Content Note Guidance

Some topics can be emotionally challenging for students to engage with. Certain topics can bring up distressing emotions, memories, or mental health issues. For students with mental health issues or who have experienced trauma, this can be a crucial accessibility issue.

Students who have experienced trauma may find that stimuli can bring back (or trigger) memories and distressing emotions associated with a previous traumatic event. Helping students to identify and manage these trauma triggers can help recovery. Therefore, when modules refer to content that is likely to be distressing or triggering for students, we need to signpost this and support students to engage with these topics in a way that is less compromising to their wellbeing.

It is, of course, difficult to identify all the content that can be distressing for students. What is experienced as sensitive or emotive is personally defined, highly individual and connected to lived experience. The ability to engage with emotionally challenging topics, to make sense of lived experiences and develop skills to help others in the future, may also be a key motivator behind students' study choices. Students may also find different things difficult at different times, dependent on changes in their own personal circumstances and global events. Different topics can also require a different response. So, it may be helpful to start with the following approach that classifies content into three categories with recommendations for content notes and signposting to support and guidance.

Category A

Category A topics require the most signposting and support, as these can trigger harmful behaviours in students. Category A topics include:

- Suicide
- Eating disorders
- Self-harm or body hatred
- Addiction

If a module contains category A topics, it should have the following adjustments:

Strongly advised	A section on emotionally challenging content in the accessibility and module guide
Strongly advised	A content note at the beginning of the session or section containing emotionally challenging content

Strongly advised	Signposting support, e.g. links to guidance (Your emotional resilience skills: A guide for students studying emotionally challenging content) mental health, wellbeing and topic-specific specialist support (university and/or local/national service)
Strongly advised	A content note at the beginning of the module

Category B

Category B topics may trigger flashbacks of experienced trauma. Category B topics include (but are not limited to):

- Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, domestic or other)

- Rape

- Severe or graphic violence

- Murder or genocide

- Child abuse, paedophilia, incest or child death

- Abduction or kidnapping

- Human trafficking or forced prostitution

- Racism, hate speech or targeted abuse (e.g. transphobia, antisemitism, homophobia, islamophobia, ableism, etc.)

- Stillbirth, miscarriage or traumatic childbirth

- Colonialism, slavery and intergenerational trauma

- Severe mental distress or illness, psychosis or trauma

- Severe debt

If a module contains category B topics, it should have the following adjustments:

Strongly advised	A section on emotionally challenging content in the accessibility and module guide
Advised	A content note at the beginning of the session or section containing emotionally challenging content
Advised	Signposting support, e.g. links to guidance (Your emotional resilience skills: A guide for students studying emotionally challenging content) mental health,

	wellbeing and topic-specific specialist support (university and/or local/national service)
Optional	A content note at the beginning of the module

Category C

Category C topics may be painful or distressing to students. Category C topics include (but are not limited to):

- Animal cruelty (including testing and experiments)

- Death or severe illness

- Mental illness

- Divorce or family separation

- Impacts of mental illness on children (e.g. post-natal depression impact on child attachment)

- Common phobias (e.g. needles, blood, spiders)

- Gender dysphoria (please note, if this relates to body hatred or self-harm, it should go in category A)

If a module contains category C topics, the following adjustments are advised:

Advised	A section on emotionally challenging content in the accessibility and module guide
Advised	An in-text content note at the beginning of the session or section containing emotionally challenging content
Optional	Signposting support, e.g. links to guidance (Your emotional resilience skills: A guide for students studying emotionally challenging content) mental health, wellbeing and topic-specific specialist support (university and/or local/national service)
Optional	A content note at the beginning of the module

As discussed above many topics can be distressing, depending on context and how they are addressed in a module. **This page aims to provide broad guidance, but the decision of what adjustments to adopt is made by the teaching team. It is recommended that you regularly seek anonymous feedback from your students to identify topics and develop your approach.**

Example text: beginning of module

The following is example text that may be adapted and included in advance of the first teaching session or included in a module guide or handbook.

Some topics we are covering in this module may be distressing. They may touch on difficult experiences that you have come into contact with (like *[examples]*) or deal with subjects which may be distressing for you (e.g. *[examples]*).

We'd suggest that before reading on you check whether any topics in the module might be challenging for you to engage with. This might involve looking over the titles for each week of the module and noticing whether any emotions come up for you and what they are. Do you feel anxious or angry at the thought of certain topics, for example? If so, we recommend looking at the guidance 'Your emotional resilience skills: A guide for students studying emotionally challenging content' which you can find [*add details of how students can access this guidance*] and speaking to your [*add appropriate educator/academic support*] about your support needs to ensure they are able to support you.

Example text: beginning of week or activity

The following is example text that may be adapted and included in at the beginning of a session containing potentially distressing content.

Please be aware, this week/session/activity discusses *[topic.]* If you are likely to find this distressing, please consider carefully how you might want to engage with this. You can find suggestions in the 'Your emotional resilience skills: A guide for students studying emotionally challenging content' guidance, [*add details of how students can access this guidance*]. You might also want to check in with [*add appropriate educator/academic support*] at this point to see how they may be able to support you.

Or

In this activity/session, you'll be asked to *[activity].* If you are concerned this might adversely affect your mental health, you might like to skip this activity or engage with it only very lightly. Please speak to [*add appropriate educator/academic support*] if you have any questions.