

Supporting Staff who are Supporting Students in Crisis

1) Background

Staff in both academic and service departments may potentially be supporting students experiencing a personal, emotional or mental wellbeing crisis. The University recognises that it can be stressful for staff to interact with someone in distress and may result in staff not only feeling unsure about how to respond but also feeling responsible, helpless, fearful, frustrated or angry. The University therefore has a strategy for addressing the support needs of those staff who are supporting students in crisis.

2) Purpose

Aberystwyth University is committed to creating the best possible working environment to support staff and to create an environment which works in harmony with employees and actively contributes to enhancing their lives. The University's Staff Health and Wellbeing Policy expresses the University's commitment as a responsible employer to providing a working environment and management practices which promote employee wellbeing and good health (paragraph 1.2).

Furthermore, in line with the policy (paragraph 1.3), the University will fulfil its commitment by:

- Identifying potential hazards or circumstances which might contribute to inappropriate levels of work-related stress and conduct risk assessments to eliminate or control the risks from such stress. These circumstances and risk assessments will then be kept under review;
- Consulting with relevant trade union safety representatives and other stakeholders (e.g. Heads of Department), on issues relating to staff wellbeing;
- Increasing awareness and understanding of stress related issues and the importance of general good health and wellbeing through identification, prevention, control and subsequent monitoring of causes of stress at work including where appropriate training and health promotion;
- Providing enhanced training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices appropriate to this policy;
- Providing a confidential counselling service for staff whose wellbeing is adversely affected by stress;
- Ensuring that appropriate resources are provided to enable managers to implement the University's agreed staff wellbeing strategy.

3) Benefits

By recognising the impact supporting students in crisis can have on staff and by responding appropriately the University will ensure it meets its commitments to staff wellbeing, making the University a genuinely supportive and positive environment.

4) Provision

The University provides the following support to assist staff in responding to students in crisis:

a) Home department

Support is available to all members of staff from a line manager. The line manager acts as a first point of contact for any issues which may impact on the member of staff as a result of their interaction with students experiencing a personal, emotional or mental wellbeing crisis.

b) Student Support and Careers Services

Advice on managing a crisis is available by phone, email or in person from staff in Student Support Services. In addition, Student Support and Careers Services provide advice regarding the range of University services available to support students in crisis. Furthermore, staff in Student Support and Careers Services deliver a range of CPD courses and maintain a comprehensive website which provides guidance to staff on dealing with a number of support related issues.

While its primary purpose is to provide direct support to students, Student Support and Careers Services will nevertheless support staff in their interactions with students. They do this by exploring options and making suggestions to help guide members of staff who are supporting students experiencing a personal, emotional or mental wellbeing crisis. Advice will often centre around the need for boundaries, onwards referral and ensuring that the individual staff member seeks support for themselves.

c) Human Resources

External counselling services are offered which provide staff with a completely confidential and independent means of accessing support for a range of issues, both work and non-work related, 365 days of the year and 24/7. These services are available to staff seeking support for themselves as a result of or during their interactions with students in crisis but this may not be widely known. The service is employee led and employees can contact the Employee Assistance Programme direct to arrange counselling. Details of the service can be found at <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/employment-information/eap/>. A range of additional resources are also available on the supplier's website.

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