

October 2022 update from Professor Edward Peck, Higher Education Student Support Champion

Dear Colleague,

As the new term begins, it seems timely to share an update on what I have done so far and where I propose to focus next. Thanks to all those of you who participated in one of the four roundtables last month; the themes of these are reflected below. They have been the major influence on what follows. I have briefed the Department for Education recently and colleagues there are supportive of my priorities and I am looking forward to discussing the work programme with the new Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Skills. I am grateful to a range of mission groups that have given me their time to share their perspectives and I am accelerating my interactions with student groups.

Serious Mental Illness

Held in conjunction with UUK, this roundtable was attended by colleagues from across health and higher education. Whilst challenges remain, there are models of HE/NHS partnerships in place that have a positive and significant impact, ensuring students are referred to and from NHS care in a smooth and timely fashion. They serve also to bring clarity to the limits of HEPs responsibilities in relation to students exhibiting symptoms of serious mental illness.

The most promising approach I have seen creates a co-funded student mental health team within the NHS that provides: an agreed referral protocol; assessment and treatment; and case management through more specialist services. I am collaborating with UUK and AMOSSHE to establish how many localities have such arrangements and what more needs to be done to make them available to all higher education students across England.

Information Sharing

Also held in partnership with UUK, and attended by colleagues from the higher education, policing, and accommodation sectors as well as the ICO, it discussed guidance on information sharing with trusted contacts that will be published soon. I encourage you to discuss this guidance within your senior teams. It sets out clearly the circumstances within which HEPs can share information about a student with families, carers, and trusted friends, even when they do not have that student's agreement. All of the parents I have spoken to since becoming Student Support Champion have told me how important it is that all institutions act on this guidance.

The roundtable highlighted the need to create similar guidance for other partners with which HEPs engage. I am beginning discussions with colleagues across police, accommodation providers, local authorities and students' unions to create such

mutual understanding about how and when we share information where there are concerns for a student's welfare.

Student Analytics

Run in partnership with Jisc, this roundtable included presentations from two differing examples of analytics: those that seek to measure engagement as an early-warning for non-continuation; and those that seek to identify students who may be showing signs of mental health difficulties. More details of the latter will be published by the OfS in the near future and it is a game-changing piece of work.

The next step is to bring together the evidence and expertise that HEPs have gained over recent years to develop a core data specification for student analytics for senior leaders across the sector. Again, this will be done with Jisc.

Models for Building Resilience

This roundtable was held in collaboration with Advance HE. It was built around presentations from three differing approaches to building students' sense of confidence, agency, and belonging. It is clear that the sector is showing enormous creativity and real determination to support students through a variety of interventions.

However, at the roundtable, and in many subsequent conversations, it has become apparent that HEPs may need to step back from the generation of new initiatives to think again about the key functions of student support, the best method of delivering them, and the creation of a lean and legible system. In turn, this would prompt reflection on the skills and behaviours that institutions want to develop in colleagues. Beginning in early 2023, I will work with Advance HE to explore such service redesign.

Future

Looking forward, in addition to the forthcoming project on service redesign, I am minded to give consideration to the support needs of specific groups of students, potentially starting in the new calendar year with international students. Views on how I might approach this would be appreciated.