

CYPE(6)-23-22 – Paper to note 10

Additional information from Universities Wales following the meeting on 6 October

- on suicide rates and whether this has gone down because of students' greater willingness to disclose their mental distress:

Data is available via the ONS on student suicide rates: [Estimating suicide among higher education students, England and Wales: Experimental Statistics - Office for National Statistics](#)

Between the academic year ending 2017 and the academic year ending 2020, higher education students in England and Wales had a significantly lower suicide rate compared with the general population of similar ages.

There are a number of variables that make it difficult to point to any specific reason for changes in the student suicide rate. While increasing numbers of students are declaring a mental health condition when applying to university, we would be cautious in drawing conclusions on whether there is a causal relationship between the two.

However, it is worth noting that students are statistically less likely to die by suicide when compared with the wider population. When compared with the general population, the suicide rate for higher education students among those aged 20 years and under and those aged 21 to 24 years showed the biggest difference, with the rate in the general population being 2.7 times higher than that in students.

The suicide rate for higher education students in the academic year ending 2020 in England and Wales was 3.0 deaths per 100,000 students (64 suicide deaths); this is the lowest rate observed over the last four years, although the small numbers per year make it difficult to identify statistically significant differences.

- further comment of the advice that had been published by Universities UK with the aim of preventing suicide by contacting key contacts of students and whether additional funding is needed to support this work:

The guidance published by UUK and PAPYRUS is here: [Sharing information \(universitiesuk.ac.uk\)](#)

The recommendations include:

- Making it mandatory for students to give a trusted contact at registration, being clear that the contact does not have to be a parent, and starting a conversation about when and how these contacts might be involved

- Having check-ins at the start of each academic year for students to update this information and making it easy to update the contact if circumstances change
- Ensuring that universities review their suicide prevention plans and policies to keep students safe, identifying students of concern, assessing risk, working in close partnership with NHS services and, where there are serious concerns, initiating conversations about involving trusted contacts
- Making clear that, although always preferable to gain agreement from the student, where there are serious concerns about a student's safety or mental health, universities can decide to involve trusted contacts without agreement. Such decisions should always be made in the student's interests, be taken by appropriately qualified staff, supported by senior leadership, be based on a risk assessment establishing the grounds for serious concern and be properly governed and recorded.

The guidance is the first time a consistent practice has been proposed for the sector. It places the student at the centre of decisions about their safety and care. But it also aims to give institutions the confidence to be proactive about involving trusted contacts, to set out properly governed processes to share information and to give staff clarity about their roles and responsibilities.

Although Universities Wales has suggested the Committee make a recommendation to Welsh Government for longer-term, sustainable funding, there is no specific funding request attached to this guidance.

- in relation to the cost-of-living crisis to provide examples of "how costs are shooting up"

Professor Elizabeth Treasure offered to provide examples from the catering team at Aberystwyth University. In calculating an increase in cost from 2021 to 2022 in producing meals, the team found that (as of October 2022):

- Chicken curry to produce as a dish last year cost £1.44 in 2021 to 2.44 in 2022 an increase of 69%. This is due to the large increase in the price of onion, tomatoes, chicken and imported items like coconut milk, spices and mango chutney.
- A cheese and bean jacket potato cost £1.07 to produce in 2021 and 2022 it cost £1.51 an increase of 41%
- Tomato soup cost £0.58p to produce in 2021 and 2022 it cost £0.82 an increase of 41%