

**Mental Health and Wellbeing Handbook of Practice (2014-2015)**

**Welcome:**

The University of Bristol Student Counselling Service (SCS) is an experienced team of counsellors, administrators and support staff who offer warm, calm, accepting and non-judgemental individual and group attention within a welcoming environment that is away from University pressures.

The service values and works towards maintaining healthy relationships and shared spaces. Students may have been encouraged to attend SCS by their tutors, academic staff, wardens/pastoral staff, Students Union or staff from another of the Universities Student Services, by friends, family or colleagues. Referral can be made via the SCS web site, by phone or by coming into the service<sup>1</sup>. The service is open from 9am until 8pm Monday-Thursdays and 9am-5pm on Fridays.

SCS staff offer support to around 300 students a week (either individually or as part of a small group, workshop or with supported self-help resources). We aim to nurture and attend to an individual's self-care and to the care of others. SCS also offers support for friends of students who have emerging mental health difficulties.

Alongside other Student Services, academic and University support staff, SCS aims to support students when physical or emotional needs adversely affect their ability to study and enjoy University life by offering a range of support options which includes:

- Small group work for 6-8 weeks (such as Study Strategy, Relaxation, Therapeutic, Writing, Art, Self Esteem, Stress Management and Mindfulness Groups)
- One off themed workshops
- Single session, One off or regular one to one counselling (for up to six sessions)
- An up to date informative and accessible web site

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<sup>1</sup> Our address is: Student Counselling Service, Third floor, Hampton House, St Michaels Hill, Cotham, Bristol, BS6 6AU. Our website can be found at [www.bristol.ac.uk/student-counselling](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/student-counselling) and our contact details are: [student-counselling@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:student-counselling@bristol.ac.uk) and 0117-9546655

- A self-help resource library with literature and books to share
- Bespoke supported self-help interventions of 20 minutes.

The availability for one to one or group support changes throughout the year and there are peaks in demand in the Spring Term and early Summer Terms in particular. Details about what is currently on offer can be found in the appendix to this document, on our leaflets or via our web site.

We operate in daytime and also across 4 evenings in the week which enables students to access the service when they are free from academic lectures and commitments. We also offer a small satellite service at Langford. We are able to offer a limited service of phone counselling for students unable to access the main site due to academic commitments.

### **Reducing the stigma of mental and emotional illness:**

SCS believes that everyone is unique and understands that we all bring our own wisdom, beliefs and experience to interactions with ourselves and with others. SCS believes it is important to guard against jumping to conclusions or making assumptions that we 'professionals' know what mental ill health or crises in wellbeing is like for anyone individually.

It is our intention to understand a student's present sense of mental health and work together to enable them to engage in a conscious journey towards improvements in wellbeing.

Just as in society, a spectrum of mental health diagnoses will be present within the University. SCS is committed to meeting the person not the label and as such we would want to explore what any mental health diagnosis might mean to the individual concerned.

### **Valuing difference**

We recognise that **International students** may come to Britain with different ways of understanding mental health and wellbeing and we endeavour to help people understand themselves within their own frameworks as well as ensuring they know how to access the systems available in the UK. <sup>2</sup>

Young Minds reports that the risk of international students experiencing problems with mental health and wellbeing can be reduced by: providing extensive pre-arrival information and orientation on arrival, making sure there is a language proficiency familiarising students with teaching method support during the holidays, concentration on international students and their faith communities, helping students prepare to return to their home, identifying

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<sup>2</sup> SHS guide to the NHS International Students

early warning system for students in distress, encouraging registration with GPs, being aware of stereotypes (such as a belief that international students would not like counselling)<sup>3</sup>

SCS offers a service that is interested and sensitive to diversity and difference. Currently the Student Counselling Service team is predominantly female white and European in origin but our recruitment processes seek to actively encourage applications from a more diverse population.

Our current team includes counsellors whose native tongue is English, Mandarin, German, Dutch, French and Spanish. We currently have female counsellors of Hispanic, Chinese and BME origin, three white male counsellors and a white male administrator in the team. Counsellors of different ages are available.

SCS offers support with psychological blocks to study across the calendar year and there are counsellors on the team who have a lead role in international student liaison and Equality and Diversity.

SCS has offered workshops specifically run by men for men and continues to be interested in developing ways of enabling under-represented groups accessing the service.

### **Respecting personal details:**

For all contacts we make an accurate and brief written record (producing clear and accurate case notes, written assessments and reviews.) Students have the right to read any written record about themselves and SCS has a clear formalised process which allows this to happen.<sup>4</sup> SCS also considers and reflects upon student situations between sessions (believing that regular supervision and inter team liaison enables movements towards the most effective support for individuals).

### **Encouraging personal autonomy:**

We encourage students to:

- Move towards a pro-active engagement with their own health and wellbeing
- Make choices about the kind of input received from SCS.
- Prioritise any commitments made with SCS during the working week
- Give enough notice (preferably 48 hours) if unable to attend a session

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<sup>3</sup>From *Stressed Out and Struggling: Higher Education Institutions and International Students' Mental Health*, Young Minds 2006

<sup>4</sup>Details of this process are available on request.

- Recognise the importance of wellbeing to academic functioning.
- Have ownership of their comments (to say 'I feel,' rather than 'we all feel' for example.)
- Consider and work within SCS personal confidentiality guidelines (not sharing others experiences or views expressed within groups.)
- Establish nurturing and healthy support networks and lifestyle choices.
- Work and interact in ways that are non-discriminatory, nurturing and respectful of people's difference
- Give feedback about what you value and to tell us when we get things right and/or wrong (feedback, reactions and ideas are a valuable resource as they can enhance our service provision, current therapeutic relationships and be of great value to other students).
- Work towards a time when they no longer have need of our services

### **How people can develop wellbeing and self-care for themselves:**

The ways towards an improved sense of wellbeing are manifold and sometimes involve adjusting the way we live to take in more relaxation. Our sense of wellbeing may be improved by attending to these five areas:

- **CONNECT:** With people around us
- **BE ACTIVE:** Discover a physical activity that is enjoyable and that suits our level of mobility and fitness.
- **TAKE NOTICE:** Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether walking to work/university, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around us and what we are feeling. Reflecting on our experiences will help us appreciate what matters to us.
- **KEEP LEARNING:** Set a challenge that is enjoyable to achieve. Learning new things can make us more confident as well as being fun.
- **GIVE:** Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer time. Join a community or university group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing ourselves and our happiness, as linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around us.<sup>5</sup>
  - As well as finding support from the Student Counselling Service, accessing sports and leisure facilities, The Students Union for 'Just Ask' advice, clubs and societies, or gaining input from Student Services, academic tutors and other support staff in the University can also be effective ways of supporting ones sense of wellbeing. Accessing The Big White Wall may also be helpful.

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<sup>5</sup> See Bristol University folder for summation of the Healthy Universities guidance 'Five ways to wellbeing' for the full text around improving your own sense of wellbeing. Based on research from New Economic Foundation <http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/entry/five-ways-to-well-being>

SCS currently offers *Art Therapy* and *Writing as Therapy* groups each academic term. These can be ideal places for people to develop a sense of their own creativity, voice and wellbeing. In the recent past students completing a *Writing as Therapy* group have been supported by SCS to establish a *Self-run Writing* group.

SCS has offered *Relaxation* and *Mindfulness* introductory workshops, and workshops attending to *Self-care*, and to issues of *Perfectionism*.

SCS are currently developing the range of *Bespoke Supported Self-care* on offer. *The Self Help Resource Library* continues to grow.

### **Seeing value in liaison with other professionals:**

At the earliest appropriate stage students are routinely asked to consider if SCS can liaise with other professionals. Consideration and respect for the students wishes and for issues of confidentiality<sup>6</sup> are always considered before any such liaison takes place.

Where appropriate we work with students to enable collaborative referral and liaison with other support services within or outside of the University. Liaison may be a phone call, a letter or through regular meetings between nominated individuals responsible for taking the lead on mental health from the Student Counselling Service, Students' Health Service, Disability Services and the Vulnerable Students' Support Service.

If a student is particularly vulnerable to self-harm, a danger to or from others or if they are suicidal, SCS we would want to liaise with appropriate medical professionals.

It maybe that someone needs more specialist support than we can offer. If this is the case SCS aims to support a referral towards the most appropriate service. We might encourage a referral to an NHS resource to find specialised therapeutic and mental health support (accessed through the Students' Health Service or other GP practice)

Mental health services have variable ease of access and different access criteria. SCS aims to work with the student so that they can find the right support at the right time.

SCS regularly liaises with mental health services to keep up to date with their current service provision. We also attend University working groups designed to enhance the joined up response to the needs of International students.

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<sup>6</sup> Our full confidentiality policy can be found on our web site. 'A guide for Students' is offered before first assessment and can be found in the appendix. Our initial contact with you will always include careful discussion and recording of your wishes around possible sharing of your personal information with anyone outside of the counselling team.

In 2014 SCS the two counsellors with a lead for mental health agency liaison have prioritised developing contact with local Community Mental Health Teams, MIND, Rethink Mental Illness and Self Help Self Harm.

### **Hearing how students cope:**

We are interested in hearing how students cope, what past and present support works and in hearing about perceived strengths and about the areas students would wish to strengthen.

During each counselling session and at the beginning and end of each group work programme students are asked to complete a CORE self-assessment (of how they have experienced the last seven days). Student feedback and two way discussion about students experience is integral to one to one and the group support offered.

Our services understanding and appreciation of the diversity and experience within student life is continually deepened and widened by our contact with students. Our commitment to honouring diversity is recognised in the presence of a counsellor with responsibility for Equality and Diversity and another with specific responsibility for helping the service consider the needs of International Students.

SCS aims to be reflective rather than reactive and we welcome feedback at any time (directly during contact with the service or by using the SCS web form [www.bristol.ac.uk/student-counselling](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/student-counselling) ). The feedback received helps SCS to reflect upon and adapt our practice.<sup>7</sup>

### **Early Intervention:**

We know that asking for help and having the courage to process emotional and physical and spiritual pain can be tough going.

We encourage students to approach us and let us together decide what kind of support may meet their unique set of needs and aspirations.

- *Help before starting at the University*

Any potential student of the University of Bristol who has known mental health issues is encouraged to make contact with Disability Services and/or with academic admissions, so their learning needs can be recognised and supported at the earliest opportunity.

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<sup>7</sup> We routinely ask for anonymous feedback from all students who receive a service from us. We regularly review what we do and how we do it so that we can respond better to your feedback and the emerging requests for the services time.

- *Intervention after referral to SCS*

After a student referral, SCS aims to make contact within two days and to offer a first appointment, either in person or on the phone, within ten working days. Students who are at the greatest risk within their studies and/or who are emotionally the most vulnerable are seen first.

Individual counselling and more intensive support packages are prioritised for those students who are in greatest need.

It is our intention that anyone approaching our service should be offered support or be signposted to other services as soon as possible.

SCS offers Talk and Plan (TAP) appointments and drop-in groups on a weekly basis.

- *Help during vacations*

For some students who are not Bristol residents the movements between term time and holidays can mean having to change mental health teams and support. We are happy to offer such students advice and support if these transitions of care do not run smoothly. It maybe that encouraging the student to discuss their situation with their Doctor is also important.

Between July and September 2014 SCS offered

*Introduction to Mindfulness, Managing Work-life Balance and Greenway to Lasting Serenity and Good Mental Health* workshops and,

*Getting to Grips with Study Strategy, Postgraduate Support, International Tea Time, Relaxation for Health & Wellbeing and Mindfulness* groups.

### **Focusing on psychological difficulties which stand in the way of academic achievement:**

Students are encouraged to develop an ongoing relationship with their academic tutor or supervisor and with their Hall wardens or with those offering pastoral support in their living and social environments. It is hoped that students feel able to approach their academic and pastoral support network when difficulties begin to stand in the way of academic achievement.

As a student counselling service (SCS) funded by the University, we also have a particular interest in supporting students in their academic studies. Our services reflect an awareness of the academic cycle and the varying needs of people engaged in Undergraduate and Postgraduate studies. We operate across the calendar year and not just the academic cycle

and thus are able to be a resource for students at times when other parts of the University may be quieter and less resourced.

Our workshop and group programme has an emphasis of support for academic study, identifying and working with some of the psychological blocks which can prevent students from succeeding.

- *Vocational courses*

SCS seeks to offer counselling support that is sensitive to the demands of vocational courses. Evening appointments are available and phone counselling can be arranged when necessary. SCS offers counselling sessions at Langford (specifically designed to enable greater access for veterinary students).

If the student is enrolled on a medical, health and social care course of study our work together will also be informed by the relevant profession's fitness to practice expectations/requirements (as such students are studying and also likely to be working with vulnerable clients).<sup>8</sup>

SCS has offered bespoke *Mindfulness* workshops to Engineering and Social Work students.

SCS offers off site counselling at Langford and has offered group and workshop support to post graduates within the Doctoral College.

- *Extenuating Circumstances*

When seeking reasonable adjustments to a study programme *The University Fitness to Study Policy* recommends that students consult their academic department in the first instance.

Students who have had contact with The Student Health Service (or medical practice) should also liaise with their General Practitioner (as they may be able to offer medical evidence in support of the request).

For students seeking practical or longer term input to support ill health and ability to study then an approach to Disability Services for an advice appointment is recommended.

SCS may also be able to offer one off or regular time to talk about the situation and may then be able to offer supplementary non-medical evidence for Extenuating Circumstances.

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<sup>8</sup> Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure explicitly does not relate to any Fitness to Practice issues



### **How SCS offers support for students feeling lonely, low and isolated:**

We recognise that good mental health and wellbeing is enhanced by restorative time alone and by positive contact with others. Many students approaching a service may feel overwhelmed by their contact with others and/or may feel isolated and lonely.

We offer students the chance to be with fellow students in creative and encouraging ways. SCS offers evidence based supported self-help (including bespoke care packages) for some students experiencing mild to moderate low mood and/or issues with anxiety, compulsive thinking.

Our workshops and groups focus on relaxation, mindfulness and wellbeing, self-esteem, effective ways to work with anxiety and low mood stress and other specific issues (in response to student experience and demand)<sup>9</sup>.

Being in a therapeutic group can allow students to connect on deeper levels than normal social interaction often affords. Students who experienced the safe container of a therapeutic group often report feeling a stronger connection to others in social and academic environments. Groups can also provide opportunities for students to learn new skills and try out new ways of being with others.

SCS has offered workshops on *Depression and How to Survive it*, *Understanding Anxiety*, *Self Esteem*, and on *Understanding OCD*.

*Self Esteem*, *Understanding Ourselves and Connecting with Others*, and, *Mindfulness* groups are also offered during the academic year.

### **SCS support for students who are new to Bristol or the UK:**

Coming to University is a transition and as with any change this may bring a sense of greater vulnerability and loneliness along with new opportunities. Adjusting to a new culture of study and a new way of life can be positive, exciting and challenging. For some it can also be stressful, confusing and tiring. Establishing a place in new groups, social life and peer relationships may impact on a student's sense of wellbeing. Unexpectedly negative and stressful reactions to new environments are relatively common.

Students who come from non-traditional backgrounds (such as students from British minority ethnic groups, those from low affluence postcodes and those who are the first in the family to go to university) may find it harder to find their own place within a University system and may therefore experience difficulties with self-esteem and identity as a result.

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<sup>9</sup> See University of Bristol folder for the list of past workshop offerings for students & staff. Copies of these can be provided on request.

International students may be especially affected by their new environment. The difficulty in adjusting to new environments (which can include increased physical symptoms such as headaches, aching limbs, lack of sleep) is sometimes called 'Culture Shock.' Our website has a page specifically for International students for this reason.

SCS can offer workshops entitled *Arriving in a New Culture*, and *Into The Pressure Cooker* for International and other students new to the city and to The University of Bristol.

SCS can offer a tour of Support Services and a place to discuss 'what counselling is,' for Pre-Sessional language students.

SCS usually offers a specific group (*International Tea Time*) over the summer months for lonely and isolated international students.

### **SCS support for students facing endings, loss and bereavement:**

Times of transition (leaving home or University for example) and/or experiencing emotional crises (grief, loss and/or bereavement for example) may involve shifts and changes in beliefs about yourself and in the meaning you attach to life, death and existence.

SCS have supported students facing emotional issues around transitions by offering time limited sign posting interventions alongside:

*One to one regular counselling* (one off and time limited counselling may also be available for students suspending their studies), and

6-8 week regular groups on *Bereavement* and *Preparing to leave the University* and various workshops including one on *Managing Transitions*

### **SCS supporting Spiritual health and wellbeing:**

We welcome people with any faith and/or spiritual belief and those with none. Faith and/or spiritual belief, prayer, meditation and experiencing peaceful stillness can be a route for some to enhance their sense of health and wellbeing. We recognise that many people engaging with counselling are on a journey to find meaning in their lives. For some this will come from a greater understanding of self and others, and for some this may include a desire to explore spiritual understanding.

For some life transitions can involve a spiritual strengthening and greater connection with themselves and what they understand to be a spiritual or higher power. For others grief, loss and transition can lead to a void in the meaningfulness of existence and/or painful disconnection with their faith and /or spiritual beliefs.

We do not provide spiritual accompaniment or guidance around Faith but frequently refer people to the Multi Faith Chaplaincy as a resource for students of any faith or none.

If SCS or the student feels that the combination of spiritual beliefs and mental health issues cause distress or put the student or others at risk of physical or emotional harm then SCS will encourage the student to consider involving other support agencies (their General Practitioner or Faith leader for example)

As a staff team SCS encompasses a spectrum of having faith and/or spiritual belief and having none. Within the counselling relationship the student's unique experience and perspective will be cherished and nurtured.

### **Alcohol and non-prescribed drug use and student wellbeing:**

Anecdotal evidence shows that some people increase alcohol and non-prescribed drug consumption during times of being a student and that they can then continue to study, enjoy life and be unaffected by these activities.

For some people excessive or binge use of alcohol and or non-prescribed drugs can greatly reduce a sense of wellbeing and can in some instances exacerbate mental health issues and make times of crisis even worse. Some people may notice a growing need for alcohol and or drugs on a daily or regular basis (often despite the difficult side effects).<sup>10</sup>

SCS is not a specialist drug and alcohol counselling service, but we do have experience in supporting people with drug and alcohol issues and have good links with the doctors within The Student Health Service and external agencies. We also can offer support in accessing relevant services in Bristol.<sup>11</sup> SCS offered a workshop *Drugs: friend or foe?* in 2013 which is available in power point form

### **Student use of nicotine and wellbeing:**

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<sup>10</sup> 'Alcohol dependence is rare in young people. The main problem in students is harmful or hazardous drinking.....These high levels of alcohol use are a concern in themselves. They render students vulnerable to ill health, academic under performance and place them at risk of accidental harm and assault.' Royal College of Psychiatrists College Report CR166 page 26.

<sup>11</sup> Your General Practitioner can be a very good first port of call for such concerns, The Addiction Recovery Agency, Bristol Drugs Project, Nillari, Southmead Project, and KWADS are good voluntary agencies working with people and carers of people with alcohol and/or drug difficulties, there is also an extensive 12 step (abstinence) based network of support in Bristol. At present the Student Union has request based drop in sessions run by Bristol Drugs Project for concerned students and The Bristol Specialist Drug and Alcohol Service run a club drug drop-in service for students concerned about their use of 'club drugs.'

A recent Rethink Mental Illness research paper has suggested that up to 40% of the UK's smokers have challenges to their mental health. The report relates the higher than average smoking rates to mental health discrimination (in that smoking can give rise to reduced physical health and earlier death).

The Student Health Service has resources available for anyone who would like to reduce or stop their consumption of nicotine.

### **SCS support during times of emerging mental health needs:**

For some a concern about emerging signs of mental un-wellness leads them to seek counselling or other support. The following could be signs of emerging mental ill health

- concerns around persistent low mood and lack of motivation
- recent awareness (or diagnosis) of depression and/or anxiety.
- concerns with emerging experiences of high and energised mood followed by very low mood.
- extra difficulties relating to other people or emerging learning issues within your studies.
- Unhealthy or compulsive eating patterns
- Becoming dependent on a particular behaviour

SCS may be the first people to recognise an emerging mental health issue in a student. We endeavour to keep that student at the centre of any planning for their support and recovery.

Together we aim to work towards understanding and recognising emotional patterns and where appropriate to gain support from other services as well as our own (Students' Health Service, Disability Services, and Bristol wide mental health services for example).

### **SCS support for students with a recognised diagnosis of severe and enduring mental health needs:**

SCS frequently works with people with symptoms and/or a diagnosis of Anxiety, Depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Personality Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, with Eating Disorders (such as Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia) and less commonly with students who are experiencing hallucinations and/or hearing voices. In these situations the service endeavours to ensure early and ongoing liaison with medical services (in most instances the persons General Practitioner) so that care can be appropriately shared.

Students with severe and enduring mental health needs are encouraged to consider approaching Disability Services to discuss possible access to longer term support for their academic studies (accessed usually by an application for DSA funding).

SCS offers Wellbeing Group (for 6-8 weekly sessions each term) for students who have severe and enduring mental health needs. Offering both professional and mutual support, members have greatly valued these non-stigmatising and supportive meetings.

### **SCS helping Individuals and the University manage psychological risk appropriately:**

SCS believes that living involves risk taking and that many of the risks people take in life lead to positive outcomes and growth. As adults we all have the right to make choices around how we live our lives. Our Counsellors are experienced in enabling people to talk about their strengths as well as their vulnerabilities. Often talking about positive as well as painful or risky behaviours can be cathartic.

For some students their mental health distress expresses itself in unhelpful coping strategies or unmanageable behaviours (which can include overuse of alcohol and/or drugs, an unhealthy association with food, and obsessional and/or self-harming behaviours).

SCS aims to enable students to talk about the worries they may have. Working in an open and non-judgemental way we endeavour to help students express their distress and to reduce the harm they and/or others experience.

From the start of our contact we will encourage students to express and learn from both the positive and less positive risks they take in life.

### **SCS aims to offer sensitive, consistent, clear and balanced input around risk:**

- The Student Counselling Service has its own confidentiality policy which is published on the website and all students are informed of this when they first contact the service.
- We routinely ask for consent to share information before we liaise with other services. Most students using our service are happy for us to liaise with their GP, with other Student Services and with other professionals within and beyond the University where appropriate. Students can talk about vulnerabilities and possible risky behaviour safe in the knowledge that the details discussed will remain within the Student Counselling Service (this may change if the student is deemed to be at *imminent* risk of harm towards themselves or other people).
- During each counselling session students are asked to complete a CORE self-assessment (of how they have experienced the last seven days). This asks specifically about risk to self and others (CORE also covers questions that look at the person's sense of well-being, ability to function and cope with problems). The results from this self-assessment will be shared with the student and usually this becomes a focus within each session.
- Confidential reflective notes are written after each session and counsellors also consult within the team for advice around the ongoing support offered.
- Counsellors routinely receive supervision for their work from trained supervisors, and consultative support from senior staff (Clinical Leads) within the service.

- During assessments and review sessions our service uses an agreed system to prioritise the need for ongoing sessions.

### **How SCS can help at times of crisis:**

We are not a crisis service but we do aim to support students who are experiencing varying issues and degrees of risk to self or others. We work hard to keep students central to any decision making and discussions around potential risk.

- We may prioritise a watchful care towards a student during times of increased stress (maybe where they are actively or on the cusp of harming themselves and or another person). What this means is that a student's progress will be especially monitored by their counsellor and a Clinical Lead. In this way the counsellor will have greater background support which can help him or her offer more effective support in the counselling sessions. We use a confidential internal audit list (called an 'At Risk Register') and supervision sessions to help us in this task.
- We may support and encourage students to seek out the help from other members of Student Services and encourage them to have regular contact with their GP.
- Sometimes our duty of care and concern means that (with consent) the students' situation may be discussed at a Student Services Complex Case Meeting. For some students (again with their consent) we are able to attend Inter Agency Case Conferences. In both instances the aim is to improve communication between agencies and people who may be able to offer support.
- Sometimes our duty of care and concern about *imminent risks* of harm towards self and/or towards or from other people may mean that we need to liaise with other services even if the person does not offer their consent, (inform the persons GP, contact the Vulnerable Support Service or discuss the situation within a Student Services Complex Case meeting for example). Any such action would only occur after careful consideration of the person's particular situation, (including considering legal and ethical issues). This action will often be informed by a desire to highlight possible networks of support for the student and others during a crisis time. <sup>12</sup>

### **How SCS supports an individual who feels suicidal:<sup>13</sup>**

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<sup>12</sup> Also see Bristol University folder in the appendix for The University of Bristol's 'Mental ill health emergency response protocol.'

<sup>13</sup> 'Whilst students as a population are not at increased risk of suicide, research suggests periods of transition and instability increase the risk of suicide. Some subgroups of the student population may be more vulnerable; a review of literature suggests that young males are at increased risk of suicidal ideation and behaviour. Students with multiple risk factors, such as mental health difficulties, alcohol and substance misuse, relationship problems, perfectionism and academic difficulties may be a high risk for suicide and should be offered intensive support, particularly in periods of transition.' (Quoted in Healthy Universities *Developing an Holistic and Joined up Approach to Mental Wellbeing*, Page 6. See Appendix)

We welcome having discussions with students about how they cope when feeling suicidal. Sometimes giving air to such negative thoughts and ruminations can alleviate the intensity of suicidal feelings. Within our interactions we may well encourage the person to think through and plan who they would contact in the event of the suicidal thoughts becoming active.

The '*Need help now,*' tab on our web site gives specific information and telephone numbers. We also have self-help literature that can be taken away if this type of support feels easier to digest.

SCS is not a crisis service and therefore we cannot usually respond in the moment of feeling actively suicidal. Accessing the General Practitioner, Accident and Emergency or crisis support (telephone lines such as the Samaritans or Mind Line for example) may be of use in such events. We are happy to be a point of information and signposting where appropriate and will help resource students with appropriate information about who they can contact.

A student can discuss a crisis episode in confidence with their regular counsellor or possibly at a drop in session. We believe that reaching out and contacting someone is hugely important in the journey to restoring a positive mental equilibrium.

#### **How SCS supports students who have issues around self-harm:**

Thinking about and actually self-harming can take many forms and can be complex in nature. Not eating, taking drugs or alcohol to excess, cutting, biting, burning and placing oneself in dangerous situations, could all be thought of as self-harm. We encourage a sharing of such experiences within counselling. We also know that often it takes courage to disclose self-harming behaviour. Our aim would be to enable the person to talk about what lies behind their self-harming thoughts and behaviour, and to gently help them reduce the level of harm, replacing currently learned patterns of behaviour with ones more conducive to positive wellbeing.

Other good avenues of support may be the students GP, a local self-harm support group (such as the Self Injury Network Group run by Bristol Crisis for Women service, or Self Help Self Harm) or TESS (a text based self-harm support service for women in Bristol) or national support web sites such as Harmless.<sup>14</sup>

SCS have offered workshops on self harm (*Healing the Wound, Understanding Self Harm*) in 2011 and on eating disorders (*Eating Your Heart Out*) in 2013. Both power points are available on request.

#### **Providing Psycho-education and continuing professional development:**

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<sup>14</sup> See self-help pages on Student Counselling website for more information

SCS attends open days and offers university wide training and advice and engage with outside agencies regarding developments in service provision. We also work individually and collectively to develop our resources and expand the work of the service. Some staff take the lead on particular projects such as information technology, developing self-help resources, effective assessment, triage and reviewing, mental health liaison, supporting international students, working with equality and diversity, managing the development of supported self help, developing training placements for counselling students and heading up the Green Impact team.

We are a placement provider for trainee counsellors in the final stages of their training. These students come to us having already had experience of client work and are closely monitored and supported in the work they do. Students will always be asked whether they want to work with a trainee. Trainee counsellor's level of experience and training will determine which students they are offered to work with, they will not be asked to work with anyone whose assessed needs are greater than the Trainees current experience and skill base.

In 2014-15 SCS offers facilities and support for 6 trainee/placement counsellors.

In 2014 SCS gained the *NUS Green Impact Gold Award* and a staff member gained the award of *Environmental Hero Of The Year*.

#### **Our ongoing training and research:**

SCS prioritises on-going training for staff. We also aim to collate, produce and disseminate relevant research appertaining to improvements in wellbeing and mental health for young people and students studying within the UK.

We also aim to continue to collect and amend our knowledge about the external services that can support students in their wellbeing and mental health.

2014 saw joint training with Student Health Service staff and involvement in Student Service trainings around Autism.

SCS staff as a whole engaged in one day Solution Focussed training and 4 members of the team were given a further 2 day training. Individual counsellors began training in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Oxford) and attended training and research days on Self Harm, Borderline Personality Disorder, Effective group work and the development of Mindfulness group work in H.E.

The Head of Service attended regular meetings of the Heads of Student Counselling Services in Universities and Colleges and a member of staff attends the British Association for



Counselling University and Colleges Annual conference each year.

The Head of service was a speaker at an international conference run by the European Association for Counselling, speaking about the mental health needs of students during the transition to Higher Education.

SCS has been involved in several research projects into the efficacy of online CBT and is now developing its own research project studying how interaction with the natural world impacts on mood and wellbeing.