



Addressing Student Mental Health

Tuesday 30th January; 10:00am-11:00am

Committee Room 20, Houses of Parliament, Westminster, SW1A 0AA

The APPG met to discuss the rise of mental health difficulties across the whole of education and the current state of mental health provision available for students. The event was attended from Parliamentarians, students' representatives and organisations with an interest in education.

David Hughes, Chief Executive at the Association of Colleges (AoC), spoke about the importance of education in allowing students to become agents of change, rather than being subjects of change themselves. He spoke about the AoC's ongoing work on mental health noting their annual survey on mental health and wellbeing of all their members. Their surveys from 2015-2017 has shown a huge increase of students experiencing mental health difficulties – up to 85% of colleges reporting an increase. He noted that colleges have witnessed a rise of increasing stress and strain on young people accompanied with failing mental health services which has left many young people unable to access appropriate support. David spoke about a policy group the AoC have set up which includes 25 colleges across the country, who are responding to the Government's Green Paper on 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision' which he hopes will embody both college and student perspectives. He signposted delegates to a resource pack put together by the AoC available for colleges to embed better wellbeing in their work.

Jack Robinson, Democracy and Campaigns Officer from University of East Anglia, Students' Union, began by noting that mental wellbeing is disproportionately impacting students. He noted that in higher education in particular, he wondered what the role of universities are in addressing mental health difficulties of their students. Jack highlighted UUK's student mental health strategy as a good example of strategic priority universities can adopt and implement. Following this, he spoke about the freedom of information requests the University of East Anglia sent to 134 universities across the country with regard to their strategy on mental health. Out of the 106 requests that came back, it was found that only 20% of universities had an appropriate mental health strategy. He noted that the Office for Students should include a baseline of student mental wellbeing, and include mental health in accompanying surveys as well.

Ruth Spellman, Chief Executive at Workers' Education Association (WEA), spoke about the positive contribution accessing education can have to alleviate mental health difficulties for adult learners. Research conducted by WEA found that 86% of students in the study reported a real benefit to their mental health condition. Ruth highlighted the urgent need for a better education system that is more accessible to all learners. She mentioned the importance of peer support, and argued that there is much focus on prevention of mental health difficulties when the focus should be on the positive benefits of education can have on mental health. She also spoke about part-time learners, particularly those from the Open University and the issues that exist for them especially considering the huge decline in part-time students. Ruth further noted that the future pattern of learning must include a system of part-time/flexible learning and much work still needs to be done in allowing students to acquire the skills needed to improve their own health and wellbeing.

In comments from the floor, attendees raised issues of access to mental health care provision:

- Attendees spoke about cuts in mental health services offered to students, such as the decrease in therapy sessions offered to students - which in some higher education institutions has fallen from eight sessions per student to four.
- Attendees further argued that students in further education are particularly facing many challenges in accessing the appropriate support.
- Comments from the panel included a need to work collaboratively to address the triggers of mental health difficulties facing young people.

For further information, please contact the Secretariat, Ayesha Ahmed, Public Affairs Officer, National Union of Students (ayesha.ahmed@nus.org.uk).