

Mental Health Case Conference Protocol for Students

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Mental Health Case Conference Protocol for Students

1. Introduction

This protocol sets out the circumstances in which a Mental Health Case Conference will be convened and the associated responsibilities and processes. The protocol applies to current students only. A summary of responsibilities is provided in Appendix A.

2. Context

In some cases, the behaviour of a student may not present an immediate crisis but still causes significant concern and require advice and input from more than one of the University's support services. In other cases, a pattern of behaviour may be displayed over time which may indicate that a student is in slow decline and there is potential for a crisis situation to develop.

In these situations, and as per the [Edinburgh Napier Mental Health Policy](#), it is likely that staff will have sought to resolve matters informally through discussion with the student concerned and through interaction with student support services. However, despite attempts at informal resolution, there may be occasions when the student's situation remains a cause for concern and, in such a scenario, it may be advisable for those members of staff who are actively involved in supporting the student to convene a case conference.

3. What is a Case Conference?

A case conference is a small ad hoc group convened to address the needs and monitor the progress of a particularly complex or higher profile student case. The use of a case conference can provide a useful forum for discussion of particular concerns and situations and help to contain difficult situations, review support approaches and protect the interests of both the student concerned (providing a unified and consistent approach), and equally importantly, those in the surrounding environment who may be seriously affected by disruption.

By using this approach, members of staff are supported and protected when dealing with more complex cases by drawing upon the knowledge and expertise of others within the University and also by the sharing of responsibility through consensus decision making.

If staff have any concerns about whether or not a case conference is the next appropriate next step, they can discuss the case with the Head of Student Wellbeing who may also take advice from the Head of Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing and/or the Head of Disability & Inclusion.

4. Case Conference Objectives

The case conference would have the following objectives:

- to consider the background to the case including the impact of:
 - the programme of study on a student's mental health;
 - a student's mental health on their academic work and the work of others; and

- in the case of students in the School of Nursing, Midwifery & Social Care, the impact of their condition on patients, patient's families, student peers and NHS staff.
- to determine what action is necessary to try and ensure the health and wellbeing of the individual concerned including where deteriorating mental health may lead to posing a risk to themselves or others;
- to determine what action is necessary to support or protect any other students/staff who may be affected by the behaviour of the individual concerned;
- to consider any impact upon the individual's academic studies and whether these can be mitigated in any way.

Please note that the key purpose of a case conference is to co-ordinate support for the student and does not supersede the [Student Conduct Regulations](#), [Academic Regulations](#) or [Fitness to Practise Regulations](#).

5. Roles & Responsibilities

The Head of Student Wellbeing has the lead role in managing and coordinating the University's support for student mental health problems and is responsible for organising case conferences to discuss the management of the support needs of students whose mental health is giving cause for concern.

The Head of Campus Services, supported by the Head of Student Accommodation, will also monitor closely the Incident Report Forms, completed by Security in respect of student behaviour on campus and in University Accommodation, to identify cases where advice should be taken as to whether a case conference may be beneficial.

Whilst University staff do have a key role in responding to the needs of students with mental health problems, the University recognises that external agencies have a statutory duty to carry out assessment and treatment of serious mental health problems or emergencies. The [University Data Protection Code of Practice](#) applies to the process of managing mental health concerns and sharing information about these concerns. However, it is important that staff are aware that the need to maintain confidentiality is over-riden in the event of a [mental health emergency](#), such as suicidal ideas, or concern about the risk of harm to self or others.

6. Calling a Case Conference

Before considering that a mental health case conference is necessary, please read through the [University's Mental Health Policy](#). Particular attention should be paid to 'Appendix 2: Helping Students in Distress – A guide for staff' and to ensure that all appropriate steps have been followed, in relation to the sharing of all staff and fellow students' concerns, with the student under review.

If it is agreed that the concerns about the student warrant a case conference, the Head of Student Wellbeing (or designate) must invite the student to attend. If the student is not able to attend in person, arrangements can be made to allow the student to attend remotely using Skype or WebEx.

A date must be set for this meeting that allows time for the student under review to seek independent guidance and support and to familiarize themselves with any documentation under review.

7. Inviting the Student

This can be done verbally or by email but, in all cases, a letter must be sent to the student via recorded delivery confirming that a case conference will take place. This letter should:

1. reiterate that the University has concerns about the student's wellbeing;
2. include a copy of the University's Student Mental Health Policy;
3. explain the nature and purpose of the case conference;
4. be accompanied by any documentation that is to be considered at the case conference. (The conference can only consider information that has already been conveyed to the student in face-to-face meetings and reiterated in this letter). Documentation may include:
 - Security reports;
 - Summarised concerns from academic staff about either the program of study on the student's mental health or their mental health on their academic work and the work of others;
 - Summarised concerns raised with the student prior to the case conference;
 - Issues with fitness to practice concerns and examples thereof.Reports may come from individuals who do not wish to be identified and consequently documents may need to be anonymised as appropriate;
5. state the potential outcomes from the case conference;
6. offer the student the opportunity to be appropriately supported at the meeting (this would preferably be Edinburgh Napier Students' Association or a mental health practitioner who is already supporting the student. However, if the student prefers they could bring a parent or partner instead);
7. a date must be set for this meeting that allows time for the student under review to seek independent guidance and support and to familiarize themselves with any documentation under review. This would normally be a minimum of 10 working days from the date of posting.

A template letter is provided in Appendix B.

8. Gaining Consent from the Student

If the student does not wish to attend, then the student should be asked to give their written consent to the case conference going ahead in their absence, unless they have previously provided this. If permission is given verbally by the student, this should be followed up with written correspondence confirming that permission has been given and the date.

On occasion a student may not recognise, or be willing to accept, that they have a difficulty and, as a consequence, are unlikely to be willing to attend a case conference or give their consent to it going ahead in their absence. If this scenario occurs, then the case conference may only take place where the University can demonstrate that it is in the vital interests of the student and/or other students or staff affected by the behaviour(s) of the student with mental health difficulties.

If there is any doubt about whether or not it is in the vital interests of the student to convene a case conference, a conference can still go ahead but the identity of the student should be protected from those who have not been given direct permission to know about the case and are not required to do so.

If staff have any concerns about whether or not a case conference can go ahead given the confidentiality issues involved they are advised to take advice from the relevant Dean of the School in consultation as necessary with the University's Governance team.

9. Membership of the Case Conference

The membership of the case conference will depend upon the nature of the case under consideration. Consequently it is difficult to be prescriptive regarding the person who should Chair the case conference. However, in most cases, it is likely to be:

- The Head of Student Wellbeing;
- The Head of Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing; or
- The appropriate Dean of School (or their designate).

It is also not possible to be prescriptive with regard to the membership of the case conference but the student and his or her representative should be asked to attend and serious consideration should be given to inviting some, or all, of the following:-

- a representative of the Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing team;
- an external mental health practitioner who is involved in supporting the student (if the student agrees to them being present);
- a representative of the University's Disability & Inclusion team;
- a representative of the student's School such as their Programme Leader or PDT.

It is expected that professional advice should always be available at the case conference from a representative of at least Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing and/or Disability & Inclusion

Depending on the nature of the student concern, consideration should also be given to including some of the following:-

- a senior representative of the University Security team;
- a representative of the University's Accommodation Services;
- a representative of the University Visa & International Support team;
- a senior representative of the University Information Services team.

However, for each case conference, it is important to establish who must attend and from whom the necessary advice/input can be sought without attending. Any data sharing must be kept as tight as possible and on a 'strictly need to know basis' to protect the 'vital interests' of the student. All information must be shared securely as set out in Section 8 of the [University's Data Protection Code of Practice](#).

10. The Role of Professional Medical Advice

Due to the nature of the difficulties they are experiencing, students who are suffering from mental health problems may, or may not, be receiving professional healthcare support. As noted above, some may also not accept that they have a difficulty or may refuse to engage with the support services available to them both within the University and externally.

Whilst supporting evidence (such as a GP or Psychiatric report, CPN or Psychiatrist psychiatric report / supporting letter) will always be helpful when attempting to reach

a decision in terms of the action to be taken in relation to a particular student, it is up to the student to provide it at the case conference.

Decisions can still be made via a case conference even if it is not possible to ascertain a professional, certified medical opinion on the health of the student, provided their behaviour is of sufficient cause for concern. Any decision regarding a student that does not include certified medical evidence, should be backed up by appropriate professional advice and guidance provided, for example, by the Head of Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing, a University Mental Health Adviser and/or external agencies such as social services (such as a social work report/ supporting letter) or a support worker/ support organisation. Any formal supporting letters or reports should be requested by the student.

11. The Case Conference Meeting

The member of staff convening the meeting will arrange the time and location for the meeting and ensure that any relevant background information is provided and shared securely via a secure SharePoint folder to which only strictly agreed and controlled access is given.

They will also arrange for an agreed note of the meeting (including actions and recommendations) to be kept and to oversee any follow-up actions ensuring that these are undertaken. It is likely that a single meeting will be sufficient to address the issues underlying a particular case but it is at the discretion of the case conference whether they wish to meet again to review progress.

12. Case Conference Outcomes

Possible outcomes of the case conference might include, but are not restricted to:

- offering to support a coursework extension or deferral of assessment as defined in the [Fit to Sit and Extenuating Circumstances Regulations](#) (it should be noted that the outcome of any such request for cannot be prejudged prior to its consideration by an appropriate Extenuating Circumstances Officer);
- asking the student to give an undertaking with regard to their future conduct;
- referring the case to be considered under the [University's Student Conduct Regulations](#); or
- recommending that the student is suspended on the grounds of ill health, or other appropriate grounds, as set out in the [University's General Regulations](#) (see section A8.4).

If appropriate, support will also be offered by the Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing team to those students and staff who have been affected by the situation. A central file will be kept in Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing including the agreed written note, recommendations, referrals, action and developments in the case and relevant colleagues will be updated on a strictly 'need to know' basis and in keeping with the [University Data Protection Code of Practice](#).



Appendix A: Summary of Responsibilities for Case Conferences

Role	Responsibility
Advice regarding appropriateness of case conference	Head of Student Wellbeing who may also take advice from the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing; and/or • Head of Disability & Inclusion.
Further advice if specific confidentiality issues are involved	Relevant Dean of the School in consultation with the University's Governance team
Monitoring Incident Report Forms, completed by Security in respect of student behaviour	Head of Campus Services
Organising a case conference including inviting the student	Head of Student Wellbeing
Chairing the case conference including ensuring an agreed note is kept and oversight of follow up actions.	Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Head of Student Wellbeing; • The Head of Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing; or • The appropriate Dean of School (or their designate).
Core case conference membership	Some, or all, of the following representatives:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing and/or Disability & Inclusion; • an external mental health practitioner involved in supporting the student (if the student agrees to them being present); • the student's Programme Leader, Year Tutor or PDT.
Ad hoc case conference membership as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a senior representative of Security; • a representative of Accommodation Services; • a representative of the Visa & International Support team; • a senior representative of Information Services.
Support for the student in a personal capacity at the case conference (1 person)	This could be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a representative from the Mental Health team; • their PDT; • a partner; • a parent; • someone who is supporting them in a mental health capacity; or • ENSA Advice Advisor.
Support for affected students and staff	Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing
Records maintenance	Student Counselling & Mental Wellbeing

Appendix B: Template letter inviting the student to attend a case conference

Dear (insert students name)

Ref: Case Conference Invitation

As you are aware from our recent communications and/or meetings, the University has some concerns about your wellbeing and are concerned that these have had an adverse impact on your studies/behaviour/other students (*delete as appropriate*).

Unfortunately these concerns continue and we need to find a way to resolve the matter. Consequently I am writing to invite you to attend a case conference meeting in accordance with the University's Student Mental Health Policy, a copy of which is enclosed for your information. This meeting will:

- consider the background to our concerns;
- determine what action is necessary to try to ensure your health and wellbeing;
- determine what action is necessary to protect any other students/staff who may be affected by your behaviour;
- consider any impact upon your academic studies and whether these can be mitigated in any way.

The following people have also been invited to the meeting (*insert as appropriate and with an explanation of why each person has been invited*) and we will be considering the enclosed documentation as well as our discussion with you (*list documentation to be considered here*).

If you wish to bring documentation with you to share at the Case Conference, such as medical evidence, social work reports or letters from support agencies, you are welcome to do so.

We recognise that this may be a difficult process for you therefore, it would be helpful if you brought along someone to support you in a personal capacity. This might be someone from the Edinburgh Napier University community such as a representative from the Mental Health team or your PDT. Alternatively, you may wish to bring a partner, a parent or someone who is supporting you in a mental health capacity. In addition, you may wish to receive independent advice and guidance in relation to your current position and this can be provided through ENSA Advice within Edinburgh Napier Students' Association. ENSA Advice can be contacted on 0131 229 8791 or via email at ensa.advice@napier.ac.uk. They are located in the Merchiston Campus.

Please let us know by (*insert as appropriate*) if the proposed date and time for this meeting is suitable for you and if you will be able to attend. Please note that if you do not respond to this invitation, the meeting will still go ahead in your absence. If you have any questions about this process please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely