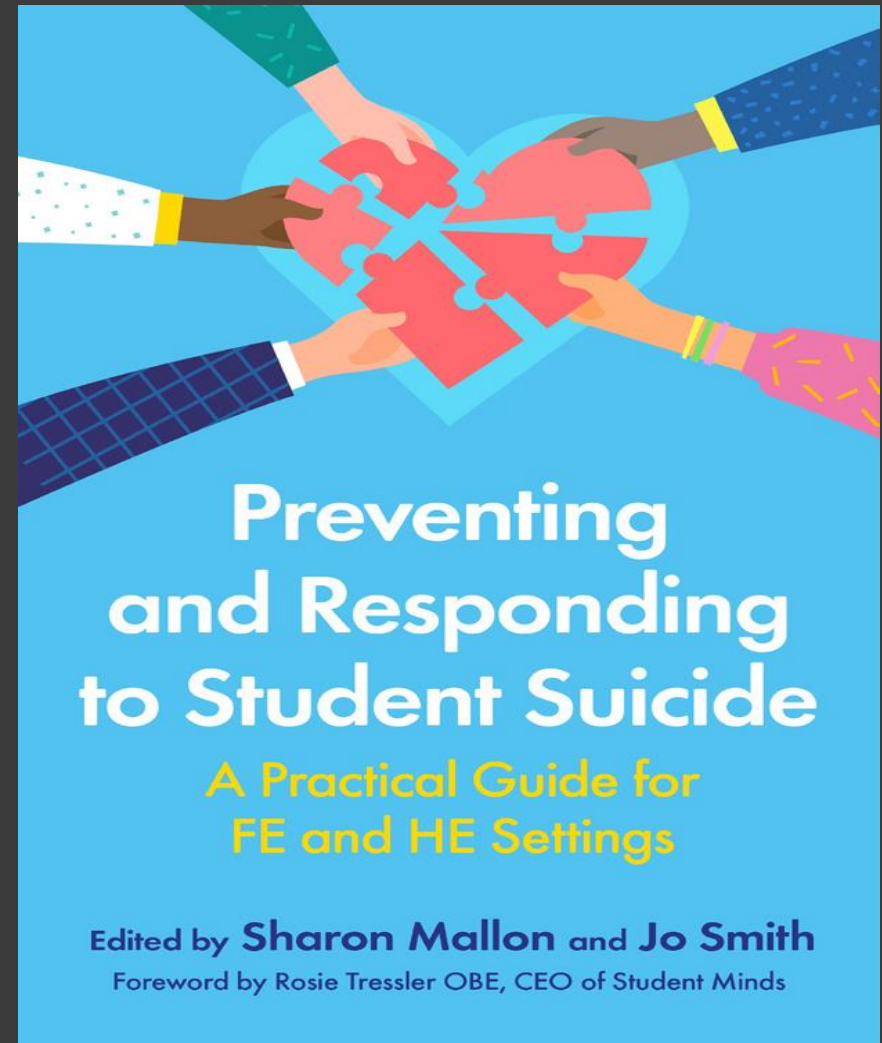


PREVENTING
AND
RESPONDING TO
STUDENT
SUICIDE
IN HIGHER AND
FURTHER
EDUCATION



Dr Sharon Mallon, The Open University
Professor Jo Smith, University of Worcester

'I expect all HE providers to understand the risk factors at their institution and undertake a range of prevention activity, proactively intervene to support students at risk, and deal sensitively when a tragedy occurs.'

'I would expect that every provider has in place a dedicated Suicide Safer strategy by the end of this calendar year.'

'...it is vital that you monitor deaths of students studying at your institution, including undertaking rigorous investigations into deaths by suicide or suspected suicide. This includes conducting lessons learned exercises and a review of activities after a death has occurred, involving your local public health teams and bereaved families. Actions should be followed up as part of your ongoing activity to prevent further deaths.'

Letter to all HE Providers July 22nd 2021

Rt. Hon. Michelle Donelan MP

Minister of State for Higher and Further Education

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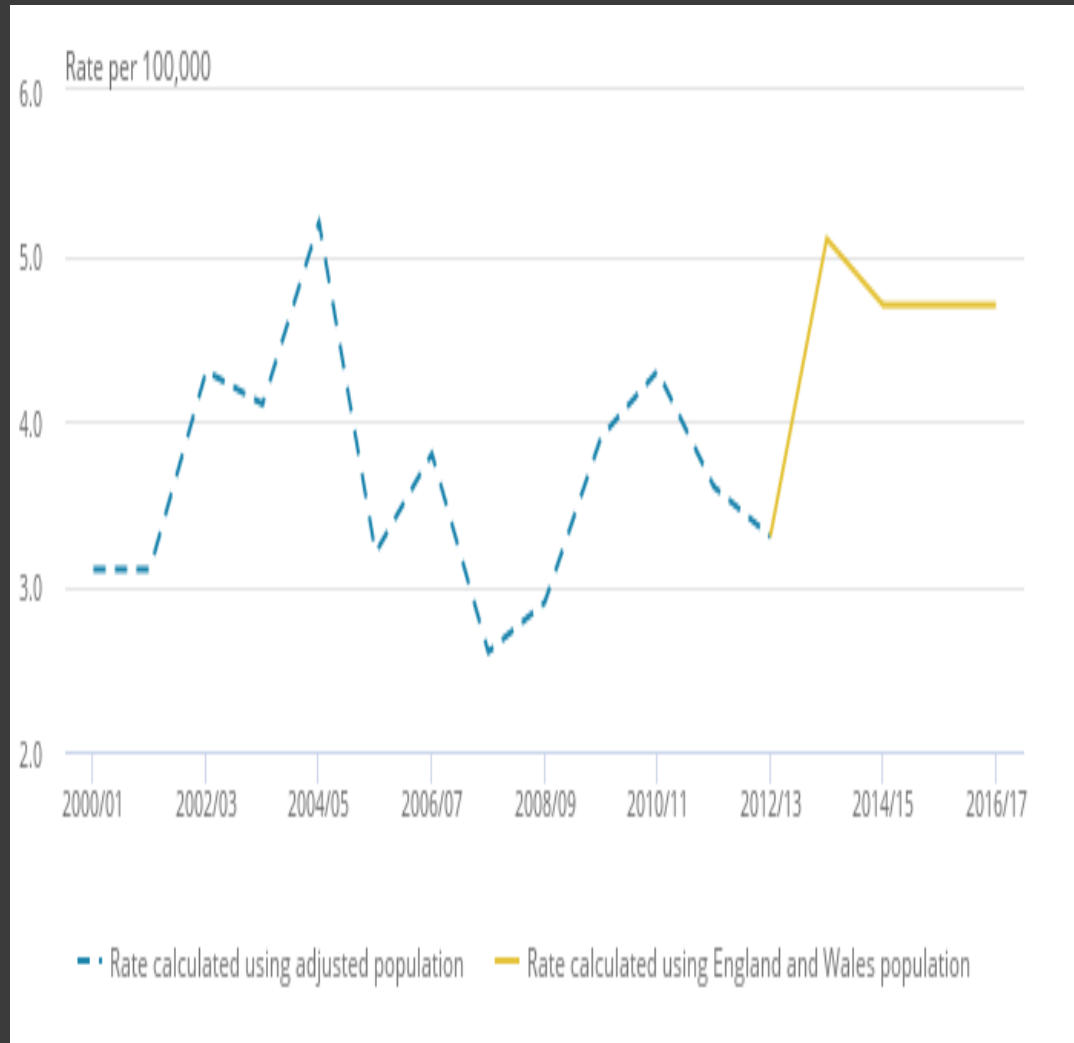
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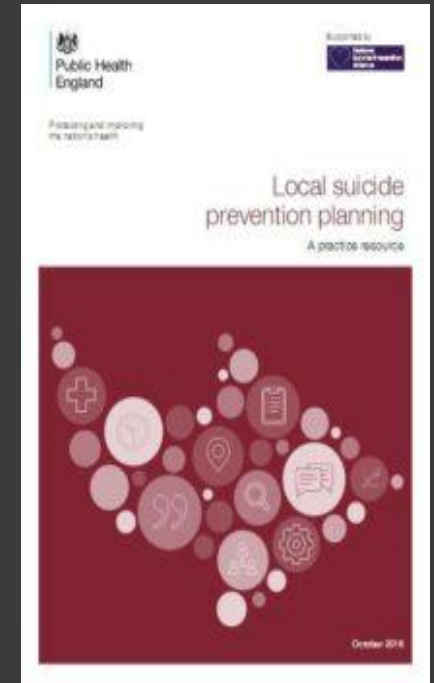
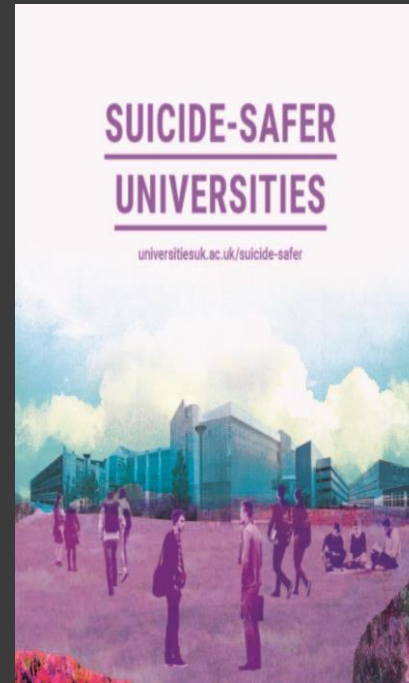
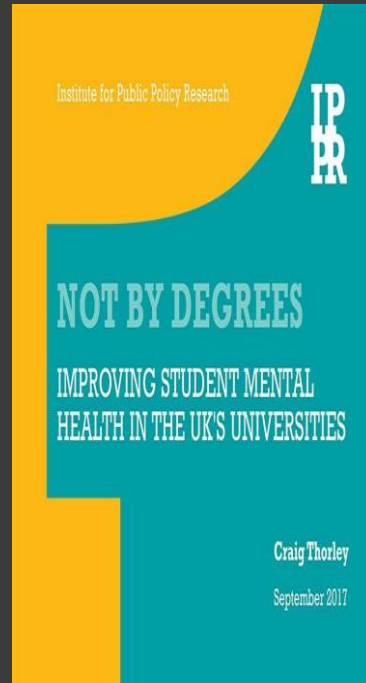
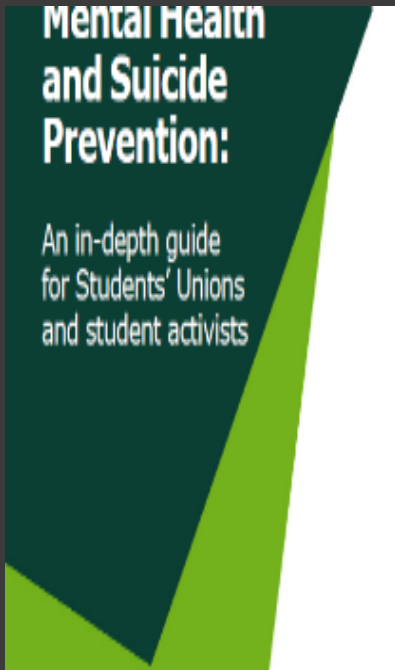
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SUICIDE AMONG HE AND FE STUDENTS



- Particular risks associated with aspects of student life may contribute to some student deaths (Li et al 2019).
- Rates of suicide among students has risen dramatically over the last 10 years (Gunnell et al 2020)
- Rates of suicide among students are lower than rates in age matched non-student peers in the general population (ONS 2018; Gunnell et al 2020),

POLICY CONTEXT



Challenges:

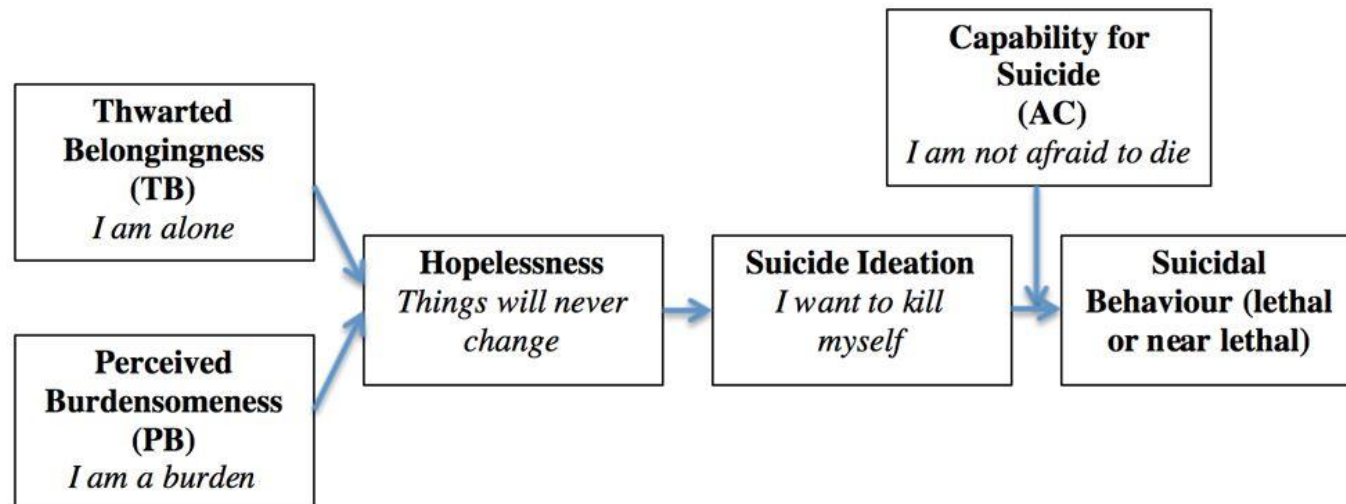
- Cultural resistance
- Fears about reputation and recruitment damage
- 'Duty of Care'
- Confidentiality
- Involving family members

UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING SUICIDE AMONG STUDENTS: THREE ASPECTS



Theoretical perspectives on suicide:

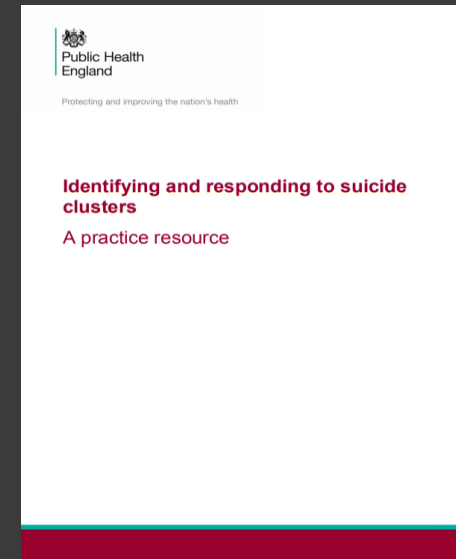
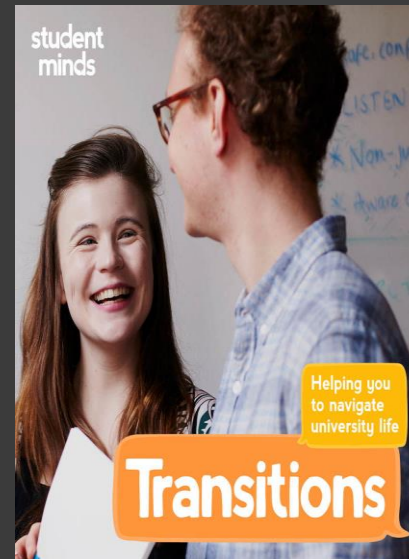
Causal pathways to suicidal behaviour from the perspective of the Interpersonal Theory (IPT) of Suicide



Dhingra et al. (2021) Chapter 6, From Suicidal Thoughts to Behaviour. In Mallon, S. and Smith, J. *Preventing Responding to Student Suicide* p.108-121

STUDENT SUICIDE RISK FACTORS

- Early childhood trauma experiences and parenting style
- Social media
- Transitions
- Perfectionism: socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP)
- Suicide suggestion: suicide clusters and contagion



DEVELOPING A SUICIDE-SAFER

STRATEGY

Suicide prevention, intervention, postvention – within an over-arching mental health strategy.

Executive level ownership

Leadership

Strategic planning

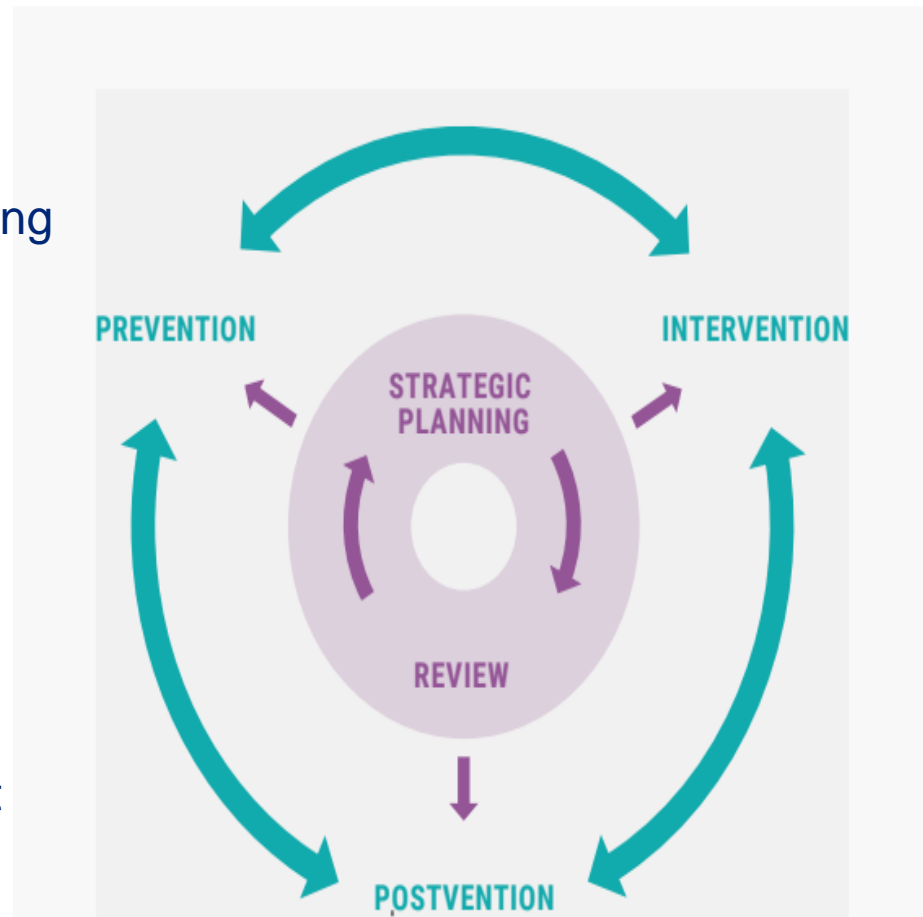
A whole institution approach:
'everybody's business'

Co-production

Multi-agency

Culture of continuous improvement
and review

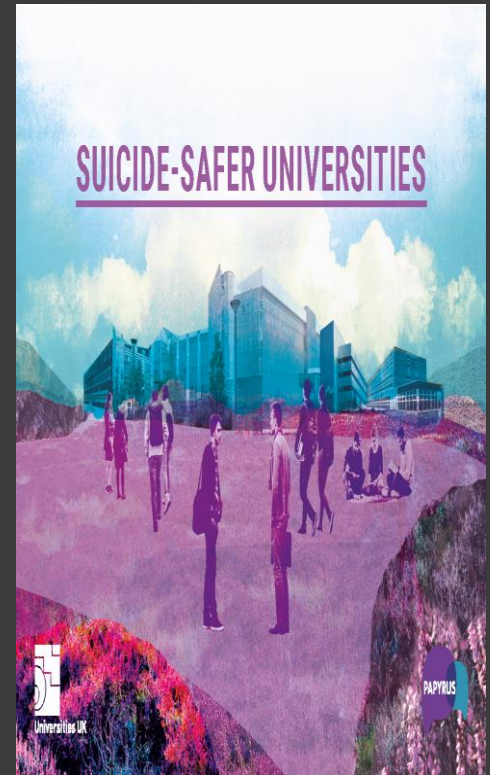
Openness, transparency and 'no
blame' culture



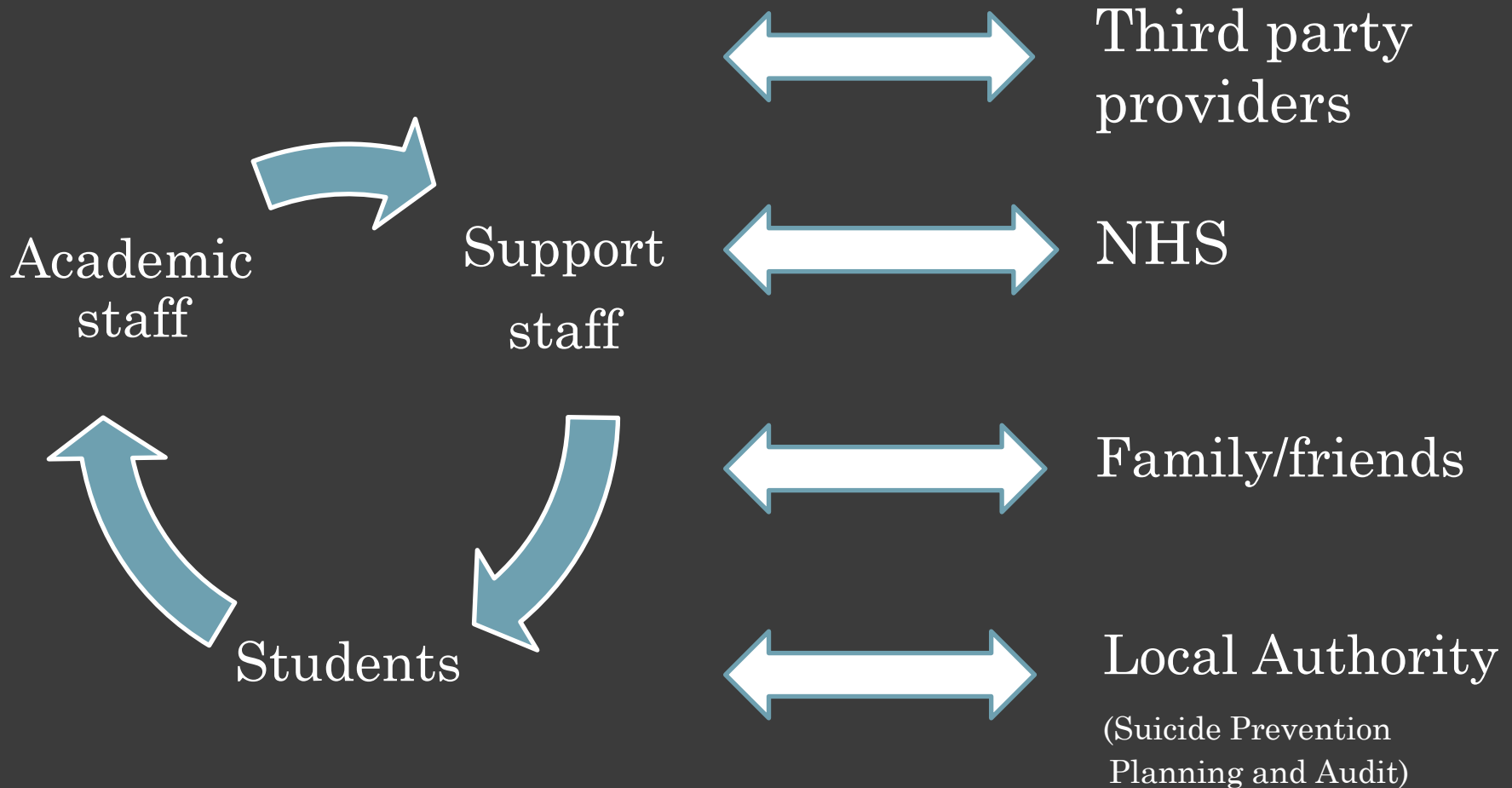
UUK, 2021

MODEL FOR STUDENT SUICIDE PREVENTION

- **Multiple interventions to target whole communities aiming to increase protective and reduce risk factors:**
 - Suicide awareness and training for staff/students
 - Life skills to promote resilience/successful coping
 - Promoting social networks
 - Social marketing/awareness raising/signposting to increase help-seeking and encourage disclosure
 - Identifying students at risk and risk factors
 - Mental health service provision
 - Crisis management procedures and care support pathways/ partnerships with external agencies
 - Restriction of access to potentially lethal means
 - Recording/monitoring of serious self-harm
 - Student Death Response Plan
 - Quality improvement/organisational learning based on serious incident review processes.



INFORMATION SHARING PROCESSES (UUK, 2021)





CELEBRATING SIX YEARS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
WORCESTER SUICIDE SAFER PROJECT: 2013 - 2019



Support mental wellbeing and effective suicide prevention responses at an individual and institutional level through delivery partnerships with local and national statutory and voluntary sector partners, including community based health practitioners.

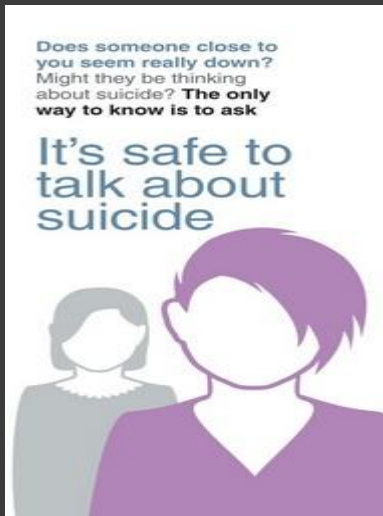
4 work strands:

- Campaigning and awareness raising about mental health and student suicide;*
- Education and training on mental health and suicide for staff and students;*
- Developing and promoting resources and support for students and staff;*
- Developing and contributing to HE student suicide research.*

**University Of Worcester
Suicide Safer Project Case
Study Example**

RESPONSES TO RISK

- Talking about Suicide (see, say, signpost)
- Safety planning
- Crisis support (24/7 including out of hours/weekends)
- Consulting parents about students at risk, while managing confidentiality: consent/named contact at registration.



My Safety Plan

CONNECTING PEOPLE

Getting through right now

Making your situation safer

Things to lift or calm your mood

Things to distract you

People to support you

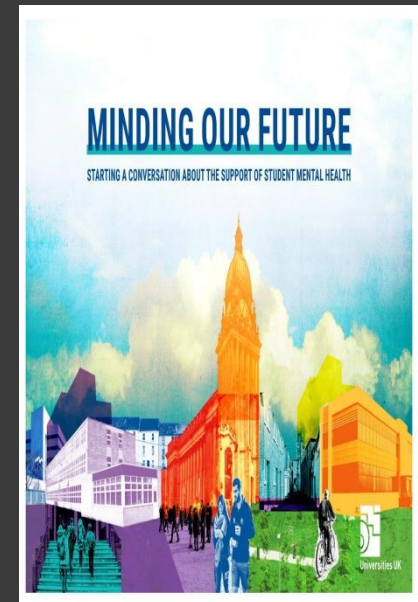
List who you can talk to if you are distressed or thinking about self-harm or suicide

Emergency professional support

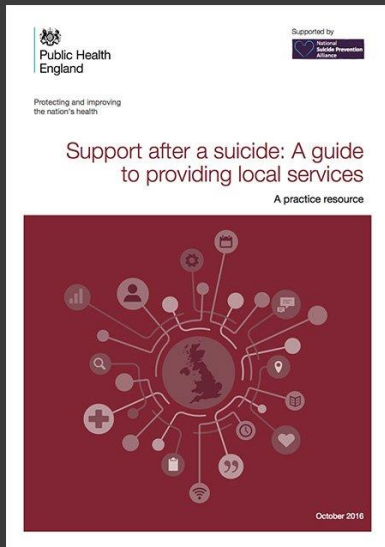


RESPONSES TO RISK

- **Training staff to recognise warning signs and signpost students who may be at risk**
 - Example: 'Three minutes to Save a Life' HE training model, University of Wolverhampton.
- **University Mental Health Charter (2019) framework to support student mental health and wellbeing**
 - Example: University of Bristol development of student support services.
- **Work in partnership to enable access to external primary care and specialist mental health support services**
 - Example: University of York Student Mental Health Network (YSMHN) involving key student health agencies in York.

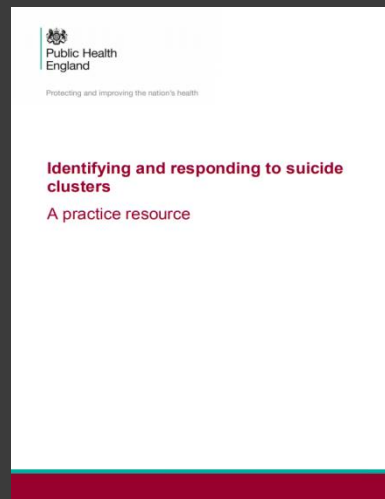


RESPONDING TO A STUDENT DEATH BY SUICIDE



- Postvention: interventions undertaken after a suicide to prevent further deaths
 - Those bereaved by suicide are at greater risk of suicide themselves.
 - RaPSS study found evidence of transfer of methods and increased vulnerability.

- Universities should have a Death Response Plan that specifically deals with a suicide context. The book contains a detailed Checklist for those responding.



- Monitoring for Clusters is now strongly advised ([Identifying and responding to suicide clusters \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)).

- Postvention Support Plans can now be found on the Web- examples are also given in the book.

POSTVENTION SUPPORT

- Death Response Plan (DRP)
- Responding to needs of students, staff and families:

Student peers:

“I keep seeing images of her... and thinking about her, I just can't believe it.”

“Is this just accepted that suicide is part of life... part of student life?” (Flynn, 2021)

Bereaved parent:

“there was no proactive contact from police, healthcare or the university; no family liaison. when my study window was broken by a would-be burglar, victim support contacted the family within 48 hours as mandated. after my son killed himself (at university), there was nothing.” (Mosse, 2021)

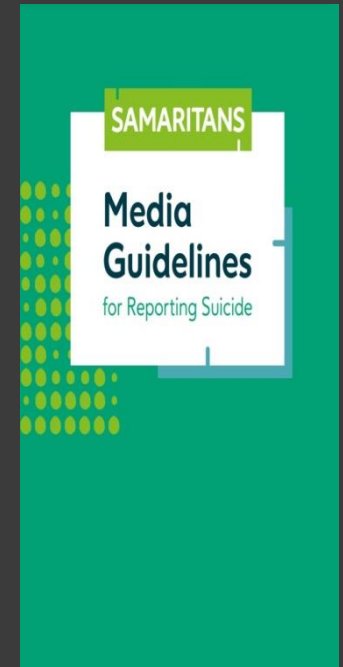
Staff member:

“Management in many ways treated the death of students as (a) crisis to be managed and forget that the staff closest to the student are not just their job-role but also people impacted by the event. I felt unsupported by my employer in terms of giving me the space I needed to make sense of what had happened” (Causer et al 2021)



KEY RESPONSE FEATURES

- How/When a death is determined to be a suicide is not straightforward.
 - Identifying all those affected by the death can be challenging.
 - Communication and Management of Media should be carefully considered
- Key features
 - For many students, this may be their first significant bereavement.
 - Particular attention to house mates and those exposed to direct circumstances of the death.
 - Awareness that the deceased was struggling with their mental health- may struggle with thoughts about how the death may have been prevented.
 - Where death was 'out of the blue'- may struggle to create an explanation



USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Suicide prevention free e-training** (20 mins) developed by Merseycare Zero Suicide Alliance: <https://zerosuicidealliance.com/>
- **'We need to talk about suicide'** suicide awareness e-training resource developed by HEE and PHE <http://www.nwyhelearning.nhs.uk/elearning/HEE/SuicidePrevention/>
- **'Stay Alive' Suicide prevention mobile phone app** developed by Grassroots, Brighton: www.prevent-suicide.org.uk
- **'Safety Plan' suicide prevention guidance:** www.stayingsafe.net
- **'Its Safe to Talk about Suicide' Leaflet** developed by University of Exeter and Devon County Council- pdf copy available from: <http://devon.cc/mentalhealth>
- **RiPPLE** free service to reduce exposure to harmful online content relating to Self-harm and Suicide: www.ripplesuicideprevention.com
- **SHOUT 85258** free, confidential, 24/7 mental health crisis text support service: <https://giveusashout.org>
- **Building Suicide Safer Schools and Colleges: A Guide for teachers and staff** developed by POPYRUS <https://www.papyrus-uk.org>
- **'Step by Step' Samaritans Postvention support service:** practical support and guidance to schools and colleges following a student suicide www.samaritans.org/stepbystep
- **UniversitiesUK resources** www.universitiesuk.ac.uk:
 - [Suicide safer Universities](#) UUK/POPYRUS guidance for University Leaders and Practitioners
 - [#stepchange](#) looking at how we can do more upstream to prevent **mental health** problems at University
 - [Minding our future](#) new guidance to improve the coordination of care for students between the NHS and universities

We started this presentation with the following quote

All those who are in the privileged position of working with young people need to know what part they can play in preventing suicide and what steps they can take to support the friends and family of a young person who has taken their own life.

Anne Parry (Former CEO of POPYRUS)

Before we finish today, reflect upon what you have heard today and answer the following questions either for yourself or in the chat:

- What part can you play in preventing student suicide at your institution?
- What steps can you take to support staff, friends and family if a student death should occur?
- What action points are you taking away from today that you can work on immediately?
- Who can you talk to in your institution about a strategic level response to student suicide?



[Preventing and Responding to Student Suicide – Jessica Kingsley Publishers - UK \(jkp.com\)](https://www.jkp.com) * 30% off using code **STUDENT22** at www.jkp.com

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