report can also be accepted.

8.5.3 The Student Welfare Support Services will be available to provide advice and support to facilitate the student's transition back onto the programme, particularly in relation to any action that might be required under the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018.

## **8.6. Non-emergency situations (Fitness to Study Policy)**

8.6.1 If a student is suffering from a serious mental health difficulty, they may seek to take time out to become fit to study again. Different processes for making this request apply to students (as per the EP Fitness to Study Policy) and medical conditions may be set regarding fitness to return to study.

8.6.2 In a limited number of cases the student's behaviour, arising from their medical condition, impacts adversely on the wider student body and on staff. The Fitness to Study Policy focus on managing this impact in the least restrictive way possible. This will usually involve discussions with the individual student concerned, regarding the negative effects of their behaviour on others. Staff involved in these discussions should ensure that they are adequately equipped to have such discussions and are sensitive to issues related to mental illness.

8.6.3 A student's medical condition may be such that they are unable to meet the reasonable academic requirements of the programme; and the reasonable social and behavioural requirements of a student member without their physical, mental, emotional or psychological



health or state having an unacceptably harmful impact upon the health, safety and/or welfare of the student and/or other students and/or EP staff.

8.6.4 In such cases it may be necessary to request that the student suspend study for a period or to initiate the Fitness to Study procedures, through which suspension may be imposed.

## **9. Data Protection**

9.1.1 The EP policy on Data Protection, in accordance to GDPR and the Irish Data Protection Act 2018, contains guidance on the use of sensitive information and should be consulted by staff. The student should be clearly informed about the limits of confidentiality in terms of information sharing.

**Appendix 1: Mental health and wellbeing assessment matrix**

Level of Risk	Type of situation	Key assessment Information
Low risk	Non-emergency situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health problem may be present, but the student has no thoughts of plans regarding harm to self or others.</li> <li>• Student has no plan or thoughts relating to self-harming behaviour.</li> <li>• Student is confident about maintaining his/her own safety and confident about resolving any academic matters.</li> <li>• No evidence of immediate or short-term physical vulnerability or risk.</li> </ul>
Medium Risk		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health problem(s) present and/or has non-specific thoughts or ideas regarding harm to self or others.</li> <li>• There is no plan to act on self-harming or suicidal thoughts. However, the student's wellbeing is at risk of deterioration and they may be physically vulnerable in certain circumstances.</li> </ul>
High Risk	Emergency situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious mental health problem(s) present, including possible features and symptoms.</li> <li>• May well have frank plans to engage in further self-harming behaviour, or to harm others.</li> <li>• Has clearly identifiable risk characteristics, such as imminent thoughts or plans relating to self-harm (or harm to others) or suicide.</li> <li>• May have already engaged in self-injurious or self-harming behaviour.</li> <li>• May lack capacity and competence to consent to or refuse on-going help.</li> <li>• Student's wellbeing and mental health are likely to deteriorate without intervention and the student will almost certainly be physically vulnerable</li> </ul>

**Appendix 2: Recording Student Mental Health concerns**

Date	Name of staff member	Student ID number	Details of mental health and wellbeing concerns	Action to be taken	Action to be completed by	Outcome of actions	Staff signature

## Student in distress – How to respond

Staff member concerned about a student in distress

### Urgent/Emergency situation

If the student is or appears:

- Very aggressive/threatening towards the staff member or other students (seek help from Police calling 999);
- Suicidal/actively talking about suicide;
- Disoriented or is displaying psychotic behaviour;
- Taken an overdose of drugs/alcohol;
- A recent victim of an assault or an attack;
- A risk to self or others.

### Non-urgent situation

If the student is or appears:

- Withdrawn, low in mood, tearful or unduly anxious or has a sudden deterioration in academic performance

**AND**

- Does not display features considered as urgent/emergency

### Actions

- If possible consult a colleague or a member of the Student Services team and try not to act alone (it is important to ensure your own safety and that of the distressed student).
- Talk to the student and explain your concern (unless you believe it will aggravate the situation).
- If it is a life-threatening emergency, request an ambulance by calling 999. Inform Campus security/reception and inform your line manager.
- In non life-threatening situation, identify if the student is willing to seek help and seek consent from the student to contact the Welfare Support Services or any relevant professional services or the student's own emergency contact.
- Consider A&E emergency services if other services unavailable or closed.

- Talk to the student and explain your concerns.
- Clarify why the student is upset and identify what existing support is in place.
- Identify if the student is willing to seek help.
- Advise the student of the services available to them and encourage the student to make contact with the relevant service themselves.
- When concerns are raised about a student's fitness to study, the Head of Programme Management will act as the case officer.
- For further information, please follow the EP' Fitness to Study Policy.