

## **July 2022 update from Professor Edward Peck, Higher Education Student Support Champion**

Dear Colleague,

I want to thank all those of you who came back to me with your contributions to my initial questions. The breadth and depth of responses will shape the work we undertake together to strengthen our support to students. I received around 120 sets of comments from higher education providers, mission groups, sector agencies, students' unions and organisations representing views of parents.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge that what I read confirmed what I think we all know: all of us engaged with higher education are showing enormous creativity and real determination in seeking to optimise the engagement and welfare of our students. Inevitably, in what follows - which draws in particular on answers to my third query, where do the major challenges still lie? – I focus on areas where more needs to be done and where I believe my role can make a contribution. However, they should be viewed in this context.

I have used three criteria to select three broad initial areas: were they mentioned in the majority of responses? can I add impetus to progress on addressing the challenges without replicating existing initiatives? and are there sector organisations with which I can work to optimise impact? I summarise these areas below. My intention is to convene four roundtables in late August to explore these further before deciding what further input from me might help move the topics forward. Specific invitations to these will be issued shortly and more detailed briefings will be circulated in advance.

Following the roundtables, I will produce a scoping report to share at the start of the 2022/23 academic year which will contain my proposed initial work programme for the next two years.

### Growth in number of students with major mental health problems

Firstly, the increasing volume and complexity of conditions of students with serious mental health difficulties are concerns for almost everyone who replied. These are raising questions about the responsibilities, resources, risks and relationships of higher education providers in addressing them. Many of you discussed the boundary between provision within educational settings and specialist mental health services provided by the NHS. New collaborations are emerging here and I am aware that these are being supported by funding and/or guidance from the DfE, OfS, and UUK. However, there would be benefit in discussing in more depth: the objectives and obstacles around these new models of HE-NHS partnerships; the core elements of a robust model; and methods for engaging Integrated Care Boards and mental health service providers.

Secondly, one of the issues that arises in improving partnerships with the NHS is information sharing. UUK will be issuing guidance on information sharing with parents, guardians or nominated adults in early September - and I recognise that this may extend beyond students with serious mental health problems - but it will not cover other agencies that may be involved in supporting them, such as accommodation providers, local authorities, police forces and students' unions. I want to explore the principles and practices that could underpin our approaches across a range of sectors within the current legal framework for data sharing.

I am organising these two roundtables, one on each of these two topics, in partnership with UUK.

### Models of building resilience

The second area of focus is related to the first but starts from a very different point. Many responses drew attention to initiatives being put in place that sought to build resilience amongst students, especially in their first year. Not all of them used this terminology or, notably, seemed to deploy the same sorts of interventions; however, they appeared to share broadly similar ambitions.

In this roundtable, I am interested in looking at: what are the most common methods of engendering resilience? when, how and for whom are they being deployed? what evidence do we have of their effectiveness?

I am organising this roundtable in partnership with Advance HE.

### Student analytics

The third area relates to student analytics: using data about students' characteristics and behaviours to enhance the personalisation of interventions that support them. From the responses, it is clear that providers possess varying levels of system capacity and capability to collect, analyse, disseminate and act upon these data. Yet interest is growing, and the publication of the outcome of the OfS sponsored initiative with Northumbria University will prompt even further discussion.

In this roundtable, I want to look in some detail at one topic: what do we need to know? Drawing on current practice, the goal will be to start to establish a common specification that could then underpin how we think about engaging with the design and delivery of the systems that might deliver this outline specification.

I am organising this roundtable in partnership with Jisc.