

Document Title	<b>SUPPORT SERVICES GUIDELINES</b>			Page 1 of 6
Document Number	044	Document Revision	G	Date Issued
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DOCUMENT FRONT SHEET			
1	Document category	Guidelines	
2	List of document approvers	Director Student Support Services	
3	Minimum list of document users to be notified upon release of document update	All Staff and all Students	
4	Document change history		
F	DCN #	Date released	Change originator
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	<b>Change history (Section/change details)</b>		
Change in title form 'Student Support Services Guidelines' to 'Support Service Guidelines'. Replaced 'Student' and 'Staff' with Client where applicable.			
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Included cross-reference to Manual of Procedures			

**PLEASE READ BELOW BEFORE REFERRING TO THIS DOCUMENT**

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**Continuous Improvement**

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*Note 1: The procedure below is replicated in the Manual of Procedures, Chapter 3, paragraph 2*

*Note 2: In this document, where applicable, staff and student/s will be referred to as 'Client/s'*

These guidelines are intended for the use of students and staff (thereafter referred to as 'Client/s') in order for them to be familiar with the services offered by the Support Services and how to access them.

## **1. Scope of counselling/therapy**

The MCAST Support Services Department provides the necessary services to cater for the personal needs of the students to achieve within the College their optimal personal, academic and vocational development. This process of personal and professional growth will enhance the students' prospects of achieving educational success in turn preparing them for the current or future work-place.

By establishing a safe and supportive environment, counselling and therapy help individuals (staff and students) to recognise unhealthy patterns, explore new ways of being, change dysfunctional ways of relating, and affirm aspects of themselves which they undervalue. This process encourages personal growth leading to a more productive, self-enhancing, and fulfilling personal and professional life.

## **2. Practical information on the service**

- a) Counselling/therapy sessions are free of charge for both students pursuing studies for a full-time qualification and MCAST staff
- b) Sessions last about 50 minutes;
- c) Clients will be offered 10 sessions, following which, the practitioner and client will re-evaluate the therapeutic process and either have a closure session or extend therapy in cases where more sessions are needed;
- d) Attendance is usually on a weekly or fortnightly basis, depending on clients' needs;
- e) Appointments by clients should preferably be made during their free time;
- f) Clients need to contact their counsellor/therapist as soon as possible if they need to cancel or postpone a session;
- g) If a person misses three sessions in a row without any reason, the counselling/therapy process is automatically terminated;
- h) Clients will be invited to complete a 'Student Feedback Form' at the end of their counselling/therapy or at the end of each academic year in order to help the department evaluate and improve its service;
- i) Clients who have graduated or resigned from the College may continue to avail of the Support Services for two concluding sessions;
- j) Practitioners are available every day of the academic year, Monday to Friday from 08:00 until 16:30. While the Support Services continues to operate during the summer recess, the service provided at that time will be on a reduced basis;

## **3. Confidentiality**

- a) The highest level of confidentiality is maintained by the practitioners of the Department Unless clients give their consent, no information regarding the clients will be passed on to a third party.
- b) However, the practitioners may decide to break confidentiality if in their professional judgement:
  - there is a risk of the client seriously harming themselves or being harmed;
  - there is a risk of another person being seriously harmed; or

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- there is a risk of a serious crime being committed.
- c) In these cases, the practitioner will first seek to obtain the client's consent, unless the law specifies otherwise. If the client disagrees with the disclosure but the practitioner still believes that it is necessary, the practitioner will inform the client that the disclosure will occur and with whom the disclosure will occur.
- d) The Department keeps different kinds of records to support practitioners in their activity. All these documents are property of the Support Services Department and are kept in a safe and secure location. For more information, kindly refer to the Support Services policy

#### **Reference Document:**

Doc 031: Support Services Policy

## **4. The Support Services Department**

### 4.1 Location

- a) The Support Services Department is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor in the Student House, Main Campus, Paola.
- b) Practitioners can also meet clients at the Satellite Institutes.
- c) When clients attend one of the Satellite Institutes, it is their choice whether to meet at Main Campus or the Satellite Institute which they attend, unless in extraordinary circumstances. Clients who still avail themselves of the service during each year's academic calendar summer recess will be asked to attend sessions at the Main Campus, Support Services Offices, Paola.

### 4.2 Making contact with the Department

- a) Contact needs to be made by phone or email, in order to setup an initial, brief appointment where a registration form is filled and a counselling/therapy agreement is explained.
- b) If a client requires a particular counsellor/therapist, the intake appointment can be made directly with the practitioner.
- c) Individuals will be contacted within one or two working days of their referral to the Department.
- d) Contact by email for students needs to be made through [counsellors@mcast.edu.mt](mailto:counsellors@mcast.edu.mt)
- e) Students at the Gozo Campus may directly contact the department as above or they may opt to contact the Institute Support Services Coordinator through [studentsupport-gozocampus@mcast.edu.mt](mailto:studentsupport-gozocampus@mcast.edu.mt) .
- f) Contact for staff may be done directly with the Director, Senior Counsellor or the practitioner of their choice or through [counsellors@mcast.edu.mt](mailto:counsellors@mcast.edu.mt) .
- g) The department's telephone numbers are the following: 2398 7115/7129/7133/7186/7188/7189 or 2398 7665/7666/7667 for the Gozo Campus.

## **5. Referring students to the Department**

For some clients, being at College can prove to be a very challenging and stressful experience. The range of supportive services provided throughout the College are significant in assisting clients to cope effectively and successfully in achieving academic success and maintaining personal well-being. However, there are times when more specialist intervention is required in order to address specific issues that may arise. It is at these times that a referral to the Support Services may be appropriate.

- a) Clients can choose to directly refer themselves to the Support Services.

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- b) Staff, parents, other students, external agencies, or other professionals can all directly refer a client to the Support Services or seek consultation with the Director, Senior Counsellor or one of the practitioners.
- c) Once contact has been established during working hours, an intake session will be organised and carried out. A counselling/therapy agreement will be explained and signed between the Support Services representative and the client.
- d) Following the intake session, a practitioner will contact the client to start therapy. In the course of therapy, the practitioner may discuss with the client regarding any liaising required with other internal or external entities for the holistic multi-disciplinary interventions offered to the client.
- e) In case of any known trauma situations, or a member of staff or student or their close relatives experience a tragic accident or death, MCAST administration or the administration of the relative Institute needs to notify the Support Services through a referral form. Support Services will primarily provide psychological first aid so as to support and assist the client/s concerned. It is recommended that this support is availed of immediately. Consequently, the clients may seek further support when they feel it is timely to do so, which may be weeks or months later, through counselling/therapy.
- f) In case of a referral that is a crisis or an emergency, the first available practitioner will respond to the crisis and inform the Director Support Services, Senior Counsellor or in their absence the Principal. As long as a situation is deemed by the practitioners to be an emergency, the client will be seen to on the day once one of the practitioners has been reasonably contacted during MCAST working hours. The client will continue to be attended to until the crisis is suitably taken care of, even if this means that the practitioner overstays the hours of work. However, if a crisis occurs and is referred after MCAST Support Services working hours, the practitioners cannot be held accountable to intervene as above described. It is recommended that after office hours, in case of a crisis or emergency, other 24-hour services and support lines are contacted accordingly, such as Support Line 179.

## **6. Ways on how to refer when students disclose with a member of staff**

- a. When the disclosure is one that concerns a breach of MCAST regulations, particularly held on any of MCAST's campuses, one needs to immediately inform the student that any of the Senior Management Team and in turn, the Principal & CEO needs to be informed. The formal MCAST procedures will be followed.
- b. When the disclosure is one that needs to be referred to the Support Services and does not present the need for breach of confidentiality as described in point 3.b and 5.1.a of these guidelines, discussion of 3 different options and allowing the student to choose is required. These 3 different options are:
  - i. Client self-referral,
  - ii. Direct referral to Support Services,
  - iii. Referring to any of the Institute Senior Management Team or to Institute Student Support Services Coordinators.

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Below is a table enlisting guidelines on how to proceed in the 3 different options.

<b>Guidelines on how to proceed</b>		
<b>Client self-referral</b>	<b>Direct referral to Support Services</b>	<b>Referring to any of the Institute Senior Management Team or to Institute Student Support Services Coordinators</b>
a) Stay calm b) Listen to the client c) Adopt a non-judgemental attitude d) Reassure the client that self-referral to the Support Services is welcomed and encouraged e) Provide client with contact details of the Support Services f) Follow-up with client to show concern and ask them whether they have made contact with the Support Services and whether they have been seen by one of the practitioners at the same department.	a) Stay calm b) Listen to the client c) Adopt a non-judgemental attitude d) Discuss confidentiality and its limitations with the client e) Discuss direct referral to the Support Services with the Client if s/he prefers that you make initial contact on their behalf f) Fill in the Referral Form, not necessarily in the client's presence g) Support client during referral time and accompany him/her for their intake session if the client refers.	a) Stay calm b) Listen to the client. c) Adopt a non-judgemental attitude d) Discuss confidentiality and its limitations with the client e) Discuss referral to any of the Institute Senior Management Team or to the Institute Student Support Services Coordinator with the client. f) Fill in the Referral Form and decide whether it is beneficial to do so with the personnel mentioned in point 5 g) Support client during referral time

## 7. What to do regarding concerns over a student

- a) Concerns can be shared in confidence with the Director Support Services, Senior Counsellor or any of the practitioners at the Support Services. Otherwise, members of staff can share their concerns in confidence with any of the Institute Senior Management Team or the Institute Student Support Services Coordinators
- b) Unless the case demands that confidentiality is broken (as indicated in section 3.b and 5.1.a of this document), it is up to the member of staff concerned to decide whether or not to disclose the student's name with the Support Services. If the member of staff prefers not to disclose the student's name, then they are taking full responsibility for their concern over the student.

## 8. Referring members of staff to the Support Services

- a) Staff members too can be going through a difficult moment or experiencing mental health, psychosocial or emotional issues. Like in the case of students, a referral to the Support Services may be appropriate in certain situations. This can be done by other members of staff or Senior Management Team who can also consult with the Support Services

## 9. Change of practitioner assigned



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- a) In case a client wishes to change practitioner, the client is strongly encouraged to return to the initial practitioner to discuss such a change. If they still wish to change, a closure session is recommended. Following this, the first practitioner needs to discuss with the client whether there is any information that needs to be passed on to the new practitioner. Every attempt needs to be made to always discuss the passing on of such information with the relevant client
- b) In particular circumstances either for the beneficence of the client or due to the practitioner experiencing serious professional dilemmas, the practitioner may formally request not to continue sessions with the client. The practitioner is encouraged to discuss these dilemmas and request, with the external supervisor, following which, this request will be approved or otherwise by the Director Student Support Services

## **10. Complaints about the functioning of the Department**

- a) If there are concerns regarding the conduct of a practitioner within the department, clients are encouraged to initially address this with the practitioner concerned
- b) If this route is not satisfactory or possible for the client, then individuals need to personally contact the Director Student Support Services or the College Principal & CEO.
- c) If there are complaints regarding the running of the department, the clients may opt to contact the Director Student Support Services of the College Principal & CEO.
- d) If the need arises, MCAST authorities will investigate and process the matter according to MCAST protocol.