



Department  
for Education

## Minutes from Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce Meeting Four

Notes of 4th Taskforce meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023  
(10:30 – 12:00), virtually via MS Teams

### Chair

Higher Education Student Support Champion, Professor Edward Peck

### Members Present

- Professor Edward Peck, Taskforce Chair
- Professor Louis Appleby - Chair of National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group
- Mia Brady, student representative - Student Minds Student Advisory Committee
- Dr Nicola Byrom - Network Leader, SMaRteN
- Kathryn Cribbin - student representative, QAA student panel
- Emma Douthwaite – Acting Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Office for Students (OfS)
- Lee Fryatt - Co-founder, The LEARN Network
- Angela Halston – Senior Policy and Engagement Officer, Independent HE (IHE)
- Jane Harris - Chair, Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Expert Group (MWBHE)
- Helen Megarry - Independent Adjudicator - The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)
- Mark Shanahan - Co-founder, The LEARN Network
- Jill Stevenson – Chair, Association of Managers Of Student Services In Higher Education (AMOSSHE)

- Dr Dominique Thompson - Clinical Advisor, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Student Minds
- Rosie Tressler – CEO, Student Minds
- Professor Steve West - Board member, UUK

## Apologies

- Prathiba Chitsabesan - National Clinical Director for Children and Young People's Mental Health, NHS England
- Gordon McKenzie – CEO, GuildHE
- Stuart Rimmer - Chief Executive at East Coast College, representing Association of Colleges (AoC)
- Matt Lee - Head of Children and Young People's Mental Health Policy, Department of Health and Social Care

## In Attendance

- Peter Fonagy - National Advisor, NHS – (deputising for Prathiba Chitsabesan).
- Dominic Smithies – Head of Influencing and Communications – Student Minds
- Kate Wicklow – Policy Director (Insight, Access & Student Experience). Guild HE
- DfE officials
- Student Support Champion's team

## Item 1: Welcome and Introduction

The Chair welcomed members.

## Item 2: Review of minutes from Taskforce meeting three

**Action:** Taskforce members to provide any comments on meeting three minutes by the end of the week (15 December).

## Item 3: Feedback on Interim Report

Taskforce members were welcomed to share their thoughts on the draft Taskforce interim report for Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education.

### Item 3a: Feedback on Interim Report - Overall Comments

- Taskforce members praised the general flow, content, and layout of the report, noting it was a good summary of a complex subject area.
- Several members called for an executive summary of the document to clarify the boundaries of the work remit and make it more accessible to the public.

**Action:** The Chair and Taskforce project team will look to provide an enhanced introduction to the report

### Item 3b: Feedback on Interim Report - Identification of students at risk

Taskforce members' specific feedback on this section included:

- There should be a more detailed roadmap for implementation.
- There is a need for consistency around good practice, particularly training of non-specialist staff and roles of personal tutors.
- Making clear the need for boundaries between HE support and NHS care.
- Acknowledge issues around increasing signposting to already overstretched services.
- This section should capture more of the October roundtable discussion around using data analytics to identify vulnerable students.
- Suggestion of including a specific expectation on universities to evaluate interventions being put in place to train and monitor non-specialist staff. The Chair noted that a reference to this point will be added.
- On encouraging early disclosures, members would like to see guidance on how universities respond to this information.
- Acknowledging non-UCAS entry to HE.
- The report may want to define the 'students at risk' the Taskforce is concerned with; the Chair noted that this term was in the Terms of reference but that identifying students

with vulnerabilities due to mental distress may be a more appropriate term for what the Taskforce is seeking to achieve.

**Action:** The Chair and Taskforce project team will reflect on this feedback for the final draft of the report.

### **Item 3c: Feedback on Interim Report - HE Student Commitment**

Taskforce members' specific feedback on this section included:

- It needs to be clear that as well as the work aiming to creating a standard against which OIA cases being judged, there is a primary purpose of being compassionate to students and preventing harm.
- It was suggested that the tone in communications is a reflection of a provider's culture and we must therefore further stress the important role of senior leaders in addressing cultural issues. On the other hand, it was argued that changing practices can itself impact culture.
- There needs to be a targeted ambition about how the Taskforce will identify examples of good practice. The Chair note that the Taskforce could create its own exemplar if needed.
- The report should avoid the term 'anecdotal evidence' when discussing examples of serious harm to students, instead using 'evidence from experience' or similar formulation.
- The report should note the effect of timing of communications from providers on students.
- The report should emphasise the importance of the sector evaluating the impact of changes to their communications, so they can understand any unintended harms.
- The Taskforce should also consider the impact of delays in students receiving the Disabled Student Allowance.

**Action:** Chair to speak with OfS to get an update on how they are managing impacts from changes to DSA with a view to updating Taskforce members.

**Action:** The Chair and Taskforce project team will reflect on this feedback for the final draft of the report.

### **Item 3d: Feedback on Interim Report - National Review of HE Suicides**

The Chair informed Taskforce members that the intention is to write to the sector to encourage engagement in the National Review in the new year, with a potential role for the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education. There will also be engagement events with providers and potential development of an FAQ based on discussions from the subgroup meeting on this.

Taskforce members' specific feedback on this section included:

- Engagement between Taskforce representatives and the reviewer had gained the confidence of the group. Communications on the review should focus on stressing the independence of the reviewer.
- It is important to acknowledge evidence from experience to add context to any data, with involvement of bereaved families. This section of the report needs to also speak directly to the concerns of those families.
- More clarity is needed on which cases need to be reported. It was confirmed that suspected suicides and attempted suicides would be in scope but the reviewer could consider further clarification of this scope in the new year. NCISH will not give detailed instructions on how providers should submit a report; that will be developed and sent out separately and would reflect current guidance.
- It was suggested that the Taskforce explore coroners reporting back to providers following the death of a student.
- The report should acknowledge that whilst some elements of consistency between institutions are important, the differences due to local context are also critical.

**Action:** The Chair and Taskforce project team will reflect on this feedback for the final draft of the report and NCISH will consider relevant aspects as the approach is developed.

### **Item 3e: Feedback on Interim Report - Adoption of Good Practice**

Taskforce members' specific feedback on this section included:

- The report should acknowledge that as well as embedding mental health strategies students should understand progress against these.
- The Taskforce should consider further the need for additional guidance and specific toolkits for small and specialist providers before making any recommendation.

- It was suggested that smaller and independent providers are broadly supportive of the flexibility in the University Mental Health Charter, though membership bodies representing these providers need to contribute to the conversation about the Award process for these providers.
- The report needs to be clear about responsibility for mental health support and charter coverage where there are partnerships and collaborative agreements, including franchising and validation arrangements.
- TASO has released reports on evaluating small cohorts; there are difficulties evaluating the impact of work in small providers and this could be acknowledged in the report.
- A concern was raised about the resourcing implications of suggesting every provider should be covered by a charter. It was suggested that the report note that this burden should not fall just on student services that it should be owned by executive leadership.
- The report should not commit Student Minds to work beyond current expectations and present funding; any milestones or timelines should reflect this position.
- It was suggested that more should be done around the transparency of the University Mental Health Charter Programme, including reporting on progress of providers on the Programme
- The report needs to reflect that the University Mental Health Charter Award is not an end point and that the focus is on constant improvement. It will take some providers some time to achieve Award status.
- The report will capture the numbers of both UK-wide and English institutions on the Charter Programme.

**Action:** The Chair and Taskforce project team will reflect on this feedback for the final draft of the report.

### **Item 3f: Feedback on Interim Report - Additional Areas of Focus**

Taskforce members' specific feedback on this section included:

- A member was happy to see the potential of a national drive on improving NHS links with HE; however, it is key to ensure the right stakeholders are engaged from primary care, including GP practice teams.
- The need to be cautious about listing problems with NHS primary care join up without providing solutions. On the other hand, it was suggested it is also vital not to propose

solutions without fully scoping feasibility, for example around the suggestion of dual registration.

- The report needs to be clear that although some student groups are not in scope of the taskforce, evidence submitted during the consultation has been taken into account in other work strands.
- While the focus of the Taskforce is England, it is important it addresses how English services work with those in devolved administrations.

## Item 4: Next Steps and close

The Chair stated that the final draft of the interim report would be submitted to the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education prior to Christmas.

**Action:** The Chair and Taskforce project team will reflect on feedback across each section and make amendments in the final draft of the report.

**Action:** The Taskforce project team will reach out to relevant members to agree wording where they are directly referenced.