



Department
for Education

Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce

Notes of 6th Taskforce meeting held on 7th March (12:30 – 14:00), 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
- Angela Halston – Senior Policy and Engagement Officer, Independent HE (IHE)
- Jane Harris - Chair, Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Expert Group (MWBHE)
- Dr Mark Shanahan – member of 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
- Prathiba Chitsabesan - National Clinical Director for Children and Young People's Mental Health, NHS England
- Lee Fryatt - Co-founder, The LEARN Network
- Polly Harrow - FE Student Support Champion
- Dominic Smithies - Head of Influencing & Communications, Student Minds
- Helen Megarry - Chief Executive, Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

Apologies

- Professor Steve West - Board member, UUK
- Emma Douthwaite - Acting Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Office for Students (OfS)

- Professor Louis Appleby - Chair of National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group
- Jen Hope - Senior Policy Lead, Association of Colleges (AoC)

In Attendance

- Mark Ewins – Head of Mental Health, NHS England
- Dr Kate Wicklow – Policy Director (Insight, Access & Student Experience), GuildHE [deputising on behalf of Gordon McKenzie]
- Department for Education (DfE) Officials
- Ben McCarthy - Student Support Champion's team
- Jenny Shaw - Student Support Champion's team
- Hayley Lennox – Hughes - Children and Young People's Mental Health Policy, Department of Health and Social Care [deputising on behalf of Matt Lee]
- Peter Fonagy - National Advisor, NHS

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chair welcomed members and thanked them for their continued engagement. New Taskforce members introduced themselves.

2. Confirmation of Previous Minutes

The Chair shared feedback he had received from members outside of Taskforce meetings that called for more detail in published minutes. He said he would seek to ensure that was the case as far as was possible.

3a. Work strand Updates – Learning and Development of Non-Specialist Staff

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- A working group has been convened and consensus reached on what a suitable training package for non-specialist staff should include. This included members of the Taskforce.
- The current working assumption is that the remit of this work includes all staff with student-facing roles.
- A high-level competency framework is being developed.

- This framework will be shared with relevant representative and accreditation bodies for comment and, thereafter, endorsement and adoption.
- Feedback from the sector has been positive to date.
- A final version of the framework will be brought back to the Taskforce.

3b. Work strand Updates – Identifying At-Risk Students with Analytics

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- JISC will shortly be publishing documents which will support institutions with the use of data analytics to identify at-risk students, including;
 - An evaluation of the Northumbria University analytics project
 - A data maturity framework
- JISC has also recently published a digital transformation framework and a guide for senior leaders on embedding analytics.

The Taskforce would be consulted on what further steps it might take on this issue once this material had been reviewed. In the meantime, Taskforce members are invited to contact the Taskforce project team with any thoughts on this matter.

3c. Work strand Updates – Adoption of Good Practice

The revised AoC mental health charter had been launched – and shared with Taskforce members – ahead of the meeting and the following points were discussed:

- The new AoC charter has been redesigned to be far more aligned with the principles and practices that underpin the University Mental Health Charter.
- There has been good feedback from AoC members.
- The AoC is targeting 100% of FECs signing the Charter by September 2024.
- Concerns were raised over the lack of external assessment to ensure that AoC members are implementing the requirements of the Charter thoroughly. AoC is determined that sharing of lessons and communities of practice will lead to significant improvements across Colleges. Furthermore, FEC Corporations have a role to play here in delivering oversight.
- There are no current plans for external accreditation, but AoC will follow developments of HE Charter closely and could revisit this element in the future.

- Members raised potential levers which could ensure that FE colleges are abiding by the principles of the AoC charter, including Ofsted reports and Competition and Markets Authority legislation.

In respect of the UMHC, members considered:

- Student Minds is aiming to complete the first stage of its light-touch review by end of June 2024. Its opening position was that experience suggests that the principles of the Charter are still relevant.
- Vice Chancellors at English universities which have not joined the programme will be contacted for feedback on their reservations by UUK. This will be shared with Student Minds to respond to in its review.
- Programme membership window will re-open in June 2024, with drop-in sessions taking place in May and June to encourage dialogue with HEPs yet to sign-up. The target remained 100% sign-up by English universities by September 2024.
- A member of the taskforce expressed their strong disagreement with the target to join the Programme being a suitable measure for sector improvement. It is not a measure that indicates any level of engagement or action to improve their practice.
- This member also called for Student Minds to be more transparent on programme members' journeys towards securing award status.
- Student Minds will report on general levels of engagement, as well as share publicly general insights of the awards assessments. It is not proposing to name where individual institutions are in the awards journey as it does not believe this will encourage HEPs to enter the awards process and undertake the development work required.
- Two members stated strong disagreement with this approach. The Chair invited Student Minds to reflect during its review on how it may find ways to meet their concerns and become more transparent.
- Results from the latest awards assessments will be announced very soon. It was noted that the majority of institutions which have gone through the assessment process to date have achieved 'award with conditions' status.

3d. Work strand Updates – Case Management

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- The Taskforce Project team is currently engaged in conversations with providers which have implemented case management systems. Three key themes are being explored in these conversations:
 - Why did the provider embed a case management system?
 - What have been the challenges in embedding this system and how were they overcome?
 - What role could the Taskforce play in developing capacity and capability in HEPs?
- AMOSSHE and UMHAN will be consulted on this work over the coming weeks.
- There will be an update on this work at the next Taskforce meeting.

4. Student Commitment

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- A draft commitment has now been developed which was shared with Taskforce members.
- The commitment draws on excellent input from the OIA and ARC (Academic Registrars Council).
- It is anticipated that ARC may take ownership of this work going forward.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members with regards to the formulation of this work:

- Some members fed back their wish for the name to remain as 'Student Commitment'.
- A member raised they felt 'Commitment to Students' is more appropriate.
- Whilst perhaps not ideal, the consensus was that the current framing was becoming familiar and should be retained.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members with regards to the content and wording of the commitment:

- Several members supported the use of the term 'kind' in the draft, as it has consistently been a popular term with stakeholders and has some justification in the literature.

- Several Taskforce members stated the need to define what kindness means here as context to what the commitment is seeking to achieve.
- Members agreed that providers need to show compassion, but they also need to be firm and clear.
- Several members stated that the paper needs to reflect that it is vital for students to be active participants in their own care and development.
- The importance of ensuring that wording of policies, procedures and communications does not leave universities open to unfair complaints and litigation was raised.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members with regards to how this work should be communicated and deployed into the sector:

- A member raised that the notion of confidential information in the Commitment could lead to siloing of information; this issue will be picked up with the Chair separately.
- Students need to be clear that universities have made this commitment, and what it means in practice, and universities are accountable for delivering it.
- A member questioned whether the Commitment could be incorporated as part of the University Mental Health Charter.
- It was suggested that the most effective way of operationalising the Commitment may be to encompass its principles and practices into future versions of existing local charters which HEPs sign up to with students.
- A member strongly expressed that any commitment should extend to university staff as well as students; implementation requires a cultural change which will not succeed fully if the commitment is limited to students and does not pursue a compassionate campus.
- The project team will collect feedback from students on the draft, particularly from neurodivergent and international students.

5. UCAS

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- It was clarified that the aim of this work is to understand how disclosures of mental health conditions can be increased, linked to the processes of UCAS and providers following a disclosure.
- How relevant information held by schools can be transferred to UCAS through the reference is also being considered.
- UCAS hopes to provide an update on this work to the Taskforce in the May meeting.

The following points were raised by Taskforce members:

- A member noted that a key reason for this area of work is to streamline the process, ensuring that students do not have to constantly repeat the details of their conditions and needs. They stated that UCAS applications are just one stage, and more must be done to ensure applications to the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) are also streamlined. The Chair stated that issues at DSA application stage should be considered after work on the UCAS application has progressed.
- A member warned that caution must be exercised when considering how information is shared from schools and FE to HEPs. Student autonomy must not be undermined nor student confidentiality compromised.
- A member raised the importance of how the need for disclosure is framed to students. There must be a balance between not over-burdening students and being clear that HE is not school.
- A member questioned the level of student engagement UCAS undertake to understand real and perceived barriers to disclosure. The Chair will ask UCAS to provide details of how they are engaging with students to understand the barriers to disclosure.

The Chair noted the need for DfE colleagues to work together internally to look to weave together information about learners from FE and schools and connect this into HEPs. This will be picked up in his work as HE Student Support Champion.

6. NHS Secondary Care

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- The working group held their first meeting on 5 March.
- Taskforce members were provided with a template derived from examination of existing literature on HE-NHS collaboration.
- The template will be shared with identified models of care to elicit information about their design, implementation, and feasibility.
- The plan is for different models to be shared with HE providers, to engage them in implementation, but the Taskforce will not look to prescribe any specific model.
- The working group will meet again to evaluate the responses from the partnership models and to reach consensus on what to include in the guidance.

- A member provided an update on recent discussions with the Royal College of Psychiatry on their emerging work on the topic of student mental health and potential collaboration with the Taskforce.

7. AOB

The Chair shared the news with members that his role as HE Student Support Champion, and therefore Chair of this Taskforce, has been extended by 12 months to 31 May 2025. Public announcement was made on Thursday 14 March. Current Taskforce role and membership is only confirmed until May 2024 and will therefore need to be reviewed; this will be discussed at the next Taskforce meeting.

8. Next Steps and Close

Next Taskforce meeting will take place 19 April 10:30am.

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