

June 2025 update from Professor Edward Peck, Higher Education Student Support Champion

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to my final update as Higher Education Student Support Champion (HESSC) and Chair of the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce (HEMHIT). I will reflect on the key themes that have shaped my work over three years and highlight the outputs we have produced. At the same time, the process of exploration that has involved hundreds of our colleagues has been as important as these products.

Mental Health

The mental health of students was the primary concern raised with me throughout my time as HESSC. As Chair of HEMHIT, I am confident that the sector is engaging with, and responding to, the outputs that HEMHIT has generated.

The [Compassionate Communications statement](#) was published in November 2024 with the Academic Registrars' Council. It outlines five principles to guide HEPs in ensuring their policies, procedures, and communications are delivered with compassion and, as far as possible, do not exacerbate students' difficulties. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education may take these principles into account when reviewing student complaints in England.

The [Competency Framework](#) was published in February 2025 with AdvanceHE. It acknowledges that not all students seek help through formal services; many turn to trusted individuals such as lecturers, tutors, and administrators. This framework articulates the essential approaches, skills, and knowledge that non-specialist student-facing staff should possess in order to engage in student support safely and confidently.

In May 2025, the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health (NCISH) published its independent review of student suicides (and non-fatal self-harm) in England. Its findings and recommendations – which can be found [here](#) – represent an important backdrop to the continuing work of the Taskforce. I am grateful to NCISH for leading this review, and to those HEPs who shared their local reports.

In addition, the Taskforce is supporting the forthcoming Mental Health Governance Framework created by the Committee of University Chairs. The framework emphasises the role of governing bodies in approving and monitoring institutional mental health plans. This will be a key resource for HEPs to ensure arrangements are in place to oversee the effective development and oversight of their mental health services.

Finally, the Taskforce has supported previous Ministerial targets for HEPs to join the [University Mental Health Charter](#). The 85% growth in sign-ups between 22/23 and 24/25 is an encouraging signal of HEPs' commitment to student mental health. The

membership of the Association of College's (AoC) [Mental Health Charter](#) has also grown. I would like to thank Student Minds and the AoC for their ongoing support.

Digital Technology

Data and technology are set to play an increasingly central role in the delivery of student support. Analytics systems may prompt interventions with students who require support because of concerns about their engagement or their wellbeing. In March 2023, I published with Jisc the [Core Specification for Student Analytics](#). The specification outlines the sorts of data that HEPs could use to achieve actionable insights. It is derived from the innovative Northumbria University wellbeing analytics project. This work has continued through the Taskforce, with a [May 2025 roundtable](#) highlighting both interest in and barriers to developing analytics systems.

The Taskforce has also explored the use of case management systems that align data within an institution to improve visibility of students' challenges and to enable joined-up support. A Taskforce report, [published in June 2025](#), highlights good practice and identifies key design principles that HEPs could use to inform their own approaches.

However, as I have frequently noted, possessing data is only one part of the solution. HEPs must have the capacity and capability to act on data they collect or generate; failure to do so comes with risks that have been established in [recent case law](#).

External Partnerships

It has become apparent to me that collaboration between HEPs and external partners is key to delivering effective, responsive and joined-up student support. It is in this context that the relationship between HEPs and the NHS is crucial. The Taskforce will soon publish a report outlining how institutions may co-develop NHS-led student mental health services, drawing on exemplar partnerships found across the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, in my role as HESSC I have explored how the relationship between HEPs and students' unions and private accommodation providers could be improved to support student wellbeing. Two pieces of guidance have been generated through these discussions: one on data sharing with students' unions and the other on data sharing with private accommodation providers. They can be found [here](#).

Transition

I have become increasingly aware of the range of challenges that younger students face, for example the post-Covid impact of missing independence and learning skills and cost of living pressures. These trends have implications for the transition support that HEPs deploy. I have explored these issues in the [report I published with Unite Students](#) in May 2024; further insight can be found in the [series of roundtables](#) I held on this topic over summer 2023.

One aspect of transition that I have advocated is better information sharing between schools, colleges and HEPs regarding students' support needs. As more HE students choose to study closer to home, developing strong local networks between educational institutions could make such enhanced sharing feasible.

Future Developments

As I outlined in my [HEPI Policy Note](#) in May 2025, my time as HESSC has deepened my understanding of the forces which are reshaping the traditional model of higher education. This publication highlights 10 key trends – from the impact of technology to that of changing student expectations – and explores their potential implications.

Two roundtables I held in March 2025 have reinforced my view that the curriculum must evolve to accommodate community, belonging, and wellbeing. My other key takeaway – that HEPs must orientate towards becoming customer service organisations – may require more fundamental changes to organisational services and skills.

Responding to these trends will be challenging. With AdvanceHE I have developed the [Student Needs Framework](#) to support HEPs in mapping, evaluating and then rethinking their range of support. The [User Guide](#), which complements the framework, provides further practical guidance on achieving whole-system redesign of student support.

Acknowledgements

As I noted at the outset, these outputs represent the fruits of three years of discussions with colleagues, organisations, and institutions across the sector and beyond. I would like to thank all of you for your engagement and support, as well as those folk within the DfE with whom I have collaborated, especially Hannah Sheehan and Laurence Morton.

I want to acknowledge the crucial contributions of Ben McCarthy, Jenny Shaw, and Sandra Binns. Ben is returning to his post as Associate Policy Manager at Nottingham Trent University. Jenny remains HE External Engagement Director at Unite Students. Sandra has moved on already to become a Policy Adviser at Universities UK

The Government have confirmed that both the Higher Education Student Support Champion and Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce will continue. I wish the new Champion all the best in their role.

As you will know, I will step away from my other responsibilities in early July to focus on being the Chair of the Office for Students. I am taking what I have learnt both about the challenges students' face and the creative ways in which so many HEPs respond into my new task. I look forward to continuing to work with you in my new guise.