Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Response Policy

Aberystwyth University

Lead: Director of Student Journey

Date of Next Review: November 2026

Context

Suicide is the biggest cause of death in young adults. Nearly 1 in 4 young people will experience suicidal feelings at least once in their lives. 1 in 20 will try to take their own life. The suicide rate is higher for young adults outside of universities; however, we know that a range of characteristics and experiences which affect mental health and wellbeing are particularly impactful for students in higher education.

In common with other Universities across the UK, enhancing our tailored mental health and wellbeing support is a priority development area, and enhancing our support for suicide prevention and response is an important aspect of our overall approach to safeguarding the wellbeing of our students.

In 2023 Universities UK and Papyrus published new guidance to support universities in developing their approach on preventing, intervening, and responding to suicide as part of their overall mental health framework. Aberystwyth's Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Response Policy aligns with the guidance and will also be informed in the coming months and years by the 'Collective responsibility, collective action to prevent student suicide' guidance that was published in 2024 and the Wales Government Suicide Prevention and self-harm strategy and 2025-28 delivery plan.

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Trigger Warning

This document includes references to suicide and serious mental ill health. We are highlighting this because if you feel your mental health could be affected by reading this, or that reading the document might remind you about a time when you were struggling, we suggest that you read with a friend or colleague.

If after reading the document you would like to talk to someone,
please contact: Student Wellbeing at
studentwellbeing@aber.ac.uk or 01970 621 761

Your line manager or contact Human Resources on 01970 628 555

All members of our community, students and staff can also make contact with our Student and Employee Assistance Programmes – delivered by Health Assured.

Alternatively, anyone can call the PAPYRUS Hopeline247 on 0800 068 41 41

1. Introduction

Our Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Response Policy underscores the importance of a comprehensive university-wide approach and collaboration with external partners like the NHS, Public Health Wales, and Welsh government. Recognising the unique challenges of suicide prevention, intervention, and response, we have developed a policy that alongside ongoing efforts will embed this work across our community and reduce the risk of suicide and self-harm.

Aberystwyth University is committed to fostering a trauma-informed and supportive environment through a whole-university approach to mental health and wellbeing. Suicide prevention, intervention and response are vital components of our broader commitment to safeguarding the welfare of our students and staff. We recognise that suicide is a deeply tragic and complex issue, with a profound and lasting impact on families, friends, peers, and the wider university community.

Our suicide prevention and response efforts are integrated into our overall approach to student mental health and wellbeing, aligning with national guidance and best practices. We recognise the vital role of partnership working in effective suicide prevention and response. We are committed to strengthening and building on our relationships with local, regional and national mental health providers and support services, including Public Health Wales, Hywel Dda University Health Board, local GP practices, Ceredigion County Council, and other community-based organisations that contribute to the wellbeing of our students and staff.

The impact of these partnerships is recognised through the establishment of a Wales-Wide Suicide prevention steering group and community of practice for Higher and Further Education, which was launched in early 2025. This has been achieved through a positive and open relationship with NHS Wales and our regulatory body, MEDR and ensures that our approach aligns with national standards for student safety, mental health, and wellbeing.

Strategic oversight is provided through our Suicide Prevention and Response Oversight Group which reports to key university governance bodies including the Education and Student Experience Committee, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee and our Council Governance and Culture Committee.

Our commitment to openness and transparency in developing our suicide-safer approach involves acknowledging the realities and risks of suicide. We prioritise informing our community about where and how to access support when needed. This policy and our developing institutional action plan outline specific measures for 'Prevention,' 'Intervention,' and 'Response'.

2. Important Definitions

Suicide	The deliberate act of taking of one's life.
Suicidal Feelings	Suicidal ideation and suicidal thoughts can range from being preoccupied by having abstract thoughts or rumination about ending one's own life, or feeling that people would be better off without you, to thinking about methods of suicide, or making clear plans to take one's own life.
Suicidal Behaviours	A range of behaviours related to suicide and self-harm in vulnerable individuals, including suicidal thinking, deliberate recklessness and risk-taking, self-harming not aimed at causing death and suicide attempts. Around 20% of young people have self- harmed (non-suicidal) by the age of 20, far fewer around 2-3%) make suicide attempts.
Self-Harm Non-Suicidal Intent	An action that is deliberate but does not include an intention to die and often does not result in hospital care. It can be used for one or more reasons that relate to reducing distress and tension, inflicting self-punishment and/or signaling personal distress to important others. Non-suicidal self-harm is a signal of underlying mental health difficulties; self-harm is a strong predictor of future suicide risk; people who self-harm may also make suicide attempts and be at risk of suicide.
Cluster	A cluster is three or more deaths that occur unexpectedly closely in terms of time, place, or both. In a university setting, two suicides occurring close to each other may indicate a cluster and should be taken very seriously.
Contagion	Death by suicide may trigger suicidal thoughts and feelings in some other individuals and may increase their risk. This is also known as suicide contagion and may lead to a cluster. Likewise, reporting of suicide methods or locations may promote use of those methods by others. Or locations may promote use of those methods by others.

3. Beliefs and Understanding Suicide

The reasons for suicide are often complex and individual, however there are a number of factors which may predispose individuals to a higher risk of suicide. Research published in the guidance from Universities UK has identified the following experiences may indicate a higher risk of experiencing distress:

- Serious (suicidal) self-harm
- Exposure to suicide and serious self-harm (contagion)
- Relationship or family issues, breakdowns in social support networks
- Transitions between mental health services
- Alcohol and/or drug misuse
- Those who have experienced trauma or abuse.
- Asylum seekers and refugees are exposed to several experiences which are linked to an increased suicide risk.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) young people exhibit more suicidal behaviour than those who do not identify at LGBTQ+
- Male students are more than twice as likely to take their own lives as female students.

It is essential to break down stigma around suicide and encourage individuals to contact support and that community members understand the evidence around suicide and are able to challenge misconception.

Below are misconceptions around suicide from the Samaritans Resource: *Myths about Suicide* and the Universities UK Guidance: *Suicide Safer Universities*.

"Talking about suicide can create or worsen risk."

Suicide is a stigmatised topic and can be taboo. By asking someone directly about suicide, you give them permission to tell you how they feel. People who have felt suicidal will often say what a huge relief it was to be able to talk about what they were experiencing. How we talk about suicide is important, we should make sure not to use words that stigmatise or criminalise suicide, for example "committing suicide," "successful/ unsuccessful suicide" or "they aren't the suicidal type."

More information about language around suicide can be found at:

- Mind your C's and S's: The Language of Self Harm and Suicide and why it matters
- Appendix 3, page 29 of the Universities UK Suicide Safer Universities Framework

Once someone starts talking, they have a better chance of discovering options that are not suicide. **Asking someone about suicide does not create or worsen risk.**

"People who talk about suicide aren't serious and won't go through with it" Research has shown that individuals who die by suicide have often expressed suicidal feelings or ideation to those around them. This may be through phrases which are direct, or those which hold the implication – e.g., having no future, or life not being worth it.

Individuals who express suicidal feelings or thoughts should be treated with empathy and compassion. **It is important to always take someone seriously if they talk about feeling suicide.** Helping them get the support they need could save their life.

"Most suicides happen without warning."

Most suicides are preceded by warning signs. These may be verbal or behavioural. It is important that individuals can confidently identify indications of suicidal thoughts and behavioural signs.

"If a person is serious about killing themselves then there's nothing you can do."

Most individuals who are feeling suicidal do not want to die but rather do not want to live in their current experience of life. The distinction may seem small but is very important. It is why talking through other options at the right time is so vital. Often, feeling actively suicidal is temporary and this is why it is essential individuals are able to access crisis support.

"You have to be mentally ill to think about suicide."

1 in 5 people have thought about suicide at some time in their life, and this number increases to nearly 1 in 4 young people. **Not all people who die by suicide have mental health problems at the time they die.**

Most people who complete suicide are not known to mental health services. This highlights the need to dismantle mental health stigma and barriers to care and create a compassionate community.

Prevention, Intervention and Response

At Aberystwyth University, suicide prevention and response are fundamental to our whole university approach to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff. This commitment is reflected in our strategic work to embed a culture of care, compassion, connection, and early intervention across all parts of the University community.

We have established a Suicide Prevention and Response Oversight group that will develop a holistic, whole-University plan, utilising the recently published 'Collective responsibility, collective action to prevent student suicide' guidance.

Oversight of this work is provided by the Education and Student Experience Committee, which reports to the University Executive.

If you have any questions about this work or would like to contribute to its ongoing development, please contact us at: studentwellbeing@aber.ac.uk

Monitoring, Reflection and Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the Suicide Prevention and Response Oversight Group with progress against planned developments reported to the Education and Student Experience Committee and Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee. Overall executive responsibility for the policy sits with the Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) Education and Student Experience who will provide updates to the University Executive.

Sources of Support

Information on the university's internal sources of support can be for students at the Student Wellbeing Team webpages: Wellbeing Team : Student Services , Aberystwyth Universityhttps://www.gcu.ac.uk/currentstudents/support/wellbeing and staff at the Health and Wellbeing Internet Hub: Health & Wellbeing : Staff , Aberystwyth University

Within this section there is information both on out-of-hours and emergency support services, and further resources for supporting those who may be at risk of suicide.

Out-of-hours and emergency support services

It is not uncommon for people to feel at a crisis point and you are doing the right thing by seeking support and advice. If the feeling is overwhelming or you feel so distressed that you have thoughts of harming yourself or you feel you are at risk of harming others, then you need to:

- Phone or visit your GP as soon as possible to tell them how you are feeling. Find your local GP via this link: NHS 111 Wales - Services Near You : GPs - Information and LinksIf your GP surgery is closed, call NHS 24 on **111**
- You can contact Samaritans on **116 123**
- Call Papyrus Hopeline **on 0800 068 41 41**

The directories below provide information on suicide prevention crisis lines internationally:

- Therapy Route provide information on helplines, suicide hotlines and crisis lines from across the world.
- Suicide.Org provide information on international prevention, awareness, and support organisations.
- Befrienders Worldwide provides an outline of the contact details of helplines by country.

Support for Supporting Others

Supporting someone who is experiencing suicidal thoughts or distress can be emotionally challenging, especially for students, staff, and peers who may feel unprepared or overwhelmed. It's vital to remember that your wellbeing matters too — you're not alone, and help is available for you as well.

Recognising the Impact

Providing emotional support to someone in crisis can lead to:

- Stress, anxiety, or feelings of helplessness
- Compassion fatigue or burnout
- Difficulty focusing on studies or work
- Emotional withdrawal or guilt

Whether you're a student checking in on a friend, a lecturer concerned about a student, or a peer supporter, it's important to:

- Set healthy boundaries
- Know when and how to seek professional support
- Understand you're not expected to "fix" things alone

Resources and Support for You

Here are some trusted organisations that offer resources for those supporting others in distress:

- **Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide**
  Advice for people worried about someone under 35
  https://www.papyrus-uk.org/help-advice/supporting-someone-else/
  HOPELINE247: 0800 068 41 41 / text 07860 039967 / pat@papyrus-uk.org
- **Mind**
  Resources on supporting someone with suicidal thoughts and caring for your own wellbeing
  https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helping-someone-else/
  Mind also has dedicated guidance for university students.
- **Student Minds**
  Empowering students and staff with mental health support and training
  https://www.studentminds.org.uk/
  Includes guides on helping friends and maintaining your own mental health.
- **Rethink Mental Illness**
  Advice for carers, family, and friends – including managing stress and boundaries
  https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/support-groups/
- **Samaritans**
  Support 24/7 for anyone in distress – including those supporting others
  https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/if-youre-worried-about-someone-else/
  Call: 116 123 (free, any time) Samaritans have published **Supporting someone online who might be at risk of self-harm or suicide** at https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety- resources/supporting-someone-online-who-might-be-risk-self-harm-or-suicide/
- **EAP (Employee Assistance Programme)** – you may find it helpful to seek support from the University's EAP, Care First – you can find out more at Health Assured.

Looking After Yourself

- It's okay to take a step back if you feel overwhelmed.
- Make time for rest, routines, and activities that restore your energy.

- Don’t wait until you’re struggling — reach out early.

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Unit/ Service	Student Journey
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1.1	July 2025	Updates to include new Collective responsibility guidance and Wales Gov Suicide and Self Harm 2025-28 strategy.