



Department  
for Education

## Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce – Terms of Reference

### Purpose

The mental health of Higher Education (HE) students is a priority for government and the HE sector. The proportion of HE students reporting a mental health condition to their university or institution has been increasing over recent years<sup>1</sup>. We want to break down barriers to opportunity by ensuring all students are given the support they need to thrive, and all possible action is taken to prevent suicides which have a devastating impact on families, friends and communities.

Progress has been made to tackle this challenge by funding innovative approaches to student mental health and through the provision of additional services. Mental health experts and the sector have also worked to produce significant best practice guidance, supported by government, including the University Mental Health Charter, and a range of broader best practice from Universities UK, as well as guidance that applies to colleges. Since its inception, the Taskforce has produced further guidance directly addressing issues raised by those with lived experience, including guidance on compassionate communications and training for non-specialist student facing staff. However, there is wide recognition among mental health practitioners, charities, those with lived experience and the sector that more could and should be done.

The Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce aims to build on existing best practice and ensure that guidance and key initiatives are implemented in full, with greater clarity on which parts are applicable to different types of institutions, and with clear measures for identifying progress. It also aims to fill gaps in areas where more consistency is needed and where there is the opportunity to roll out innovative practice more widely. Ultimately, prospective and current students – and their parents/carers and families – need to have the confidence that students will feel safe in their HE setting and be able to access the right support to help meet whatever challenges they may face.

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<sup>1</sup> [Table 15 - UK domiciled student enrolments by disability and sex 2014/15 to 2023/24 | HESA](#)

## Scope of outputs

The Implementation Taskforce will support and challenge the HE sector to improve mental health and wellbeing for all students, across the diverse range of HE providers. It will be accountable to the Minister for Skills for delivering on these outputs, though many will be led and maintained by the sector and other bodies beyond the duration of the Taskforce.

In this new phase, the Taskforce will focus on implementation, ensuring that recommendations from the National Review of HE Student Suicides and the Taskforce's previous outputs are embedded across the sector.

By February 2026, the Implementation Taskforce should:

- Develop a sector-wide implementation plan for the Minister, setting out:
  - clear roles and responsibilities for different organisations
  - milestones and progress measures
  - expectations for different types of institutions
  - mechanisms for public accountability and reporting
- Support the sector to implement the recommendations from the National Review of HE Student Suicides.
- Promote and monitor the adoption of best practice across the sector, including approaches identified through sector-led charters and guidance, as well as the Taskforce's previous work. This includes improving the identification of students at risk, embedding compassionate communications, and strengthening HE–NHS partnerships.
- Address two new priority areas agreed with the Minister:
  - Accountability: exploring how to hold the sector to account for improving student mental health and implementing the review's recommendations and wider best practice.
  - Strengthen the data and evidence base around student mental health and wellbeing in higher education: working with relevant partners to explore options for a more systematic process for recording and investigating serious incidents, including student suicides. The Taskforce will support implementation of the national review's recommendations to ensure institutions have robust mechanisms for monitoring incidents and learning from experience. It will also identify gaps in the current evidence base and promote improved data collection, sharing, and evaluation to inform future policy and practice.
- The Taskforce will also consider the impact of neurodiversity on student's health and wellbeing, and how providers can best support these learners, as part of their work.

It will identify progress to date in these areas and articulate further areas of potential work.

By September 2026, the implementation taskforce should produce:

- a public document outlining:
  - progress made in implementing the review's recommendations and wider best practice
  - work still to be completed
  - areas where additional interventions by all parties should be considered by the minister and other actors for further improvement

In concluding its work, the Taskforce should consider what background documents and further considerations on next steps should be passed on to those who will take forward the work.

The group may, where appropriate, commission other relevant bodies and establish working subgroups to produce specific outputs, in particular where expert input is needed. It should also consult with stakeholders beyond the group to ensure its outputs reflect a wide range of views.

## Membership

The implementation taskforce shall be formed of experts in student mental health, those with lived experience and representatives from across the higher education sector and relevant government departments and agencies.

The expectation is that members will:

- contribute actively to the taskforce, including by helping shape its workplan, attending all implementation taskforce meetings and participating in relevant events
- use their expertise and experience to progress proposals on the four areas of focus for the taskforce, including by providing evidence and leading on development of papers and proposals where appropriate
- help ensure the interim and final reports are robust and delivered on time by providing relevant content for these reports and commenting in a timely way
- the taskforce will seek to operate on the basis of consensus around evidence and good practice. It will put the interests of students at the centre of its deliberations and look to establish where these lie most in the event of any dissensus. Where members continue to have significant differences with any publications, guidance or advice emanating from the taskforce, these will be recorded

The outputs of the taskforce will report directly to the Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern, and she will be invited as appropriate to be updated on its progress.

## **Confidentiality**

There will be a duty of confidentiality imposed on all taskforce members. Members may be exposed to sensitive information as part of discussions. Confidentiality is extremely important and, while it is understood that staff of taskforce members may see some documents connected to the group's work, unnecessary involvement of third parties in handling this material is strongly discouraged.

## **Conflicts of interest**

Members will ensure that there are no conflicts of interest likely to prejudice their independence and objectivity in performing their roles in the group. Where any such possible conflict of interest does arise (either before or during the term of the taskforce) members will declare it. Members and their employers will not use their position on the taskforce or information obtained in the course of that work, to benefit their employer, particularly in gaining advantage in competition to provide services to the Department for Education.

## **Frequency and duration of meetings**

The Taskforce should meet formally at least once every [to be agreed].

Sub-groups may be convened to take forward the outputs and these may meet more frequently as required.

The secretariat will be provided by DfE and will aim to:

- circulate papers a minimum of five working days before the meeting
- issue minutes no longer than five working days after the meeting

Papers and materials may be provided by appropriate members of the Implementation Taskforce, as well as by external bodies and individuals who are supporting its work.