



Department
for Education

Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce

Notes of 9th Taskforce meeting held on 6th December (13:00 – 15:00).

Chair

Higher Education Student Support Champion, Professor Edward Peck.

Members Present

- Suzy Allinson – Safeguarding and Welfare Manager, Office for Students (OfS).
- 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.
- Prathiba Chitsabesan - National Clinical Director for Children and Young People's Mental Health, NHS England.
- Kathryn Cribbin - Student Representative, QAA student panel.
- Mark Ewins – Head of Mental Health, NHS England.
- Angela Halston – Senior Policy and Engagement Officer, Independent HE (IHE).
- Jane Harris - Chair, Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Expert Group (MWBHE).
- Peter Mayhew Smith - representing Association of Colleges (AoC).
- Helen Megarry - Independent Adjudicator - The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
- Olivia Okobia – Student Representative, Nottingham University.
- Mark Shanahan - Co-founder, The LEARN Network.
- Dominic Smithies – Head of Influencing and Communications, Student Minds.
- Jill Stevenson – Chair, Association of Managers of Student Services In Higher Education (AMOSSHE).
- Professor Steve West - Board member, UUK.
- Dr Kate Wicklow – Director of Policy and Strategy, GuildHE.

Apologies

- Lee Fryatt - Co-founder, The LEARN Network.
- Polly Harrow – Further Education Student Support Champion.
- Matt Lee - Head of Children and Young People's Mental Health Policy, Department of Health and Social Care

- Dr Dominique Thompson - Clinical Advisor, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Student Minds.

In attendance

- John Bloomfield – AMOSSHE.
- Peter Fonagy – National Clinical Advisor of the NHS England Children and Young People's Mental Health programme.
- Ben McCarthy - Student Support Champion's team.
- Amanda Oliver – Committee of University Chairs (CUC).
- John Rushford – Committee of University Chairs (CUC).
- Jenny Shaw - Student Support Champion's team.
- Department for Education (DfE) Officials.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed members and thanked them for their commitment and contribution to date which was reflected in the second Taskforce Report which had now been published.

Baroness Smith shared a video message with members thanking them for their important work, also acknowledging the progress which had been contained in the Report.

2. Compassionate Communications Update

The following updates were shared with Taskforce members:

- The Compassionate Communications framework has been published and shared with the sector.
- The Academic Registrars Council (ARC) is leading on dissemination of this work across the sector and has seen good engagement so far. It was launched at the ARC conference in November.
- An article written by the Chair is due to be published on HEPI next week as part of a continuing approach to maintaining its profile.
- Members were invited to provide ideas and suggestions for further ways to promote the launch of the framework and suggestions were forthcoming, such as the British Universities Directors of Finance Group (BUFDG), the Student Loans Company (SLC) and Student Finance England (SFE), as well as students' union groups via National Union of Students (NUS).

3a. Supporting Adoption of Good Practice – University Mental Health Charter (UMHC) and Association of Colleges (AoC) Mental Health Charter

- Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- Student Minds has published a package of reports available on their website:
- UMHC Development & Continual Improvement Report.
- UMHC Award Assessment Insights Report.
- UMHC Framework Review (2nd edition).
- UCLan UMHC Evaluation Report.

The AoC Charter has now been live for around 9 months and a significant number of colleges have signed-up. This Charter maps across to the UMHC.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- A Taskforce member asked for any available insights from universities as to why they had not chosen to join the UMHC programme. They asked also whether government was continuing to push for full membership.
- In response it was noted that almost every medium and large university was signed up and it was acknowledged there is still work to be done to explore how the UMHC Programme worked for smaller members. Reasons for providers not having joined include financial cost and time commitment in a context where resources are being focused on delivery of services. However, over 90% of students at universities in England are covered by Charter Programme membership representing strong progress on coverage since the initial target was set. In these circumstances it had been agreed that continuation with a target for sign-up was unnecessary.
- A member observed that joining a programme does not by itself improve support at universities and asked what is being done to ensure members are engaged and working towards to assessment process?
- Student Minds is clear on the expectation of members to engage actively with the programme and will be monitoring the engagement and attendance of members. However, it does not plan to push members to take part in the assessment if they are not ready. The new cohort model of assessment will allow for assessees to receive their outcome reports more quickly.
- The Chair also commented that there is unlikely to be award assessment slots available for some time given the number of members waiting for assessment; thus, having additional programme members sign-up would not impact the number of assessments taking place for some time to come.
- A member asked for an update on the proposal to assess HE mental health support as part of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).
- The OfS administers the TEF. Early stage conversations about this proposal are taking place alongside wider conversations on OfS policies. The OfS hopes to be able to share more information in upcoming taskforce meetings.

3b.Supporting Adoption of Good Practice – Mental Health Governance Framework

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

The Committee of University Chairs (CUC) has been considering the literature and holding interviews with stakeholders. This has led to an early draft of a mental health governance framework.

This framework will focus on 9 key elements:

- The leadership, culture and behaviour of governing bodies and the role they play in promoting mental health.
 - Structural oversight and leadership on mental health, including through committee systems and a Board champion for mental health.
 - The development and oversight of an effective mental health strategy.
 - A clear resource model that focuses on preventative activity but which outlines appropriate support for high risk students.
 - A focus on monitoring, reporting, and evaluating, ensuring data are robust and encourage confidence in reporting.
 - Integrating mental health into risk management systems and processes.
 - Routine evaluation of mental health support with some form of independent input.
 - Assurances around the training and awareness of staff in relation to student mental health.
 - Clarity on the role of all stakeholders and partners, including statutory services, and assurances around governance arrangements and data sharing agreements that underpin these partnerships.
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- The draft also includes a list of questions which Boards can use to understand and evaluate their current arrangements.
 - Development of this draft will continue, followed by a consultation where Taskforce members and other stakeholders will be able to make comments. This is expected to take place alongside the next Taskforce meeting in February.
 - The Chair commented that this initial draft demonstrates the positive steps the CUC has made to take ownership of and progress this work.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- A Taskforce member argued that Boards' focus on reputation management in the most tragic cases has meant that universities sometimes adopt defensive legal behaviour at the expense of learning from tragedies and protecting future students. They asked what an effective process would look like which balances different drivers.
- The response was unequivocal that Boards need to focus on long-term reputation management, recognising that openness and learning will benefit them in the long-term even if this means adverse attention in the short-term. The Chair noted that the framework needs to clearly demonstrate the importance of openness.

- A member noted the recent drive to implement a duty of candour in healthcare systems and how this could shift the focus to transparency and engaging with bereaved families and a focus on sharing and learning.

4.National Review of HE Student Suicides – Early Findings

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- The National Review of HE Student Suicides, run by NCISH, will collate findings, predominantly from serious incident review forms submitted by higher education providers. These forms cover cases of suspected suicide, as well as serious self harm, which took place during the 2023/24 academic year.
- NCISH did also receive some other data, including Prevention of Future Death reports, and other reports on historic data from bereaved families, which will inform their study.
- The project's key focus is on learning lessons from and collating findings, not reinvestigating cases or allocating blame.
- The publication is due in Spring and it will analyse key themes, risks, and responses to incidents.
- The project will also report on the overall quality of the reports submitted.
- The report will make policy recommendations based on its findings.

5a. Identification of Students at Risk – Case Management, Analytics and UCAS

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates in relation to case management:

- Work is taking place with the University Mental Health Advisers Network (UMHAN) and Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE) to develop guidance and good practice to support the implementation of case management systems by higher education providers.
- In January 2025, discussions will take place with institutions to better understand their approach to wellbeing case management and to inform the development of guidance.
- Draft guidance will be shared with the Taskforce at its February meeting for review.

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates in relation to wellbeing analytics:

- A roundtable is planned for spring 2025, which will include discussion on the efficacy of wellbeing analytics and how institutions may go about implementing analytics systems.
- It was noted that major obstacles remain for institutions considering adopting analytics, including the cost and complexity of implementation.

- The Chair noted that the recent report by Jisc – collaboration for a sustainable future – may provide a helpful resource through which to contextualise the roundtable and consider how the sector may collaborate on wellbeing analytics through shared approaches to digital, data and technology.

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates in relation to UCAS:

- The discussion between UCAS and the Taskforce has been rescheduled for February to allow UCAS more time to consider how it will support student transitions, which will be outlined in its next strategy.

5b. Identification of Students at Risk – Competency Framework for Non-clinical Staff

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- With thanks to the working group, the final draft of the competency framework has been prepared and its launch is expected in January 2025.
- Advance HE has agreed to be the custodian for this framework and to develop and iterate it over time.
- Several Taskforce members offered positive feedback.

6. HE-NHS Partnerships

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- A draft paper was shared outlining the key themes and reflections from discussions with several HE-NHS partnerships.
- From this paper, initial draft guidance will be prepared early in 2025 and shared with appropriate stakeholders and the Taskforce for comment.
- The final paper will not recommend one single model, but will outline fundamental principles that should be considered when implementing and designing a HE-NHS partnership.
- Full launch of the guidance is expected later in the year, and work is taking place to consider appropriate forums through which to socialise and disseminate the guidance.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- The new NHS 10-Year Health Plan is underway and there should be inclusion of student mental health within this.
- The Chair stated the importance of engaging with Ministers in DfE and DHSC on this strand of work and getting their joint endorsement.
- A key reflection from Bristol's HE-NHS partnership has been ensuring that risk assessments carried out by the universities are consistent with those used in and by the NHS.

- Collaboration between HE providers is crucial, so partnerships need to be designed to be inclusive to as many types of higher education providers as possible.

7.Next Steps and Close

Next Taskforce meeting will be 27 February 13:00.

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