



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

Helping Distressed Students

A guide for Staff

Updated March 2018

Most students will cope well with the stresses of academic life given reasonable support from their friends, family and academic tutors. Sometimes they need more than this. If you feel you need to, or are requested to, give a student extra assistance, it is important to help within the boundaries of what you feel competent to do.

This guide gives you advice on dealing with both crises and more everyday situations. It has been produced to:

- a) Help you to recognise when a student may be in difficulty.
- b) Provide advice to help you respond/refer appropriately and effectively.
- c) Remind you of the sources of support within the University and in the Community.
- d) Raise awareness of issues relating to student mental health.

Recognising student distress

Student distress may come to your attention in a variety of ways. Some students will tell you if they are experiencing difficulties and will ask you directly for help.

You may also realise from changes in someone's behaviour, appearance, attendance or academic performance that they may be in some difficulty.

You may notice evidence of drug or alcohol abuse or self-harm.

You may also be alerted to problems by concerned classmates or friends of the student.

It is important to meet promptly with students once you are aware there might be a problem.

Early intervention is crucial in tackling common mental health difficulties and can help to minimise the effect of students' personal circumstances on their academic performance and progress.

Confidentiality

Treat all the personal information a student might disclose with respect and discretion. However, confidentiality cannot be kept in the following circumstances:

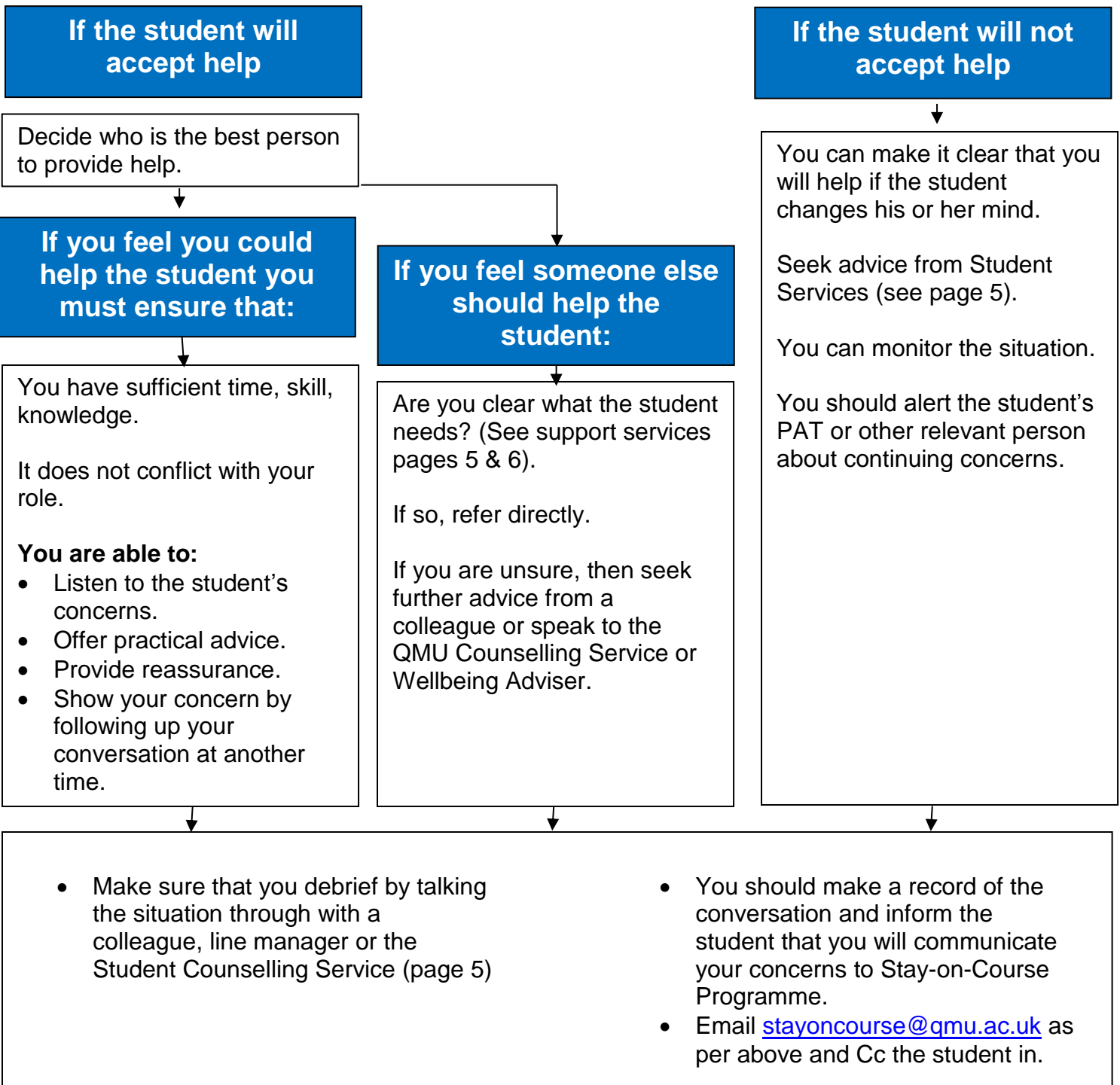
- When we believe there is substantial risk of the student harming themselves or others.
- When there is a requirement in law to disclose information.

Ask for a student's consent to sharing information with other University staff. Most students will agree to the level of information sharing which is necessary to ensure that they are getting the support they need.

If a student insists that they need to speak to someone in strict confidence they should be referred to the Student Counselling Service which has a professional code of confidentiality. If a student is attending the Student Counselling Service it is not possible for the counsellors to share information with other University staff unless the student gives specific consent.

IF IT IS NOT URGENT: What you should do if the situation does NOT require immediate action

It is NOT urgent, if there is no immediate risk to the student and/or to others, although the student may be depressed, anxious, generally stressed, homesick, lonely and isolated, having problems with relationships, suffering from low self-esteem, bereaved, having unexplained study or financial problems.



IF IT IS URGENT: What you should do if the situation IS urgent

It IS urgent if:

**You believe the student may be at risk of harm to him or herself, or others.
You are concerned for one or more of the following reasons. The student:**

- May be at risk of serious self-harm.
- Expresses suicidal thoughts.
- Has completely stopped functioning.
- Seems very disorientated and out of touch with reality.
- Is behaving out of character.
- Is violent or threatening violence to people or property.

If the student will accept help

In office hours

Refer the student directly to his or her GP or to the QMU Counselling Service. If at immediate risk, call security (2222) and arrange for the student to be accompanied.

Out of hours (GP and University)

Call NHS 24 (111) or call the emergency services (999).

You can get help by phoning Security on 2222.

If the student will not accept help

In office hours

Contact the student's GP or if unknown, call security on 2222 for help in contacting emergency services.

Out of hours (GP and University)

Call Security on 2222 for help in contacting emergency services or call NHS 24 (111), emergency services (999) or Mental Health Assessment Service (0131-537-6000).

In all situations

- Try to stay calm.
- Engage with the student if possible, but put safety first.

- Prioritise your own safety and that of others at the scene.
- Whenever possible, make sure that you have support available, i.e. colleague, friend, security.

- Make sure that you debrief by talking the situation through with a colleague or the Student Counselling Service or Wellbeing Service.
- Keep a written record.
- Inform your line manager.

University Support Services

Emergency, dial 2222 (from internal QMU phones)

Security (First Aiders)

Tel: 0131 474 0000 then say “Security”

Security staff can assist in contacting emergency services.

Student Services www.qmu.ac.uk/student-services/

Student Services is located in the Staff and Student Information Point on Level 1.

Tel: 0131 474 0000 then say “Student Services” or one of the specific services listed below:

- **Wellbeing Service** wellbeing@qmu.ac.uk
- **Counselling** counselling@qmu.ac.uk
- **Disability Service** disabilityadvisers@qmu.ac.uk
- **Funding Advice Service** studentfunding@qmu.ac.uk
- **Careers and Employability** careers@qmu.ac.uk

RILO

rilo@qmu.ac.uk

Tel: 0131 474 0099

Support for international students.

Effective Learning Service ELS@qmu.ac.uk or ELSinternational@qmu.ac.uk

Located in the LRC. Gives advice on a range of study skills.

Accommodation Services accommodation@qmu.ac.uk

Support and advice on campus accommodation matters.

Residence Life reslife@qmu.ac.uk

For students living in QMU accommodation. Help & support offered by the Residence Life team.

Students' Union helpzone@qmu.ac.uk

Tel: 0131 474 0000 then say ‘Students’ Union’

The Students’ Union Help Zone provides students with independent, confidential advice and support on welfare and academic matters, including extenuating circumstances, academic appeals, disciplinary, complaints, and fitness to practice issues.

Further advice and information in regard of this Guide can be provided by the Head of Student Services or the Student Counsellor.

Useful numbers

Emergency	999 (or 112) (from internal QMU phones, dial 2222 instead)	
NHS 24	111 (calls are free)	
Breathing Space	0800 83 85 87	www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk
The Samaritans	116 123 (free call) Text: 07725 909090 Email: jo@samaritans.org	www.samaritans.org
Royal Infirmary A&E	0131 536 1000	
Mental Health Assessment Service (Royal Edinburgh Hospital) Mackinnon House, Morningside Terrace, Edinburgh	0131 537 6000	
Riverside Medical Practice	0131 446 4171	Musselburgh (by TESCO)
Edinburgh Crisis Centre (City of Edinburgh residents only)	0808 801 0414 Email: crisis@edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk Text: 07974 429075	www.edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk
Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre	08088 01 03 02 Email: support@ercc.scot	http://www.ercc.scot/
Nightline (confidential peer support for Edinburgh students, 8pm – 8am term time)	0131 557 4444	http://nleusa.ed.ac.uk