

# Higher Education Student Support Champion in partnership with Unite Students: Transition into Higher Education for Young Students

**Roundtable one summary: 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**

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**Chair:** Edward Peck, HE Student Support Champion

**Date/time:** 22 August 2023, 14:00- 15:30

**Agenda:**

Agenda item	Duration	Topic	Lead
1	5	Welcome and Introduction	Chair
2	20	Unite Students – 2023 Applicant Index	Jenny Shaw – HE External Engagement Director, Unite Students
3	60	Discussion	Participants
5	5	Close – what do we do next?	Chair

## Welcome and introduction

- Edward Peck outlined the aims of the session which are to gain a more nuanced understanding of the emotional and behavioural changes seen in younger children, what schools are doing in response, and what that means for their attitudes and expectations of higher education.

## Unite Students – 2023 Applicant Index

- Jenny Shaw presented findings, drawing insights related to the wellbeing and independence of applicants. Applicants reported a higher level of confidence and

wellbeing than the 2022 cohort, although the findings are within the margin of error. Demographic variations within most categories were noted. Mental health issues – particularly anxiety - remain prevalent, affecting LGBT+ and Trans applicants more than the general student population.

- Students generally have a positive attitude towards disclosing information about their disability or condition to university and they feel their school/college has supported them to do so. Responses to a hypothetical question suggest students would be supportive of schools/colleges sharing at least some of their personal information (including related to mental health) directly with universities.
- Questions related to independence were included for the first time this year. Students reported greater confidence in day-to-day independent living skills such as cooking and washing. They are less confident in their ability to manage conflict or access external support, and those with mental health conditions tend to be least confident.

## Discussion

- Initial reflections from participants indicated that there is a more sustained change in the needs of younger people, rather than a shorter term Covid legacy. More fundamental concerns around cost of living and financial uncertainty, as well as a longer-term trend in increasing mental health disorders, appears to be exasperating this change.
- One participant shared an overview of mental health trends from a clinical perspective, noting a steady but longer-term trend in young people with mental health needs. Mental health needs are more prominent among girls and vulnerable groups (i.e. lower income, care leavers, etc.). These groups are more prone to not only the effect of Covid but underlying exasperating factors - such as social media and societal pressure – which is likely to continue into the foreseeable future.
- There was some discussion about the use of language in defining needs. A few participants noted that young people are more likely to use medical terms to describe how they feel (i.e. anxiety/depression) but this may or may not relate to diagnosed conditions. This could affect the ability to appropriately assess need and put support in place.
- Some participants noted the individualised approach to supporting pupils in schools and the expectations this may create when moving to a HE environment where independence is required. Edward Peck noted that the UK is somewhat unique in that most students leave their local support networks and move around the country to undertake HE which disrupts their transition, where students are expected to establish themselves independently for the first time.
- Many participants' comments suggested that this is exasperated by the disconnect of service provision (i.e. healthcare) and information (i.e. declared needs) between schools/colleges and universities. While it was noted that this topic would be covered specifically in a separate session, there was considerable interest in understanding how more collaboration between services could alleviate these pressure points.
- In regard to pupil expectations, a few participants gave examples of how the advice given to pupils in schools may be contributing to expectations. This could be a result of knowledge gaps in schools' information, advice, and guidance or, as one participant suggested, the challenge schools face to 'keep up' with what support is available in HE. It was generally felt that this contributes to students feeling less confident upon arrival into a HE environment.

- It was suggested that this may be compounded by universities and organisations delivering similarly framed support in different ways. An example given was that 'resilience' courses can be teaching quite different things. It was suggested that more collaboration and some level of standardisation may be useful.

## **Summary and Close**

- Edward Peck reflected on the session, noting consensus that the challenges discussed are long term and systemic, rather than short term consequences of Covid. The particular challenge for HEPs lies in reconciling pupil's experience of individualised support in schools with HE's variable approach to addressing student needs and managing expectations.