

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 08

Ymateb gan: Student Minds

Response from: Student Minds

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

As the UK's student mental health charity, Student Minds endeavours to ensure that we utilise the latest academic literature, the insights of colleagues across the sector and by engaging students to hear about their experiences.

Our own research from over the last 18 months has given us a reliable overview of the current extent of need. We have consistently seen around 1 in 4 students reporting having a diagnosed mental health issue and a further 1 in 4 self-reporting an undiagnosed mental health issue. Research from UCAS has shown that applicants disclosing having a mental health condition has increased by 453% over the last 10 years. Mental health challenges are seemingly common amongst the student population.

It is positive that students are becoming increasingly comfortable and confident in disclosing their mental health condition, talking about their challenges and seeking help. The need to tackle stigma around mental health is fortunately less needed. But this does in part contribute to increasing demand for support services.

In addition, as we're seeing a general increase in the number of students experiencing mental health challenges we're also seemingly seeing an increase in the complexity of support needs. Key issues that students report as contributing to their mental health are around financial hardship; academic pressure; loneliness and isolation; discrimination, harassment and bullying. We also see notable disparity with some student groups when it comes to the challenges they face with their

mental health - particularly: LGBTQ+ students; international students; disabled students; Black and racialised students; women; students from low socioeconomic background. This disparity is clear in terms of differences in reporting experiencing mental health difficulties, accessing help, having a positive experience with support services and ultimately health outcomes.

In regards to Covid-19, we published research exploring the impact the pandemic had on student mental health - University Mental Health: Life in a Pandemic. While the short-term impact was stark and notable it still may yet be too early to fully understand what the long-term impacts and ramifications of the pandemic may be.

The nature of the student experience means that there are many factors that can have an impact upon mental health which is why it's so vital that universities have a strategic, holistic, whole-university approach to supporting their students.

References:

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/insight-briefings.html>

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/student-mental-health-in-a-pandemic.html>

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/mh-inequalities-international-students.html>

<https://www.ucas.com/file/513961/download?token=wAaKRniC>

<https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/mental-health-inequalities-factsheet>

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/mh-inequalities-international-students.html>

2. Adnabod a darpariaeth | Identification and provision

At Student Minds, we're confident that Higher Education Institutions have, broadly, been improving in how they address student mental health, despite the scale and complexity of the challenges. But, while positive steps are being taken across institutions to improve the culture, policies and practice around student mental health - there is still a way to go for the sector when it comes to confidently supporting the scale and complexity of student mental health challenges. We'd also like to note that we have 60 universities signed-up to the University Mental Health Charter Programme this academic year (2022-23), and whilst we had great

involvement from Welsh institutions in our development roadshow, currently none of those 60 are Welsh institutions.

There is increased confidence in discussing mental health openly at university. We have been seeing a constant increase in rates of disclosure and help-seeking. While this could be perceived to be an indication of an increasing demand due to an increase in either scale or complexity of challenges that students are facing, these increases are at least in part due to a reduction in stigma, a growing confidence in talking about mental health, wider knowledge of services that are available to support students and an improvement in help-seeking behaviours and skills.

We surveyed just over 1,000 students about how they felt about their institution's efforts in our research in January 2022. Our findings were that 52% of those surveyed agreed with the statement "The environment/culture at my university is healthy and allows me to thrive and succeed". 14% disagreed and the remaining 34% were neutral. We'd want to see this shift over time more into agreement, as universities implement a whole university approach.

In regards to early identification of students and institutions' readiness to proactively support students, we think this is going to need to be an urgent focus for the sector in the coming years. There is an assumption and expectation that staff across different parts of a university are joint-up and have constructive knowledge about individual students - in reality it may be the case that not all staff requiring knowledge receive adequate training and guidance to do so, and that across departments staff and services aren't communicating proactively enough to identify students who may be struggling at a point where an early intervention could be positively impactful.

We have consistently found in our research that students most commonly seek mental health support from their university, but that GPs / Doctors are a close second. A key issue we see students face is the challenge of continuity of support throughout the calendar year when students might be living between two addresses over the course of the calendar year, but only able to register with one GP surgery. We are also aware from engagement with practitioners across multiple regions in the UK of certain mental health conditions where waiting lists for specialist support are particularly high, such as for eating disorders support and wait times for ADHD diagnoses. Flexibility for students to be able to access healthcare is key. And quality information sharing between universities and services so that students don't fall

through gaps is going to be vital to ensure a comprehensive support package for students.

On transitions, we have a number of resources available to students - both before and after they start university. The University Mental Health Charter also identifies transitions as a key domain for institutions to focus on within their whole-university approach to student mental health.

References:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/student-mental-health/mental-health-challenge-competition-improving-mental-health-outcomes/>

<https://www.ucas.com/file/513961/download?token=wAaKRniC>

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/minding-our-future-starting-conversation>

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/transitions.html>

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/universitychallenge.html>

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/grandchallenges.html>

<https://universitymentalhealthcharter.org.uk/>

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

We welcome this consultation and inquiry to explore how the Welsh government could be further supporting student mental health.

There have been well received efforts from the Welsh government (and in particular HefCW) to support students - such as the funding to support students through the pandemic, the innovative approaches being taken in Welsh institutions and the support for Student Space, Student Minds' support platform available in English and Welsh language.

Moving forwards we're keen to ensure this continued commitment and would encourage the Welsh government to address the issue of student mental health

strategically and holistically. Our framework for addressing student mental health, as set-out in the University Mental Health Charter, is to encourage a whole-university approach. This approach is well evidenced, strategic and will be impactful in the long-term. Supporting and enabling Welsh institutions to develop their policies and strategies in line with the good practice principles set out in the Charter would be a considerable step forward.

We would also encourage the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research to work collaboratively across departments in the Welsh government to address systemic challenges. For instance, Welsh government could further encourage and support NHS partners - in regions where Welsh institutions are based - to work collaboratively with their universities and student representatives to map out emerging needs and trends for the current and next generations of students and share how they are commissioning effectively to support and promote the health of this population. We are aware that some Welsh institutions are already working hard on building these relationships. In addition, to look at ways the Welsh government can mitigate the cost of living pressures and housing challenges impacting students which are well evidenced as having a bi-directional relationship with a students' mental health.

References:

<https://universitymentalhealthcharter.org.uk/>

<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/creating-a-blueprint-for-supporting-student-mental-health/>

<https://gov.wales/10-million-support-university-students-through-pandemic>

4. Argymhellion ar gyfer newid | Recommendations for change

Our main recommendations are as follows:

Encourage institutions to be taking holistic, whole-university approaches to student mental health. Engage with the University Mental Health Charter; use the framework, adopt the principles of good practice and go through the awarding process.

Encourage institutions to utilise toolkits, resources and guidance documents to improve practice, particularly around embedding wellbeing into the curriculum,

improving accessibility and prioritising prevention & early intervention. Examples of recent publications include the Education for Mental Health Toolkit, UUK's Information Sharing Guidance and the Student Services Partnerships Evaluation and Quality Standards (SPEQS) Toolkit.

Ringfence funding to support, reactively, students with urgent needs. For example, having hardship funding for challenges faced during the pandemic or for the current cost of living crisis and long term housing challenges.

Ensure joined-up approaches between institutions and local health care provision.

References:

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/education-mental-health-toolkit>

<https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/universitycounsellingservice/current-projects#h.vb40n5dmnf3>

<https://universitymentalhealthcharter.org.uk/>

5. **Arall | Other**