

Improving mental health and wellbeing support for Scotland's students

Recommendations for institutions

If you have a student mental health strategy, align it with your Student Mental Health Agreement

- 1** The strategy is a strategic overview; the SMHA sets out the responsibilities of the institution and student association.



These should be:


- Student-led and evidence-based
- Measured and evaluated
- Clear about who is responsible for what
- Clear and accessible
- Developed with internal and external partners

Support with money issues

- 2** Review and deliver services to help students overcome financial pressure. The Scottish Government has done a survey that may help with this.



Put student mental health and wellbeing at the heart of all you do

- 3** Make student wellbeing a key part of how you teach. For example, curriculum link staff roles can help with this.
-  Give all teaching and student-facing training in student wellbeing.

Support students through transitions

- 4** Remember, students may need support with their mental health throughout student life. For example, pre-entry, transition into the institution, transition to second year, exam and assessment times and periods away from the institution.



You could have an annual cycle of advice and activities to coincide with key trigger points in the student journey.

Reach out

- 5** Promote student services in a variety of ways. Review how you do this and see if you can improve.



Making information available in a variety of ways is especially important since the pandemic. Make sure you offer advice and information to students who are waiting for counselling or mental health support.

Address inequalities

- 6** Use your data to understand why students from some backgrounds aren't accessing support. Make sure your information targets these groups and individuals.



For example, you should consider and address the effect of on-campus racism on BAME students.

Listen to students who don't find your services helpful, to improve what you do.

Tackle stigma

- 7** Assure students that your services are confidential and available to everyone. Tackle stigma across your institution and get involved in national anti-stigma campaigns.



Evaluate to improve

- 8** Funding has been made available from the Scottish Government to help monitor and evaluate your counselling provision.



You should also evaluate other support, such as peer groups and online platforms.

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Recommendations for student associations

Review your social activities

- 1 Review the opportunities you provide for students to socialise and form relationships. Make sure they include and meet the needs of a range of groups.



Use Student Mental Health Agreement project processes to plan, deliver and evaluate how this affects student wellbeing.

Work together

- 2 You can't do this alone.
Work with internal and external partners, using your Student Mental Health Agreement as a vehicle for facilitation.



Support students through transitions

- 3 Be aware that there are multiple points in the student journey where people might need mental health support.



You could develop an annual cycle of activities that coincide with key trigger points, such as at the start of a new academic year, or during exams.

Reach out

- 4 Review how you promote internal and external student mental health services. Use a variety of ways to communicate, including online and face to face.



This is especially important since the covid 19 pandemic.

Address inequalities

- 5 Use institutional data to explore why some students don't access support.



Target your information and advice where take-up is low.

Tackle stigma

- 6 Assure students that mental health services are confidential and are for everyone.



Get involved in work to tackle stigma and national anti-stigma campaigns.

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Recommendations for the Scottish Government

Support capacity building

- 1 Work with colleges, universities, professional bodies and unions to review and improve staff capacity to consider student mental health and wellbeing.

Financial support

- 2 Improve student cost of living support, over and above the 2017 support review. Monitor demand for locally-administered discretionary funding to ensure resourcing is adequate.

Conduct recurring research into student finance to inform decision makers and review money advice and support at institution level.

Anti-stigma campaign

- 3 Work with NUS Scotland to lead a national awareness-building campaign to reduce stigma and misconceptions about mental health and support.

Equity of access

- 4 Work with the SFC to ensure equity of access to counselling across all institutions in Scotland.

Improve NHS access

- 5 Review and take action to address students' difficulties accessing NHS mental health services.

Address inequalities

- 6 Work with SFC to support research into the experiences of BAME students, to address systemic racism and decolonise the curriculum.

Support evaluation and improvement

- 7 Improve data collection methods to support colleges and universities to monitor, evaluate and embed systematic, embedded mental health and wellbeing strategies.

Fund further research

- 8
 - Why students at FE level are less likely to be aware of or access mental health support
 - Differences in experiences of institutional mental health and wellbeing support, notably among BAME students
 - The experiences of students who do not report a good experience or benefit from services
 - The nature, extent and efficacy of relationships with NHS and other external partners
 - What strategies are effective specifically in a Scottish FE and HE environment for increasing student resilience to support mental health and wellbeing.

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Recommendations for Think Positive

SMHA Guidance

1



Work with SFC to produce clearer guidance on the role of Student Mental Health Agreements and Mental Health Strategies and the differences between these.

Improve money advice

2



Continue to work with institutions, the National Association of Student Money Advisers (NASMA) and the Further Education Student Support Advisory Group (FESSAG) to enhance their work on money advice to students.

Anti-stigma campaign

3



Work with the Scottish Government to lead a national awareness building campaign to reduce stigma around student mental health and challenge preconceived ideas about who support is for and not for.

Gather evidence

4



Grow the evidence base of effective practice around mental health and wellbeing. Identify and share approaches and initiatives, backed by evidence from Student Mental Health Agreements.

Support evaluation and improvement

5



Work with SFC to provide support and specific guidance to the sector in monitoring and evaluating student mental health and wellbeing provision.

Read the full report at
www.thinkpositive.scot