

July 2023 Update from Professor Edward Peck, Higher Education Student Support Champion

Mental Wellbeing of Students

You will be aware that the petition promoting a Statutory Duty of Care for HEPs was debated in Parliament recently. The Minister of State for Skills, Further and Higher Education outlined a package of four initiatives aimed at improving mental health support across the higher education sector:

- developing ways of identifying students at risk, including student analytics;
- encouraging compassionate student-facing policies, procedures, and communication;
- initiating national review of local examinations of suspected suicides; and
- ensuring adoption of good practice, encompassing all HEPs being covered by an appropriate charter or equivalent.

I have provided further information on these activities in a briefing to Vice Chancellors, Principals, and Chairs of University and College Councils.

The first meeting of the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce (HEMHIT), created to take forward work on these four strands of work and accountable to the Minister, took place on July 18th. HEMHIT comprises bereaved parents, students, mental health experts, related charities, and representatives from further and higher education and health sectors. Regular updates - initially including its Terms of Reference and membership - will be available shortly on its website.

Open online fora on compassionate communication and identification of students at risk will be held in early October. Please e-mail me on my contact address below if you or your organisation would like to attend.

In addition, the Minister has asked the HEMHIT to suggest additional areas of potential focus for the future. There will be an open and inclusive process to seek views on what these might be. If you or your organisation would like to contribute, again, please email me on the address below.

Student Support Service Redesign

I have agreed with the UUK Student Policy Network and AdvanceHE the next steps for this project. This includes developing the Student Needs Framework as a development tool which can be used by HEPs to map its interventions and identify overlaps and gaps in their student support system. This resource will be hosted on the AdvanceHE website, illustrated with case studies submitted by HEPs, and underpinned by evidence where available. AdvanceHE will also create an online space for collaboration, conversation, and good practice sharing through AdvanceHE Connect. These will be

accompanied by a blog which will map out the background and purpose of the Student Needs Framework.

We have also identified specific areas of focus on which we will hold four exploratory sessions for UUK SPN members in Autumn, starting in October. The first two sessions will focus on innovations around with compassionate communications and progress with student analytics. Two further sessions will be on: models of tutoring that provide personal development and pastoral support; and approaches peer to peer support. Further details will be available on my website.

Transition to Higher Education

Building on one of the priorities identified in my initial consultation with the sector last summer, I will chair a series of three roundtables, in partnership with Unite Students, in August and September to discuss:

1. the experience of schools and colleges of the changing support needs of 11-18 year olds and the interventions they are putting in place to meet them;
2. the information held in schools and colleges and by UCAS about individual students and whether and how they should be shared with and within higher education institutions; and
3. what the conclusions of the first two roundtables suggest about the induction and transition activities of HEPs.

We will look to develop key messages that HEPs might want to consider as they design their transitional arrangements for 2024 and also recommendations for if and how data should and could be shared.