

December 2024 update from Professor Edward Peck, Higher Education Student Support Champion

Dear colleagues,

Welcome to the end of term update on my work as Higher Education Student Support Champion and Chair of the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce.

Mental Health Taskforce

Last week, the Department for Education published the second report of the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce. The report outlines the progress made across each of the strands, the key elements of which are summarised below.

On the first strand – supporting adoption of good practice – I am pleased that 113 HEPs have joined the 2024/25 University Mental Health Charter programme. This represents a significant improvement over previous years. In addition, Student Minds has recently published a package of resources which celebrates the Charter’s success and outlines its plans for continuous improvement; my thanks to OfS for funding this work.

The Committee of University Chairs (CUC) is working with the Taskforce to develop a Mental Health Governance Framework. This Framework will outline how HEPs can use the creation of mental health strategies most effectively, alongside monitoring and reporting mechanisms, to deliver the best possible outcomes for students, staff, and institutions alike. We anticipate that this Framework will be published in spring 2025.

The second strand is pursuing ways that HEPs can identify and support students who may be vulnerable to declining mental health, but who may not self-disclose. It has multiple elements, including:

- A Competency Framework to support non-clinical staff in identifying and responding to students’ mental health needs in ways that are role-appropriate (to be published early 2025);
- A mental health analytics roundtable that will bring together HEPs, sector agencies, and system providers (planned for March/April 2025);
- Work with UCAS to consider how it may further support and improve the transition experience of students with mental health challenges; and
- Guidance on implementing case management systems, in collaboration with AMOSSHE and UMHAN (to be published in spring 2025).

The third strand has seen the publication of the compassionate communication document, launched at the Academic Registrar’s Council (ARC) conference in November. The document sets out five principles that HEPs should adopt in their academic and conduct processes. They are consistent with the Good Practice Framework published by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

(OIA) and may be taken into consideration by the OIA when reviewing student complaints about HEPs in England.

The fourth strand – the National Suicide Review – continues, with the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health (NCISH) having received a considerable number of serious incident reviews from HEPs. NCISH will now consider these reviews and its report on sector good practice and lessons to be learnt will be published in spring 2025. I would like to thank all those HEPs that have engaged with this first-of-its-kind activity.

The relationship between HEPs and the NHS is the final strand. Since my last update, insights collected from several notable HE-NHS partnerships have been collated and will underpin guidance to enable HEPs and the NHS to co-design and implement local student-specific mental health services. Initial guidance will be shared early in 2025 before a full launch later in the year.

Student Support Redesign

Working in collaboration with AdvanceHE, I convened the first stakeholder group of the Student Support Redesign project in November. This group will inform development of resources to support HEPs to consider the support interventions they are delivering and to identify opportunities to improve their design and delivery of support. This work is a development of the Student Needs Framework that I published with AdvanceHE in 2023.

As part of this project, I will be hosting two roundtables in 2025 with the purpose of better understanding the current extent of evidence and innovative practice to inform development of the Student Support Redesign work. These roundtables will explore:

- Models and approaches of personal tutoring, coaching, and advising.
- Models and approaches of peer support and tutoring.

I will share more details on these roundtables in my 2024/25 term two update.