Further Education and Mental Health
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Agenda

• The research and policy landscape
• Student perspectives
• Students’ vision for services
• Case studies
Mental Health in HE and FE

- Demand for mental health provision is rising
- Increasing numbers disclosing pre-arrival; needs emerging while students were at university; increasing complexity of problems
- General anxiety disorders, thoughts of suicide, attempts at suicide and self harm more common in young people (16-21) than in the rest of the population
- Adult learners studying part-time more likely to be under pressure and stressed
- Distance learners can feel isolated and unable to access on-campus services
NUS Mental Distress Survey

In 2015 we carried out a survey of 1093 students asking about their mental wellbeing

- 78% of students consider themselves to have experienced mental health issue in the past year
- 87% reported feeling of stress
- 77% reported feelings of anxiety
- 36% reported thoughts of self-harm
- 30% reported thoughts of suicide
Student Perspectives

NUS Workshops

• What were the triggers for poor mental health?
• Services available to them
What triggers were identified?

• **Social Media** – the need for validation and bullying or harassment
• **Family Problems** – lack of understanding from families led to feelings of isolation (applied also to friends)
• **Sexuality and Gender** – verbal and physical harassment was identified as a significant issue
• **Workload** – and the GCSE resit policy
Triggers continued

• **Poor Careers Guidance**- feeling trapped on courses that weren’t right for them and the pressure to get a qualification/ go to university

• **Financial Worries** – support bursaries linked to attendance, but if too ill to attend, then bursary is stopped

• **College and 6th Form Policies**- isolation policies, penalties, impacted on wellbeing
Access to Services

- **Stigma and shame** – being ‘weak’, not ‘coping’, trivialisation of language
- **Staff training** – feeling of ‘burdening’ staff, staff not knowing how to respond, staff seeing illness as an ‘excuse’
- **Not knowing how to access support** – part-time provision, not well publicised, not knowing what it’s for
- **Regional variations** – NHS services different across the UK
Access to Services

• **Lack of consistency** – having to explain circumstances to different GPs and specialists

• **Lack of trust** – Bad experiences of CAMHS and long waits for treatment

• **Services that were not culturally competent** – LGBT+ and BME students felt that trying to explain their specific issues to people with no experience of their background was a deterrent to seeking help
Students’ Vision for Services

- Counsellors available through their college
- Trained staff – ‘interim listeners’
- Staff to be culturally-aware
- Staff to know when and how to intervene
- Short or no waiting time for initial help
Students’ vision for services

- Mindfulness, Yoga, Meditation, Resilience and Self Care classes/ courses/ discussions
- Supervised peer support networks
- Clear and frequent communications
- End the stigma
- Talk more about mental health and consider it throughout the curriculum (ie when setting work, before exams etc)
Case study

New College Stamford
Listening Service

• training Welfare staff to be listeners so that students can receive early intervention support for mental health problems and other welfare issues

• built better links in the community with students GP’s, and non-statutory charitable organisations to create a culture of wrap around support where the support comes from the expert at multi-agency level.
Highbury College/Solent Recovery College
Health and Wellbeing Session

• deliver Health and Wellbeing sessions
• support and empower student’s progression and self-advocacy, by emphasizing positive physical, psychological and social mental attitudes of the students through a variety of activities and exercises
• Students’ overall wellbeing improved by an average 21.22%
Reflections
Resources

NUS: FE Mental Health Report

AoC Students with Mental Health Conditions in FE

Universities UK Step Change strategy
Thanks for listening!

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