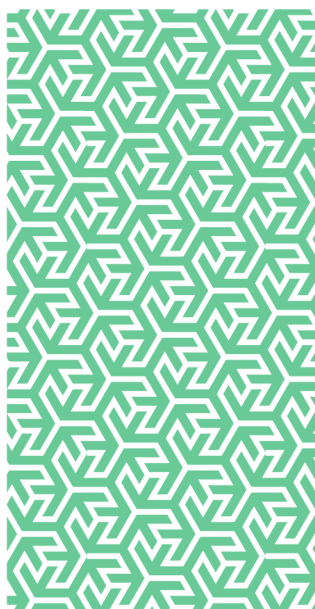




Risk control

Student Suicide Awareness and Management



In partnership with



Student Suicide - Awareness and Management

Introduction

This guidance document focusses on the preventative strategies and methods that institutions can use to provide postvention interventions for people connected to student deaths by suicide.

According to the Office for National Statistics¹:

- The suicide rate for higher education students in the academic year ending 2020 in England and Wales was 3.0 deaths per 100,000 students (64 suicide deaths); this is the lowest rate observed over the last four years, although the small numbers per year make it difficult to identify statistically significant differences.
- Between the academic year ending 2017 and the academic year ending 2020, the male suicide rate for higher education students was statistically higher (5.6 deaths per 100,000 students; 202 suicide deaths) compared with female students at 2.5 deaths per 100,000 students (117 suicide deaths); this is in line with the trend seen in the general population where suicide rates are higher amongst males.
- Between the academic year ending 2017 and the academic year ending 2020, higher education students in England and Wales had a significantly lower suicide rate compared with the general population of similar ages.
- When compared with the general population, the suicide rate for higher education students among those aged 20 years and under and those aged 21 to 24 years showed the biggest difference, with the rate in the general population being 2.7 times higher than that in higher education students.
- Between the academic year ending 2017 and the academic year ending 2020, first year undergraduate males had a significantly higher suicide rate at 7.8 deaths per 100,000 students compared with those studying in other years (4.3 deaths per 100,000).
- The stark reality is that suicide is the largest reason for pre- mature deaths in student age groups 18-30 in the UK.
- Students in higher education predominately make up this age group. Leaders of Higher Education Institutions should be considering how suicide prevention strategies, policies and processes are effectively implemented and integrated into all parts of their institute.

Young people are facing many factors that may be contrary to good mental health and wellbeing. Factors include poor mental health; academic pressures or worries; bullying; social isolation; family environment and bereavement; relationship problems; substance misuse; or neglect. Factors can be cumulative over time, and adverse childhood

experiences, deprivation, and poor physical health also contribute to the risk of suicide.

Poor mental health and wellbeing certainly impacts on student's performance and experience of university life. The important support services within institutions not only provide help and support with mental health and wellbeing but may also enable students to succeed in academic achievement and other aspects of university life.

Under the Equalities Act, Higher Education Institutions have responsibilities to ensure reasonable adjustments are made for students. Legal action can be expensive and bring high risks of reputational damage after already tragic events.

An Effective Approach

Higher Education Institutions should consider suicide prevention strategies and policies that are clear, holistic, and continually improve standards of support provided to their students and communities.

Integrating suicide prevention into all relevant aspects of universities business, governance structures, and student experiences increases successful implementation and ensures support is provided to those who need it.

The importance that any suicide prevention strategy and policies are championed, supported, and communicated effectively by the Higher Education Institutes leadership team should not be underestimated. The implementation process should be monitored by this team and interventions carried out if needed.

A structured approach should be followed when developing suicide prevention strategies. Universities UK (UUK) and Papyrus (the UK's national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide) first published 'Suicide – Safer Universities Guidance'² in 2018 to help Higher Education Institute leaders prevent student suicides. The guidance provides a three-stage strategic approach to the task:

Prevention

- Take a whole-university approach to good mental health.
- Aim to create compassionate communities among staff and students.
- Encourage disclosure of difficulties and distress.
- Ensure that students getting into difficulties are identified, signposted to help, and followed up.
- Work together with schools, colleges, and other universities in your locality to ensure smooth transitions between educational settings.
- Raise suicide awareness and work to destigmatise suicide.

- Encourage students to involve parents, guardians or other trusted advisers early if they run into mental health difficulties. Students' first source of support is friends and families.
- Make this everyone's business and provide specific training on suicide prevention awareness.
- Provide a range of easily accessible and culturally appropriate support for those experiencing difficulties.
- Signpost support available from the university, including in departments / schools, faculties, halls of residence, central support services, and others.
- Signpost support available externally, which includes NHS, voluntary sector and others.
- Prevent and act against bullying and all types of discrimination and harassment.
- Restrict access to locations and materials that can be used for suicide.
- Ensure good communication between all elements of the university involved with student welfare (i.e. if concerns are raised in halls of residence, ensure schools / personal tutors are aware).

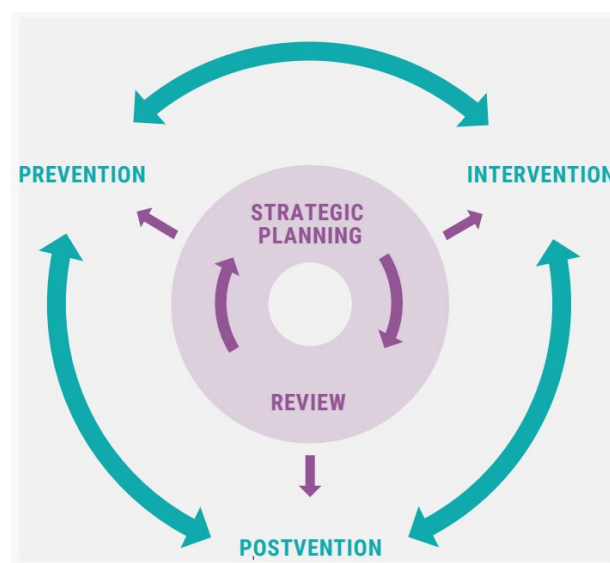
Intervention

- Recognise signs and vulnerabilities: use alert systems to detect patterns of difficulty, such as not engaging in academic work, running into academic difficulties or dropping off the academic radar, not paying rent, fees or fines; disciplinary issues, not engaging with other students or staff or not being involved in community activities.
- Train all student-facing academic, professional services and operational staff across the organisation and provide refresher training in suicide awareness, how to have conversations and how to intervene.
- Provide and publicise resources such as 'use of language', 'spot the signs', 'it's safe to talk about suicide', and others to the wider university community.
- Consider your institution's policy and practice on information sharing agreements, disclosure and consent.
- Develop, implement, and regularly review support pathways within the university for distressed students.
- Establish clear and collaborative local care pathways into statutory mental health services and NHS crisis intervention teams.

Postvention

- Contact the bereaved, offering to meet and provide compassionate support.

- Support affected students and staff – ensure individual approaches for anyone identified as being at risk of contagion, including rapid referral for community mental health support where and when needed.



Source: Suicide – Safer Universities Guidance (2018)

- Agree internal communications, including staff and students, as appropriate.
- Legacy and anniversaries – find the best way to celebrate the life of the deceased, without glamorising suicide.
- Alert local and public health services, as appropriate.

Further Information

Universities UK's Suicide Safer Universities Guidance is available and assists HEI's to develop their strategies.

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/features/suicide-safer-universities>

Signposting

Signposting to mental health services is simply the directing of a person to the opportunities available to support and assist them under the current situation. The following selection on the next page is not exhaustive but can support a suicide prevention strategy.

Other Mental Health Support Services

Samaritans	
Website:	https://www.samaritans.org
Email:	jo@samaritans.org
Phone:	116 123 (24 hours a day, free to call)
Who is this service for?	Provides confidential, non-judgmental emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that could lead to suicide. You can phone, email, write a letter or in most cases talk to someone face to face.

Mind Infoline	
Website:	www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines
Email:	info@mind.org.uk
Phone:	0300 102 1234 (9am-6pm Monday to Friday)
Who is this service for?	Mind provides confidential mental health information services. With support and understanding, Mind enables people to make informed choices. The Infoline gives information on types of mental health problems, where to get help, drug treatments, alternative therapies and advocacy. Mind works in partnership with around 140 local Minds providing local mental health services.

The Mix	
Text	Text 'THEMIX' to 85258.
Website:	www.themix.org.uk/get-support
Phone:	0808 808 4994 (3pm to 12am, free to call)
Who is this service for?	The Mix provides judgement- free information and support to young people aged 13-25 on a range of issues including mental health problems. Young people can access The Mix's support via phone, email, webchat, peer to peer and counselling services.

SHOUT	
Text:	85258
Website:	https://www.giveusashout.org/
Who is this service for?	Shout is the UK's first 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need immediate help.

Saneline	
Website:	www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/helpline
Phone:	0300 304 7000 (4:00pm-10:00pm)
Who is this service for?	Saneline is a national mental health helpline providing information and support to people with mental health problems and those who support them.

Side by Side	
Website:	https://sidebyside.mind.org.uk/
Who is this service for?	Side by Side is an online community where you can listen, share and be heard. Side by Side is run by Mind.

References

1. Office for National Statistics, available at:
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/estimating-suicide-among-higher-education-students-in-england-and-wales-experimental-statistics/2017-to-2020>
2. Suicide-safer universities, available at:
<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/features/suicide-safer-universities>

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

contact@rmpartners.co.uk



Risk Management Partners

The Walbrook Building
25 Walbrook
London EC4N 8AW

020 7204 1800
rmpartners.co.uk

This newsletter does not purport to be comprehensive or to give legal advice. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, Risk Management Partners cannot be held liable for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies contained within the document. Readers should not act upon (or refrain from acting upon) information in this document without first taking further specialist or professional advice.

Risk Management Partners Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Registered office: The Walbrook Building, 25 Walbrook, London EC4N 8AW. Registered in England and Wales. Company no. 2989025.