



**MENTAL HEALTH
AND WELLBEING**



**The Open
University**

SUICIDE SAFER UNIVERSITY ACTION PLAN (2022)

**Developing a whole institute approach for the support
and protection of students and staff**

ACTION PLAN

No.	Action	Goal	Stage	Completed by
1.1	A detailed action plan for Stages 1 and 2 objectives will developed, setting out expected timescale for delivery, owners of each action, relevant stakeholders, reporting routes and the key results (performance measures).	Coherent action plans developed and agreed, stating timescales, action owners and key performance measures	1	Jan 2022
1.2	A Suicide Safer Strategy Working Group comprising stakeholders from across the university will be established and will meet on a regular basis, to ensure actions are delivered in a timely and effective manner, adopting a task and finish approach to assist with project management.	Group established with Terms of Reference outlining scope, remit, membership and reporting lines	1	Jan 2022
2.1	Operational processes identified and developed to enable the systematic and sensitive capture of data that will inform institutional practice, policies and procedures associated with suicide prevention, intervention, postvention.	All actions relating to the strategy including development of Stage 2 are informed by robust and reliable data (see Actions 5.3, 6.1 and 7.7)	1	July 2022
2.2	Identify through research pertinent studies, information or datasets associated suicide and the prevention of suicide, in particular that which is relevant to a distance learning or distributed (remote/hybrid) working environment.	External evidence base can be used to inform and compare work within the OU (see Actions 5.3 and 7.9)	1	July-Dec 2022
2.3	Complete a systematic review of Suicide Prevention Action Plans in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, to ensure alignment with Stage 1 actions, and to maximise coherence of support and communications for students and staff, irrespective of their place of residence.	Actions taken within the OU to support students and staff complement local to national initiatives, irrespective of location. Insight gained internal to the OU can be directly compared with nation specific initiatives. (see Actions 5.2, 5.3, 6.2, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7 and 7.10)	1	April 2022
2.4	Undertake a systematic review of relevant existing OU student, staff and whole-institute policies to ensure compliance with recommendations and outcomes from the Suicide Safer Strategy and to ensure consistency in approach to the information and support provided to students and staff	All policies and procedures are aligned in the context of information and support associated with suicide prevention awareness and advice (see Actions 5.1 and 6.1)	1	Aug 2022
3.1	Ensure all institutional communications about suicide use appropriate terminology, are undertaken sensitively, and provide clear and systematic signposting to internal and external support services.	Communications encourage individuals to talk with others about their concerns, without fear of repercussion or stigma (see Actions 5.2, 6.1 and 7.8)	1	Dec 2022

3.2	Working with third-sector support services, develop a systematic approach to the promotion of student and staff suicide prevention awareness events to coincide with national awareness raising events and key points in the university calendar	Aligning internal and external awareness raising events gains better traction and engagement from students and staff (see Action 5.2, 6.1 and 6.2)	1	Dec 2022
5.1	<p>In addition to Action 2.4, undertake the following actions to ensure effective training about suicide prevention and awareness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – establish a list of core mental health training programmes by staff role that include aspects on suicide prevention, and measure uptake and repeat engagement by staff with these training programmes – actively promote the MHFA training programme and monitor levels of uptake across the University and encourage any areas with no or very few trained MHFAs to engage with this programme – actively promote the ‘Responding to distressed and suicidal student’ training programme and increase the level of engagement by academic-related and academic staff involved in supporting students – review the content, focus and levels of uptake of mental health and wellbeing training resources provided to postgraduate research students – identify and resolve gaps in current training provisions for students and staff, by revising resources and/or developing new resources – work with partners and mental health charities to develop training resources that promote an awareness of cultural competency matters associated with suicide. 	Increase in the levels of awareness, engagement and repeat engagement with information, advice and training development associated with suicide prevention	2	Aug 2022 - July 2023
5.2	<p>In addition to Actions 2.3, 3.1 and 3.2, undertake the following actions to promote a compassionate and aware community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – scope out an internal communications plan that sensitively raises awareness of suicide risk and frames this as an ‘every person’ responsibility to destigmatise help-seeking and discussions of suicidal thoughts or behaviours – establish protocols to ensure proactive communications to students and staff to promote a compassionate, safe environment in which individuals feel enabled to disclose difficulties, a sense of exclusion or distress – ensure appropriate signposting to sources of support for students and staff on a range of mental health and wellbeing topics, including suicide prevention, with these are reinforced via a range of interaction channels – promote the concept of ‘mental wealth’ through a programme of education and training, including the active development of compassionate leaders and compassionate leadership at all levels of the University 	<p>Increase in the number of open and supportive discussions raising awareness of suicide risk and prevention</p> <p>Improved sense of inclusion and support in student and staff surveys</p> <p>Increase in occurrence and reporting of compassionate leadership exemplars</p> <p>Increase in student and staff declaration rates of mental health difficulties</p>	2	Aug 2022 - July 2023

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increase student and staff declarations of a mental health difficulty through positive and proactive communications explaining why, how and where declarations should be made - evaluate the impact of peer-supported study groups on mental health and wellbeing and a sense of inclusion - work with other groups (PVC-S Office, EDI Office, faculties, People Services etc) to ensure mental health and wellbeing support initiatives are inclusive of under-represented and disadvantaged groups, and those deemed to be more at risk from suicidal ideations and behaviours - explore the use of Report+Support or other mechanisms by which students and staff can raise concerns about University strategies, policies and/or language used in relation to mental health and suicide. 			
5.3	<p>In addition to Actions 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, undertake the following actions to ensure effective support for students and staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establish robust mechanisms to enable regular auditing and evaluation of externally contracted services to ensure they are providing an appropriate and effective service to OU students and (where appropriate) staff - implement procedures to ensure vulnerable students who express suicidal ideations are referred to appropriate forms of support, and follow-up checks are carried out - work with the Mental Health Casework and Advice Service to evaluate the efficiency of referrals and type of support needs of vulnerable students expressing suicidal ideations or behaviours, directed to the service - work with the Safeguarding Team to monitor trends in referrals where reference is made to suicide, suicide ideations and/or bereavement by suicide - ensure all staff responsible for the pastoral and academic support of students know how, when and why to refer students to specialist support services - develop and implement improved procedures for staff to support other staff at a distance and on site, who are distressed or suicidal - review staff awareness of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and ensure that managers can signpost staff to relevant resources to meet their needs - monitor uptake and demographics of students and staff who use external specialist support services - review resources and support structures for students and staff that address common risk factors (such as debt, work pressures, disabilities, index of multiple deprivation, and culture) that may influence an individual's risk for suicidal ideations or behaviours 	<p>Improved evidenced-based understanding of the impact and effectiveness of support and support services provided to students and staff</p> <p>Increase in levels of early preventative engagement with resources</p> <p>Improved timeliness of preventative and intervention support</p>	2	Aug 2022 - July 2023

5.4	<p>Undertaken the following actions to mitigate access to means to enact suicide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – introduce protocols to ensure those who no longer require permanent or any access to restricted areas have their access permissions changed – provide guidance to managers responsible for high-risk facilities on how to respond to individuals exhibiting signs and behaviours of being at risk of suicide, and support them via a cocreated suicide safety plan – provide additional training for Estates staff, laboratory managers and contract staff (e.g. cleaners) on responding to individuals working in high-risk facilities, who are exhibiting signs and behaviours of being at risk of suicide and how to report such behaviours for further supportive action. 	<p>Managers and workers in high-risk areas know how to respond to and support individuals exhibiting signs of being at risk of suicide</p> <p>There are no incidents in high-risk areas.</p>	2	Aug 2022
6.1	<p>In addition to Actions 2.1, 2.4, 3.1 and 3.2, undertake the following actions to improve intervention support for individuals at risk of suicide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – actively promote the 'Guidelines for responding to distressed and suicidal students' webpage and the associated online workshop, and track level of webpage visits and workshop participation – develop and disseminate 'Guidelines for responding to distressed and suicidal staff' to all managers, and promote aware of these guidelines via the Mental health and wellbeing resources on My Learning Centre – include a feedback mechanism for staff who use the Guidelines to state how and when they were applied, and how effective they found the process – improve the level of information recorded on actions taken to support students in distress or at risk of suicide – develop training support materials on responding to individuals expressing suicidal ideations – improve awareness of and access to the staff debriefing support service, for any staff member who has had to manage a challenging conversation with an individual who is in distress or suicidal 	<p>Increase in the number of staff confirming awareness of the Guidelines for responding to distressed and suicidal individuals</p> <p>Data collected on the frequency and reasons for use of the Guidelines</p> <p>Staff report improved levels of confidence in responding to individuals expressing suicidal ideations</p>	2	Aug 2022 - July 2023
6.2	<p>In addition to Actions 2.3 and 3.2, undertake the following actions to improve engagement with resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – improve the directness of advice on the Help Centre for students who feel they are in crisis, to include information on external support routes relevant for the UK nations, Republic of Ireland and international students – investigate the potential to track occurrences of students searching online for help with crisis situations – work with units to encourage staff to complete a skills-needs analysis about suicide prevention awareness 	<p>Improved early warning support for students</p> <p>Increased uptake of wellness action plan by staff reduced workdays lost to stress</p>	2	Aug 2022 - July 2023

	– work with People Services to promote the wellness action plan for line managers to work with direct reports to develop a better awareness of working style, stress triggers and responses, and to help staff stay mentally healthy.			
6.3	Put forward an evidenced-based recommendation that staff in frontline roles involved in the support of students and/or staff should complete a minimum level of suicide prevention training and engage in refresher training at least once every three-years, as part of the University's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.	Improved levels of engagement with suicide prevention training by staff across a wide range of roles and units	2	July 2023
7.1	Improve awareness of who to contact following notification of the death of a student or member of staff by suicide or suspected suicide	Improved compliance with policy	1	Dec 2022
7.2	Review staff guidance on handling the notification of a death (of a student or staff member) when reference is made to suicide or suspected suicide.	Improved compliance with policy	1	Dec 2022
7.3	Develop an individual response template to able appropriate and systematic decisions to be made on a case-by-case basis	Template created and aligned with policies and procedures	2	July 2023
7.4	Develop a coherent response plan following the death of an individual by suicide, that supports and directs students and staff to appropriate in-house resources and third-party support services including the NHS	Response plan created and aligned with internal resources and listings of national and international charities	2	July 2023
7.5	Collate and maintain a comprehensive listing of national charities specialising in suicide prevention and bereavement (covering the UK and Ireland), to share with those affected by suicide	List is available for frontline staff use Maintenance routine implemented	1	July 2022
7.6	Collate and maintain a list of reputable international suicide prevention and bereavement support services to share with those affected by suicide	List is available for frontline staff use Maintenance routine implemented	1	July 2022
7.7	Devise Terms of reference and principles of operation for the Core Suicide Response Group, with named representatives identified from each core area. The group will then develop an action plan template (including a decision flow chart) that can be adapted should an incident arise.	Terms of reference established for Core Suicide Response Group	2	Apr-July 2023
7.8	Establish protocols on how to manage communications to the wider student and staff community, about the death of an undergraduate or postgraduate taught student by suicide.	Protocols established and agreed with Communications Team	2	Apr-July 2023
7.9	Implement procedures to monitor and review student and staff deaths (including suspected suicides), ensuring records include relevant individual characteristics to ascertain common associations.	Procedures established and informed by external research on data efficacy	2	July 2023
7.10	Establish protocols for a University Suicide Cluster Response Group that can be stood up at speed to review possible or suspected suicide clusters amongst students and/or staff.	Protocols established and informed by external insight	2	July 2023

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