Department for Education

Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce

Notes of the 11th Taskforce meeting held on the 22nd of May (10:15 – 12:15).

Chair

Higher Education Student Support Champion, Professor Edward Peck.

Members Present

- **Professor Sir Louis Appleby**, Chair of National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group (NSPAG) and Director of National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health (NCISH).
- **Mia Brady,** Student representative- Student Minds Student Advisory Committee.
- **Dr Nicola Byrom**, Network Leader- SMaRteN.
- **Suzanne Carrie**, Head of Student Equality and Welfare- Office for Students (OfS).
- **Prathiba Chitsabesan**, National Clinical Director for Children and Young People's Mental Health- NHS England.
- **Kathryn Cribbin**, Academic representation manager- Manchester Metropolitan University.
- **Angela Halston**, Senior Policy and Engagement Officer- Independent HE (IHE).
- **Jane Harris**, Chair of Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Expert Group (MWBHE).
- **Peter Mayhew-Smith**, Group Principal and CEO - South Thames Colleges Group, representing Association of Colleges (AoC).
- **Olivia Okobia,** Student representative.
- **Dr Mark Shanahan**, Member of The LEARN Network.
- **Dominic Smithies**, Head of Influencing & Communications - Student Minds.
- **Professor Sir Steve West**, Board Member - Universities UK (UUK).
- **Jill Stevenson**, Chair of 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.

In Attendance

- **John Bloomfield**, Executive Director - AMOSSHE.
- **Ben Elger**, Chief Executive, Office of the Independent Adjudicator.
- **Mark Ewins,** NHS.
- **Ellen Graves**, Policy Advisor - Guild HE (deputising on behalf of Kate Wicklow).
- **Ben McCarthy**, Student Support Champion's team.
- **Graeme Rosenburg,** Head of Student Equality and Welfare- Office for Students (OfS).
- **Jenny Shaw,** Student Support Champion's team.
- **DFE Officials.**

Apologies

- **Peter Fonagy**, Head of Division of Psychology and Language Sciences - University College London (UCL).
- **Lee Fryatt**, Member of The LEARN Network.
- **Polly Harrow,** Future Education (FE) Student Support Champion.
- **Cathryn Rodway,** Programme Manager and Research Associate - National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health (NCISH).
- **Kate Wicklow,** Director of Policy & Strategy - Guild HE.

Introductions

- The Chair welcomed Taskforce members thanking them for their work in producing the numerous outputs of the Taskforce.

Adoption of Good Practice

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates regarding the University Mental Health Charter Programme:

- 113 universities have signed up to the charter.
- 21 events have been held covering issues such as leadership, suicide prevention and gender-based violence.
- 30 awards assessments have been carried out to date with 17 award holders. 50% of institutions assessed have gained some level of award but should anticipate changes overtime.
- 2 pilot assessments have been confirmed.
- 40% of institutions have gone through the assessment or indicated a plan to do so by 2031.

- Student Minds are collecting insight from programme events and are currently live on recruitment for 25/26 membership.

There is an opportunity for government and ministers to encourage the sector to go through the award process and support non-member institutions to carry out work on mental health. Though Student minds acknowledge the need to balance this with ensuring that institutions are taking part in the assessment at the right time to provide them with value. The Chair encouraged DfE, OfS and Student Minds to liaise outside of this meeting to discuss this. Taskforce members raised the following points:

- A member congratulated two institutions who recently received awards.
- Several members questioned why there are available assessment slots. It was discussed that cultural adaptations, the financial landscape and long-term institutional planning were contributing factors. Members discussed whether HE providers should be offering and assessed on clinical support.
- A member stated that AdvanceHE are starting work on inclusion and if there is opportunity or risk in ensuring this works alongside other charters.
- A member stated that there are now around 50 charters on different issues which have been shared across the sector and there needs to be work to prioritise.

Taskforce members were provided with an update on the AoC's Mental Health Charter for Further Education (FE) providers.

- The charter is now adopted by approximately two thirds of the FE sector with 130 colleges signed up, 218 potential signatories and ongoing work to encourage the remaining 80 colleges.
- There is a reduction in the rate of increase of colleges reporting mental health incidents, particularly severe cases such as suicide and self-harm, however there has been in more minor cases.
- The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) delivery model is welcomed and supports the NHS 10-year plan.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- A member asked how the charter is viewed in relation to Ofsted.
- Ofsted will recognise the charter, but their focus is within observational evidence.
- The Chair asked how far FE corporations oversee the charter and AoC's approach in promoting this. The Chair also welcomes a further conversation on how the Taskforce can support this in the next meeting.
- A member asked if neurodiverse referrals are more prevalent rather than explicit mental health cases and would welcome an offline conversation with DfE on this.

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates regarding adoption of good practice from IHE members:

- IHE are working to offer a document of good practice and develop wellbeing & mental health strategies alongside The Charlie Waller Trust.

- Pilot session ran 24/25 for IHE members and created a community of practice via the IHE training platform.
- For the most part, IHE members are not engaging with the Student Minds Charter.
- IHE are working on a governance guidance document alongside their members. It has been circulated to members for comments and is based on similar principles as the second stage report and Committee of University Chairs (CUC) guidance.
- Looking ahead, members will re-run a survey on adoption of best practice with their members, which was previously circulated 2 years ago.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- The Chair asked for an update to be brought to the next meeting on oversight of impact and government engagement.

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates regarding CUC governance guidance:

- CUC will publish governance guidance in the upcoming months with Taskforce members given an opportunity to review in advance.
- Guidance will be shared with governing bodies to enact change and presented at the AMOSSHE conference.

Actions:

- Student Minds to engage with UKRI to discuss embedding inclusion in charter work.
- DfE to join up with data from schools regarding neurodiverse & mental health referrals.
- An update on oversight of impact and government engagement (in relation to the Mental Health Charter from an FE perspective) to be brought to the next Taskforce meeting.
- Integration of mental health and wellbeing into TEF will be discussed at the next Taskforce meeting.

Identification of Risk & Wellbeing Analytics

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- A well-attended roundtable on student analytics took place on 9 May with presentations from Northumbria University, Nottingham Trent University and JISC on analytical evidence, operationalising analytics and supporting analytics for the sector.
- The readout has been sent to attendees. Key points from this roundtable were:
    - There is interest in the use of analytics;
    - While analytics are a useful tool for identifying students at risk, it is not the only tool;
    - There is correlation between disengagement and suicide;
    - Institutions are developing how data is used more generally, not just for supporting student wellbeing.

- Taskforce members were asked to consider if there is future interest in shaping wellbeing analytics or other data projects.
- Transforming Access and Student Outcome for Higher Education (TASO) work in relation to this will be published shortly and JISC may wish to engage next year with the Taskforce.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- The Chair and other members stressed the need for UUK to keep momentum on this project.
- A member also stressed the key of this work is not simply focussing on the data collected but also ensuring case management systems ensure follow-up.
- The Chair suggested role is with institutions to uptake this work, and this is a watching brief for members.
- A member suggested there is a longer-term piece of work to understand the difference between technical systems and thematic analysis.
- A member was concerned from a research perspective that analytics are not accurate yet in this space and further work is needed on this.
- A member suggested we needed to focus on why we are collecting data and to feed this into the triage approach.

Case Management

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- The first draft of the case management product was shared with members in February, reflecting the most dominant approach to case management, informed by feedback from the HE sector, AMOSSHE and University Mental Health Advisors Network (UMHAN).
- Case management product will be published as part of the Taskforce report in June and presented at the AMOSSHE conference.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- Principles of the report were endorsed by several members with feedback to make recommendations clearer in the executive summary.
- A member raised the finding from The National Review of HE Student Suicides that institutions need to improve communication.
- A member was supportive of anything that improves communication between teams, but suggested clarity is still needed of specific individual responsibility for a case.
- Several Taskforce members highlighted challenges with data governance as information that is raised may not meet the threshold for intervention. The chair suggested that information should be used by the wider institution, not just the support team, with the threshold for intervention being assessed on a team-by-team basis.
- A member suggested publication of case studies from practicing institutions would be useful to further illustrate the impact of this system.

- A member raised concern that some students may be more able to open up to academics such as their personal tutor, and input from all teams needs to be equally valued. The Chair agreed that this needs to be a fully integrated system that values input from all teams. If this was not clear in the paper then work needs to be done to clarify that in the paper.
- A member suggested this needs to be supplemented by robust referral pathways to create a holistic support system.
- A member questioned how doctoral students should be classified in these systems. The Chair confirmed that they are students, not staff, and should be treated as such.

National Review of HE Student Suicides

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- The National Review of HE Student Suicides report has now been published.
- This project has now reached an end but the remarkable engagement and cooperation from institutions, demonstrates their commitment to learning and suicide prevention.
- Data collection has now stopped, this should be addressed to ensure a smooth transition between years and a continuation of strong engagement levels from providers.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- Taskforce members agreed that the momentum on this work should continue.
- DfE officials confirmed that they are considering options for the future of this project.
- UUK will work alongside DfE to update guidance for their members.
- The chair thanked NCISH for their important work and the sector for their strong engagement with this project.
- A member suggested the role of coroners should be considered, particularly due to variability across Preventing Future Deaths (PFD) notices.
- A member noted that neurodiversity and suicide is an increasingly common theme across students. Suggested for this theme to be discussed at Taskforce to bring mental health and neurodiverse approaches together.
- A member highlighted that while some media coverage has focused on critical views from a small number of parents, the bereaved families they've worked with have been strongly supportive of the Taskforce's efforts. They emphasised the importance of continuing this work, which has been shaped by the voices of those affected. They also noted that suicide rates remain concerningly high, and in the absence of legislation, urged a focus on practical, measurable actions by institutions— suggesting the Teaching Excellence Framework could be one such avenue.

HE-NHS Partnerships

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- Taskforce members have now received an updated draft of the report. Work is underway with NHS England to refine and finalise the report.
- The Chair confirmed his desire to get this work out to the sector quickly and encourage them to engage with their local NHS services.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- A member agreed that this should now be disseminated across the sector and welcomes approaches to gaining views of key stakeholders.

Reflections and Future of Taskforce

Taskforce members were provided with the following updates:

- DfE officials noted the department is committed to continuing the progress the taskforce has made.
- DfE are progressing with recruitment for the next HE Student Support Champion and Taskforce Chair, they hope to host the next taskforce meeting at the start of the new academic year.
- Next steps regarding the National Review will be clarified following the Spending Review.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- Taskforce members welcome the continuation of the taskforce and suggested implementation should be prioritised.
- Several Taskforce members suggested there should be a joined-up approach between mental health and disability and considering international student experience. This could be reviewed as part of the Taskforce terms of reference.
- Several Taskforce members also suggested that the scope for the taskforce should be narrow to ensure meaningful impact.
- A member suggested transitions of students coming out of university is a key struggle and should be a focus of the taskforce.
- Several Taskforce members suggested taskforce membership should be reviewed to understand if additional memberships are needed, dependent on priorities.

Close

- The Chair thanked all taskforce members for their commitment and collective efforts.