

**Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i gymorth iechyd meddwl mewn addysg uwch](#)**

**This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Mental Health support in Higher Education](#)**

**MHHE 2**

**Ymateb gan: Coleg Penybont**

**Response from: Bridgend College**

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**Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad. | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.**

**1. Maint yr angen | Extent of need**

From my experience, observation and reports from colleagues in the Student Wellbeing team, the challenges students face in HE in regard to their mental health include:

- Complex / multiple issues that have an effect on mental health such as financial / housing / relationship / childcare issues whilst studying and, often, employment.
- Availability and time to attend or access support with mental health services, particularly if they are engaged with multiple support professionals due to their employment, family and curriculum commitments.
- Students who have experienced domestic abuse, also suffering with the trauma and mental health concerns associated with that experience, whilst navigating the housing services, becoming homeless, placed in a women's refuge and ensuring any children involved are safe and cared for whilst remaining on their course and meeting academic deadlines.
- Statutory service delays to health services such as Adult Mental health, securing an appointment with GP's and a move to digital resources to access health services.
- If students have additional needs that make them more vulnerable, such as, physical health problems, care leavers, those with additional learning needs, students subject to social services involvement with their own children. We supported a student last academic year who accessed numerous mental health

and counselling support services whilst her child was going through the adoption process having been removed from her care.

- In terms of the effect of Covid-19 on the mental health of HE students include the pressure of attending their course whilst trying to home educate their children, managing the household and being in employment with limited support due to the lack of contact with their natural support network of friends / family / previous childcare arrangements. There was also an increase in anxiety about returning to social situations for fear of contracting covid or passing it onto more vulnerable members of their family. Not able to see elderly relatives residing in care homes and the numbers of bereavements students have had to endure throughout the pandemic.

## **2. Adnabod a darpariaeth | Identification and provision**

From my experience in Bridgend College there is a good working relationship between the wellbeing team and curriculum colleagues including HE, Work Based Learning and Apprenticeships. We recognise the limited availability of HE students and promote an online student assistance programme which the students can access at any time that is convenient to them. They can access advices and information about wellbeing, mental health, finance, housing, legal matters and many more issues as well as being able to request to speak to a counsellor who will speak to them on the same day as the request in the language they require.

We identify students who need support with their mental health via self-disclosure on their application form or at enrolment, or referrals from support staff, the ALN team and curriculum colleagues based on any concerns they may have or behaviours they have observed.

We have established an effective working partnership with ARC (Assistive Recovery in the Community) which is a local adult mental health service for those students living in Bridgend. We are able to refer students directly to ARC and they attend the campus at a convenient time for the student and carry out a consultation and refer the student onto the appropriate professional or support service. We also support student to call the single point of access team if we have concerns they are at immediate risk of harm due to their mental health which enables the student to have an immediate consultation by trained mental health professionals who then confirm whether they need to attend the local hospital on the mental health ward, or they

provide advice and guidance and how to keep themselves safe. There is also a good partnership with the local Mental Health Matters organisation who offer peer support groups in the community. There are a number of staff who are mental health first aid instructors who deliver Mental Health First Aid training to cohorts of staff to raise awareness about mental health, how to recognise poor mental health and the information to signpost appropriately.

Some students have reported having a more positive experience with Adult Mental Health services in terms of waiting list, being listened to and having access to the right support, as opposed to their experiences with CAMHS.

In Bridgend College we have a number of 'next steps' initiatives to support students with transitions, 'keep warm' initiatives to engage students in their learner journey prior to them starting with us, a student handbook to outline the support available to all students and 'freebies' promoting positive mental health and wellbeing such as free water bottles, invested in water stations, following the five ways to wellbeing and increased the visibility of the wellbeing team who wear purple and have a generic email and phone number.

Across the Post 16 sector I am aware that institutions are keenly aware of the challenges around supporting students with poor mental health, contributing factors and the emphasis on promoting numerous strategies around Mental Wealth, how to practice self-care, how to support good mental health and how to recognise the need for additional support.

### **3. Polisiâu, deddfwriaeth a chyllid Llywodraeth Cymru | Welsh Government policy, legislation and funding**

Additional funding that has been made available by Welsh Government over the last two academic years has significantly supported the recognised need to support the mental health of all students. In particular, regular meeting with neighboring colleges and WG colleagues has supported the sector to be consistent in its approach and gives colleges an opportunity to raise emerging themes and trends around the challenge of support student mental health.

As a college who has had a pilot project of a sexual health clinic on campus and an effective partnership with Adult Mental Health services, we have experienced the

benefits of being able to work closely with health colleagues and share information. It would reduce barriers for students and professionals if the communication between Education and Health was more accessible. Another element of good practice in this area is attending the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board as well as the Safeguarding week and Teaching and Learning Group Boards to understand the variety of health services and how to work together effectively. This is not consistent across all areas – health boards and HEI's.

#### **4. Argymhellion ar gyfer newid | Recommendations for change**

- Funding, new initiatives and pilot projects to be made available for a minimum of two academic years to all the programme to be embedded and enable effective impact monitoring.
- Health and Education services to be more aligned to support students / patients holistically.

#### **5. Arall | Other**