**UEA Suicide safer strategy**

**Content warning**

This strategy paper discusses suicidal thoughts, feelings and behaviours as well as issues related to completed suicide and bereavement by suicide. If you feel effected by any of the content, please do reach out for support, support services information is included in the appendix.

**Introduction**

**Strategy support from UEA’s executive team**

**Endorsement from the Senior pro Vice Chancellor, Student Education and Experience.**

Suicidality and mental distress remain a significant concern across society and our community and as such it is essential that we are well placed to proactively notice those who may be vulnerable and create conditions in which those in distress feel able to disclose and are supported. I am pleased to see the development of this Suicide Safer strategy as part of our ongoing commitment to this work and fully endorse the aims and actions within.

**Endorsement from the CEO of the Students’ Union**

It is more important than ever that higher education institutions, and their respective students’ unions continue to focus on preventative practices and methods to reduce the difficulties students are experiencing during their time in education. It goes a long way to see UEA’s commitment to supporting our most vulnerable members through a robust strategy which puts people at the core. And one that the SU fully supports and endorses.

**Statement of purpose**

At UEA we are committed to creating a suicide-safer community. Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people in the UK. The death of a student by suicide is devastating for the family and friends and can profoundly affect the wider community. At UEA we aim to minimise suicide and attempted suicide in so far as is possible, recognising that the University can play a key role in helping to do this. This plan cannot cover all eventualities, and it is recognised that sadly not all suicide is preventable.

This strategy aligns with the suicide safer guidance (Universities UK and Papyrus, 2018) and the AMOSSHE guidance ‘Collective responsibility, collective action to prevent suicide’ (2024). Providing a framework to better understand and respond to the issues of suicide in the HE population. The focus is on the three key elements which represent the component parts of an effective suicide prevention and response system: Prevention, Intervention and Postvention. The strategy follows a clear emphasis on the benefits of a whole University approach, and close liaison with the NHS, Public Health, local government and other key external agencies as well as UEA Strategy 2030 and the SEE strategy. The strategy is also aligned with the student death process adopted across the university.

The strategy action plan lays out what the university has in place and what we commit to doing to support a suicide safety community and provides detail of specific actions and projects which are linked to ensuring the realisation of the Strategy.

In having this strategy and action plan the university can actively work toward reducing the risk of suicide by identifying areas of good practice and areas for future development, proactively building on current offer to forward our aim to see fewer incidents of death by suicide and attempted suicide within our community.

This strategy and action plan have been developed in partnership with key internal and external stakeholders. It is owned by the Deputy Director of Student and Academic Services (Student Journey and support services) with executive sponsorship coming from the PCV student education and experience. Oversight and dissemination responsibility is held by the Student Experience Committee.

It will be reviewed and refined annually to reflect learning.

**Context**

UUK, along with Papyrus, through the suicide safer universities guidance encourages all universities to make a commitment to suicide-safer universities.

The number of students disclosing a mental health condition to their higher education institution is increasing and demand for support services has grown significantly across the sector in the last five years. The UEA picture reflect this.

**Data**

Data relating to suicide both in the general population and in the HE environment over the last ten years provides a sobering picture.

Suicidal thoughts are common. Papyrus estimate that nearly 1 in 4 young people will experience suicidal thoughts at least once in their lifetime, and that approximately 1 in 20 young people, will attempt to take their own life by suicide.

Higher education students in England and Wales had a significantly lower suicide rate compared with the general population of similar ages. However, research has shown that approximately 75% of adults with a diagnosed mental health illness first experience symptoms before the age of 25, making the transition and journey throughout academic life a particularly vulnerable time for many individuals. At the same time, it should also be recognised that being in higher education can also be a protective factor, reducing the risk of suicide.

The suicide rate for higher education students in the academic year ending 2020 in England and Wales was 3.9 deaths per 100,000 students (64 suicide deaths). Whilst there is some variation over the years where statistics are available the small numbers per year make it difficult to identify statistically significant differences.

**Risk factors**

Social, psychological, and cultural factors can all interact to lead a person to suicidal thoughts or behaviour. For many people, an attempt may occur after a long period of suicidal thoughts or feelings, while in other cases, it may be more impulsive. Several risk factors commonly act together to increase vulnerability to suicidal behaviour.

Risk factors can include serious self-harm, alcohol and substance misuse and health and psychological factors such as adverse life experiences and early childhood trauma, chronic medical pain, perfectionism, social alienation/isolation, interpersonal conflict and loss and feelings of entrapment and hopelessness.

Factors that may increase mental distress in the student population may include academic difficulties, financial problems, isolation and loneliness, loss or change in support structures as well as broader social and cultural pressures. Students are likely to be particularly vulnerable at key transition points.

Male suicide rate for higher education students is statistically significantly higher (5.6 deaths per 100,000 students; (202 suicide deaths) compared with female students (2.5 deaths per 100,000 students; 117 suicide deaths). This is in line with the trend seen in the general population where suicide rates are higher among males.

In addition, first year undergraduate males had a significantly higher suicide rate (7.8 deaths per 100,000) compared with those studying in other years (4.3 deaths per 100,000).

The Office for students (2021) reports that only 1 in 4 of students who have ended their lives have been in contact with mental health services. Indicating a need for a focus on awarness raising within the community, clear pathways to reporting concerns, accessing support and early intervention.

Groups in the general population that have been identified as being at higher risk of suicide include those who have experienced bereavement, asylum seekers and refugees, those who have experienced trauma, people with a pre-existing mental health condition or those with underlying health conditions. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) young people exhibit more suicidal behaviour than those who do not identify as LGBTQ+.

**Key elements**

There are three key elements to the strategy: prevention, intervention and postvention.

**Prevention**

Evidence demonstrates that suicide is preventable, therefore ensuring appropriate levels of awareness, training and support are in place is integral to UEA’s Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Prevention should increase understanding of suicide, encourage discussion and challenge common misconceptions about suicide, reducing stigma and shame associated with the subject

**Intervention**

Creating an environment where students and staff feel comfortable to have open and honest conversations is a foundation of being able to support intervention.

Our approach to intervention acknowledges that everybody at UEA has a role to play in recognising the signs and increased vulnerabilities to suicide.

Through training and clear guidance, we endeavour for all staff to be alert to the signs that someone might be vulnerable and ensure that there are clear referral routes and guidance in place so that staff, or student peers, can quickly refer to someone who is appropriately

**Postvention**

The term postvention refers to the actions taken following the death of a student by suspected suicide. This includes the appropriate steps in supporting those bereaved, managing internal communications and responding accordingly to external media communications. This also includes minimising the risk of contagion and ensuring relevant steps to review and learn from the incident, so as to inform and mitigate future risks.

Our approach to postvention recognises the reach of impact and aims to support those affected in a sensitive, compassionate and person-centred way.

The strategy sets out clear aims and actions under these three key areas.

Principles, aims, objectives and actions

 

**APPENDICES**

**Further Resources and Support Organisations**

**Prevention/ intervention**

**UEA services**

Quick info [Wellbeing Support Available](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsway.office.com%2F6Xb3L5IHkj395Lj7%3Fref%3DLink&data=05%7C02%7CC.Pratt1%40uea.ac.uk%7C6a91c2377ac040f99e6308dcd0db8bce%7Cc65f8795ba3d43518a070865e5d8f090%7C0%7C0%7C638614888558499850%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=I6ksKo3LdWNqsbpmyTVMQaEXizAih%2FYzw5Ays959EGQ%3D&reserved=0)

SIZ [Student Information Zone (SIZ)](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsiz.uea.ac.uk%2F&data=05%7C02%7CC.Pratt1%40uea.ac.uk%7C6a91c2377ac040f99e6308dcd0db8bce%7Cc65f8795ba3d43518a070865e5d8f090%7C0%7C0%7C638614888558504395%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=OMc%2BbmSdAUCQqagqnB0ZaCyhfHwfrt%2BEirbUfCoE4iA%3D&reserved=0)

MyUEA [Wellbeing](https://my.uea.ac.uk/divisions/student-services/wellbeing)

Blackboard [Student Services Hub](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flearn.uea.ac.uk%2Fauth-saml%2Fsaml%2Flogin%3FapId%3D_477_1%26redirectUrl%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Flearn.uea.ac.uk%252Fultra%252Forganizations%252F_146873_1%252Foutline&data=05%7C02%7CC.Pratt1%40uea.ac.uk%7C6a91c2377ac040f99e6308dcd0db8bce%7Cc65f8795ba3d43518a070865e5d8f090%7C0%7C0%7C638614888558508944%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=xiAGK9j1lsRNa1Vt%2FW4%2FJr0fEUKFjc4jg0pRyuSFEVw%3D&reserved=0)

Wellbeing workshops and events [Wellbeing workshops, groups and events](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fbit.ly%2FWBTsway&data=05%7C02%7CC.Pratt1%40uea.ac.uk%7C6a91c2377ac040f99e6308dcd0db8bce%7Cc65f8795ba3d43518a070865e5d8f090%7C0%7C0%7C638614888558513521%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=DySaACrCNBKIQNzKDe5lXF2Afy2vTMuGYlDDv0pqCk0%3D&reserved=0)

**External services**

NHS urgent support via 111: [Check your mental health symptoms - NHS 111](https://111.nhs.uk/triage/check-your-mental-health-symptoms)

Details of free to access NHS support [NHS Mental Health Support](https://my.uea.ac.uk/divisions/student-services/wellbeing/mental-health/nhs-mental-health-support)

Norwich REST: [Homepage - REST - Norwich](https://restnorwich.co.uk/)

**PAPYRUS**

PAPYRUS provide confidential support and advice service to people ages up to 35, who may be at risk of suicide, or who may be concerned about someone else’s risk of suicide. Support can be accessed via HOPELINEUK Call: 0800 068 4141, Text: 07786209697 or Email: [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org) [Papyrus UK Suicide Prevention | Prevention of Young Suicide](https://www.papyrus-uk.org/)

**Samaritans**

Samaritans provide confidential emotional support 24/7 every day of the year, and can be contacted by telephone, email and face to face in local branches: **Call: free phone 116123 (24-hour service) or email** [**jo@samaritans.org**](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)[Samaritans | Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy | Here to listen](https://www.samaritans.org/)

**SHOUT**

Shout provides free, 24/7 text support for young people across the UK experiencing a mental health crisis. Text SHOUT to 85258. [Shout: the UK's free, confidential and 24/7 mental health text service for crisis support | Shout 85258](https://giveusashout.org/)

**Young Minds**

[YoungMinds | Mental Health Charity For Children And Young People | YoungMinds](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/)

**Postvention**

**The Support After Suicide Partnership**

The Support After Suicide Partnership brings together suicide bereavement organisations, and people with lived experience, to achieve a vision that **everyone bereaved or affected by suicide is offered timely and appropriate support. They have produced a** guide containing information about what may happen after a suicide or sudden traumatic death, including; feelings and emotions that bereaved people may experience, coping advice, sources of support and useful reading material. This booklet also provides information for professionals to assist in providing help and finding support for themselves. **:** [Help is at hand – Support After Suicide](https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/resource/help-is-at-hand/)

**MIND**

MIND offer details of organisations who can help someone bereaved by suicide: [Losing someone to suicide - Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/bereavement-by-suicide/)

**Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)**

SOBS is a national charity which offers free support to adults (aged 18+) bereaved by suicide via a helpline, peer support online forum and self-help groups: [Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide - Overcoming the isolation of people bereaved by suicide](https://uksobs.com/)

**Media Guidelines (Samaritans)**

Samaritans’ media guidelines for reporting suicide and online resources to reinforce industry codes of practice, supporting the highest standard of coverage of suicide: [Samaritans' Media Guidelines](https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/media-guidelines/)

**References**

Office for National Statistics (2022),Estimating suicide among higher education students, England and Wales’: Experimental Statistics: 2017 to 2020

Office for National Statistics (2018) Estimating suicide among higher education students, England and Wales: Experimental Statistics.

Papyrus: Prevention of Young Suicide; August 2021

[Suicide prevention - Office for Students](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/effective-practice/suicide-prevention/)

**Linked UEA policies and procedures**

* Emergency opt in/ trusted contact policy The policy can be found [Policies](https://my.uea.ac.uk/divisions/student-services/policies)
* Student engagement policy [Student Engagement Procedures - University Governance](https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/university-information/governance/policies-and-regulations/general-regulations/student-engagement-procedures)
* Missing and disengaged [Policies](https://my.uea.ac.uk/divisions/student-services/policies)
* Student death procedure - under review link to be added