MENTAL HEALTH POLICY
1. **Introduction**

1.1 One person in four experiences some of the symptoms associated with mental health problems at some point in his/her life and national studies have demonstrated that students are a vulnerable group in terms of mental health difficulties. Views as to the proportion of the student body that is affected, either directly or indirectly, by such difficulties vary but there is little doubt that the mental health of the student population has become an issue of increasing concern to academic and student support staff in HEIs in recent years. (Degrees of Disturbance, AUCC 1999).

1.2 “Mental health refers to a positive sense of well-being and a belief in our own worth……[It] affects our ability to cope with and manage change, transition and life events” (Jenkins et al. 2002). In many cases, the first episodes of mental health illness occur between the ages of 16-30 and can be triggered or exacerbated by the stress inherent in university life viz. meeting deadlines, examinations and living away from home for the first time.”

1.3 The stigma attached to mental health difficulties has a particular impact on students’ willingness to disclose them or seek help and so mental health problems represent the ‘invisible disability’ in the student population (Responding Effectively to Students’ Mental Health Needs – University of Hull 1999). In recognition of this, UWIC has identified the need to develop a Student Mental Health Policy, in order that it can respond sensitively and appropriately to students with mental health problems.

1.4 UWIC also recognises that, with the increasing focus on access and widening participation together with the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, mental health issues are likely not only to increase but to become more complex.

2. **Legislation and Good Practice**

2.1 This policy has been written and developed within the context of the legal provisions concerning disability, generally the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and, more specific to UWIC, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001).

2.2 This policy is aligned with the QAA code of Practice: Students with disabilities (1999), which aims to assist HEIs in making accessible and appropriate provision for disabled students.

2.3 Reference was also made to the Association of Managers of Student Services’ (AMOSSHE) Good Practice Guide entitled ‘Responding to student mental health issues: Duty of Care responsibilities for students in higher education’ (2001).

2.4 In June 2000 Universities UK (UUK), formerly CVCP, published guidelines on the development of student mental health policies and procedures for the higher education sector, which have provided a robust framework both for this policy and for future developments.

3. **Scope**

3.1 In the same way that all people have physical health, everyone has a state of mental health and this policy demonstrates UWIC’s positive approach to the promotion of mental well-being, which necessarily permeates all aspects of provision at UWIC including learning and teaching and research and enterprise.
3.2 The policy affirms the inclusive ethos of UWIC and is grounded in UWIC’s Equal Opportunities Policy, Openness Policy and the Disability Provision Development Plan.

3.3 This policy must necessarily overarch and dovetail with UWIC’s Harassment and Bullying Policy, Student Disciplinary Procedures, Student Complaints Procedures and the Admission Procedures for Disabled Students.

3.4 The policy applies to all existing, potential and prospective students and staff. (For the purpose of this policy, for ‘students’, read throughout existing, potential and prospective ones, as appropriate.)

3.5 Collaborative Provision – It is important that validation and review and quality assurance processes ensure that arrangements for managing students with mental health problems are in line with UWIC’s policy.

4. **Aims**

The aims of the Policy are to ensure that:

- All students with mental health difficulties:
  - are encouraged to declare their support needs at the earliest opportunity
  - are treated fairly, sensitively and with respect;
  - are offered the support and encouragement they need to achieve their full learning potential;
  - can expect to study in a non-stigmatising, non-judgemental academic community;
  - are afforded the opportunity to experience university life on an equitable basis;
  - have access to a range of support services within UWIC;
  - are provided with comprehensive information on the relevant support services provided by agencies and organisations outside UWIC and can expect to receive some guidance in identifying appropriate bodies;
  - can expect to receive realistic and honest information on the nature and parameters of the support that is available to them.

4.1 UWIC does not discriminate academically or socially against any student because of his/her mental ill health.

4.2 Students who offer peer support to fellow students with mental health problems are themselves supported.

4.3 Members of staff are made aware of the particular needs of students with mental health problems and are supported in their dealings with these students individually through advice from UWIC’s Counselling Service and through ongoing training.

4.4 UWIC fosters an inclusive environment, which recognises a social rather than a medical model of disability, acknowledging that problems are often caused by attitudes to difference rather than difference itself.

4.5 UWIC builds on existing links and seeks to establish new partnerships with other agencies, in order not to replicate services that exist within the local community

**Confidentiality and UWIC’s Duty of Care**

5.1 **Duty of Care**

AMOSSHE’S Good Practice Guide (2000) identifies a number of areas in which HEIs may owe potentially a Duty of Care to students and outlines an institution’s responsibilities and liabilities in the context of the current legal framework. This Duty of Care takes precedence over a Duty of Confidentiality (see below) in
circumstances where there are serious concerns about an individual’s mental or physical health or about the safety of others, who may be at serious risk from that person. (The complete document can be accessed at www.amosshe.org.uk).

5.2 Confidentiality

All data relating to a person’s physical and/or mental health are regarded as sensitive, personal data and all staff and students in UWIC, who are party to such information are bound, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998, by a Duty of Confidentiality. (For further information, see the section on Data Protection in the relevant Staff or Student Handbooks at www.uwic.ac.uk or contact the Data Protection Officer in the Academic Registry)

Many departments within UWIC have their own confidentiality statements or codes of confidentiality and some, such as the Counselling Service, the Chaplain and the Nursing Staff, have additional guidelines and are bound by their own Professional Codes of Ethics and Confidentiality.

5.3 Disclosure

If a member of staff or fellow student feels it necessary to disclose personal information about a student, then that student’s ‘informed’ consent should be obtained in the first instance. In cases where consent is given, information should be shared only for the purposes of providing support, care or protection for the student him/herself or for fellow students or staff and only on a ‘need to know’ basis. Where information is recorded or shared, the terminology must be agreed with the student and reflect needs as opposed to diagnosis.

5.4 Failure to Disclose

In cases where consent is not given, the wishes of the student should be respected. However, the needs of the wider academic community must also be considered and, therefore, the following exceptions have been identified as circumstances that would warrant disclosure in the absence of consent:

- where a member of UWIC’s staff would be liable to civil or criminal prosecution if the information were not disclosed (e.g. where the law requires disclosure);
- where a student is putting him/herself at risk;
- where there is a threat to the safety of any student, member of staff or legitimate visitor to UWIC.

5.5 Fitness to practise

Certain courses in UWIC have links with external Professional Bodies, which have specific expectations regarding ‘fitness to practise’, as students on these courses are technically practising professionals. These bodies may identify additional criteria with regard to ‘exceptions to maintaining confidentiality’ and may specify additional course entry requirements and assessment criteria, which UWIC must acknowledge in all its literature and policies, as its Duty of Care extends to a student’s eventual client group and to placement providers during training. Students with mental health difficulties must be given honest information about the possible impact that their mental health difficulties may have on their chosen course of study due to these additional requirements.

6. Policy Statement

UWIC is committed to providing educational opportunities and a learning environment that are rooted in the principles of fairness, honesty, openness, equality of opportunity and mutual respect and, to this end, will:
6.1 Positively promote mental well-being and create a culture in which students feel encouraged to articulate their support needs.

6.2 Ensure that this culture is maintained through effective monitoring and review arrangements.

6.3 Ensure that all staff and students are aware of mental health issues and have access to adequate and appropriate information via leaflets and UWIC’s website.

6.4 Develop consistent, fair and effective policies and procedures to support students with mental health problems.

6.5 Ensure that all its published material is free from stereotypical references and negative language.

6.6 Actively seek to further develop existing links and establish effective partnerships with appropriate statutory services and external agencies.

6.7 Put in place clear protocols for the referral of students with mental health problems.

6.8 Address staff training needs through the provision of relevant and appropriate opportunities for development relating to Disability training and specific training/awareness raising on mental health issues.

6.9 Introduce support mechanisms for its students, who themselves offer peer support to students with mental health problems, by a range of means that would include involving them in training events and by offering debriefing sessions, especially following a serious incident.

6.10 Review existing policies and procedures to ensure that they do not discriminate against students with mental health difficulties.

6.11 Ensure that non-judgemental and accurate records are stored and managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.