Maintaining Confidentiality in Your Work: Confidentiality Policy of The School of Health and Human Sciences

*\*(This section is produced in full from the HHS Postgraduate Students’ Handbook, 2011-2012, pp. 39-42)*

## Scope

This policy of the School of Health and Human Sciences applies to the complete range of educational provision without exception.

### Introduction

**The maintenance, and management, of confidentiality is the responsibility of the individual student. The student must seek guidance from their supervisor on the effective discharge of this responsibility.**

As a student of the School of Health and Human Sciences you will note that modules use different forms of assessment. The common component of the assessment strategies is the requirement for you to present work that accurately portrays the environments in which you practice/seek to practice. Consequently, information contained in submitted work is often detailed and specific. In presenting work of a suitably high standard, you must be constantly aware of the necessity to maintain confidentiality for all concerned.

### What can I include?

#### Pseudonyms

We suggest that you use pseudonyms throughout; using ‘Patient X in Hospital Y’ does not aid the readability of your work.

* + 1. Public information

As a general rule you may include any data that is already within the “public domain”. This means any document that a Trust, Social Service Department or Organisation has made available to the general public. Your line manager/mentor will be able to confirm whether this is the case for a specific document.

* 1. **What must I not include?**

Any information that would breach confidentiality for service users, carers, staff, students or anyone else involved in the scenario that you are describing including the organisation.

* + 1. For the service user, you must not include:
* Any personal details from which the identity of a service user could be deduced
* Any dates significant to a service user’s episode of care
* Any specific location details of hospitals, clinics, services etc. relating to the service users episode of care
	+ 1. For colleagues, you must not include:
* Any personal details from which the identity of staff mentioned in the work could be deduced
* Any specific location details of hospitals, clinics, services etc. in which the staff are work
	+ 1. For provider organisations, you must not include:
* The name of the Trust or organisation referred to in the work

### Specific Assessments

#### Portfolio

Where portfolios form part of the assessment it is the recommendation of the School of Health & Human Sciences that you **do not submit** reflective diaries maintained throughout your period of studies as part of your portfolio evidence. The exception to this is where your module leader specifically requests such a document. In such circumstances you will be given information as to how confidentiality will be maintained.

1.5.2. Extended Projects

Some modules require students to undertake long term projects of specific work from which the relevant Trust may be perceived as identifiable. Regardless of this, the student remains responsible for presenting work that protects the confidentiality of those concerned. The student should consult and seek guidance from his/her supervisor if he/she is unclear about how to maintain confidentiality.

* + 1.

### Dissertations

Dissertations require students to undertake specific work from which the relevant Trust may be perceived as identifiable. Regardless of this, the student remains responsible for presenting work that protects the confidentiality of those concerned. The student should consult and seek guidance from his/her supervisor if he/she is unclear about how to maintain confidentiality.

* 1. **Using multimedia recording**

There are some instances where you may feel that it is essential to include an audiovisual record in your work. The following procedures can support such an audiovisual record, but must first be explored with your supervisor.

Where you wish to include audiovisual record, photographs etc. of an episode of care, which will inevitably compromise confidentiality, the following points must be addressed.

* The student must obtain written consent from the module leader if this form of evidence is to be included.
* The student must confirm with his/her line manager whether an organisation policy on the use of educational videotape, or similar, currently exists.
* The student must seek written consent from each service user/participant involved. If the employing organisation has a Medical Illustration Department, this department will provide a pro forma consent form.
* The completed consent forms must be provided to the student’s line manager. The line manager will write a statement to the effect that they have seen the consent form and approve of the evidence being included in the portfolio. **The completed consent forms must not be included in the portfolio.**
	1. **Consent of colleagues**

Colleagues have the same rights to confidentiality as service users. Where details by which colleagues may be identified are included in the work the student is obliged to seek consent and provide written evidence of such within the portfolio.

* The student must obtain written consent from the module leader if this form of evidence is to be included.
* The student must seek written consent from each colleague involved.
* The completed consent forms must be provided to the student’s line manager. The line manager will write a statement to the effect that they have seen the consent form and approve of the evidence being included in the portfolio. The completed consent forms must not be included in the portfolio.
	1. **Commercially sensitive material**

Confidentiality may extend beyond people involved in a caring environment to **products** of, and **information** concerning, employing organisations. Products and information may be commercially sensitive and each student must consider his/her responsibilities in relation to such items. A trainee’s judgement on such confidentiality issues should be based upon systematic reflection on his/her role as:

* Student of the University
* Professional practitioner
* Organisation employee

If a student is concerned about inclusion of material that may be commercially sensitive (e.g. information concerning the organisation that is not already in the public domain) he/she should seek guidance from his/her academic supervisor and/or line manager.

* 1. **Assessment at the School of Health and Human Sciences**

The University of Essex regards all work produced by students as confidential. Staff do not engage in discussion concerning students’ work except with fellow assessors. The School of Health and Human Sciences retains:

* All coursework for one calendar year after the student has completed the programme
* Undergraduate and Graduate dissertations are retained for five calendar years after the student has completed the programme
* Doctoral dissertations are retained within the Albert Sloman Library

Information about student progress may be shared, within clearly defined parameters, with the student’s employer/sponsor. However, student work is not disseminated outside the School of Health and Human Sciences without prior consent from the relevant student.

* 1. **Other Considerations**

Students should also consider the following guidance and legislation in relation to their work:

* Human Rights Act 1998
* Data Protection Act 1998
* Professional guidance on confidentiality, record keeping and conduct (as issued by regulatory bodies relevant to your professional programme)
* Freedom of Information Act 2004

### Penalty

Student submissions that breach the School’s Confidentiality Policy, explicitly or implicitly, in the view of the internal assessor/moderator will be penalised.

A breach of confidentiality as outlined above is an Academic Offence and will be referred to the Head of School for investigation. The complete University policy on Academic Offences can be found at:

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/academic/docs/regs/offpro.shtm>