Mental Health Policy for Students

1. Introduction

Richmond upon Thames College is committed to widening participation, increasing retention and achievement and supporting progression for all learners.

Central to this commitment is the wish to offer an appropriate programme of study, with support, to students with mental health difficulties. This support will be designed to meet individual requirements within resource constraints. The College encourages applications from any learner who is able to benefit from our courses and who meets the entry requirements. However, care will be taken to ensure that we are not setting a student up to fail as we are aware that this may compound any existing mental health problem. We aim to ensure that an individual is able to meet the demands of the course, has the potential to succeed and comply with the Student Responsibilities.

In addition the College is committed to raising awareness of mental health issues and challenging stereotypes. This will include the provision of staff development as appropriate. This policy will be kept under regular review.

What do we mean by mental health?
Mental health issues are relevant to all of us. Everyone has a state of mental health that may fluctuate throughout his or her life. Mental health can be affected by a number of elements including social, personal, economic and environmental factors. It is estimated that one in four adults will experience a mental health difficulty during their lifetime.

The most common symptoms of mental illness are depressed feelings and withdrawal but other signs include:

- anxiety, mood swings, obsessions, phobias, disruptive behaviour, paranoid feelings, delusions, neglect to personal appearance and hygiene, eating disorders, alcohol or drug dependence, self-harm and attempted suicide.

It is important to remember that professional diagnosis relies on observation of a cluster of behavioural symptoms over a period of time. In an educational setting we can only act upon observable behaviour that may be verified by others as cause for concern.

Why do we need a policy?
- To ensure equal access to education at College and to appropriate support for all with the goal of retention and achievement of students
- Because it is recognised that students can be vulnerable as they are in a period of transition and therefore may experience stress or other mental health difficulties
- To establish procedures that safeguard the College community, give guidance regarding appropriate action and ensure accurate written records are kept
For regulatory and legal reasons:


The Act uses a wide definition of disabled persons to include people with mental health difficulties.

2. Access, Admissions and Assessment

Identification of Mental Health Difficulties Prior to Admission to College
Every applicant for a place at Richmond upon Thames College has the entitlement to discuss their needs at the recruitment stage and have an assessment of these needs in relation to their educational programme.

Students will be encouraged to discuss their needs prior to admission. This can be done on the student’s own initiative or someone else may do this on the student’s behalf (with her/his permission). Information about a mental health difficulty may be made on the application form and/or may be discussed at interview. At all times it will be made clear that any information shared will only be used in the student’s interests and with her/his full knowledge and permission. It is our aim to make anticipatory arrangements for a student’s support needs.

Full-time students
At the College interview, applicants who have identified themselves as having a mental health difficulty will be seen by a member of academic staff and the Disability Officer at which point a suitable programme of study is negotiated. It may be necessary for the Disability Officer to contact the appropriate mental health worker e.g. a psychiatrist or community psychiatric nurse (CPN). This would be in order to look into the care plan and medication as well as establish stress factors to look out for. If there were any doubt about the student’s mental health in terms of coping with the demands of the chosen course, the Disability Officer would ask the applicant’s permission to write to their mental health worker for her/his view.

If there is no previous information and an interviewer has concerns during the interview, they will not make a course offer at the time but consult with the Disability Office after the interview. A second interview can then be offered. An admission decision will then be made and a written record kept of the facts and the outcome. This information will be kept confidential.

Once a programme has been agreed, the Disability Officer will undertake an assessment of support needs. If required, a Risk Assessment will be completed in consultation with the Health and Safety Officer.

Part-time students
If an applicant identifies her or himself as having a mental health difficulty, the Disability Officer will contact them but will not be present at the interview stage. An assessment will be undertaken of the suitability of the programme and any special support needs the student may have. The process would follow the same pattern as for full-time students in that an admission decision would be made and a written record kept of the facts and the outcome. This information will be kept confidential.
Appeals Procedure
There is an admissions appeals procedure that can be used by any applicant. Normally a decision on an appeal is made by the Assistant Principal in consultation with the relevant support staff.

An Assessment of the Support Needs of the Student with Mental Health Difficulties
The Disability Officer in liaison with the Support for Learning Manager will undertake an assessment of support needs and plan any reasonable adjustments that are to be made. This may include:

- One to one support
- In class support
- Additional tutorial support
- Examination concessions
- Additional educational resources

Once the learning support needs of the student have been assessed, the college will put in place other necessary measures, which could include:

- Access to counselling services or medical referral
- Fieldwork/Work placement arrangements
- Financial support
- Co-ordination with external agencies

The relevant managers in the College (including the Safeguarding team) will have access to information about all students with mental health difficulties. In addition, for full-time students, the Personal Tutor will have access to information about their support provision. For part-time students, a named person would have access to this information. If a student has agreed to disclosure, basic information will be placed in the ALS area of RI Warehouse. Information via the ALS button is open to all staff.

Identification of mental health difficulties after admission to College
Any member of staff who is made aware that any student has a mental health difficulty may refer them for additional support to the Disability Officer. An assessment of their learning support and other needs will then be undertaken and appropriate support put in place. If required, a Risk Assessment will be completed in consultation with the Health and Safety Officer.

It needs to be noted that many students do not require intensive support as described above. However, there are some who do require a large amount of time and resources.

Fitness to study
Following a crisis situation or absence from College for mental health recuperation, which may necessitate a student repeating a year, the student and (where appropriate) their carer, will need to attend an interview to gauge their fitness to study. This meeting should be led by their Personal Tutor and will include other members of staff as required, such as the Disability Officer, College Counsellor or a Safeguarding Officer. The aim of the meeting is to establish that the student is well enough to return, and to agree what reasonable adjustments might be made for both the student and the College to support a return to study. The student will need to provide evidence from a health professional to support their request to return: refer to Fitness to Study procedure.
3. **Curriculum and Tutorial Support**

Subject teachers and Personal Tutors have an important role, particularly as they have more contact with the student than specialist support services. This section outlines the roles of various academic staff in supporting students with mental health difficulties.

When the student has enrolled into college the following procedures apply. At all stages staff will document the discussions and decisions. This will be dated, timed and signed and sent to the Personal Tutor for the student’s file.

**Role of Personal Tutors**

In general, the Personal Tutor keeps oversight of the progress of their tutees. For some post-19 and part-time students the lecturer may take on this role. Student Services will inform the Personal Tutor, wherever possible, of any prior information related to a student’s mental health status. This, however, will depend on permission being given by the student.

The Personal Tutor will discuss the nature of the student’s difficulties and, where appropriate, discuss them with the Mental Health Officer and Disability Officer. It is recognized that not all students will require, or request, intensive support and the normal cycle of personal tutorials will provide sufficient support. Where extra support is needed this will be discussed and agreed by the Personal Tutor.

An individual learning plan will be drawn up (to include appropriate reasonable adjustments), agreed with the student and a copy sent to the Disability Officer.

Where it is appropriate, and with the student’s permission, the Personal Tutor will inform teaching staff and liaise with the Disability Officer. If permission is not given the student needs to be made aware that it might affect the level of support that could be provided. Students should be encouraged to give as much information as possible to ensure that we meet our obligations under the **Equality Act 2010**.

The Personal Tutor will support the lecturer through giving advice and liaising with the Disability Officer and parents where this is necessary. In conjunction with the lecturers and Curriculum Managers the Personal Tutor will identify whether the student can manage the programme and, if necessary, make adjustments to it. This could include e.g. some leeway on the completion of work or attendance requirements. If the student’s difficulties cause problems for the completion of their programme the Personal Tutor will advise the appropriate manager on the calling of a case conference to discuss possible outcomes.

If there are behavioural problems that impact on the learning of the student or other students, a “contract” covering this will be agreed by all. This may be established through a case conference. This will encourage a consistent approach to be developed. ([contact details are given with the accompanying leaflet Identifying and Responding to Students with Mental Health Issues](#))

**Role of Lecturer/Manager**

The Lecturer will discuss strategies with their Manager, where appropriate, to decide on any leeway with attendance/punctuality/completion of work/ break from studies. An individual learning plan will be drawn up and agreed with the student. This may be coordinated by the Personal Tutor.

If there are behavioural problems that impact on other members of the group, the student should be referred to the Personal Tutor or appropriate manager.
**Disciplinary Issues**

All students are subject to the rules and disciplinary procedures of the College. However, where a student is known to have mental health difficulties or where the student is exhibiting behaviour giving cause for concern, the student’s case must be referred to the Personal Tutor. In conjunction with the Mental Health Officer and the Disability Officer, the Personal Tutor will decide whether the student needs support rather than using the disciplinary procedures. Disciplinary action may need to be taken where it is vital to stop serious disruption to others or if there is a threat to the health and safety of students or staff.

**Liaison with Exams**

There may need to be liaison with the Examinations section to gain exam concessions or agreement on suitable examination conditions. This should be negotiated through the Disability Officer (or directly with the special examination arrangements administrator where appropriate). Students need to be aware that the decision of the exam board is final and they are encouraged to make an early application.

**Liaison with Parents/Carers and Other Agencies**

Each case will be considered on its own merits but the following general guidelines will apply:

If a student is under 16 the school will be informed and the school will undertake to liaise with the parents/carer. If a student is open about their situation then the tutor will keep the parents/carer/appropriate adult informed.

If any student is unwilling for their tutor to discuss the matter further, the Personal Tutor/Assistant Principal/Disability Officer will be informed.

The Personal Tutor/Assistant Principal/Mental Health Officer/Disability Officer will undertake liaison with any other agencies.

**Monitoring of Performance**

In setting targets and deadlines staff will have reference to the Individual Learning Plan developed for that student. If there were any difficulties the lecturer would consult their Manager and the student’s Personal Tutor as is the current practice for all students.

**College Visits**

Please consult the College’s guidelines and policy on visits. As part of preparation for any visit or placement it is important that the student’s parent/guardian is aware of the importance of disclosing any medical issues, including mental health, that could possibly arise on the trip or placement.

4. **Cross-College Support**

a. **Staff Roles**

All students have a right to a range of support services. These are services that, whilst not directly concerned with delivery of the curriculum, aim to support students who have problems, issues or disabilities that might interfere with their ability to achieve academically or to get the most out of their time in College.

The following are those that might be of particular help to students with mental health difficulties (contact details are given with the accompanying leaflet Identifying and Responding to Students with Mental Health Issues):
**Counselling Service**
The College counselling service provides confidential counselling for students who ask for such support. It is appropriate for those who could have quite serious mental concerns, such as eating disorders or depression, but are managing to cope with the demands of the College. It is increasingly recognised by CAMHS and other NHS mental health support services that on-site college counselling forms a central element of any care plan for those who are otherwise able to manage their academic demands. Provision of the College Counselling Service therefore, is essential to fulfilling the commitment to offer reasonable and appropriate support to those students experiencing mental health difficulties.

The College Counsellor has a dual role as co-ordinator of support services, both internal and external, for students who have mental health concerns. S/he will invite new students to a brief meeting at the outset of their course to establish short term care services are in place and what College services are appropriate. S/he will establish a protocol where appropriate to cover a crisis situation which may occur during the student’s time at College. S/he may also be required to attend case conferences to make decisions on a student’s fitness to study.

The counselling service offers once a week therapeutic clinical sessions during term time and in addition may liaise with other internal or external professionals as appropriate. In addition, counsellors offer a daily drop-in service at 3pm which may be accessed by students experiencing emotional or mental health difficulties.

**Disability Officer**
If the Disability Officer has prior knowledge of a student’s mental health via the initial application or interview s/he will offer advice and support to the student and to staff working with them. S/he can also be involved in case conferences or liaison with outside agencies including psychiatrists or community mental health teams.

The Disability Officer will arrange additional learning support appropriate to each individual (this may include in-class or one-to-one support) and liaise with the examinations section to support application for exam concessions. S/he may also offer advice and support to students and staff regarding reasonable adjustments to be made and may be included in cases conferences and liaison with outside agencies where appropriate.

**Student Liaison Officer**
The Student Liaison Officer (SLO) offers one to one appointments for students who are identified as being vulnerable or at risk, in order to maximise their retention and achievement and participation in College life. The SLO will work with students to develop strategies to minimise disruption to academic achievement and progression, to maintain motivation, and to provide opportunities for positive activities. Where appropriate this may involve signposting to or liaising with other agencies, including other college staff and services, to establish a network of support.

**Careers**
Careers advisers are available to discuss future career paths and applications to higher education. Additional support can be given to students where a mental health difficulty is raised or discussed. Such help could include advice on types of organisations and the particular requirements of a job as well as choice of higher education courses or institutions, completion of the UCAS form and student statements.

There is a section on the UCAS application form which relates to disability or special needs. This enables higher education institutions to take the individual needs of students into consideration. In order to ensure full support at a student’s chosen higher education
institution, a brief outline of a mental health problem might be helpfully included in a UCAS reference, where the student is in full agreement. Any discussion of a student’s mental health difficulty between Personal Tutor and careers adviser would only take place with their full knowledge and permission.

**Commissionaires**
The Commissionaires are only likely to be involved in an exceptional situation where a student with a mental health problem was posing a health and safety risk to themselves or others.

**b. Cross-College Support Issues**

**Raising Awareness and Providing Information on Mental Health Issues**
All staff should be expected to challenge stereotypes and offensive language. The College must ensure that posters and leaflets are displayed to raise awareness of the issues and staff development events are organised that contribute to a greater understanding of mental health amongst staff. Student Services staff may have a particular role to play in this.

**Links with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Community Health Services, Social Services and Other Relevant Agencies**
The College Counsellor/Mental Health Officer should, where possible, make links with local community health services, e.g. CAMHS and local adult mental health services.

**Crisis/Emergency**
The occurrence of emergency situations in College involving students with mental health problems is rare. However, such situations can be disturbing and clear procedures are essential. Examples might be: where a student is exhibiting behaviour that is alarming to other people or a student is threatening to harm themselves or others. In such circumstances the Day Duty Officer should be contacted.

**Returning to College**
Following a crisis situation and/or absence from College for mental health recuperation, a student will need to attend an interview to gauge their fitness to study. This meeting should be led by their Personal Tutor and may include other members of staff as required such as the Disability Officer, College Counsellor or a Safeguarding Officer. The aim is to establish that the student is well enough to return and to agree what reasonable adjustments might be made by both the students and the College to support a return to study.

Procedures for dealing with such situations are laid out in the leaflet: *Identifying and Responding to Students with Mental Health Issues*.

**Support for staff or students involved with another person with Mental Health Difficulties**
Staff or Students who are either caring for someone with mental health difficulties or have been distressed by a disturbing incident may themselves be in need of support. The counselling service will provide support for such people in the form of counselling, debriefing or information as appropriate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Name:</th>
<th>Mental Health Policy for Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective Date:</td>
<td>January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last reviewed:</td>
<td>May 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Date:</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Responsibility:</td>
<td>Head of Student Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved By:</td>
<td>College Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Action By:</td>
<td>All Staff and Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Information to:</td>
<td>All Staff, students and Parents/Carers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 1.  

**Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure**

1. **Introduction**

   The context within which this has been drawn up is the increasing number of students potentially unfit to study due to health difficulties: in particular those with mental health difficulties. The expectation from the World Health Organisation and is that the number of people suffering from mental health problems will increase and that the largest increase will be in young people of the age of our students.

   The purpose of this policy and procedure is to ensure that the College takes a fair and consistent approach in circumstances where students are unable to meet course requirements in terms of attendance, participation in class or completion of work, or the expectations in the Student Responsibilities due to:

   - a medical condition
   - a mental health difficulty

   The College recognises that there may be circumstances when a student is unable to recognise that s/he is placing unreasonable demands on staff, the learning of other students or endangering her/himself or others and the situation is best approached through a fitness to study procedure.

2. **Procedure (concerns due to a suspected mental health difficulty)**

   2.1 If a member of staff has concerns about a student’s mental health, s/he should follow the procedure outlined in the Mental Health Procedures, contacting the Personal Tutor, Head of Student Services, Safeguarding Lead, Disability Officer or College Counsellor. The Safeguarding Lead should be informed of any student in this position. In liaison with the Personal Tutor and other members of staff as appropriate, the Safeguarding Lead will review the concerns. It may be possible to offer appropriate support within Student Services; if the matter appears to be related to a more serious mental health difficulty, the student should be referred to the College Counsellor/Mental Health Officer (MHO).

   If it is possible to provide appropriate support within Student Services, the Personal Tutor will arrange a meeting with the student to put in place a support plan involving, for example, one to one support. The Personal Tutor will monitor the student’s progress, and inform curriculum staff as appropriate.

   If the initial concern is related to a more serious mental health difficulty, or if the arrangements outlined above break down, the matter will be referred to the College Counsellor/MHO, who will meet with members of staff as appropriate to build up a picture of the behaviour causing concern.
The College Counsellor/MHO may already know the student and there may be a support plan in place, in which case s/he will meet with the student to discuss the behaviour which has been reported and to establish whether there have been any changes in the student’s medical condition, medication and personal circumstances. It may be possible to address the concerns through this meeting and to adapt the support plan accordingly.

If the College Counsellor/MHO does not know the student s/he may wish to meet her/him to explore the difficulties the student is facing with the intention of agreeing a support plan.

If the College Counsellor/MHO, in liaison with the Student Services Manager, Disability Officer and Safeguarding Lead, feels that a support plan is not appropriate or sufficient, a fitness to study meeting will need to take place.

3. **Fitness to study meeting**

It is clearly in the student’s interest that a meeting be convened as soon as possible. If there is a delay and it is felt that the student’s behaviour, health or welfare cannot be accommodated in the interim, the College Counsellor/MHO will recommend that the student be required to stay at home and not attend college. It will be stressed to the student that this step is not a disciplinary sanction and will not be recorded as such. If the student declines to do so, as a last resort, the student will be suspended pending further investigation. In the case of health and welfare concerns, the Personal Tutor or Disability Officer will arrange a meeting with the student and the College Counsellor/MHO or Disability Officer will inform any external agencies involved that the student cannot attend College until agreement has been made on the next steps.

The participants in such a meeting will typically be:

- The Personal Tutor
- The College Counsellor/MHO and/or Disability Officer
- A member of staff from the curriculum division
- Someone to support the student e.g. a family member, key worker, mentor etc. The College will not be prescriptive regarding who attends to support the student but will reserve the right not to agree to a particular person in exceptional circumstances
- Safeguarding Lead

3.1 **Purpose of the Meeting**

The purpose of the meeting will be to establish whether further reasonable adjustments / Additional Learning Support can be put in place to enable the student to continue her/his studies or whether s/he will be asked to interrupt studies until s/he recovers sufficiently and behaviour improves. If the student is asked to interrupt studies, s/he will be asked to undertake this step voluntarily. The interruption in studies may take the form of an agreed period of authorised absence to allow for recovery (up to one month) or withdrawal from the course with a view to re-enrolment on an appropriate course in a future academic year.
3.2 During the meeting, a summary will be produced of the main points covered. It is important to agree the written action plan setting out what is required to be undertaken, the support to be offered to the student, the expectations for future behaviour and the consequences if the learner fails to engage or the behaviour does not improve. The action plan should be signed by the student, parent/carer and the Mental Health Officer or Safeguarding Lead. The review period for the action plan should be not more than six weeks, and it may be necessary to curtail this process and make an emergency intervention, should the student’s situation deteriorate within the review period.

3.3 The summary will include arrangements for monitoring the progress of the student. The monitoring may be undertaken by the Personal Tutor or by another identified member of staff within the College. The monitoring arrangements may include a further meeting to be convened at some point in the future. If the student declines to sign the plan, that should be recorded.

3.4 Following the meeting, if the behaviour giving concern continues or reappears, the matter should be referred to the Safeguarding Lead who will gather the views of colleagues and will consult with the Head of Student Services and College Counsellor/MHO to decide whether to:

- Liaise with external professionals
- Reconvene a Fitness to Study Meeting
- Exclude the student from College

4. Appeal

4.1 The student shall have the right of appeal against any decision to require studies to be temporarily interrupted or to exclude her/him.

4.2 The appeals procedure will follow the same guidelines as in the Student Disciplinary Procedure. A student may appeal against the decision to ask her/him to interrupt studies or to exclude on the grounds that the College did not follow its own procedures or that new evidence has appeared. The appeal should be lodged in writing with the Assistant Principal within ten days of the date of the letter confirming the decision. The Assistant Principal will decide whether there are grounds for appeal and the student will be informed of this decision in writing.

4.3 The Assistant Principal will chair the appeals panel within 14 days of the appeal being lodged. The Assistant Principal will determine the procedure for the appeals panel, but usually this will take the form of a review of the decision of the Fitness to Study Meeting. The Assistant Principal will ask one or more other managers to be part of the panel. These managers should not have had any previous involvement in the case. The appeals panel will consider the case and come to a decision to uphold the appeal or not. The panel can make recommendations whether to reinstate the student and on any conditions which should be attached and their decision will be final.
5. **Return To Study**

5.1 During any period of agreed absence, the College Counsellor/MHO will liaise with the external agencies so that appropriate steps can be taken at the point at which a return to study might be viable.

5.2 At the point at which return to study might be viable, the College Counsellor/MHO/Safeguarding Lead will ask for written evidence from a health professional that the student is fit to return to study with reasonable adjustments if required. If the student is unable to provide written evidence, then the College Counsellor/MHO will make her/his assessment of the student’s capacity to commit to return to study.

5.3 Having assessed the information provided, or the evidence available, the Safeguarding Lead will arrange a meeting with the student and the appropriate external agencies/College staff.

5.4 A revised Support Plan will be drawn up highlighting what support is needed to enable the student to return to education. Where appropriate the student will be required to sign a contract regarding her/his future conduct and managing any risks.

5.5 If a return to study is not deemed appropriate, the options will include postponing a decision pending the receipt of further information and extending the period of voluntary withdrawal from College.

5.6 If return to study is deemed not to be an option, and the student is dissatisfied, then s/he should follow the College’s usual complaints procedure (but not appeal, as above).

6. **Data Protection and Confidentiality**

6.1 The College acknowledges that as a result of implementing this policy it will receive personal data of a confidential and sensitive nature and shall ensure that all such data is handled, processed and stored accordingly.

6.2 Normally, sensitive personal data and confidential information will only be disclosed to third parties with the express, informed consent of the learner for the purposes of implementing this policy. However, there may be rare occasions where the College is obliged to disclose, notwithstanding that the learner has refused consent. These include:

- Where the student’s behaviour threatens her/his safety or the safety of others; or
- Where the member of staff or the College would be liable to civil or criminal penalty for failing to disclose.
7. **Equal Opportunities**

7.1 The College’s commitment to equal opportunities and social inclusiveness is demonstrated through its determination that every student receives the high quality learning experience which will bring success. The Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure will be implemented in a manner which maintains each individual’s attendance at college, if at all possible. If a student is required to interrupt studies, the College will seek to make available opportunities for the student to continue at an appropriate stage in the future.

7.2 The College will ensure that its policies operates within the spirit and letter of the College’s Equality and Diversity Policy, actively promoting equality and aiming to minimise differences in success across groups.

8. **Safeguarding**

8.1 The College will ensure that its Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure promote Safeguarding of children and adults at risk.

9. **Manager responsible for policy**

9.1 Head of Student Services

10. **Related policies**

Admissions Policy  
Equality and Diversity Policy  
Data Protection Policy

11. **Date for Review**

May 2015