



## **How do we support students with eating issues?**

The University of Surrey is committed to supporting its students who are struggling with issues in their relationship with food and to help them to meet their full personal, academic and professional potential. It is also committed to using its best endeavours to ensure that students with eating disorders are kept safe.

This document sets out the nature of the support provided and the University's position on maintaining safety.

### **1. Support available**

#### **a) Local services**

All students at the University of Surrey are encouraged to register with a local GP as soon possible. Follow this link for more information about registration with local GPs: [Surrey GP Registration](#). It is usually possible to keep your home and Uni GP involved in your care.

If you are currently under the care of a team to support your with an eating disorder we recommend that you discuss transfer of care from them to the local service in Surrey as early as possible before your arrival at Surrey. This will ensure smooth transition of care. If this is not possible then make an appointment with your Surrey GP and discuss referral.

#### **b) Support at the University**

##### Disability and Neurodiversity Service

Under the Equality Act those with a diagnosed eating disorder are deemed to have a disability and as such are entitled academic adjustments and support can be obtained through Disability and Neurodiversity Service team. Follow this link for further information about how to seek this support. [Disability and Neurodiversity at Surrey](#)

##### Eating Disorder Service at Centre for Wellbeing

The University has an Eating Disorder Service ('ED Service') which is part of the Centre for Wellbeing.

The Service is staffed by a dedicated eating disorder specialist (psychotherapist) as well as an ED trained occupational therapist. Students will be seen by either ED Specialist or by the Occupational Therapist. Other members of the advice team may be drawn in as necessary.

The Service provides support to students and raises awareness around eating disorders and body image.

The Service supports students using individual therapy. The ED Service does not currently offer group therapy, but this is being kept under review.

The length and nature of the support offered will depend on the needs of the student and the capacity of the ED Service. Some students require regular support throughout their time at University and the ED service will endeavour to give this support where possible. The Service will



also provide a case management role where necessary and with the student's consent will liaise with external and internal colleagues.

More specifically there are the following expectations

If after initial assessment anorexia, bulimia and/or high-risk disordered eating are suspected students should be assessed by their GP for blood tests and possible ECG and referral to outside NHS Service if they meet their criteria.

Students will be seen by the University ED Service where the service has availability and

- They have an eating disorder and/or issues around food which do not appear to be causing serious clinical risk; this includes relapse prevention work
- They do not meet criteria for NHS ED services
- Waiting times for ED service would be harmful to the students (academic, health)
- It would be in the student's best interests to be seen alongside the NHS ED services. In these circumstances it is imperative that the NHS Service and the University ED Service work jointly and that the student consents to information sharing between them

Students will not be seen by the University ED Service where

- The student is already engaged in counselling/psychotherapy where their eating-related issues are being addressed.
- The student is experiencing a primary physical or psychiatric disorder requiring treatment before eating disorder can be addressed.
- Their issues can be addressed by the University's counselling and/or advice team.

Where a student's health is significantly compromised or at risk they are expected to engage with NHS services and to have regular physical health checks either by the GP or the NHS EDU.

The professionals from the ED Service aim to maintain transparency with the students they see and will discuss with them if there are concerns over their fitness to study/practise (see part 3 below) in order that support can be given to them.

### Holding Programme

Where individual therapy is unavailable but students are deemed suitable they will be kept on a waiting list. Whilst waiting they will be sign posted to alternative sources of help (for example IAPT), provided with self-help programmes and literature, offered group programmes where available.



## **2. Keeping students safe**

### The University's position

The University recognizes that it has a duty under the Equality Act not to discriminate against and to make reasonable adjustments for students who have mental and physical health impairments such as eating disorders.

It also recognizes that engaging in higher education can be a motivating factor in recovery from an eating disorder.

It balances these factors against its primary aim to keep students safe. The nature of eating disorders is such that they affect the physical as well as mental health of an individual. The effects of starvation and ED behaviours such as self-induced vomiting can lead to a whole range of risks including organ failure, cardiac arrest and death. Furthermore, it is not unusual for people with EDs to be unaware of the severity of their condition or deny that they have the condition at all.

Students are expected to engage sufficiently with their academic work without putting their own health at risk, and where appropriate, engage with support services in order to help achieve this engagement.

The Eating Disorder Service always holds the best interests of the student in mind. The aim of both the Centre for Wellbeing and the University as a whole is to work with the student so that they can develop as well rounded, employable graduates and enjoy their time at University whilst their health and safety remains paramount.

### How do we keep students safe?

In helping the University determine whether a student is safe or needs further support we use Guidance from the Higher Education Occupational Practitioners' Society which can be found at this link [HEOPS Guidance](#)

This Guidance gives recommendations about when it is in the student's best interests to take a break from studies and when appropriate for them to return after such a break. These recommendations are based not only on the Body Mass Index (BMI) of the student but also on medical stability. BMI is a formula which relates body weight to height and is one of the measures that can be used to monitor a student who shows signs of weight loss. Whilst it is useful to use this as a guide it is not the only criteria upon which decisions are based.

HEOPS guidance recommends that students with a BMI of under 16 should take time out of their studies to focus on treatment and recovery.

### Support to Study/Fitness to Practise and Eating Disorders

There may be times when staff at the University are sufficiently concerned about a student's health and wellbeing to initiate a Support to Study or Fitness to Practise process; this process is a supportive one with the aim of achieving the best possible outcome for the student concerned and details about it can be found here [Support to Study Process](#).



Where students are going on a placement, the University is likely to have higher expectations about health and wellbeing, including BMI, than those set out in the HEOPS Guidance.

#### Guidance for staff

If you are worried that a student may have eating difficulties then the student should be encouraged to contact the Centre for Wellbeing and their GP for further support. If you feel the situation is urgent then you can seek advice from the Centre for Wellbeing at [centreforwellbeing@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:centreforwellbeing@surrey.ac.uk) or 01483 689498.