



| |
|--|
| Student Mental Health Policy (incl. Fitness to Study) |
| Approved by: Executive Group |
| Date approved: 29 June 2021 |
| Strategy/Policy Responsibility: Vice Principal Education and Quality |
| Review date: June 2022 |

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Croydon College, takes the health, safety and wellbeing of all students seriously, and recognises this as being fundamental to their progress and success.

The College is committed to promoting a culture of positive mental wellbeing for its students, with the aim that by creating such a culture, all students will be able to fulfil their potential in their academic studies and in their lives beyond College.

Such a culture should create a supportive, non-stigmatising and well-informed environment in which to live and study.

In order to do so, Croydon College has signed up to the [AoC Mental Health Charter](#) and commits to:

- Encourage and support the whole college community to be positive in its approach to mental health and wellbeing
- Promote a culture which encourages and supports self-disclosure
- Provide a framework for responding appropriately to mental health concerns
- Take seriously its legal responsibilities in connection with the wellbeing of its students, including those relating to equality and non-discrimination.
- Recognise and respond to the mental health needs of diverse and minority groups, taking into account characteristics such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and culture, disability and age.
- Work with students and staff continually to update knowledge, skills and experience of students and their mental health
- Promote understanding and awareness of both internal and external support services
- Recognise that staff with roles involving teaching and the support and welfare of students have additional responsibilities to be alert to indicators of mental health causing concern, and to take appropriate action when necessary
- Provide guidance and information to staff and students to help them to develop confidence in their approach to mental health wellbeing

2. Definitions

2.1 Mental Health

The College is committed to supporting good mental health in all students:

“Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (World Health Organisation, 2014)

Where mental health difficulties arise, the College recognises this occurs on a spectrum, from temporary and mild-moderate wellbeing issues to persistent and debilitating conditions. Students may recognise and disclose difficulties relating to their thoughts, feelings or behaviour, or may appear to have difficulties but are unable or unwilling to recognise these.

Students may seek or hold diagnosis of specific mental health conditions, common ones including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, PTSD, psychosis and personality disorders. These symptoms themselves range in severity and complexity: “Mental disorders comprise a broad range of problems with different symptoms. However, they are generally characterised by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others.” (World Health Organisation, 2017).

2.2 Fitness to Study

It is important to be clear about what is reasonable in an educational setting and the limits to the individual support that can be provided within the College. Our staff provide outstanding care for all students, but there will be times when a student’s physical or mental health or personal circumstances are so affected that they are not able, despite support both internal to the College and externally, to maintain satisfactory progress.

Fitness to study therefore relates to an individual’s capacity to participate fully, satisfactorily and appropriately in relation to their studies at College. This includes participation in their study programme, as well as physical activities, practical assessments or mandatory competencies in practice associated with their study programme that leads them towards a final qualification.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Staff

All staff should:

- Contribute towards building a non-stigmatising culture, including treating students with dignity and respect, and encouraging them to seek help if they have mental health issues
- Be aware of the policy, procedures, services available and referral processes for responding to mental health issues
- Be aware of the boundaries of their own roles
- Be aware of the principles of confidentiality and disclosure

3.2 Students

All students should:

- Contribute towards building a non-stigmatising culture, including treating fellow students with dignity and respect
- Seek help from internal or external services if they have a mental health issue
- Inform relevant staff if they are unable to fulfil academic commitments to enable support processes to be put in place
- Be aware of their own limitations if supporting a fellow student experiencing a mental health issue, and use the referral processes available internally

4. Disclosure and Confidentiality

Students may disclose a mental health difficulty during the application stage, at interview or at any point during their time at the College.

Students who experience mental health difficulties will broadly fall into three categories:

- Individuals who enter College with long-term and enduring difficulties with their mental health
- Individuals with emerging mental health difficulties
- Individuals with temporary but debilitating conditions or reactions

Staff should respect confidentiality to encourage students to seek help where needed. Students need to know that any information disclosed will be treated with respect and only passed on to those who need to know.

In incidences where a student is at risk of harming themselves or others, the Safeguarding team should be contacted immediately using the emergency number.

Information obtained about a student with mental health difficulties, or suspected mental health difficulties, should be shared only for the purposes of providing support, or for the protection of the student, or others, on a need to know basis.

Information which needs to be written should highlight the identified supports needs as well as making clear reference to the information the student has given about their mental health.

Staff should avoid using terminology or phrases that the student has not used.

5. Referral and Consent

Students should always be asked to give consent before information is shared. It is important that where consent is given by a student, it is informed consent. Therefore, it is necessary to tell the student concerned why there is a need to disclose information, who will have access to that information and the likely consequences of giving or withholding consent.

Once consent has been obtained, it is the responsibility of the person passing on the information to ensure that this is carried out only on the terms agreed with the student.

6. Advice and Support

The College provides support to students experiencing mental health difficulties through services including the Safeguarding and Wellbeing team, Mental Health First Aiders and a College Counsellor. Students are able to self-refer or can be referred through MyPT by their tutor.

If a member of staff knows, or suspects, a student may have mental health difficulties, they are encouraged to contact the Safeguarding and Wellbeing team for advice on how to address the situation and how the student might be best supported.

Some students with mental health difficulties may not require any additional support from the College. Understanding what support a student may need should be achieved by discussing this with them.

Staff should respect the right of students who do not wish to discuss their mental health.

Where a member of staff is concerned about a student who has refused support, they should speak to a member of the Safeguarding and Wellbeing team.

7. Interruption to Studies

The College will endeavour to respond flexibly to any request to suspend studies on the grounds of mental health to enable a period of rest and recovery.

An appropriate period of recovery may be negotiated after which the College may require evidence to confirm that the student is fit and able to return their studies.

If a student requires a suspension of their studies, they should firstly discuss this with an appropriate member of staff, such as their Tutor, Curriculum Manager, Head of Year or a member of the Safeguarding and Wellbeing team.

A student will not be disadvantaged on the resumption of their studies following an agreed suspension period due to mental health difficulties.

Any suspension of study must be agreed by the Head of School/Faculty and the relevant Vice Principal or Principal at Coulsdon.

8. Emergency or Crisis Intervention

An emergency or crisis situation is one in which the usual methods of dealing with a situation breaks down, and where professional help is urgently needed.

Whilst very rare, there will be instances where a student's behaviour gives cause for serious concern. Such instances vary from concern about self-harm or suicidal intentions, to incidents where the student or others may be harmed or in immediate danger.

In an event where there are immediate concerns about harm to the student or others, the Duty Manager or a member of the College Safeguarding and Wellbeing Team should be notified and/or the emergency services should be called by dialling 999.

In the event of dialling 999, the person witnessing the student's behaviour should not leave the scene until they have briefed the Emergency Services. The student's parent, carer or next of kin should be notified by a member of the College staff in the event of calling the Emergency Services.

Where concerns are less immediate and there is time to consider the most appropriate intervention, the Safeguarding and Wellbeing team can be contacted for consultation and assistance.

9. Ongoing Concerns

In situations where a student's behaviour or wellbeing causes concern, but does not present an immediate crisis, initial support is best handled 'locally' i.e. via the support systems that are in place including Tutors or Mental Health First Aiders.

A student is more likely to respond to such an approach from a member of staff who is familiar with their situation, and to take practical advice from someone who is already known to them, and who appears to be supportive and non-judgmental.

If there are further concerns, staff can refer to or seek advice from the Safeguarding and Wellbeing team.

10. Fitness to Study

There may be times when the physical or mental health of a student is affected to the extent that academic progress is unable to be maintained. In rare situations where the support required is beyond what is reasonable, it is useful to bear in mind that:

- Whilst on a temporary basis it is reasonable for subject teachers and support staff to be flexible with attendance due to poor physical or mental health, prolonged periods of absence may not be sustainable, as many courses cannot be taught by distance learning. Virtual attendance will be considered on a case by case basis.
- There may be times when the student returns from a period of ill health and it is reasonable for subject tutors and support staff to be flexible with attendance to promote a phased return and provide reasonable adjustments where applicable to ensure stress is mitigated during this return to study period.
- There may be times when the nature of a student's ill health requires support beyond the expertise or capacity that we can reasonably offer.
- Occasionally ill health may also present a health and safety hazard and in this situation a risk assessment will be undertaken. Sometimes, however, risks cannot be managed at an appropriate level in the college environment.

Although the College will do everything in its power to support student success, there are occasions where, for one or more of the reasons above, it will be our collective judgement that to continue at the College is no longer in the best interests of the student.

Appendix 1: Fitness to Study Procedure

1. What is fitness to study

- 1.1** It is important to be clear about what is reasonable in an educational setting and the limits to the individual support that can be provided within the College. Our staff provide outstanding care for all students, but there will be times when a student's physical or mental health or personal circumstances are so affected that they are no longer able, despite support both internal to the College and externally, to maintain satisfactory progress.
- 1.2** Fitness to study therefore relates to an individual's capacity to participate fully, satisfactorily and appropriately in relation to their studies at College. This includes participation in their study programme, as well as physical activities, practical assessments or mandatory competencies in practice associated with their study programme that leads them towards a final qualification

2. When to use this procedure

- 2.1** The process may be implemented by a member of staff when:
 - a. There is concern raised that a student's health or wellbeing is affecting their attendance or capacity to study to the extent that they are not able to participate in their study programme to a level which will enable them to complete successfully.
 - b. Concerns about the student's fitness to study are raised by a third party i.e. a friend, relative, employer, a member of the College staff or medical professional.
 - c. The student has informed a member of staff that they have concerns about their own fitness to study.
 - d. Behaviour that would usually be dealt with as a disciplinary matter, may be known or suspected to be the result of an underlying physical or mental health difficulty.
 - e. A student's health difficulties are adversely affecting the health, safety or wellbeing of others.
 - f. A student's health difficulties are adversely affecting the learning, progress or likelihood of success of other learners.

3. Procedure

3.1 Stages of action

- a. The procedures can be entered at any stage depending on the level of concern and urgency although it is hoped that most situations can be remedied by action taken at stages 1 or 2.

3.2 Initial actions

- a. It is possible that the initial stages of intervention might be through the normal College procedures with regard to attendance and performance concerns as doubts

about a student's fitness to study may not yet have been identified. This is most likely in cases where health issues have not been disclosed to the College before joining or a new health issue is causing problems that have not yet been disclosed to the College.

3.3 Stage 1 – Informal stage

- a. Once concerns have been raised about a student's fitness to study, the student's Tutor will liaise with the Director of Student Support Services, Head of Student Services (Croydon), Student Services Manager (Coulsdon) or in the case of a student with an Education, Health & Care plan, Head of Additional Learning Support, to make them aware of the concern and seek their guidance and advice before approaching the student.
- b. The Tutor will then meet with the student, with support from a member of the Safeguarding and Wellbeing team if required, and explain that concerns about their fitness to study have been raised. The student will be made aware of the precise nature of the behaviour that has caused the concern. The Tutor will attempt to resolve the matter by informal discussions with the student.
- c. The student should be encouraged to explain their situation and views on the matter and will be encouraged to use one or more of the support services offered by the College if appropriate.
- d. A referral may be made to an external body, such as a healthcare professional if this is deemed appropriate.
- e. The Tutor should consider with the student whether any specific arrangements or other types of support could be applied to help them study more effectively.
- f. The meeting outcomes will be logged on MyPT as a confidential comment.
- g. The Tutor will contact the student's parents/carers (if under 18) to ensure that they are fully aware of the concerns raised and any actions arising from the meeting.
- h. A review meeting will be set not more than two college weeks from the date of the initial meeting.
- i. Depending on the concerns raised the Tutor may choose to follow the process above and review or move immediately to stage two as detailed below.

3.4 Stage 2 - Fitness to study concern

- a) If the issues raised are of sufficient concern, or if informal actions have not resulted in the improvement requires, the Tutor will ask their Head of School/Faculty to convene a meeting. The meeting should be attended by the Head of School/Faculty, Tutor, a member of the Safeguarding and Wellbeing team and Parent/Carer (if under 18 or at students request).
- b) This meeting will be formally recorded and the following should be discussed and agreed:
 - i. Details of the concerns around the student's fitness to study.

- ii. Current actions by the College, student, parents/carers, healthcare professionals or other relevant bodies in relation to the current fitness to study concerns.

An action plan for resolution of the situation. This may include:

- i. Actions to be taken by the student.
- ii. Actions to be taken by parents/carers, healthcare professionals or other relevant agencies.
- iii. Support or adjustments to be made by the College to assist with the student's studies.
- iv. Targets to be met by the student.
- v. A timescale for review and resolution. This should be no more than 4 College weeks from the date of the meeting.
- vi. Additional interim meetings may be scheduled to monitor the situation and progress made by the student. The Tutor, Safeguarding and Wellbeing team and other relevant College staff should help the student access the support available to them to enable them to continue with their studies as agreed. The expectation is, however, that the student will take personal responsibility and fully engage with the support put in place by all parties.
- vii. If the concerns have not been addressed, support has not been sought, or sufficient progress has not been made, the case will move to the next stage of the process.

3.5 Stage 3 - Fitness to study review

- a. If concerns remain despite earlier stages of intervention, a review meeting will be held to determine the next course of action. Attendees at this meeting will be:
 - i. A nominated Vice Principal or Coulsdon Principal
 - ii. Director of Student Support Services/Head of Student Services (Croydon)/Student Services Manager (Coulsdon)
 - iii. Head of School/Faculty
 - iv. The student's Tutor
 - v. Safeguarding and Wellbeing team representative
 - vi. External agency where appropriate
- b. The purpose of the review panel is to assess the student's fitness to study in the context of their current study programme and decide on the next course of action in the best interests of all parties.
- c. The College may seek additional information in the form of assessments from medical professionals or other relevant bodies.
 - d. If appropriate the student and student's parents/carers may be invited to attend the meeting.
 - e. The outcomes of this meeting will be communicated to the student and parents/carers. These are (but not limited to):

- i. **No further action required.** This is most likely in the event of the student recovering in advance of the meeting to the point they are actively able to participate in their study programme and may therefore be able to succeed this academic year. Continued monitoring of progress is also likely to be recommended.
- ii. **To recommend specific further academic or pastoral support** arrangements are put in place to assist with on-going support at College. This is most likely if the College believes that with continuing support the student may still be able to be successful on their study programme this academic year.
- iii. **To implement a revised study programme for the student.** This is likely if the College believes that a changed or reduced study programme may allow the student to be successful this academic year.
- iv. **A suspension in studies or an agreed break in learning** with a resumption or restart of their programme at an appropriate point in the future. This is most likely if the student has a condition that is temporary or will in time improve and they will subsequently be able to fully participate in a study programme.
- v. **Withdrawal of College place.** This is most likely if the College believes that the student's current state of health:
 - vi. Will preclude them from being successful on their study programme.
 - vii. Requires a level of support that the College is not able to adequately provide.
 - viii. May impact on the health, safety and welfare of staff or students.
 - ix. Is likely to have a negative effect on the learning and progression of other students at the College.

Right of appeal

The student may appeal against the outcomes of the review. A letter or email setting out the grounds of appeal should be addressed to the Principal & CEO