



## ***Student Minds University Mental Health Charter***

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January; 1:30pm-2:30pm

Committee Room 2, Houses of Parliament, Westminster, SW1A 0AA

### **Introduction**

There is a student mental health crisis in higher education which is demonstrated by a significant increase in disclosure of mental health conditions by students. This has resulted in many university services struggling to keep pace with demand and an increased focus on the support that universities are offering their students.

Students have campaigned for effectively funded university and college support services which link seamlessly with fully-funded National Health Service mental health provision. In addition, culturally competent services which are inclusive of all students are a key concern.

### **Key Statistics**

- 95% of higher education providers have reported an increase in demand of counselling services
- The Office for National Statistics estimated that in 2017/18, 95 students took their own lives
- The number of students declaring a pre-existing mental illness to their university has more than doubled since 2014/15
- In 2014/15 1,180 students who experienced mental health difficulties dropped out of university, an increase of 210% compared to 2009/10
- 87% of students in both further and higher education have felt stressed; 77% have suffered from anxiety and 33% have had suicidal thoughts, in a 2015 NUS survey

### **Upcoming developments in university mental health**

The University Mental Health Charter was created following consultation with staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK. The Charter provides a set of principles to support universities across the UK in making mental health a university-wide priority.

It forms the basis of the Charter Award Scheme, being developed in 2020, which will recognise and reward universities that promote good mental health and demonstrate good practice.

Universities UK have previously released the StepChange framework, which focuses on the approach that university leadership can take in making change around mental health. It focuses on a whole university approach, understanding that decisions that impact on student mental health happen throughout universities. They intend to release a refreshed version of the StepChange framework, including an improvement tool for senior university leaders, in early 2020.

### **University Mental Health Charter principles**

The Charter sets out 18 themes that cover a broad range of university activity that may have an impact on mental health and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> These themes have been organised into five sections, mapped to the dimensions of the refreshed model of StepChange.

- Section 1 – Learn: Explores the aspects of the student experience most influenced by the curriculum and student learning and development, in their broadest sense.
- Section 2 – Support: Explores support for mental health, including university service provision, responding to suicide and severe mental illness and collaborating with NHS, external services and families.
- Section 3 – Work: Outlines the importance of supporting staff wellbeing and development.
- Section 4 – Live: Sets out how the physical and social environments in which we live and work can promote positive wellbeing.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/191202\\_summary\\_leaflet\\_01.pdf](https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/191202_summary_leaflet_01.pdf)



- Section 5 – Enabling themes: Outlines a number of enabling themes – leadership, cohesive working across the organisation, student voice, inclusivity and research – that are fundamental to ensuring good practice across every other area.

Each theme has a number of principles of good practice for universities to work towards to achieve a whole-university approach to mental health and wellbeing. Universities that apply to the Award Scheme will be asked to demonstrate their progress towards the principles to achieve the Award.

### **Whole University Approach**

The 18 themes together make up a whole-university approach to improving the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff. A whole-university approach states:

- That every aspect of the university provision, it's physical, cultural, social, personal and educational environment, is important in preventing mental illness and promoting good mental health.
- That the mental health of both staff and students are interlinked and are important to creating mentally healthy university communities.
- That well-resourced mental health services responding to mental illness, alongside measures to promote good mental health and prevent individuals experiencing difficulties in the first place, are key.

### **Relevance of the charter to students' unions**

Student Minds have stated the following regarding relevance of the Charter to students' unions:

*Greater clarity and shared understanding:* The Charter aims to clarify what is meant by a whole a whole-university approach to mental health and wellbeing for staff and students, and what universities can do to improve mental health outcomes for staff and students across every aspect of the university's provision.

*Created in partnership with students:* In creating the Charter, Student Minds consulted with thousands of university staff, students, SU officers/ staff and higher education organisations.

*Evidence-informed:* Everything in the Charter is backed up by existing research or our own academically-rigorous consultation with staff and students. The Charter enables student leaders to campaign for change that is fully supported by evidence, so they can be confident their work will achieve the best outcomes for their members.

*Provides key asks:* The principles of good practice can be viewed as 100 "key asks" for students to put to their universities. Students' Unions can use these as a basis for exploring with staff and students: How is the university working towards these principles? How does the university know they are meeting them fully and effectively? Where they can be doing better?

*Relevant to students:* The principles of good practice are not prescriptive, but allow students to ensure universities are considering the needs of their student communities when campaigning for them to improve their approach to mental health and wellbeing.

*Puts student voice at the centre:* The Charter emphasises the need to co-produce approaches with students. It describes how everything- from developing a university-wide strategy to enhancing services and designing interventions- should be done with some level of engagement with students at your university. Students' Unions can play a key role in ensuring your university listens to a diverse range of students and supports students to be able to engage in developing solutions.



*The value of SUs in creating belonging:* The Charter emphasises the need for universities to support students to create a sense of belonging, and make friends. There is emerging evidence that student groups and societies can play a key role in this area.

*Brings staff and students together:* The Charter emphasises that staff and student wellbeing cannot be taken in isolation. Through the Charter, staff and students can come together as allies to create change that will benefit everyone in the university.

*Provides motivation for change:* University leaders often respond to external motivators in order to initiate and put significant resources behind change programmes. Students can use the promise of a Charter Award as an additional lever to encourage universities to make the change they want to see.

*Examples of good practice:* Through the Award Scheme, Student Minds will begin to build a bank of good practice case studies and examples. These will provide students will additional inspiration for influencing change at their own institution.

***For details of our next event or to receive more information about the APPG on Students, please contact the Secretariat to the APPG on Students: [info@appg-students.org.uk](mailto:info@appg-students.org.uk).***