

## University of the Highlands and Islands Student Mental Health Agreement 2020-2022

### Introduction

The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and the Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) is committed to supporting the mental health of our students and ensuring students have access to appropriate support.

The university is a tertiary institution encompassing 13 partner colleges and research centres, covering a wide geographical area within the Highlands and Islands. The actions within this agreement are designed to take account of the geographical and resource variations within this complex and unique partnership.

This document has been developed by the University's Mental Health and Counselling Manager, the Student Association Mental Health Coordinator, the HISA Vice President for Further Education, and HISA; together with feedback from students across the partnership.

Actions within in this agreement are planned in consideration that the vast majority of UHI students are faced with by learning in a purely online environment due to COVID-19. Some of these challenges include social isolation and lack of access or knowledge of support services.

The University and Student Association will undertake the following actions within the next 18 months:

### 1. Promotion of support & services available to UHI Students

As part of our ongoing commitment to raising awareness to our staff and students about how to maintain positive mental health, together with developing an understanding of ill mental health we will continue to promote our mental health and wellbeing services throughout the year. Due to the global pandemic and lockdown, most students are currently learning online – so it is even more vital to promote the wellbeing services available to students within the UHI and in the third sector.

#### Actions to be taken:

- Commitment to UHI's Mental Health Strategy launched last year, which is placed on our webpage and shared through social media.
- Continuing to promote positive mental health and wellbeing together with raising awareness of wider initiatives and campaigns across the Highlands and Islands on the UHI's Wellbeing Facebook page.
- Updating the Universities website pages on Mental Health and Student Wellbeing to include our new "digital den" with resources for all students

- Clear and widespread promotion of the Online Counselling service to all UHI students via the Green Button (which can be accessed through university and partner websites across the partnership) and by an all-student and staff email at the start of each academic term.
- Our continued involvement with Scottish Student Sport's Healthy Body Healthy Mind (HBHM) and NUS Think Positive's Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA). Both projects look at ways to improve student mental health; HBHM through focusing on student mental and physical healthy, sport and smoking cessation; and the SMHA which aims to cover both strategic and practical plans to make improvements in how the institution and students' association work together to tackle the stigma attached to mental ill health and work towards improving the mental wellbeing of their student body.

## 2. Safeguarding and Gender Based Violence

The university is aware of the importance to ensure students are safe during their time at university and as such this is a priority of the university. The university has created its own Safeguarding Group to bring leads together to develop policy, guidance and training.

The Equally Safe Group has been refreshed and now contains representation of key practitioners from across the partnership. This group will continue to ensure the appropriate processes and support are in place for those who experience gender-based violence.

Due to the national lockdown, it is even more challenging for those suffering from abuse to request help safely and escape living conditions, so it is even more critical to ensure students can reach out for support and aid.

### Actions to be taken:

- Staff training – staff will be given appropriate training to ensure they can support students who have experienced incidents of sexual assault or gender-based violence.
- Reporting – it is important students know how to report any incidents of sexual violence or gender-based violence therefore the university will investigate how this can be improved.
- Policies and guidance – the university has developed student policy and guidance around the behaviour it expects of its students during their studies and the action which will be taken should they not meet their conduct not be as expected. This will be promoted to students throughout the academic year.

## 3. Focus on combating student social isolation

This is a difficult time for students due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as many students are faced with the challenge of social isolation, either directly or indirectly caused by the pandemic or the

national lockdown. Many students are in complete isolation and it is essential to promote online options to improve their sense of community and wellbeing.

#### **Actions to be taken:**

- To actively promote all student services as well as online clubs and activities available to students via official social media channels.
- HISA to run online activities for students throughout the academic year, both on a regional and local basis and to promote and support online clubs.

#### **4. Commitment to funding counsellors**

A key part of addressing the challenges to student's mental health is by continuing to support the counsellors which have been funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Alongside SFC funding, it is hoped to put additional funding in to ensure that not just all UHI students have access to counselling provision, but there is a minimal waiting time between referral and appointments.

If SFC funding is no longer available, all attempts will be made to put in funding to cover the costs of continued delivery of these services.

#### **Actions to be taken:**

- To ensure that all SFC funding for counsellors is spent to ensure UHI continues to receive SFC funding for counsellors in future academic years.

#### **5. Measuring Outcomes**


The Mental Health Strategy is accompanied by individual implementation plans which outline the actions needed to meet the Key aims of the Strategy. This includes the development of common key performance indicators that provide evidence of the success of these plans.

The UHI Mental Health and Counselling Manager will continue to take responsibility for an overarching implementation plan that will focus on University-wide activities. Local level implementation plans will be developed by relevant Academic Partner Student Services staff, with support from the Mental Health and Counselling Manager in order to fulfil our strategic aims through a joined-up, strategic approach.

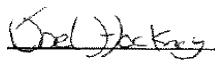
Sources of data will include:


- Higher levels of key performance indicators, particularly around the areas of students who disclose mental health issues.
- National Student Survey results
- Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey results
- Healthy Body Healthy Mind Award rating
- Clinical outcome measures (CIAO and SIAO)

Signed: -

 \_\_\_\_\_ Allie Scott, Mental Health and Counselling Manager

\_\_\_\_\_ Flo Jansen, HISA President

 \_\_\_\_\_ Joel Hockney, Student Association Assistant

 \_\_\_\_\_ Ash Morgan, HISA Vice President for Further Education