Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion in Higher Education

Prepared by the Universities UK/GuildHE Committee for the Promotion of Mental Well-being in Higher Education

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1. Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion in Higher Education

This document aims to be a source of guidance for senior managers in Higher Education in developing policies, procedures and activities promoting mental health. The main part of the document outlines some key principles and strategies while the appendix give examples of initiatives and activities being undertaken at a range of UK higher education institutions. This guidance information has been developed by the UUK/GuildHE Committee for the Promotion of Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education, which is developing a range of resources to support institutional initiatives. Further details of the aims and activities of this committee were circulated to all UUK and GuildHE institutions in June 2006.

2. Promotion of Mental Health in H.E.

Effective mental health promotion involves not only attending to the needs of those with mental health difficulties, but also promoting the general mental wellbeing of all staff and students, which will in itself bring significant benefits to the HE institution. Improved general mental wellbeing will impact on institutional reputation, staff and student recruitment and retention, performance in general [1],[2],[3], and on community relations. There is increasing awareness that mental wellbeing can be promoted by attention to, for instance, organizational practices, the general environment, availability of support, lifestyle, attitudes and social inclusion. To be effective, mental health promotion must aim to change behaviour and attitudes, not just provide information [4]. This document offers a framework for HE to guide the development of mental health promotional policies, procedures and initiatives. It does not set out to be comprehensive, and institutions may well find a need to address other issues not covered here.

Mental health promotion can be seen as involving:
 (i) the establishment of an environment at all levels of the institution to promote mental wellbeing for all through local initiatives, and/or participating in national or international projects such as the Health Promoting University Project [5].
(ii) the promotion of the needs and wellbeing of those individuals experiencing mental health difficulties.

3. Developing Institutional Mental Health Promotion Policies

The list below provides examples of strategic actions and principles that can be helpful in developing an institutional mental health promotion policy.

- Initiate regular research and review of current provision
- Involve both senior staff who can influence strategic others and initiate action, and staff with particular relevant expertise.
- Involve and consult staff and students who have direct experience of the impact of mental health difficulties (cf. the DDA Code of Practice [6]).
- Have a clear statement of aims and outcomes with clear indications of how these will be achieved, measured and evaluated.
- Address, and seek to change where necessary, relevant institutional procedures and practices, including organizational structure.
- Address institutional and individual behaviour and not just the provision of information.
- Link to wider initiatives where possible such as the Health Promoting University Project[5].
- Establish a steering committee at senior level with working groups to implement actions and continuation strategies.
- Embed policies and procedures in institutional structure.
- Make provision for long-term planning, funding and evaluation.

The Committee has also issued a framework for the development of policies and procedures for the support and guidance of higher education students experiencing mental health difficulties [7].

4. Promoting Mental Wellbeing

The aims of mental health promotion and related activities at institutional level might include some of the following:

- Providing a supportive environment that promotes a sense of inclusion amongst members of the institution and the local community, and provides opportunities for social inclusion and interaction.
- Introducing structural changes to reduce unnecessary stressors and increase support for both staff and students
  (cf (staff): http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/)
- Providing transparency and co-ordination in the workings of the institution that impact on both staff and students.
- Providing clear and widely accessible information about the availability of resources and support
- Strengthening appropriate pastoral care and support services for students and staff
- Promoting a healthy lifestyle and reducing drink and drug abuse
- Creating a pleasant working environment and promoting appropriate interaction through the design and layout of the built environment
- Reviewing course and programme design to reduce unnecessary stress.

Some examples of work in this area can be found in the Appendix.

5. Mental Health Promotion regarding Students and Staff with Mental Health Difficulties

Additionally, the aims of health promotion strategies in respect of individuals experiencing mental health difficulties might include:

- Promoting awareness of the requirements of relevant legislation (for example, the Disability Discrimination Act [6])
- Challenging any discrimination and stigma directed at those experiencing mental health difficulties, displayed by the institution, individuals and the local community [cf, 8-13]
- Making reasonable adjustments to provision to prevent academic disadvantage for students with mental health difficulties, consistent with maintenance of academic standards. Where possible, such adjustments should be made in anticipation through reviews of course design, teaching methods and materials and assessments (see Appendix: Supporting the Academic Task)
- Developing supportive but robust procedures that allow health-related breaks in study or work with assessment of readiness to return after such a break and facilitation of return to study or work.
- Offering intermediate qualifications at suitable points of a degree
- Promoting equality of opportunity for both staff and students with mental health difficulties in terms of admission and recruitment and academic and career progression
- Promoting and maintaining effective contact and cooperation between the institution and external helping agencies, including the NHS. (See Appendix: Liaison with the NHS)
- Providing support for staff dealing with students with mental health difficulties
- Making available informed financial and careers counselling when appropriate.

Some examples of work in this area can be found in the Appendix.

6. Supporting Staff working with Students with Mental Health Difficulties

Staff, particularly those such as personal tutors, academic staff, residential staff, and all those involved in the administration and day-to-day running of the institution may need support and guidance for working with students who are experiencing mental health difficulties. This list covers many of the issues involved, but is not exhaustive. Some examples of possible resources and responses are provided below.

i) Responding to issues affecting student performance:
   i. Raising staff awareness of the stresses of academic life on all students and also on particular groups of students, such as international students
   ii. Raising staff awareness about mental health difficulties and their potential impact on study and other aspects of student life.
   iii. Providing guidance for staff on the design of courses, teaching methods and materials and assessment tasks that facilitate effective learning for all students, including those with mental health difficulties.

ii) Guidance for staff on appropriate responses to students with mental health difficulties might cover:
   i. How to respond to a declaration of disability/mental health and how to provide appropriate opportunities for disclosure
   ii. The implications of the DDA and the principle of reasonable adjustments, including an outline of both personal and institutional liability.
   iii. Sources of support and information for staff dealing with students with mental health difficulties
   iv. The importance of setting appropriate boundaries in staff/student interaction
   v. The importance of early intervention and referral, including sources of specialist help and funding.
   vi. How to identify students who may be experiencing mental health difficulties, including those who may be at risk of suicide.
   vii. Responding to a crisis, including appropriate referral routes
   viii. Supporting the peers of students with mental health difficulties where necessary

Some examples of work in this area can be found in the Appendix: Supporting staff working with students.

Appendix

Some Examples of Projects and Initiatives of relevance to the Promotion of Mental Health in Higher Education Institutions

1. The Health Promoting University

University of Central Lancashire. Health Promoting Initiative [1, 2]
A health promoting institution is envisaged as a system whose performance will be improved by embedding a commitment to holistic physical and mental health and health promotion of staff, students and the wider community within the structure of the organization, together with the necessary skills, competencies and understanding of public and private health issues. At the University of Central Lancashire, a senior-management steering group of top decision-makers was established to achieve this aim and to generate innovative action, and a number of sub-groups, working groups and partnerships with organizations in the wider community were also established [1]. It was found to be necessary to have adequate resources, particularly of time, funding and administrative support. The sub-group on mental wellbeing reviewed relevant research and practice and the needs of students and staff, resulting in policy guidance and relevant activities and events [2].

Lancaster University: Health Promoting University Project [14]
This project aimed to provide a healthy working and living environment for students and staff by integrating mental and physical health promotion into routine organizational structure. A steering-group was chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor with representatives from relevant parts of the University, with three working groups usually chaired by members of the steering-group and consisting of representatives of staff and students, stakeholders, proponents of innovative ideas, and university decision-makers. The project was funded for two years which proved to be insufficient time for integrative organizational change.
A Mental Health working group initiated mental health promotion campaigns and events and established an externally funded Mental Health Working Party to embed appropriate mental health provision into university structures. The Healthy Working Life working group held focus group sessions with staff and circulated a report on staff stress.

Details of how to set up a health promoting university project are published by the World Health Organization [5]

The University of Bristol has a 'Positive Working Environment' project for staff http://www.bris.ac.uk/pwe/ which has 'the aim of making working life at the University of Bristol productive, rewarding, enjoyable and healthy for all colleagues'. Policies and procedures have been embedded which promote staff support and development, professional development for leaders and managers, improved communication processes (including a website) and an improved physical environment. These policies and procedures are subject to annual monitoring and evaluation.

2. Mental Health Policy Review Groups

University of Bath: Student Mental Health Strategy Working Group
The University of Bath Counselling Service is working collaboratively with National Health Service colleagues to improve the integration and effectiveness of mental health provision for students. The Student Mental Health Strategy Working Group is chaired by the Head of Student Services and includes counselling and learning support staff, the University Medical Centre practice manager, a psychiatrist, a G.P., and representatives of academic staff and students, and is being extended to relevant voluntary agencies. The group aims to:
- review the University's Student Mental Health Policy and Staff Guidelines in light of staff and student feedback and national best practice recommendations, including those highlighted in the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Report[15].
- develop and implement an action plan to implement the Student Mental Health policy
- develop, monitor and evaluate performance indicators in services offering support to students with mental health difficulties

- strengthen collaboration between different sectors, agencies and professional groups with responsibility for the mental wellbeing of University of Bath students

A Student Mental Health Worker, employed within the Counselling Service, and the Psychiatrist based in the University Medical Centre provide clear and effective links with the Community Mental Health Team and secondary health care services
For more information contact: e.v.davies@bath.ac.uk

University of Hertfordshire: Involving and Empowering People with Mental Health Difficulties
Viewpoint, a local agency tasked with representing the needs of people with mental health difficulties, has been invited to run a forum at UH. Viewpoint members are invited through their newsletter to contribute to the review of university mental health policy. *Viewpoint* has also contributed to curriculum review in mental health nursing and art therapy.
For more information contact counselling.service@herts.ac.uk

University of Sussex: Disabilities and Effective Inclusion Policies Project
The Disability and Effective Inclusion Policies Project (DEIP) is a collaboration between Sussex, Bristol and Lancaster Universities. It aims to explore ways in which the Higher Education sector can support equality of opportunity in education and employment for people who are disadvantaged through a range of disabilities, and who may also be disadvantaged because of their race, gender or age, Sussex is taking the lead on mental health, Bristol on deaf/visually impaired students and Lancaster on learning disability.
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities/1-2-9.html

3. Liaison with the NHS

Oxford Student Mental Health Network
A long established and productive network of Oxford universities and colleges and local NHS services. A full account of their work, information about research and links to other organisations can be found at www.brookes.ac.uk/student/services/osmhn

Durham University: Multi-Disciplinary Consultative Group for the Care of Student Mental Health
A group convened by the counselling service provides a forum for discussion between relevant staff in the university and in the NHS, meeting twice a term. It aims to promote better understanding and communication and to maintain clear pathways for referral. The group has the following membership:
- representing the University: Academic Registrar, Associate Dean of Colleges and Student Support Services (Group Facilitator), representative of the Vice Principals of Colleges, Assistant Registrar - SENDA representative (Secretary for the Meeting), Director of the Counselling Service, Director of the Service for Students with Disabilities, Coordinator for the Support of International Students, Chair of the Colleges Chaplains' Group, Students' Union Deputy President (Education and Welfare);
- representing the NHS: Consultant Psychiatrist, 2 Senior Clinical Leads - Psychiatry Liaison, Representative of Community Mental Health Team, Representative of Deliberate Self-Harm Team, Representative of Crisis Resolution Home Treatment Team, Representative of the First Psychotic Episode and Recovery Team, a local GP (also Student Medical Advisor).
For more information contact: m.r.fraser@durham.ac.uk

Cambridge University: Network to promote liaison between Universities and NHS
Cambridge University, in conjunction with Anglia Ruskin University, have established a network of relevant and interested University and NHS personnel to promote liaison and communication between the NHS and the Universities

The process of setting up the network involved gathering University support by including an item on the agenda of University senior management committees and using contacts to involve key NHS personnel. A conference was organized to raise awareness with the Universities and the NHS with high profile speakers with the stated aim of discussing the

implications of the recent report on student mental health from the Royal College of Psychiatrists [15]. Invitations were sent out to GPs, psychiatrists, community mental health workers, counsellors and therapists working with GPs, NHS and Universities, University senior administrators, tutors, nurses, chaplains, and bursars.

Following on from this, a network has been formed of relevant and interested NHS and University personnel to consider the local provision of mental health services for students in the light of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Report and to consider ways of improving the coordination of mental health care for students by improving liaison between services. The initial priorities of the network are: health promotion, continuity of care, identification of Mental Health Advisors in universities, identification of student Mental Health Advisors in local mental health services, collaboration in students' treatment and issues of confidentiality.
Contact person: Mark Phippen at mp222@cam.ac.uk

University of Leeds and NW Leeds Primary Care Trust
Since the creation of a Group on Student Mental Health Issues at the University of Leeds, and the appointment of a Student Health and Community Liaison Worker by the NW Leeds PCT in 2004, the two organisations have worked closely together to meet the mental health needs of students. Two groups were created to provide forums for discussion in the area of mental health, and health and well being with representatives from Universities and Colleges in Leeds, the PCT, the Leeds Mental Health Trust, and student unions.

The findings of these two groups are contained in a report 'Needs Assessment – Health and Wellbeing of Students in Leeds', presented in November 2005 to senior managers of Leeds universities and colleges (VCs, PVCs, Heads of Student Services), and PCT senior executives. The Chair of the Trust asked the universities and colleges to submit 5 key initiatives for action, one of which is a request to set up a mental health team for students comprising a psychiatrist and mental health workers. The PCT has funded a primary care mental health worker for students. Discussions are underway for a joint post between the University of Leeds and the PCT for a student mental health advisor post. Another initiative is health promotion in the area of alcohol and drug use. As a result of working together, focused mental health services for students will hopefully be further developed in the near future.
Contact person: n.r.humphrys@leeds.ac.uk

4. Supporting the Academic Task

There is a range of relevant teaching and learning resources available across the sector: some examples are given below, followed by examples of initiatives to support students experiencing difficulties:

The University of Wales Institute, Cardiff has published a good practice guide to accessible curricula: *Accessible Curricula: Good practice for all*, edited by Simon Ball and David Campy [16].

TechDis provides information on e-learning strategies and technical support issues, which can be as important for students with mental health difficulties as for those with physical disabilities. Details are available at http://www.techdis.ac.uk/

The National Disability Team (now disbanded) published a briefing paper for External Examiners on assessment issues and disability, and also one on Library and Learning Resources. These can be found at:
http://www.actiononaccess.org/index.php?p=1_3_3

The Open University have developed a website giving information on teaching and learning in relation to disability. It includes some mental health specific information (search on "mental health"). It provides practical advice about teaching inclusively and will also help to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. The development has been funded by the HEFCE as part of a major programme for improving disability provision. Topics covered include:`
  * how to enhance students' learning experience

- common barriers to learning and ways to find solutions
- type of learning support
- assistive technologies and specialist staff
- resources for staff development

http://www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/

The Geography Discipline Network: guidelines for fieldwork and related activities
The GDN network website provides guidelines for learning support for disabled students undertaking fieldwork and related activities, including students with mental health difficulties.
http://www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/

Nottingham Trent University Progression Support Team
Nottingham Trent University has set up a Progression Support Team to support students facing barriers to academic progression. The team has the following functions:
- Production of resources on issues such as concentration; motivation; stress; safeguarding mental well being; fact sheets about the incidence and consequence of mental health difficulties.
- Production of resources drawing attention to the fact that the team employs mental health specialists. These specialists can assist student with:
    - specific practical barriers faced in the educational context
    - building on student's own coping mechanisms
    - navigating university systems
    - involving academics in formulating joint "Progression Plans" which coordinate the approach of both Student Support Services and the academic department in supporting the student.
- Assessment of the needs of students with mental health difficulties, including undertaking DSA assessments and liaising closely with academic colleagues to ensure that appropriate adjustments are made
- Giving advice and information to students presenting with minor difficulties to help them take control of their own situation and where appropriate, referring to other services. This ensures that unnecessary dependencies are not built up.
- Working on an on going basis with students with significant difficulties. The emphasis of the support is always on empowering the student as much as possible to take control of their own situation.

The team is part of a wider multi-disciplinary team within Student Support Services with a close working relationship between the various teams which ensures that support is provided that takes into account all the student's needs.
Contact person: Philip Scarffe at philip.scarffe@ntu.ac.uk

University of Westminster: Mentoring for Students with Mental Health Problems
In response to the duty of care owed to students with long-term mental health difficulties under the Disability Discrimination Act, the university has developed a mentoring programme, staffed by professional Westminster counsellors, for students with long-term mental health problems. Before this it had been difficult to find appropriately qualified people to provide support. The programme is funded mainly by widening participation money and is a joint project between the Counselling and Advice Service and the Disability Services. It helps students:
- integrate into the University and into their courses
- find their way around the University systems
- manage their workloads
- devise more effective study strategies

The mentors are more proactive in their role as mentors than they would as counsellors, for example they contact tutors in the presence of the student and take students to see careers advisors. The advantage of using counsellors as mentors is that they have a considerable depth of understanding of psychological matters and an ability to spot the warning signs of a student in psychological trouble; they refer the student for further help, including formal counselling, if necessary.

Since the project started there has been a marked decrease in the number of reported incidents around the university involving unsupported students with mental health difficulties. More students have also felt able to come forward to disclose a mental health difficulty. For more information about the programme contact canda@wmin.ac.uk

5. Supporting Staff working with students

On-line Guides for Staff
Nottingham University Counselling Service has developed an on-line guide for staff 'Identifying and Responding to Students in Difficulty'. Sections are entitled: 'Your responsibility towards students in difficulty', 'Initial responses to a request for help', 'Your guide to referrals', 'Responding to more complex situations', 'Urgent situations', 'Confidentiality and its Limits', 'When to Consult' and 'Key Points'. Appendices cover the range of support services available, university policy and the DDA.
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/leaflets/guideforstaff.pdf
The Head of Counselling can be contacted at Pat.Hunt@nottingham.ac.uk

Another example – from Staffordshire University - can be found at
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/current/regulations/codeofprac/index.php

The University of Hertfordshire: Training Academic Staff
Many counselling services offer training on helping staff to support students and to follow the good practice recommended in their university's mental health policies. Counsellors and mental health staff work with tutors and, when requested, devise programmes to meet the particular needs of departments. Some offer more extended trainings.

The University of Hertfordshire Counselling Service has developed an intensive ten week course for personal tutors and other interested staff with a view to raising awareness of the psychological factors affecting teaching and learning. The first 'taught' half of a session covers issues such as managing the boundaries around the role of personal tutor, transitions, exam and learning difficulties, creating helpful interactions with students, recognising risk, and breaking bad news. The second half comprises presentations from course members around current issues in their work, with the aim of integrating theory with practice. The course is part of the Professional Academic Development Programme at the University and can be taken for credit. It has helped members of staff in their interactions with individual students and has also led to their devising supportive structures within their departments.
For more information contact counselling.service@herts.ac.uk

Action on Access (the National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation) has a briefing on Supporting Students with Mental Health Difficulties, including details of HEFCE supported case studies at http://www.actiononaccess.org/index.php?p=1_3_3_10&id=1155

Mind has a Powerpoint presentation (March 2005) on support for teaching staff supporting students with mental distress
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=17332&filename=WDP017

5. Peer Mentoring and Support

Oxford University Peer Support Programme
The Oxford University Peer Support Programme has been running since 1991 under the auspices of the University Counselling Service. Qualified peer support trainers provide 30 hours of skill-based training to both undergraduate and graduate student peer-supporters, focusing on:
- being a good listener
- helping others to feel more comfortable with social, academic and personal relationships

- helping others to manage and communicate about sensitive issues
- learning one's own limits within a listening situation
- knowing when to refer on the person being supported

Once trained, students on the peer-support panel, students are required to attend fortnightly supervision sessions with a qualified peer support trainer/supervisor. Through discussion of issues arising from the peer-supporters' role in college, the safety is ensured of the peer supporter, of the person seeking help and also of the college or institution in which the programme is based.

Resources available include a training manual[17]. For further information visit: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/shw/peers.shtml or contact: peersupport.coordinator@counserv.ox.ac.uk

Teesside University: Peer-Mentoring and Peer-Support Programmes
Peer-mentoring and peer-support programmes are developed in conjunction with academic departments at two levels: Level 1 (signposting and help desks) and Level 2 (students working with students on a range of issues from coursework to general student support). A Senior Counsellor is seconded for 2 days a week to the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement with specific responsibility for developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating peer-mentor and peer-support schemes across the University (including one introduced into the PDP module of the Business School).The training package for the student mentors is tailored for each School, and mentors are supervised, using the counselling supervision model.
For more information contact: s.scott-marshall@tees.ac.uk

6. Awareness Raising

National Campaigns
Universities can draw on campaigns run by national bodies such as Mind www.mind.org.uk the Royal College of Psychiatrists www.rcpsych.ac.uk/campaigns the Mental Health Foundation www.mentalhealth.org.uk

National Union of Students
The NUS are active in campaigning and awareness raising. NUS information about mental health can be found at:
http://www.officeronline.co.uk/campaignsupport/mentalhealth/271317.asp

Northumbria University Mental Health Advisor
The Mental Health Advisor:
- runs annual mental health awareness open days for all staff and students, held in the Students' Union theatre on campus, promoting healthy eating and lifestyles and stress relaxation. It involves local voluntary and charitable organisations who set up information stalls, as well as student services and the Students' Union;
- is proposing, in conjunction with a local charitable organization, to organize self-help groups for students on campus;.
- chairs a mental health forum which is open to any member of staff who has an interest in mental health issues;
- offers staff training based around wellbeing and self-awareness.

University of Leicester: interactive event for World Mental Health Day
As part of a wider health promotion programme, the Student Support Coordinator (Mental Health) arranges a celebration of World Mental Health Day each year by organising an interactive event in the Students' Union. Events focus on, for example, healthy eating. sport and exercise and stress reduction and students are encouraged to participate with freebies including piles of fresh fruit, slices of low fat pizza and low fat cereal bars. Opportunities are seized to engage students in conversation while they answer a competitive 'Test your Knowledge' mental health quiz; donated prizes include 'Stress Buster Massages' from local health clinic.

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