



**Queen Margaret  
University**  
EDINBURGH

# **Supporting Students in Distress**

A guide for Staff

Updated March 2021

Most students will cope well with the stresses of life and their academic study 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

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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 any issue that is causing a student distress/difficulty and can help to minimise the effect of students' personal circumstances on their academic performance and progress. Do not feel that you alone have to "solve" the issues that are causing the distress and if you would like support in addressing the student or want to talk the issues through with someone, Wellbeing staff will be able to support with this.

**It is also important to acknowledge your own limitations:**

<b>You Can</b>	<b>You Can't</b>
Listen	Solve all students' problems
Give the student time to talk	Take responsibility for their emotional state
Be sympathetic and not dismissive	Take responsibility for their actions
Understand their perspective	
Make appropriate referrals	
Help the student feel contained or calmer	

# Confidentiality

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The purpose of sharing information is to ensure that the student receives the appropriate support at the appropriate time. Consideration should always be taken regarding what is appropriate and relevant to share. The personal information a student might disclose will need to be treated with respect and discretion. Student Services have produced a confidentiality agreement which covers Student Services and PAT's where information is shared in the best interests of the student (Appendix A). It is being rolled out to students so that they are informed about information sharing. Always inform students about your wish to share information with other University staff and for what purpose as this helps the student not to feel disempowered by the process. However, there are circumstances where there is a duty to breach confidentiality:

- When we believe there is substantial risk of the student being seriously harmed.
- When we believe there is a substantial risk of the student harming someone else.
- When there is a requirement in law to disclose information.

Student Services have produced a simple form for staff to use if they are unsure about sharing information without consent outwith the remit of the information sharing agreement which details the circumstances and legal basis for the sharing of information (Appendix B). Feel free to use this form if you find it useful. There might be situations where you might wish to share information outside of the University with parents, GP etc. In these instances, be cautious and seek some further guidance on whether this is appropriate from the Head of Student Services.

**Recording/Note taking:** Ensure that you are making notes in regard to action taken and store this in a safe place. The type of information that is important to store is information on; what the issues are, risk factors, what actions you have been taking, where the student is staying and with whom, who you have consent to discuss with, when any incident occurred and contact details. For Student Service staff information should be stored in Student Central in a confidential manner. If other QMU staff are unsure or uncomfortable about storing the information Student Services can store information on their behalf.

## Addressing Students in Distress

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There are many reasons why a student might be in distress. It might be relating to their academic studies and struggling to keep up with their studies or it might be something in their private lives that is affecting them. Not everyone is comfortable handling some of the issues that might be causing a student distress and it is important to acknowledge this and take appropriate action.

The key points for supporting a student in distress are:

- Speak with the student in a private area to retain confidentiality
- Listen, and acknowledge what the student is saying
- Make it clear that help is available
- Be honest and open about what support you are able to provide and what you will need someone else to provide

You will also need to consider the following:

- Do I have the time to provide the support that is needed?
- Do I have the expertise are you comfortable providing the support that is needed?

If your answers are NO to either of those two questions support the student to access suitable support through Student Services or specialised support.

## Gender Based Violence

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If the student's distress is relating to Gender Based Violence (Domestic Abuse, Rape, Sexual Assault, Harassment, Stalking, Forced Marriage and Commercial Sexual Exploitation) there is a specific document for how to address this here <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/study-here/student-services/sexual-harassment-and-violence/> It is important that any issue relating to GBV is dealt with following the correct procedures as there are specific considerations in regards to timescales, reporting and referral routes.

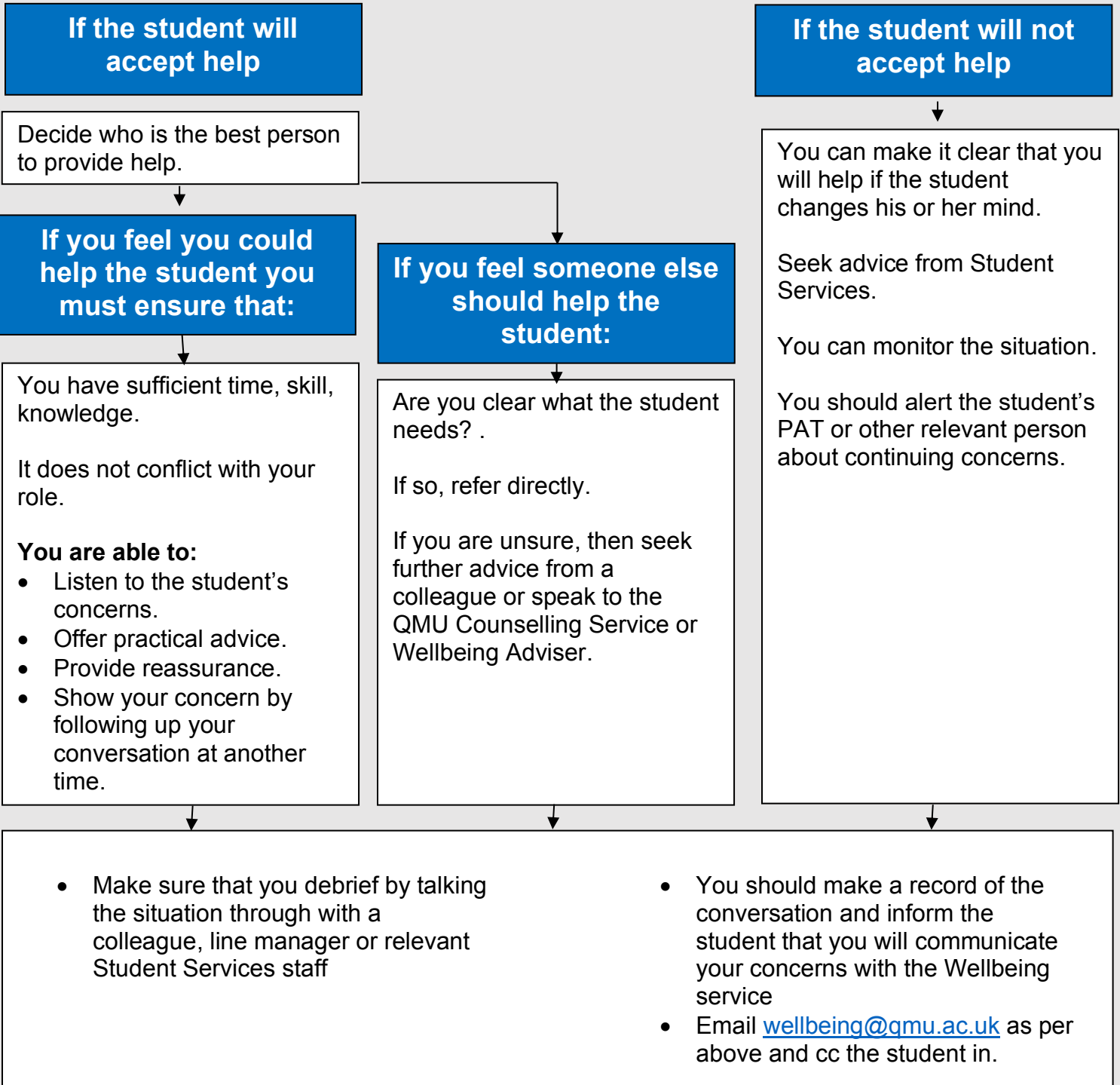
## Bullying and Harassment

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If the student's distress is related to Bullying and Harassment, QMU have an Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy that should be referred to. You can access it <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/quality/committees-regulations-policies-and-procedures/regulations-policies-and-procedures/bullying/>

# 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, or at risk of harming others. You are concerned for one or more of the following reasons. The student:**

- May be at risk of serious 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

Support them to contact the QMU Wellbeing or Counselling Service for immediate support. If possible, accompany them to the Student Services area.

#### Out of hours

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 emergency services if needed on 999 or, call security on 2222 for help in contacting emergency services.

#### Out of hours

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 relevant Student Services staff.
- Keep a written record.
- Inform your line manager.

# University Support Services

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**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/](http://www.qmu.ac.uk/student-services/)

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

- **Wellbeing Service** [wellbeing@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeing@qmu.ac.uk)
- **Counselling** [counselling@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@qmu.ac.uk)
- **Disability Service** [disabilityadvisers@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:disabilityadvisers@qmu.ac.uk)
- **Funding Advice Service** [studentfunding@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:studentfunding@qmu.ac.uk)
- **Careers and Employability** [careers@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:careers@qmu.ac.uk)

## International Office [international@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:international@qmu.ac.uk)

Support for international students.

## Togetherall <https://togetherall.com/en-gb/>

**togetherall** is a digital mental health support service which is available online, 24/7, and is completely anonymous.

## Effective Learning Service [ELS@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:ELS@qmu.ac.uk) or [ELSinternational@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:ELSinternational@qmu.ac.uk)

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

## Accommodation Services [accommodation@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:accommodation@qmu.ac.uk)

Support and advice on campus accommodation matters.

## Residence Life [reslife@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:reslife@qmu.ac.uk)

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

## Students' Union [helpzone@qmu.ac.uk](mailto: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** on this Guide can be provided by the Head of Student Services.

## Useful numbers

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<b>Emergency</b>	999 (or 112) (from internal QMU phones, dial 2222 instead)	
<b>NHS 24</b>	111 (calls are free)	
<b>Breathing Space</b>	0800 83 85 87 <a href="http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk">www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk</a>	
<b>The Samaritans</b>	116 123 (free call)	<a href="http://www.samaritans.org">www.samaritans.org</a>
<b>Royal Infirmary A&amp;E</b>	0131 536 1000	
<b>Mental Health Assessment Service</b> (Royal Edinburgh Hospital) Mackinnon House, Morningside Terrace, Edinburgh	0131 537 6000	
<b>Riverside Medical Practice</b>	0300 790 6266	<a href="https://www.theriversidepractice.co.uk/">https://www.theriversidepractice.co.uk/</a>
<b>Edinburgh Crisis Centre</b> (City of Edinburgh residents only)	0808 801 0414 Email: <a href="mailto:crisis@edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk">crisis@edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk</a> Text: 07974 429075	<a href="http://www.edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk">www.edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk</a>
<b>Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre</b>	08088 01 03 02 Email: <a href="mailto:support@ercc.scot">support@ercc.scot</a>	<a href="http://www.ercc.scot/">http://www.ercc.scot/</a>
<b>Nightline</b> (confidential peer support for Edinburgh students, 8pm – 8am term time)	0131 557 4444	<a href="http://nleusa.ed.ac.uk">http://nleusa.ed.ac.uk</a>



## APPENDIX A

### Student Services Confidentiality and Information Sharing Protocol

Student Services at Queen Margaret University is made up of the following services: Careers and Employability, Student Funding, Disability, Wellbeing and Counselling.

Within Student Services we are sharing information in order to deliver services and support to students effectively. Staff within Student Services may share information about individual students with each other, with the intention of supporting the student effectively, resolving any issue that the student has raised or respond to concerns regarding a student's welfare. Considerations are always taken regarding what is appropriate and relevant to share such as: name and contact details, what service the student has been engaging with and basic information to help us provide the best service to the student.

In situations where we are concerned about a student's welfare, we might extend confidentiality to your PAT and Programme Leader as well as in certain circumstances where there are serious concerns about your health with your GP and next of Kin.

For those eligible for NMPH (non-medical personal help), personal details such as name, matriculation number, course, contact details, detail of supports may be shared with an external support provider.

There are some circumstances where we have to disclose information without your consent such as; if there is a requirement in law to disclose; or if it is considered that there is substantial risk of harm to you, or a third party if information is not disclosed.

The information that you share within Student Services will be treated confidentially and held by the University in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and Queen Margaret University Data Protection Policy and Student Privacy Statement.

Students have the right to withdraw consent for us to record, store and use their information. If a student chose to withhold consent it may not be possible to provide them with some forms of support.

Students have the right to access information that Student Services have on record. They can do so by filing a Subject Access Request.

If you have any concerns about how your information is being shared, please contact student services. [studentservices@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:studentservices@qmu.ac.uk).

## APPENDIX B

### Information Sharing Without Consent (if sharing outside of the remit of the information sharing agreement).

Student Name	DOB	ID	Address	Phone

Concerns & risk information			
Who are you concerned about?	Tick	Who/What are they at risk from?	What are your concerns?
Student			
Child of Student			
Other State who:			

Information sharing process:		
I am sharing information based on the legal authority of	Detail	Tick
Children and Young People Scotland act 2014	Children and Young Person's (Scotland) Act 2014 where the public interest in protecting the child's safety and wellbeing overrides the need to keep the information confidential	
Data Protection Act 2018	To protect vital interests of the data subject; serious harm or matter of life or death	
Human Rights Act 1998	Right to life. Right to be free from torture, of inhuman or degrading treatment (Human Rights Act, art. 2 & 3)	
Crime and Disorder Act 1998	Prevention / detection or crime and/or apprehension or prosecution of offenders	
Common law	Overriding public interest	
<b>I have balanced the following considerations:</b>		
Information is relevant		
Information is adequate & necessary to achieve the purpose		
Sharing this information will NOT significantly increase risk		
Information is proportionate		
I have discussed this internally with:	The action we have taken is:	

Signature: .....Print Name.....Date.....