



Student Mental Health Strategy – In Conversation with Nicola Dandridge

Wednesday 31st October; 10am – 11am;
Committee Room 18, Houses of Parliament, Westminster, SW1A 0AA

The APPG met to hear from the Office for Students, and the mental health strategy they are hoping to implement to tackle the current mental health crisis facing many students. The event was attended from Parliamentarians, students' representatives and organisations with an interest in education.

The APPG held their AGM at the start of the meeting, re-electing the Chair, Paul Blomfield MP, and Vice-Chairs, Nicky Morgan MP, Alison Thewliss MP, Caroline Lucas MP and Jo Stevens MP.

Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive of the Office for Students (OfS), presented the OfS' mental health strategy for higher education. The strategy as Nicola expressed is complete for 2018/19 and are committed to implementing this plan. Mental health was noted as a priority for the OfS, as it is for students. She went on to outline the three broad priorities of the strategy:

1. Practice is informed by robust evidence – massively complex and no space for simple solutions. Setting up evidence and impact exchange – to share evidence. Identifying gaps in interventions and OfS will support the aid of solutions.
2. Use their role as HE regulator to shine a spotlight on the issue – will be talking publically about the issue. Promoting good practice and collaboration.
3. Supporting a very visible commitment from HE providers – OfS will champion evidence of innovative practice.

Nicola noted that the OfS will continue to work with students and partners, and confirmed that access to health services is pivotal. The OfS will work at a sector level which will help allow them to develop a community of practice and evidence sharing.

She then went on to outline five areas of action over the next year, which are as follows:

1. Evidence and impact exchange is being developed
2. Working with research England to evaluate projects on PGR mental health
3. Launched mental health challenge fund – up to 6 million pounds to develop new approaches to mental health
4. Working on suicide prevention
5. Contributing to existing initiatives

In comments from the floor, asked a number of questions on the strategy and the implementation:

- Attendees spoke about the pressure on mental health services within higher education providers and asked whether there would be specific guidance on this and raised the importance of needing to lobby to extend mental health funding for schools to university.
- Attendees further argued that the marketization of higher education has aggravated mental illness, such as the increased financial pressures on students having a significant impact on their health.

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