

January 2023 update from Professor Edward Peck, Higher Education Student Support Champion

Dear Colleagues

I hope this new year finds you well. Please find below my third update on my role as Higher Education Student Support Champion. As usual, this is a succinct two pages which I hope you will find a few moments to read.

Serious Mental Illness

Robust and structured partnerships between the NHS and higher education providers have a very positive impact on students suffering with serious mental illness. Some localities have created co-funded student mental health teams that are embedded into the NHS and deliver assessment, treatment, and case management for students. As well as caring for those students most at-risk, these arrangements also bring clarity to the boundaries and responsibilities of HEPs.

AMOSSHE has sent out a survey to its HEP members so I can better understand the extent to which HEPs and NHS trusts have these or similar arrangements in place across the country. I will use the results of this survey to inform what further steps I could take.

Over the past few months I have spoken with the LEARN Network of bereaved parents on numerous occasions. We agree on a number of matters. One such is how the sector can learn from previous incidents of student suicide, a matter raised with me by Minister Halfon.

I encourage HEPs to embed fully the recent UUK guidance on suicide prevention in their local procedures. There would be benefit in regular analysis of the learning from HEP case reviews - and potentially coroners' reports - being shared on a regular basis to inform future practice. I am in dialogue with UUK on this topic, recognising this is a sensitive area where HEPs will need to have confidence in the confidentiality of any process.

I am working with LEARN to produce a short briefing which we will share in February with Vice-Chancellors, Principals, and Chairs of University and College Councils. This will outline LEARN's concerns and link them to recent recommendations for supporting students with serious mental illness and preventing student suicide.

Information Sharing

Early in the New Year I will publish two pieces of guidance: information sharing with accommodation providers; and information sharing with students' unions. These have been produced in collaboration with Unipol, CUBO, the NUS and the Association of University Legal Practitioners.

The guidance will tackle the core issues of how colleagues working in the sector should share information when there is risk to a student, even where they may not have explicit agreement from the student to do so. It is my hope that this guidance will help inform discussions at a local level and dispel some of the myths around data protection.

Student Analytics

In March, and in conjunction with Jisc, I will publish a core specification for student analytics. This will bring together what we know about engagement analytics and wellbeing analytics. There will be a short briefing for Vice-Chancellors, Principals and Chairs of University and College Councils in January.

Student Support Service Design

I am beginning a project to rethink student support design alongside Advance HE and UUK's Student Policy Network. In the initial phase of work, running until April, I want to articulate the fundamental support needs of students in order to succeed and thrive in higher education. What we will derive from this is a set of functions that HEPs could adopt to meet these needs. This will be followed by development activity in a pilot set of HEPs to identify which evidence-based set of interventions best meet them, delivered by which staff, and how these can be built into a coherent institutional approach.

International Students

Whilst the UK remains a competitive and popular destination for international students, recent insight appears to show the United Kingdom trailing our main competitors when international applicants ranked their perceptions of the student support they would receive once enrolled. I am interested in understanding what may be causing this perception of the British HE sector, and where I can add value to current activity, collaborating with partners within the sector.

Employability

Universities play a key role in helping students prepare for their future careers. Yet, it can be difficult for HEPs to understand what works, how to implement most effectively strategic interventions, and how to engage fully students in the employability offer. In the New Year, I will be scoping work that addresses some of these issues. Again, I will be working with sector partners. This aspect of my agenda was requested by Minister Halfon.

Meetings and Events

Since my last update, I have presented at the UUK/Guild HE and ANUK/Unipol Joint Codes Conference in November. I was the guest speaker at the recent HEPI Partners Dinner and have joined the UUK Mental Health in HE Group, having spoken at its Mental

Health Conference last term. I presented my work to date and future priorities at the Committee of University Chairs Winter Plenary.

I have had informal meetings with a range of sector groups and I have discussed my priorities and progress with the student advisory groups linked to the OfS and QAA.

I will be attending the AMOSSHE Annual Conference in February and JISC Annual Conference in March.