

Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce

Mental Health Strategies – Project Proposal

Introduction

In its first report, the Taskforce has proposed that the approaches taken by HEPs to develop and embed mental health strategies should be explored further. This has been agreed by the Minister. This note should be read alongside the relevant section of that first report.

Project Summary

Mental health and wellbeing strategies enable HEPs to demonstrate visible leadership and a strategic commitment to whole-institution approaches. They may include both a public-facing document (the strategy) and a corresponding action plan.

A HEP may decide to implement a mental health and wellbeing strategy for a number of reasons, such as:

- Embedding whole-institution approaches to mental health that includes goal setting and action tracking to enhance student and colleague support;
- Increasing expectations around the adoption of relevant sector frameworks (for example, the University Mental Health Charter and the actions that result from self-assessment and feedback from external sources);
- Demonstrating alignment with, and adoption of, published guidance and good practice (for example, UUK Trusted Contacts guidance); and
- Codifying institutional priorities, particularly with respect to those policy and practice areas that have been identified as needing improvement following internal evaluations (for example, following a suspected suicide internal review).

For each of these areas, a mental health and wellbeing strategy enables an HEP to articulate their ambitions, responsibilities, and commitments. Where they are embedded into internal governance structures, they facilitate regular and structured reporting of innovation and monitoring of progress.

To date, approaches taken by HEPs in developing and embedding these strategies have shown considerable variation. To an extent, this is to be expected. Where commonality has been apparent it may have been prompted by alignment of these strategies with the University Mental Health Charter or UUK's Stepchange framework. The Charlie Waller Trust has published comprehensive guidance for HEPs looking to develop a mental health strategy, but there seems to be limited familiarity with this.

There may be benefit in drawing together existing guidance and sector good practice into one authoritative reference document for HEPs. This could set out the ways in which mental health strategies are developed, drawing upon a wide range of intelligence and insight perspectives, and how they are embedded within the management and governance of HEPs. There may be benefit in articulating the information derived from these strategies that students, parents, and other stakeholders would welcome being readily available. At the same time, there may be a view that HEPs are already deploying robust approaches to developing and monitoring strategies and disseminating key messages to a wider public and that further work is not a current priority.

Brief

- Identify through Taskforce members and their networks HEPs which have implemented mental health and wellbeing strategies and put in place methods of sharing required and relevant information for students, parents, and other interested parties.
- Assess the strengths, weaknesses, and profiles of current sources of advice in developing these strategies.
- Understand different perspectives around the monitoring of strategies through HEPs' management and governance structures.
- Develop any further support tools that may be beneficial.

Proposed Timelines

February:

- Taskforce receives project summary paper and discusses – 2 February.
- Taskforce members assist in call for identification of HEPs which have adopted mental health and wellbeing strategies.
- Meetings with these HEPs and other stakeholders to take place throughout February and March to explore issues summarised in the brief (above).
- Review of current guidance.

March:

- A verbal progress update provided to Taskforce on **7 March**.

April:

- Write-up of findings from discussions with HEPs and stakeholders, including suggestions on any further steps to be taken or recommended, to Taskforce on **19 April**.

Proposed Working Group

The project will be led by the Taskforce project team and be guided by a Working Group comprising:

- Taskforce members (self-selected)
- AMOSSHE
- Student Minds
- UUK, Guild HE, Independent HE and AoC
- HEPs who have developed mental health and wellbeing strategies
- Other stakeholders invited following initial consultation