

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 19

Ymateb gan: ColegauCymru

Response from: CollegesWales

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

The situation with regards to mental health of learners in Higher Education is impacted to a great extent by the mental health of those in Further Education (FE) and school sixth forms who progress into HE. Colleges reported an increase in learners reporting mental health issues even prior to Covid-19 which subsequently feed through into HE.

When it comes to looking at cohorts of learners, in addition to more 'traditional' HE learners, when considering those studying HE at an FE institution, it is important to remember that they may have very different life situations and experiences compared to those at HE Institutions (HEI). Colleges noted the distinction between the needs of students in more traditional HE settings and those studying HE within a Further Education Institution (FEI). Many HE in FE students are typically older, and have work and/or family commitments which need to be taken into account. These students are also usually from low socio-economic backgrounds, and financial insecurity is cited as a cause for a number of referrals for anxiety. Taking into account the current cost of living crisis, this number is likely to increase in the short to medium term. More assistance with the cost of courses or other learning provision is required, especially at a time when households and individuals are facing cost of living challenges.

While learners studying HE in FE should be seen as a distinct group, there will be other groups of learners who may face specific challenges. Welsh speaking learners may be unable to access support through their first language. Learners with protected characteristics, for example Black, Asian and minority ethnic populations,

may also have different or higher levels of mental health support need which need to be resourced appropriately.

In terms of the effect of Covid-19 on the mental health of HE students, colleges reported issues including 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. There was also an increase in anxiety about returning to social situations for fear of contracting Covid-19 or passing it onto more vulnerable members of their family. While we are beginning to see a return to “normality”, we are still in a phase of rebuilding, and the effects of Covid-19 are likely to impact the wellbeing of society for some time.

Some colleges report the number of HE students accessing internal college mental health services has increased by as much as 96% between 20/21 and 21/22.

2. Adnabod a darpariaeth | Identification and provision

The FE sector recognises the benefits of a ‘whole college approach’ to mental health and this applies to HE in FE students who benefit from the wider college service. Most FE colleges in Wales offer HE provision to their learners. The sector has received funding from the Welsh Government, both pre-and post-Covid, to develop a variety of different projects and resources to support learner mental health which have been shared as examples of best practice across the sector and which would be available to HE in FE learners as well as FE learners.

ColegauCymru has worked collaboratively with NUS Wales, Universities Wales and AMOSSHE to develop post-16 mental health policy recommendations for the Welsh Government.¹ These include continued funding for transitions through Renew and Reform, the need for Welsh Government to address the relationship between CAMHS and adult services, and addressing ways universities can work with local post-16 colleges/schools to support learner mental health in advance of the transition to HE. This partnership work is a good example of the wider post-16 education sector coming together to promote good mental health, particularly with regard to transitions.

The transition from child to adult mental health services can be a significant problem. Support needs to be age appropriate, not at an arbitrary cut off point such as 18, and

¹ <https://www.colleges.wales/image/documents/Mental%20Health/Post-16%20mental%20health%20policy%20-%20ENG.pdf>

linked to other relevant services. Mental health issues can be identified at a variety of points including at application and during study.

For HE in FE learners, moving GP practice is often less of an issue as many live locally, rather than moving during term time.

Appropriate data and information sharing is addressed in ColegauCymru's work with Universities Wales, NUS Wales et al and this is a vital part of successful transitions. Clarification and improved understanding of what information can and cannot be shared and in which circumstances would improve the experiences of all learners.

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

As set out in our Post-16 Mental Health Policy Recommendations work with Universities Wales and NUS Wales et al, sustainable, long-term funding from the Welsh Government is essential to support the mental health of students in HE, whether they study at HE or FE institutions. This is true of the post-16 sector more broadly. This would allow FE institutions to support all learners and plan provision and activity in advance and on a more secure basis. Likewise, the Welsh Government should address the other recommendations from this work as part of future policy considerations. Initial discussions of the work have taken place with the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing and the Education Minister, and were very positive.

A whole-system approach to mental health and well-being in post-16 education would take account of the principles set out in our Post-16 Mental Health Policy Recommendations and focus on the well-being of all learners, while providing support to those who need it. Learners who require ongoing mental health support should experience as seamless a transition between settings as possible. Information sharing obligations and limits should be well understood so that where learners wish, they don't have to explain their background and requirements repeatedly and to many different people. This will particularly apply to information shared between HE providers (including HE in FE providers) and relevant healthcare settings. Effective engagement and communication channels would exist between learners, HE, healthcare and support services. Learners would be confident of obtaining the support they need within a reasonable timescale and in the language of their choice. Staff will be trained to spot the indications of mental health problems in learners, other staff, and themselves and signpost or take action as appropriate.

The new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research should take a joined up approach to mental health and wellbeing for students across all parts of the post- 16 system where there should be expectation of some sort of parity of experience whether for HE in FE students, traditional HE, or FE students and apprentices (including higher level or degree apprentices). Mind Cymru recently shared similar views on the Commission's responsibilities when it comes to learner's mental health during an evidence session with the Children, Young People and Education Committee. 2 This can allow for differences between settings, but those studying HE in FE should be able to expect to access similar levels of support, for instance.

The Commission should ensure that institutions that it funds have a sufficient level of mental health support in place.

4. Argymhellion ar gyfer newid | Recommendations for change

The Committee should consider how any recommendations made apply fairly to those learners studying HE in FE, taking into account the different circumstances of this cohort.

A mental health service for young people 16-25 should be established to support young people through school/college/HE/apprenticeship pathways, rather than the transition from CAMHS to adult services at 18.

5. Arall | Other

It's important to remember that all those who need access to mental health services should have the option to access these through the medium of Welsh.

This is especially important if Welsh is their first language or the language they feel most comfortable communicating in.