MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE FACULTY OF HEALTH & APPLIED SCIENCES

Professional and statutory regulatory bodies give clear statements in their codes of conduct on the importance of maintaining confidentiality (HCPC, 2010; HCPC, 2008; NMC, 2011; NMC, 2008;). UWE expects all students on programmes applicable to UWE's Professional Suitability Policy and Procedure (PSP) to uphold the same standards in relation to maintaining confidentiality.

'You should remove anything that could be used to identify a service user from confidential information which you use in your assessment.'
(HCPC, 2010, p9)

'Make anonymous any information included in your coursework or assessments that may directly or indirectly identify people, staff, relatives, carers or clinical placement providers.'
(NMC, 2011, p12)

It is important that students undertaking an educational programme that will lead them to professional registration are aware of the codes that govern them as students and once qualified as registered practitioners. The Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences at UWE considers it vital that students are conscious of the importance of maintaining confidentiality in practice settings, in assessed work and on university sites. All students must recognise that they may be privy to confidential information and that any information or confidence must not be disclosed in the public domain, unless you are concerned someone may be at risk of harm (HCPC, 2010; HCPC, 2008; NMC, 2011; NMC, 2008;). It is important that students recognise that in any work submitted (assignments; projects; case studies; portfolios; presentations; examinations; reports) and in class based reflections that they must not directly identify any person or organisation.

*A breach of confidentiality is the inclusion of names, images or registration details e.g. hospital number within a student's work (including appendices) that would allow an individual or area to be identified. This includes service users, carers, colleagues (including fellow students) and organisations.

Where UWE assessment documents require information such as; name of the placement organisation, name/signature(s) of UWE or external staff (e.g. supervisor, mentor, clinical/practice educator) this will be clearly identified in the relevant documents and guidance will be given in Module/Programme handbooks. This is not a breach of confidentiality.
Information included in these documents, beyond that specified as **required**, is likely to constitute a breach of confidentiality* (*as defined above).

It is acknowledged that in some cases it may be possible to potentially identify individuals from a set of circumstances despite the removal of names etc .- intimate detail can make identification more likely.

To avoid a breach of confidentiality you should check and follow the advice given in your module and programme handbooks. Additionally;

MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE FACULTY OF HEALTH & APPLIED SCIENCES

- Use pseudonyms (which should be identified as such) and generalised terms e.g. social worker, nurse, health centre, practice area, young man.
- Avoid the inclusion of documentation, either original or photocopied, that might reveal the identity of an individual or organisation e.g., referral letters, medical imaging records, assessment records, prescription charts, unless these are anonymised. (Exceptions to this are documents or cases that are now in the public domain e.g. Baby 'P'; Shipman enquiries).
- Remove names on x ray films or other imaging records; use blank charts or pseudonyms on charts.
- Where modules allow the use of images/videos, or significant amounts of detail about client issues e.g. in case studies, written consent must be gained in accordance with the procedure given in the module.
- Guidance on referencing of confidential materials can be found at: C - UWE Bristol: Study skills

Frequently asked questions

Q   Can I refer to trust or agency documentation?
A   *Only if it is in the public domain for example easily accessible through the internet*

Q   I want to reflect on/share an experience from my placement in class. Can I do this?
A   *Yes you can discuss your placement experiences, confidentiality of area and client should be maintained. You will also need to adhere to the ground rules agreed at the beginning of the session, module or programme. Any breach to be dealt with by the facilitator as a learning point.*

Q   Can I print off discussion from online discussion boards such as Blackboard?
A   *Without the agreement of the group this would be a breach in the groups' confidentiality, group name and individual names would need to be anonymised. Consult the module handbook for modules that use discussion groups on Blackboard.*

Q   How can I anonymise my work?
A   *Identifying headings and names should be physically or electronically removed. Simply blacking out information such as hospital number or name with a marker pen or correction fluid often allows the identifying feature to remain discernible.*

Q   Can I include references to trust documentation in my work?
A   *You can use trust documentation e.g. Trust Policy if it is in the public domain. If it is not publicly available you can still use it but must anonymise the citation and reference.*

Q   How do I cite and reference a Trust document which is not publicly available and therefore needs anonymising?
A   *Your citation or reference would be as per any normal citation or reference for the document you are using, but where you would normally write the author and publisher, you need to replace this with 'The Trust' or 'The Organisation'.*

MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE FACULTY OF HEALTH & APPLIED SCIENCES

Q   Can I use social networking sites?

A   *Social networking sites such as Facebook are in the public domain and can be useful for communicating and sharing information however you must ensure that breaches of confidentiality do not occur. Further guidance can be obtained through the HCPC; Focus on Standards and through the NMC; NMC guidance*

*UWE guidance on Using Social Media can be found on the **Infopoint** under '**Guidance and Procedures'** and entitled Using Social Media.*

The Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences considers all breaches of confidentiality to be serious. Where a breach of confidentiality is noted the following suggests what action may be appropriate:

First Occasion – isolated breach; Organisation/client/carer/peer/UWE or external staff is identified in students work on no more than one occasion (or similar level of breach is noted).	Marker reports breach to Module Leader (ML) and Programme Manager (PM); breach is discussed. Potential outcomes; 1. ML meets the student to discuss the breach. The breach will be documented in student feedback and an account of the meeting held in the student file. Personal tutor should be informed. **No mark penalty.** 2. The breach is considered under PSP (level 1 unless previous PSP referrals indicate another level would be more appropriate). The breach will be documented and treated in accordance with PSP. **No mark penalty unless PSP is escalated and outcome of PSP dictates that a mark penalty should be applied.**
First Occasion – multiple breach Organisation/client/carer/peer/UWE or external staff is identified in students work on more than one occasion (or similar level of breach is noted).	Marker reports breach to ML and PM. PM considers the student/breach under PSP (level 1 unless previous PSP referrals indicate another level would be more appropriate). The breach will be documented and treated in accordance with PSP. **Mark Penalty = Student receives a mark of zero**
Second/Subsequent Occasion; Student has previously breached confidentiality.	Marker reports breach to ML and PM. PM considers the student/breach under PSP (level 2 unless previous PSP referrals indicate level 3 would be more appropriate). The breach will be documented and treated in accordance with PSP. **Mark Penalty = Student receives a mark of zero**

Mark penalties; where maintaining confidentiality is a key aspect of an assessment this should be made clear to students in the assessment brief. Students should be made aware of the above table.

MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE FACULTY OF HEALTH & APPLIED SCIENCES

References:

- Health and Care Professions Council (2010). Guidance on conduct and ethics for students. London
- Health and Care Professions Council (2008, updated 2012). Standards of conduct, performance and ethics. London
- Nursing and Midwifery Council (2012) Social Networking http://www.nmc-uk.org/Nurses-and-midwives/Regulation-in-practice/Regulation-in-Practice-Topics/Social-networking-sites/
- Nursing and Midwifery Council (2011). Guidance on professional conduct. London
- Nursing and Midwifery Council (2009). Guidance on professional conduct for Nursing and Midwifery students. London
- Nursing and Midwifery Council (2008). The Code: Standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives. London