



A Strategic Framework for a Suicide-Safer University

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Forward

The death of a student by suicide is devastating for the family and friends and can have a profound effect on the whole university community. In 2017 the University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University came together to work on the Suicide-Safer Communities project. This project to make both universities suicide safer has since been an institutional priority for both organisations.

Suicide prevention is complex and no one approach will have all the answers and solutions that we would all wish for. However, by joining our resources and knowledge together we are working to ensure that our students are offered the support and understanding that is needed in this most emotive and complex area of student support and wellbeing.

Since 2017 the partnership has naturally grown and it now works with other universities and FE Colleges in the local area, the NHS and external support organisations to develop effective prevention, intervention and postvention policies and practices.

Protecting the mental health and wellbeing of students is something we take very seriously and we will continue to support students at risk of suicide by ensuring we have services that are able to support all students in our community in an inclusive and supportive environment.

At the University of Kent we are committed to the project and this is why I am pleased to support the strategic framework for a suicide safer community at the University of Kent.

Professor Karen Cox
Vice Chancellor and President

Introduction

Suicide is the leading cause of death in adolescents and young people in the UK [1]. Student suicides, as well as being devastating for friends and family, may also have profound impacts on the wider community of students and staff [2]. Universities can play a key role in helping to prevent suicides and our strategy for reducing the risk of suicide amongst the student population has been informed by a growing body of sector-specific research and advice including the 2018 UUK guidance “Suicide-Safer Universities” [3]. This requires a whole university approach to wellbeing and mental health and highlights the need to work in close partnership with students, parents, local government, and the NHS to develop clear policies and procedures relating to prevention, intervention and postvention.

Scope

The University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University in partnership, have agreed a shared suicide safer-strategy and template with amendments according to service provision provided.

A Suicide-Safer Communities project was initiated between the University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) in 2017. Making the universities suicide-safer was made an institutional priority in both organisations, and a suicide-safer action plan was developed, with senior management responsible for its implementation. Strong links have been established with local and national partners from the healthcare sector, voluntary sector and the local authority and public health bodies as part of the project. Since 2017, the Suicide-Safer Universities project has grown into a collaboration between three Kent Universities (University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University, & University for the Creative Arts) and one further education college (Canterbury College), as well as their respective Students’ Unions. The aims of the project are to support the mental health and wellbeing of people within those communities, to increase awareness and skills around suicide prevention, and to develop and evaluate the Suicide-Safer Community approach in the context of the Universities and College, as well as the city and county more widely.

This framework outlines work already completed or underway as part of the Suicide-Safer project at the University of Kent and sets out areas for future development at the University. It runs alongside Kent University’s Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2025. This strategy encompasses seven strategic aims: leadership, partnership, prevention, early intervention, support, data and campus environment. It is designed to ensure that student mental health and wellbeing are a strategic priority, where access to support is easily available and where we are seeking to continually improve practice. All these elements contribute to suicide prevention as well as to broader mental health initiatives. This work is not duplicated

in the Suicide-Safer strategy but is an important part of the context within which this strategy has been developed.

Framework for a Suicide-Safer University

The Framework outlined below sets out current activity in each of these areas and then identifies areas for development.

Strategic Approach

In terms of developing a Suicide-Safer strategy, the 2018 Universities UK Suicide-Safer Universities guidance recommends:

- Suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention should be connected as a specific strategy, distinct from student death policies, as a component of an overarching institutional mental health strategy
- The strategy should be agreed by and have visible support from the senior executive team: it should be owned by a member of that team
- It should set out clear ambition and objectives and be created in partnership with staff, students, and external stakeholders
- It should be developed into a multi-agency action plan to detail how, who and when the strategy will be implemented
- It should be reviewed on a regular basis; and refined based on lessons learned

Since its inception, the Suicide-Safer project has benefited greatly from the engagement and support of stakeholder groups. Many local organisations that may support our students within or outside the Universities are represented on a strategic steering group which meets 3 times a year. This group works collaboratively, sharing ideas around suicide prevention and awareness raising, and includes representatives from Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust (KMPT), Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS), Kent County Council (KCC), Kent Police, Samaritans and Network Rail. The group also includes representatives from Kent Union and CCCU Students' Union; Student Support Managers from University of Kent, CCCU, and University for the Creative Arts (UCA); the Assistant Principal at Canterbury College, and CCCU Chaplains. The group is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, CCCU.

Goals

This section details the specific goals of a Suicide-Safer University approach with respect to prevention, intervention and postvention activities.

Prevention

The activities identified under prevention include suicide and mental health awareness and the promotion of good mental health and wellbeing. There is also a need to create an infrastructure and environment that encourages help-seeking; that enables students to access appropriate support and resources; and provides training for staff so that they can support student mental health themselves as well as know how to refer students for further help.

Goal	Current Activities
Take a whole University approach to good mental health	Current Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2025 to be replaced by a Student Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan for 2022 – 2027, as part of the work towards the University Mental Health Charter
Create compassionate communities among staff and students	Wellbeing Festivals and events on campus (UMHD participation). Calendar of Wellbeing Events. Wellbeing café – weekly drop-in during term time for students to access mental health support whilst engaging in wellbeing focussed activities in a group setting https://www.kent.ac.uk/student-support/50826/wellbeing-cafe-36 . Kent Community Oasis Garden -A multiuse outside space for students, staff and the local community run in partnership with East Kent Mind providing wellbeing activities and workshops.
Encourage disclosure of difficulties and distress	'It's safe to talk about suicide' information on webpages. Student induction presentations refer to all support services to seek support/help and how
Encourage students to make contact with a trusted person/service early if they run into mental health difficulties.	Students are encouraged to share the difficulties that they are experiencing with someone who they are able to trust. They are also provided with the contact details

	<p>of Spectrum Life to ensure that they can access 24/7 in-the-moment support if they reach a point of crisis.</p> <p>At the point of receiving support or intervention, students are asked if there is anyone they would like us to include in the conversation regarding their support.</p>
<p>Ensure that students getting into difficulties are identified, signposted to help, and followed up</p>	<p>The Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Service operates a daily triage system, ensuring a rapid response to students in need, and to colleagues in Divisions needing urgent advice.</p> <p>The Student Support and Wellbeing Management team has a 'Cause for Concern' list that meets weekly to discuss students where risk and mitigation factors are discussed and ensures a holistic response and approach across all support areas within SSW that is coordinated and managed by senior managers.</p> <p>Marshalls e-learning - suicide awareness and mental health training available to all staff to increase their confidence in identifying and referring students.</p>
<p>Raise suicide awareness and work to destigmatise suicide</p>	<p>'It's safe to talk about suicide' information.</p> <p>Activities organised to promote International Suicide Prevention Day and World Mental Health Day.</p>
<p>Provide a range of easily accessible and culturally appropriate support for those experiencing difficulties</p>	<p>Wide range of self-help tools that are accessible 24/7 recognising only 1:3 access services physically (e.g. Spectrum Life which provides in-the-moment emotional support, and Togetherall, which provides clinically-managed, online peer support).</p> <p>Appointments available online via MS Teams and instant messaging.</p> <p>Webpages updated to make them more accessible.</p>

	<p>Ongoing liaison with Kent Union to identify key groups and develop inclusivity of service, and offer bespoke interventions as appropriate e.g., Exploring intersectionality with females who identify as Black, African, South Asian and Caribbean, a group-facilitated by a trained counsellor and include discussion of self-care and coping strategies in order to support the wellbeing of black women, support groups for autistic students, facilitated by specialist mentors.</p> <p>SSW staff recruited with focus on cultural diversity and competency.</p> <p>Ongoing EDI professional development for all staff.</p> <p>Partnership with Spectrum Life that is able to offer counselling and crisis support in a range of languages .</p>
<p>Signpost support available from the University, including in departments/ schools, faculties, halls of residence, central support services, and others</p>	<p>Welcome week talks.</p> <p>Student awareness raising campaigns throughout the academic year to make students aware of the support available. Social media campaigns.</p> <p>Wellbeing Wednesday (SSW have access and take over the main University social media channels every Wednesday afternoon to raise awareness and focus on areas of all wellbeing.</p> <p>Training to Student Support Staff in Divisions, College and Community Life Officers and Student Conduct and Complaint Officers to ensure signposting of support.</p>
<p>Signpost support available externally, which includes NHS, voluntary sector and others</p>	<p>Promotion of external organisations through webpages, social media, posters and leaflets across the University.</p>

	<p>Agreed pathways of referrals in place with SSW and NHS and other external organisations.</p> <p>On campus Nursing Services unit/team Close proximity of NHS GP surgery at Canterbury campus, with Service Level Agreement.</p> <p>Agreement for on campus visits/drop in sessions from East Kent Rape Crisis Centre, Forward Trust for Alcohol and Drug support.</p>
<p>Prevent and act against bullying and all types of discrimination and harassment</p>	<p>Expect Respect campaign with Kent Union, includes responding to discrimination, harassment, bullying and sexual violence.</p> <p>Expect Respect compulsory online module for all registered students.</p> <p>Report and Support– online reporting tool for students to get support for sexual misconduct and assault, harassment (non-sexual), assault, bullying, discrimination and hate incidents.</p> <p>Policies and procedures review in line with Office for Students Statement of Expectations.</p>
<p>Ensure good communication between all elements of the university involved with student welfare</p>	<p>Monthly multi-disciplinary team meetings including SSW, University Medical Centre, Nursing Services, College and Community Life (CCL) and Campus Security.</p> <p>Termly meetings with Student Support Managers within Divisions.</p> <p>Student Support Services work with the wider university, academic teams and Student Support Officers via the Support to Study procedure.</p> <p>Representation from Student Services and SSW colleagues on a range of University Committees and boards (Student Experience etc).</p>

	Student Services duty manager rota in place for security to access a Senior Manager out of hours.
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Intervention

There is a need to have appropriate staff within Student Support and Wellbeing who have the right training to intervene when someone may be having suicidal thoughts. The mental health team have explicit responsibility and the professional capabilities to intervene in crisis situations, and we have developed policies and procedures to manage risk. We have worked closely with NHS colleagues locally to ensure students have quick access to appropriate secondary mental health services when needed.

Goal	Current Activities
Recognise signs and vulnerabilities: use alert systems to detect patterns of difficulty, such as not engaging with academic work, running into academic difficulties or dropping off the academic radar, not paying rent, fees or fines; disciplinary issues, not engaging with other students or staff or not being involved in community activities	<p>Support to Study procedure updated.</p> <p>Close liaison with newly formed College and Community Life team.</p> <p>Daily review of Security Incident Reports (actions from the reports agreed via Head of Student Support & Wellbeing, Head of Student Conduct & Complaints and Head of Colleges & Community Life).</p> <p>Consideration of mental health in any conduct-related risk assessment overseen by Head of SCCO</p> <p>Liaison with Student Finance team re Hardship requests and ongoing financial issues for non-payment.</p>
Train student-facing academic, professional services and operational staff across the organization and provide refresher training in suicide awareness, how to have conversations and how to intervene	<p>Suicide Awareness training available through Staff Development.</p> <p>Understanding and Supporting Student Mental Health training.</p> <p>10 staff completing training on Student Minds 'Look after your Mate' which is training for students who have friends with mental health difficulties.</p>

<p>Provide and publicise resources such as 'use of language', 'spot the signs', 'it's safe to talk about suicide', and others to the wider university community</p>	<p>'It's safe to talk about suicide' information on webpages.</p>
<p>Consider your institution's policy and practice on information sharing agreements, disclosure and consent</p>	<p>We have established protocols in place to enable sharing of information within NHS referral pathways. In addition, at the point of receiving support or intervention, students are asked if there is anyone they would like us to contact and/or be happy for us to contact if there was a concern.</p>
<p>Develop, implement, and regularly review support pathways within the university for distressed students</p>	<p>Triage system in place with Mental Health Advisers who can also offer on the day appointments to students in crisis. University staff are aware of how to refer/signpost students to this.</p> <p>Triage system in place for counselling appointments.</p> <p>Out of hours Mental Health Practitioner based in Nursing Services.</p> <p>Nursing Services on Canterbury campus 24/7 during term-time.</p> <p>Spectrum Life- In the moment crisis support available to all students in the evenings and weekends via app, text or phone. This is an external service funded by the University and with information sharing agreements that enable red flag concerns to be highlighted to the SSW team to follow up on. Campus Security reports are accessed by Student Services and directed to SSW if specialist follow-up required.</p> <p>Togetherall – providing clinically managed, online peer support 24/7.</p> <p>Canterbury Nightline – supported by University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church Universities and delivered by Kent Union.</p> <p>Wellbeing café.</p>

<p>Establish clear and collaborative local care pathways into statutory mental health services and NHS crisis intervention teams</p>	<p>A Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed between UoK and KMPT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed pathway between university and secondary mental health services that supports students well and meets their needs in serious mental health crisis • Agreement reached on escalation processes when risk of suicide &/or serious mental ill health present and on information sharing between organizations in relation to suicide risk.
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Postvention

A student suicide impacts on family, friends, university staff, and the wider university community. The aim of postvention is to support those people who have been affected by a student’s suicide and to learn lessons to reduce risk and to prevent, as far as possible, future suicides.

Suicide postvention involves a series of planned interventions, agreed templates for communications and a nominated lead to ensure an effective, appropriate and timely response. The universities’ senior leadership can set the tone for how the rest of the university responds to a suicide.

Goal	Current Activities
<p>Contact the bereaved, offering to meet and provide compassionate support</p>	<p>Protocol for responding to the death of a student was revised in September 2021. Director of Student Services, or Deputy, responsible for providing point of contact for bereaved family and friends.</p> <p>Family is provided with practical support in relation to visiting the campus (e.g. provision of accommodation) and with collecting personal belongings.</p>
<p>Support affected students and staff – ensure individual approaches for anyone identified as being at risk of contagion, including rapid referral for community</p>	<p>Student Support and Wellbeing staff and other services like CCL, Chaplains, Kent Union reach out and offer support to students and staff who have been affected</p>

<p>mental health support where and when needed.</p>	<p>by a student suicide. This can include drop-in appointments for individuals or groups and where appropriate ongoing appointments.</p> <p>On campus nursing services and external provider, Spectrum Life, would be informed of any student death so that they can be ready for possible increase in contact from distressed students. Local GP practice would also be informed.</p> <p>Any student for whom an increase risk has been identified, would receive follow-up through SSW.</p> <p>Staff can access Employee Assistance Programme for support through Occupational Health</p>
<p>Agree internal communications, including staff and students, as appropriate</p>	<p>Protocols for responding to student deaths and serious incidents have been developed. These protocols include lines of communication and have been reviewed to provide more detailed guidance for those involved in responding to events.</p>
<p>Legacy and anniversaries – find the best way to celebrate the life of the deceased, without glamorising suicide</p>	<p>Memorials/ other events put in place in liaison with friends and families, to ensure that any memorials honour the deceased but do not increase the risk of imitative behaviour.</p>
<p>Alert local and public health services, as appropriate</p>	<p>Local GP service and on-campus Nursing Services are informed to enable them to carefully consider risk amongst the students they see during this period. If considered beneficial, wider KMPT colleagues are also informed.</p>
<p>Be prepared for external communications – support the media in delivering sensitive reporting of suicide and call out bad behaviour</p>	<p>We work with the Communications Team within the University to support sensitive and appropriate communication, following Samaritans' Media Guidelines.</p>
<p>Provide information of available support</p>	<p>Provide information on Papyrus/SOBS, as appropriate, and other support available via Spectrum Life, Togetherall.</p>
<p>Support continuous quality improvement of suicide prevention strategies and action plans – facilitate research, data collection</p>	<p>Following an apparent student suicide, the Director of Student Services and Head of Student Support and Wellbeing Services,</p>

and monitoring to get to the bottom of what has happened, and lessons learned through carrying out a serious incident review	will convene a meeting to include any other staff involved to reflect on the situation and consider any lessons learnt. Meetings are also held with Student Support and Wellbeing on a regular basis to reflect on any situations where lessons can be learned, as part of ongoing improvement.
Consider holding open meetings with affected communities e.g. students in a particular university department's year group or student halls	Support sessions have been offered and held for particular groups of affected students and staff after incidents. We are also able to refer students to the Suicide Loss Support Group for Young People (16-25), which was established by Canterbury Christ Church University in partnership with Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide charity in Canterbury.

Sustainability and Future Improvements

In order to build on the foundation of what has already been achieved to date and to ensure ongoing improvement and development we have identified goals and ambitions to support our approach to prevention and identification to students at risk.

The following goals provide a focus for the project going forwards in terms of;

- building capacity within the University so we can continue to deliver a Suicide-Safer environment
- ensuring the sustainability of prevention, intervention and postvention measures.

Goal	
Identify capacity and funding available for long term implementation of successful measures.	Building on the success of our Specialist Wellbeing Adviser (Sexual Assault and Harassment), we hope to recruit a further adviser to specialise in supporting students who have experienced bullying and hate incidents. Other resources may need to be considered in future to respond to increasing demand, in order to ensure

	timely access to appropriate services and to manage risk.
Detail stakeholder relationships that have been forged and developed to enhance provision for our students and will continue to do so.	The relationships and partnerships that have been created internally and with externally will need to be continuously reviewed and developed to ensure ongoing improvements.
Create an action plan for long term plans.	Internally this will be encompassed in the Student Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan. Externally, these will be developed in conjunction with Canterbury Christ Church University, the Suicide-Safer Communities partnership and relevant external agencies
Reviewing our approach to lessons learned	To ensure that we have a robust follow up of lessons learnt after any relevant incident that includes an independent chair, a fully detailed timeline of incident and the relevant people included, so we are able to look for any learning points or opportunities to improve our approach and support.
Increase in uptake of the staff training relating to Mental Health	Student Services to deliver training to all staff completing staff induction at 3 points in the year. As part of this training we highlight how staff can direct student to support areas and we provide a link to the Staff mental health training module. Increased understanding of staff being able identify students of concern and how to signpost will ensure better support offered.
Increase our Mental Health Advisers training and awareness as part of CPD practice	To use specialist services and enhanced training to help the Mental Health Advisers in completing assessments and support offering. To offer one training opportunity each year for group training as well as other opportunities for individual training needs

Joint partnership goals (CCCU and UoK)	To agree via the partnership on joint agreed future goals that secure the partnership, funding and initiatives to be put in place that build upon the success and achievements.
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Next Steps and Plans for Review

The Framework sets out how we will work with our staff and students to embed the developments and commitments set out in this Framework and to develop and refine appropriate policies, procedures and guidance to formalise and embed our approach.

We will provide an annual update on the development of this work to the Student Experience Committee, which reports to the Student Education and Experience Board, chaired by the DVC for Education and Student Experience.

References

- [1] Office for National Statistics, "Deaths registered in England and Wales (series DR): 2016," 2017.
- [2] Bell, J., Stanley, N., Mallon, S., & Manthorpe, J. (2012). Life will never be the same again: Examining grief in survivors bereaved by young suicide. *Illness, Crisis, and Loss*, 21(1)49-68.
- [3] Universities UK (2018). Suicide Safer Universities.