



Department  
for Education

## Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce

Notes of 7<sup>th</sup> Taskforce meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> April (10:30 – 12:30), virtually via MS Teams.

### Chair

Higher Education Student Support Champion, Professor Edward Peck.

### Members Present

- Professor Edward Peck, Chair
- Mia Brady, Student representative - Student Minds Student Advisory Committee
- Dr Nicola Byrom - Network Leader, SMaRteN
- Kathryn Cribbin, Student Representative - QAA student panel
- 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)
- Polly Harrow - FE Student Support Champion
- Matt Lee - Head of Children and Young People’s Mental Health Policy, Department of Health and Social Care
- Helen Megarry - Chief Executive, Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)
- Dr Mark Shanahan – member of The LEARN Network
- Dominic Smithies - Head of Influencing & Communications, Student Minds
- Dr Dominique Thompson - Clinical Advisor, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Student Minds
- Professor Steve West - Board member, Universities UK (UUK)

### In Attendance

- Suzy Allinson - Senior Officer, Office for Students, OfS, (deputising on behalf of Suzanne Carrie)
- Peter Fonagy - National Advisor, NHS (deputising on behalf of Prathiba Chitsabesan and Mark Ewins)

- Jen Hope - Senior Policy Lead, Association of Colleges (AoC) [deputising on behalf of Peter Mayhew-Smith
- Ben McCarthy - Student Support Champion's team
- Dr Cathryn Rodway - Programme Manager and Research Associate, National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health (deputising on behalf of Louis Appleby)
- Jenny Shaw - Student Support Champion's team
- Sarah Sweeney and John Bloomfield Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE), (deputising on behalf of Jill Stevenson)
- Dr Kate Wicklow – Policy Director (Insight, Access & Student Experience), GuildHE (deputising on behalf of Gordon McKenzie)
- Department for Education (DfE) Officials

## **1. Welcome and introduction**

The Chair welcomed members to the seventh meeting of the Taskforce and thanked them for their continuing engagement and contributions.

The Chair updated members that he had spoken with the new Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, Luke Hall, regarding the future of the HE Mental Health Implementation Taskforce, and his work as HE Student Support Champion.

The Minister was committed to continuing work of his predecessor, stressed that momentum should not be lost and that he was looking forward to the Taskforce 2nd stage report in June. The Minister had also stressed his commitment to the target set for all eligible universities to join the University Mental Health Charter Programme by September.

The Chair provided an update that alongside the valuable work of the National Review of HE suicides, the benefits of looking at prevention of future death reports are currently being considered. The Chair stressed that this would be a separate piece of work to the National Review.

## **2. Confirmation of previous minutes**

There were no further comments on the minutes of the previous meeting, which had been approved via email.

### 3. Taskforce continuation 2024/25

As noted at the last meeting, it was proposed that the Taskforce was extended to June 2025, aligning with the revised term of Professor Peck as HE Student Support Champion.

The Chair reflected that there had been significant progress on many areas of work since last summer and many would have significant updates in the second stage report. In some areas, the continuing role of the Taskforce would be to monitor progress.

He stated that work strands on connecting HE providers with NHS primary and secondary care need more development beyond the Taskforce's initially stated lifecycle, though the Taskforce's work on this area should be complete this calendar year.

Other areas of work need particular focus over the coming months, with specific mention made of the University Mental Health Charter Programme target, training for non-specialist staff, and the outcome of the National Review of HE suicides.

The Chair noted he was confident that the current Taskforce membership brought together the range of agencies and perspectives necessary to pursue its agenda. He invited all current Taskforce members to continue as taskforce members beyond the summer.

The Chair did however suggest the benefit of adding a current HE student to the Taskforce membership to augment the valuable contributions made by the current student representatives. It was agreed this should be pursued by the Taskforce Project Team.

The Chair stated that Taskforce meetings beyond the summer will be less frequent, likely every 8-10 weeks. They will continue to be mostly online, although he hoped the final one in the spring of 2025 would be in person.

**Action:** Members who are unable to extend their membership of the Taskforce beyond the summer to contact the Taskforce project team.

**Action:** The Taskforce project team will confirm dates for Taskforce meetings beyond this summer.

**Action:** Taskforce Project team will explore options for an additional HE student representative as a Taskforce member.

### 4. Case management

An update was provided on the case management work strand:

- Discussions with HE providers have completed and findings from these conversations will be shared with The University Mental Health Advisors Network

(UMHAN) and The Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE).

- The consensus from HE providers was that clarity is needed on the most effective ways of supporting students with significant mental illness who were engaging with and/or causing concern to a range of academic and support services simultaneously.
- The next steps will be formalised in the Taskforce 2nd stage report and will be discussed by The Taskforce in the May meeting.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members:

- At this stage, given that the aspiration of a nationally joined up system is challenging due to lack of funding, the Taskforce should consider interim options.
- The Chair noted that a national system around sharing information is part of a different strand of work. This strand focussed on ensuring there are systems in place within HE providers which enable one member of staff to ensure that information held by different teams at a university is connected, allowing an individual student's welfare to be effectively managed.

## 5. Student commitment

An update was provided on the student commitment work strand:

- The framework has been reviewed by four student reviewers, including one international student, in addition to an academic expert on neurodivergence. It was well received and feedback is currently being processed.
- Conversations continue with The Academic Registrars Council (ARC) executive committee about embedding the outcome of this work within the sector. The paper was well received by ARC, albeit it had some questions about areas outside of their members' remit. Taskforce members will be updated when it reaches a decision.
- The Chair reflected on the positive progress of this work, how it addressed a clear problem identified from engagement with bereaved families, and the way it makes clear to students what to expect and how to seek redress should their university fall short.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members:

- A Taskforce member asked for an update on discussions with Student Minds regarding embedding the commitment into the University Mental Health Charter. They were informed that positive discussions regarding embedding the Student Commitment and the Competency Framework into the Charter had been held.

Student Minds plan to make these resources available to members via their online resource hub. Conversations around how this work can contribute to award status are continuing.

- A Taskforce member questioned whether there was a contingency should ARC not take on this work. The Chair stated there are other options available should ARC decide against it.

## **6. Adoption of best practice**

Taskforce members were updated that work was continuing on a robust process for universities which are not eligible for University Mental Health Charter, or in some cases eligible but too small to fulfil the awards process. An update would be provided in the Taskforce 2nd stage report.

The current thinking is that principles around mental health strategies will include higher education providers having a published mental health strategy informed by good practice and local student feedback, an action plan to ensure strategic objectives are delivered, a mechanism for oversight by the governing board, and transparency on progress for students and parents.

For HE providers which are Charter Programme members, this action plan should include concrete steps on areas being addressed to achieve the next level of Charter Award.

Consultations with mission groups representing small and specialist HE providers will continue to understand the resource impact and suitability of this approach.

The Chair stated that it is important that this work does not cut across the work of the Charter Programme, but must address the challenges of universities' accountability, ensuring they publicly demonstrate their progress to stakeholders.

Members were also provided an update from Student Minds on the Charter Programme target:

- Student Minds currently plans to open its membership window between 13 May to 5 July.
- It will hold 2 Q&A sessions with prospective members, on 1 May and 12 June.
- Information packs have been updated and published.
- Investment into Student Minds' resource hub is allowing for increased scale.
- Following feedback from Taskforce members, Student Minds will also now review engagement with the programme from members.
- A report from the formal review of the framework is due to be received in July.

- A consultation with members to understand barriers and concerns will be published by September. This will also address a review of the Award process.
- There are still 3 roles which Student Minds needs to fill following receipt of the recent additional investment.

The Chair raised concerns that the report which addresses barriers and concerns from UUK members which have not yet joined should be published before the membership window opens to ensure that prospective members are assured that perceived barriers are being addressed before they join the Programme. He noted that at the last meeting this opening date had been agreed to be in June 2024, alongside the sharing with the sector of the outcome of the light touch review. He argued that the membership window should close in September, to coincide with communications about the membership target end-date and to align with the ministerial target. He has written to Student Minds raising these concerns and requested it reconsiders these timelines and will feedback to the Taskforce on progress. He will also liaise with relevant colleagues at the OfS on these matters.

Taskforce members were assured that collecting feedback from members which improves the University Mental Health Charter Programme takes place regularly as part of ongoing work. This includes during communities of practice sessions and from HEPs in the awards processes. It has identified the need to help universities through the process clearly, but this must not compromise the rigour of the Programme or Award.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members:

- UUK has written to 29 of its members which are yet to join the programme to understand their intention and collect anonymous feedback. 12 of these universities have responded to the request, with 9 signalling intention to join, 2 yet to make decision, and 1 not intending to join.
- One barrier raised by UUK members was the resource commitment required to engage with the Programme fully and concerns about diverting resource from other vital wellbeing services. This factor must be considered seriously in the context of current financial pressures on the sector. Some members have provided feedback that they do not believe the apparent clinical model assumed by Student Minds was either explicit in the Charter or appropriate for their institution. Feedback also includes the need for Student Minds to be clearer on the commitments members are making.
- This feedback from UUK members will be shared with Student Minds. It was agreed that these issues were not new and that their familiarity should enable to Student Minds respond to them by the June date originally agreed.
- GuildHE has also consulted their eligible members who are yet to join the programme on their intention to join the Programme. 3 of their members have

signalled strong intention to join the programme. Concerns raised by Guild members echo that of UUK feedback - primarily on resources required and a lack of clarity of the flexibility of the charter in different institutional contexts.

- A member raised concern that, without regulation, engagement with the University Mental Health Charter and other approaches will be considered discretionary by institutions and therefore not prioritised.

## 7. Information sharing

A summary of the paper sent to Taskforce members was provided:

It was clarified that for the Taskforce this area of work addresses transitions for students with mental health problems. The HE and FE Student Support Champions are also considering this area of work, with potential solutions to cut across a range of needs.

Further engagement with the sector is needed to understand plausibility of solutions. The Chair will continue this work in his role as HE Student Support Champion.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members:

- Considering compatibility of solutions, such as passports, with the systems HE providers have must be considered.
- A member raised the importance of consulting with devolved administrations to ensure that information can be shared from UK students transitioning from outside of England.
- A member raised the possibility of more immediate local solutions to information sharing. This was happening and could be developed further. However, the point was raised that overall only a minority, albeit in some specific HEPs a majority, of students transition into HE from a school or college based in the same location.
- Several members raised the importance of UCAS's role in encouraging and enabling students to make disclosures at application phase. Though another member also reminded members it is important to remember that not all students apply through UCAS.
- A member suggested that it would be useful to communicate with students about what information is helpful to disclose and why. The Chair will speak to UCAS about this.
- A member stressed the importance of consistency in routes across HEPs for students to disclose their needs.

- Members raised the concerns applicants will have about disclosing mental health conditions, particularly whilst applying for competitive universities, as they may feel it will decrease their chances of being accepted to the HE provider. A member suggested that information should not be shared until after the student has been accepted.
- A member raised that although international students might be out-of-scope, they will still impact the work and resources of HE providers and it should therefore be considered in the next phase of Taskforce work.

## 8. Training for non-specialist staff

The competency framework draft was shared with Taskforce members.

Input at working group sessions has been very productive and work continues on finalising the draft.

The framework should be viewed as a baseline across professions as it has been raised that specific training needs will vary across different professions. The framework identifies a common core across the roles.

As a next step, current training available in the sector will be identified. This may be mapped against the framework; however, as the landscape changes rapidly with some resources possibly out of date, it may just take the form of a resource list.

The Project Team will work with professional bodies and HR leaders to ensure the framework is embedded in the sector.

Feedback so far has praised the clarity the framework provides.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members:

- A Taskforce member queried when Taskforce members would be asked for comment on the framework. Members can join the next working group session to provide detailed feedback. The Chair also encouraged members to contact the project team with any such feedback as soon as they are able.
- A Taskforce member praised the work, but noted that, as the framework is high-level, HE providers will likely map their internal training against this leading to inconsistency. AMOSSHE will put a call out to their members for resources, which could be used to develop a pack to be used as a starting point, alongside the framework.
- The Chair agreed that whilst many HE providers will have good resources already, the framework can be used to identify gaps which providers can work together to



address. He also noted that the HR Directors Network will have useful resources and the project team will reach out to them.

## 9. Student analytics

A paper was shared with members which outlines the key challenges HE providers face in adopting data systems to identify students at risk.

Recent developments across the sector should address many of the issues that HE providers have faced in leveraging data for wellbeing, such as the evaluation of the Northumbria University project, published by JISC, and TASO's announcement that it will be evaluating how effective interventions on students identified by wellbeing analytics are.

The Taskforce Project Team has identified 3 additional potential activities to support progress:

- Survey to HE providers to understand barriers faced. It was noted that this might not provide any new information.
- Working with 'trailblazer' providers in a working group which highlights the benefits of this work to the wider sector.
- The HE Student Support Champion working with Advance HE to develop a framework of principles for effective student support design.

The Project Team will consider how the implementation of analytics, and other data systems, might transform the design or delivery of support within a HE provider.

Taskforce members will be invited to the next subgroup meeting on this work strand.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members:

- A member stated that they feel progress from HE providers has been slow. The Chair took the point, but stated this work takes a lot of design and resource from providers.
- A member stated that systems are just one part of this; it is key to have an individual or team in the university to respond to issues raised by the system. The Chair agreed that there is more work to do, and the systems redesign project work in his capacity as HE Student Support Champion seeks to address this.
- A member stated the importance of demonstrating a return-on-investment on these systems.

## 10. NHS primary/secondary care

Taskforce members received the following updates:

- The primary care project aims to provide practical guidance and case studies on collaboration between HE providers and local GPs.
- Conversations continue with NHS and DHSC colleagues.
- Next steps will include conversations with existing partnerships to build case studies.

Taskforce members were provided with a summary of the paper on secondary mental illness services and were asked to note that:

- A range of models have been contacted. A commonality between these models is that they are structured, formal collaboration models which seek to address a particular group of students, usually students with long, complex or serious mental health issues.
- The response from the teams behind these models has been encouraging and they are willing to work with the Taskforce on developing the work in this area.
- Next steps are to conduct a literature review, as well as interviews over June.
- A working group will be convened in May or June which will consider responses so far and draft guidance to the sector.
- Guidance will be tested with HE and health providers over the summer, and we will aim to share an update in the 9th Taskforce session.

## 11. Next steps and close

Next Taskforce meeting will take place 31st of May 10:30am.

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