



Department
for Education

Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce

Learning and Development for Non-Specialist Student Support Roles

This strand of work emerged from the 'Developing the Future Plan' work and was outlined in the Taskforce First Stage Report. Concern was expressed that there is no standard student support training for many non-clinical job families, especially when it comes to identifying and responding to student mental health needs. There was a call for a clear and agreed framework for the professional development of all university staff, detailing core competencies required by each job family.

Update

A working group has met twice and reached a broad consensus on the basic expectations of student-facing staff when interacting with a student who can reasonably be judged to be in distress. The Competency Framework will set out a minimum standard of knowledge, skills and behaviours that can be expected of these staff.

In addition to the competencies themselves, the group identified a small number of organisational procedures that would enable staff to respond in a safer way to student distress. These procedures chiefly relate to organisation-wide communication, escalation and emergency protocols and are not deemed to be onerous.

A draft version of the Competency Framework will be circulated for review on 16 April.

The Competency Framework itself is likely to be advisory, but early conversations suggest it will be embedded into existing professional standards and recognition schemes, and that HE organisational development teams will find it helpful and easy to work with. The working group includes key professional bodies: UKAT (personal tutors), SEDA (educational developers), CUBO (accommodation and catering) and AMOSSHE (in relation to non-clinical student services). Positive conversations have been held with Advance HE and Universities Human Resources, and meetings are being arranged with OfS and UCU.

Additionally, there have been conversations with Student Minds about how the Competency Framework can be shared with institutions who are working towards the UMHC through their Hub and development programme.

The original brief of work included mapping existing training and guidance to the competency framework. At this stage, the proposal is to provide a list of resources but to

lean more heavily on the knowledge and experience of professional bodies and organisational development specialists. This approach offers some guidance for smaller providers but avoids being overly prescriptive in what can be a rapidly changing field.

For example, UKAT – the Professional body for Tutors and Academic Advisors - intend to extend their Professional Framework to include the agree competencies. This will inform how they develop the training and resources they offer to members, and it will be included as part of their professional recognition scheme and pilot Institutional Accreditation scheme. They consider the Competency Framework to be timely, in line with a strong upsurge of interest in the pastoral side of academic tutoring and advising.

Discussion points

The Taskforce is invited to comment on the direction of travel of this strand of work and to recommend further strategies for embedding the Competency Framework within the sector.

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