

Student Mental Health Agreement 2017-18

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&
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Background and Agreement

The experience of student mental health, and the factors which may result in poor mental health within students are becoming a priority within the education sector. There is recognition nationwide that the mental welfare of the population is deteriorating; with figures as high as 65% of individuals reporting that they experience mental ill health (2). To place this into context within the education sector, research has demonstrated that young adults who are studying in educational institutions, have significantly lower rates of mental health than other young adults (6), and in 2015, the National Union of Students reported that 78% of Students experienced mental health concerns within the previous year (5). This research builds upon previous findings by NUS in which they reported in 2013 that 80% of students experienced stress, 55% reported feeling anxiety, and 49% reported feeling depressed (6). Continuing this worrying trend, reports have shown that students on average experience mental ill health at least once a week (7).

The impacts of mental ill health can be significant, and the Mental Health Foundation have reported a national increase in death by Suicide in Scotland for the first time in 6 years (2). Within the student sector, NUS in 2013 reported that 13% of students who partook in their study disclosed having suicidal thoughts (3). Within an education context, mental ill health for students can have severe consequences, and in the academic year 2014/15, there was a 210% increase nationally in the number of students who withdrew from their courses in comparison from the previous 5 years due to mental ill health (6).

When seeking support for poor mental health, 21% of students disclose to their university or students' union to seek mental health support (3). This statistic is supported by disclosure and usage rates to student support services – as over the last decade, educational institutions such as Universities have nationally seen disclosure rates quadruple, with the statistic being 15,395 first year students disclosing to their institutions in 2015 (6). A survey of 24 institutions noted that 75% noted an increase in individuals making use of institution support services.

Moreover, in a study conducted into student support at higher education institutions - 94% reported an increase in demand for usage of their counselling services, which 61% of these respondents noting an increase of 25% or more (6). When examining further education institutions, research has reported an 81% increase in the usage of counselling services; with the estimation that up to 1 in 4 students at any one time are using, or waiting to use, the institutions counselling services (6). Concerning GCU specifically, the counselling service has increased by 170 service users, from 491 in the academic year 2013 - 2014, to 661 in 2016-2017. In their report, the Mental Health Foundation note the significance of education-based counselling services within their recommendations to educational institutions; as they reported that 70% of young individuals did not receive adequate support or interventions for their mental ill health (1).

Given the aforementioned context of student mental welfare, it is essential that education institutions and student associations recognise the change in dynamics in student welfare; and support students throughout their educational journeys (4).

GCU Students' Association alongside Glasgow Caledonian University, document in their values, mission, and vision a common theme of student support to enable an outstanding student experience at GCU. This theme is carried into both institutions respective Strategic Plans, and additionally both institutions have a great history of coming together to achieve what is in the best interests of the student population. Both Glasgow Caledonian University, and GCU

Students' Association are now working in partnership to produce a Student Mental Health Agreement, where both institutions can come together to provide a more holistic support provision at GCU.

This document is part of the Student Mental Health Agreement project (co-ordinated by Think Positive and NUS nationally, which aims to bring students' associations and universities together to help support student mental health) outlines the working areas that GCU Students' Association and Glasgow Caledonian University agree to develop to positively benefit GCU Students throughout the Academic Year 2017-18. The plan will be reviewed, and work completed will be evidenced in another document produced at the end of the academic 2017/18 year. Upon conclusion, this agreement should be updated on an annual basis to ensure an ongoing partnership between the two institutions to champion Student Mental Health.

Three areas were chosen from a selection of criteria produced by NUS Scotland in line with their Mental Health Agreement initiative, these are:

1. To promote current student support services
2. Work on initiatives to help tackle stigma
3. Facilitate peer support networks



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References

- (1) The Mental Health Foundation; *Surviving or Thriving – the State of the UK's Mental Health*
- (2) The Mental Health Foundation; *World Suicide Prevention Day Policy Briefing*
- (3) NUS; *Mental Distress Survey Overview*
- (4) Think Positive; *Silently Stress – A survey into student mental wellbeing*
- (5) NUS-USI; *Student Wellbeing Research Report*
- (6) Institute for Public Policy Research; *Not By Degrees- Improving Student Mental Health in the UK's Universities*
- (7) NUS Disabled Students; *Mental Health and Suicide Prevention: an in-depth guide for Students' Unions and student activists*

Action Plan

Support Services Promotion

Within both the Students' Association and University there is a wealth of student facing support services which aim to positively impact upon the lives of students and their wellbeing. It is therefore essential that the current services which are available to GCU students are effectively highlighted so students know where to go for support.

The hope is that by focusing on this objective, we can not only see an increase in student wellbeing at GCU, but also an increase in appropriate support service contact.

1. Develop a Support Booklet with every internal support service

Produce a booklet which outlines every support service available to GCU students on campus, as well as out of hours contacts, in one easily accessible and understandable booklet. The booklet would then be implemented on a tab on GCU Learn. This would make the information visible, and accessible to all students.

2. Host a Publicity Campaign for the Nightline Service

The Nightline service is currently advertised through Plasma Screens around campus, and on the university and association websites. The service itself has a publicity officer who helps to organise Nightline Awareness Week in Trimester 1; and publicity campaigns throughout the academic year. By introducing a campaign which is supported and organised with the Sabbatical Officer Policy Lead a greater awareness of, and engagement with, the service can hopefully be observed.

3. Continuing ongoing advertisement of Advice Centre & Wellbeing Service

Currently, there is a focus from the University and the Students' Association to continue effectively advertising these services to students. This occurs in several ways such as leaflets, through online webpages, in all student emails and in social media. These methods, and more, will be demonstrated in the final report for the 2017-18 Student Mental Health Agreement.

It is hoped that these advertisement methods could be expanded in ways such as Sabbatical Officer social media posts, lecture shouts, the support booklet and GCU learn support tab.

Tackling Stigma

The university and students' association also recognise the importance of challenging societal stigma which currently surrounds mental health. It is important that this is challenged as research has previously shown that negative and stigmatising attitudes may lead to discrimination, prejudice, or self-stigma and this can have a further negative impact on individuals' mental health.

1. Organise a Mental Health Campaign – Wellbeing Volunteering

GCU Students' Association currently host a range of campaigns aimed at improving student wellbeing. The campaigns always reference the university wellbeing department, and Students' Association Advice Centre. The campaigns are usually championed by the Wellbeing Volunteers, who are registered GCU students.

Each year the association and full time sabbatical officer policy lead decide on the topics which will be covered in the campaign, and in November 2017 a topic surrounding mental health will be delivered in collaboration with

SeeMe to address societal stigma. Through this campaign we aim to normalise discussing mental health issues and decreasing stigma.

SeeMe Scotland will then be invited to participate in the annual Wellbeing Fayre, further precipitating the message. Breathing Space will also be invited to attend the Wellbeing Fayre.

2. Mental Health Themed Student Summit Event

The Student Experience Summit is an annual event at GCU, where students and staff discuss issues surrounding the University's commitment to deliver a 'truly outstanding' student experience. This year, the summit is focused on the theme of Mental Health; with the title being "Mental Wealth; Enhancing GCU Student well-being".

The focus of this is to inform the development of an action plan to enhance student mental health and well-being at GCU. Aside from informing this action plan, we hope that the conversations which arise from the summit event, as well as the active promotion will challenge stigma in regards to Mental Health.

3. Organise for an Anti-Stigma Speaker on Campus

To educate students on the topic of mental health stigma, the idea of having a speaker come onto campus to speak on Mental Health was discussed.

This has been incorporated into one of the sabbatical officer's individual objectives (Rachel Simpson, VP GSBS).

4. World Mental Health Day (10th October)

Mental health in the workplace was the theme of World Mental Health Day in 2017. World Mental Health Day is observed on 10 October every year, with the overall objective of raising awareness of mental health issues and mobilizing efforts in support of better mental health.

5. University Mental Health Day (1st March)

University Mental Health Day is the national campaign to focus efforts on promoting the mental health of people who live, work and study in Higher Education settings run jointly by Student Minds and The University Mental Health Advisers Network.

The theme this year is community. Whether you're a student, a member of support staff, an academic, or a senior university leader, we all have a part to play to cultivate a positive mental health community at university.

Within this, we hope to:

- Improve students' and staff's awareness of support and promote a sense of belonging.
- Improve understanding among students and staff of the role the environment and community can play in protecting student mental health.
- Raise awareness of the specific challenges students face with regards to support for their mental health and influence education institutions and health providers to work collaboratively so all in higher education can thrive.
- Improve students' and staff's awareness of support and promote a sense of belonging.

6. Encourage Participation in SMHFA Course for Student facing staff

The Scottish Mental Health First Aid Award is a course which aims to equip students with the skills to help an individual in distress in the same way a first aid certificate can help educate those in assisting those in physical distress.

The skills and abilities taught in the course may assist student facing staff in supporting distressed students.

Peer Support Networks

Alongside services provided by the university and Students' Association, the aspect of enabling peer support within the GCU community is another working area both parties would like to develop this academic year.

There are multiple benefits to this – including allowing students to gain confidence to engage with university and association support services; as well as providing a safe and inclusive environment in which students may seek support.

By developing this network, we hope to provide a more holistic approach to providing student support. This will be through the introduction and development of various support networks currently.

1. Introduce the Scottish Mental Health First Aid Award to Students

The course, as explained above, is recognised by the NHS, and would be a great opportunity for students to learn how to greater support their peers at university.

The aim is that the course will be introduced to the GCU Glasgow Campus free of charge to students. This would be incorporated into the already existing Student Leaders Programme, and is included in one of the individual objectives of the full time sabbatical officers, Rachel Simpson, VP GSBS.

2. Preventing and Responding to Gender Based Violence Peer to Peer Training

In the past year the university and association have been working to develop a programme for students which aims to challenge sexual violence. Students will be trained and supported to deliver workshops in which issues such as consent, how the media portrays gender-based violence, and others will be discussed with other students in a safe environment.

These workshops would be free to students; and will be available from September 2017. The idea is that the workshops will be free, and frequent to allow it to be as accessible as possible to students within the GCU population.

3. Continue our Nightline Service

Nightline is a confidential listening and information service run by and for students of Glasgow Strathclyde and Caledonian Universities. The service operates from 7pm-7am, Monday-Friday during terms time.

The service requires student volunteers each year, who the Students' Association trains and supports in both trimester 1 and 2, and then help to facilitate a rota in which students can sign up to support their peers. We are committed to continuing this service throughout the 2017/18 academic year, and increase student awareness of this.

4. Promote the Gender and Sexuality Safe Space

The Students' Association currently hosts a Gender and Sexuality Safe Space. The space was established to provide a safe space for students to find community regarding gender and sexuality, as well as seeking peer support. The room is open to any student and is located on the second floor of the Association, in NH205.

It is our ambition to increase the current knowledge of the space, and encourage more students to make use of the supportive environment. This will be done by the sabbatical officer policy lead for Equality and Diversity, publishing an article on the space, and the inclusion of the space in the support booklet.

5. Introduce 8 Week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Course

Mindfulness can help us to learn to cope better with the pressures we are under, recognise the thoughts and judgements we make, often subconsciously, that generate more stress and find balance and a sense of calm.

The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Course is a recognised and established mindfulness course, proven to help people cope better with stress, depression and anxiety. This eight-week life-skills course combines experiential mindfulness practices and includes mindfulness meditation practices, gentle stretching and movement, group dialogue and discussion and individually tailored instructions.

6. Introduce a 6 Week My Recovery Action Plan (My Rap) Workshop

MyRAP is the work of a multi-agency group whose aim was to produce a self-management tool to support people in taking control over their own wellbeing and recovery. It is an enabling tool to assist people identify their strengths and build on them. There may be a number of reasons why people come to MyRAP workshops, for example they may be mentally well and simply wish to learn more about staying well or they may be currently unwell and being supported by mental health services but would like to take more control over their own recovery through self-management.

7. Introduce Look After Your Mate Workshops

This is a student peer to peer support group for mental health which has been developed by Student Minds. It is a 2-3 hour interactive workshop for students who may be supporting a friend experiencing mental health difficulties or would like to know more about mental health, the support available for university students, and how to look after your own wellbeing whilst at university.

The workshop is delivered through trainer presentation, group discussion and individual and group activities.