

University of the Highlands and Islands Partnership: Mental Health Strategy 2019-2022

Introduction

The Mental Health Strategy for the University of the Highlands and Islands sets out our strategic direction over the next three years. As a Partnership, we are extremely proud of the work we undertake in relation to supporting student mental health, but recognise a need to coordinate and promote parity of these services in order to offer a consistent and effective provision of services to all students regardless of level, mode or location of study. This strategy aims to be a source of inspiration and commitment to improving mental health support throughout the Partnership, and to provide an environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle in tandem with services to support individuals and groups experiencing periods of mental ill health.

Background

The University of the Highlands and Islands is a unique institution made up of thirteen Academic Partners and an Executive Office (“the Partnership”), covering some of the most rural and isolated places across Scotland. Student Support Services are managed and resourced by their Academic Partner locally. This includes responsibility for planning, setting and allocating budgets and establishing data collection and reporting requirements.

Mental health is one of the most challenging public health issues of our time. Approximately one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year, and around three quarters of adults with mental illness first experience symptoms before the age of 25. The Institute for Public Policy Research has found that ‘over the past five years, 94% of universities have experienced a sharp increase in the number of people trying to access support services, with some institutions noticing a threefold increase’ (BBC, 2018).

Students of any age can be at risk of experiencing poorer mental health and wellbeing due to factors relating to academic, financial and social pressures. This is evident in the high levels of mental distress reported by students, and the extent to which educational institutions have experienced significant increases in the number of students seeking counselling support, and in the proportion of students who disclose a mental health condition to their institution.

Vision

The Partnership believes that mental health is everybody’s responsibility and that mental health and wellbeing affects every aspect of student life. We will place student mental health at the forefront of our decisions, and promote equal treatment of physical and mental health. In doing so, our students will be empowered to manage their mental health and wellbeing, enabling them to achieve their goals and attain qualifications to assist them in their future careers.

Context

Student services are delivered within a federal structure whereby an overarching university strategic plan and strongly embedded and effective horizontal structures interact with local plans and staffing arrangements. The university is, nevertheless, keen to ensure that there is an equivalence of student experience in the accessing and promotion of mental health services.

In order to facilitate this, a University-wide mental health service review was carried out during the 2017/18 academic year. The review showed that many Academic Partners were working in a reactive rather than proactive way, whereas working towards the creation of a preventative culture would improve provision. This would be achieved by services that enable all students regardless of mode, location or level of study to avoid, where possible, mental health decline and seek the support and guidance they need at the appropriate time during their academic journey.

An analysis of the review outcomes was conducted and an action plan was developed that set out requirements and recommendations for implementation. Further to this, in 2018 the Scottish Funding Council released guidance setting out their expectation for all universities in Scotland to produce a mental health strategy. From these requirements and recommendations, six strategic aims for 2019-2022 have been developed and are set out in the section below: 'Strategic Aims 2019-2022'.

The University of the Highlands and Islands Mental Health Strategy Implementation Plans go into further detail about the local delivery of the strategic aims.

Definition of Mental Health

The Mental Health Foundation defines mental health as: 'the ability to learn, the ability to feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions, the ability to form and maintain good relationships with others, the ability to cope with and manage change and uncertainty'.

We see mental health on a continuum and the term "mental health" used in this document refers to the spectrum of experiences ranging from the experience of feeling mentally well and maintaining habits that support wellbeing at one end, to having a diagnosis of a serious mental health problem and not being able to engage in activities or habits which support and promote mental wellbeing at the other end and all that goes in between.

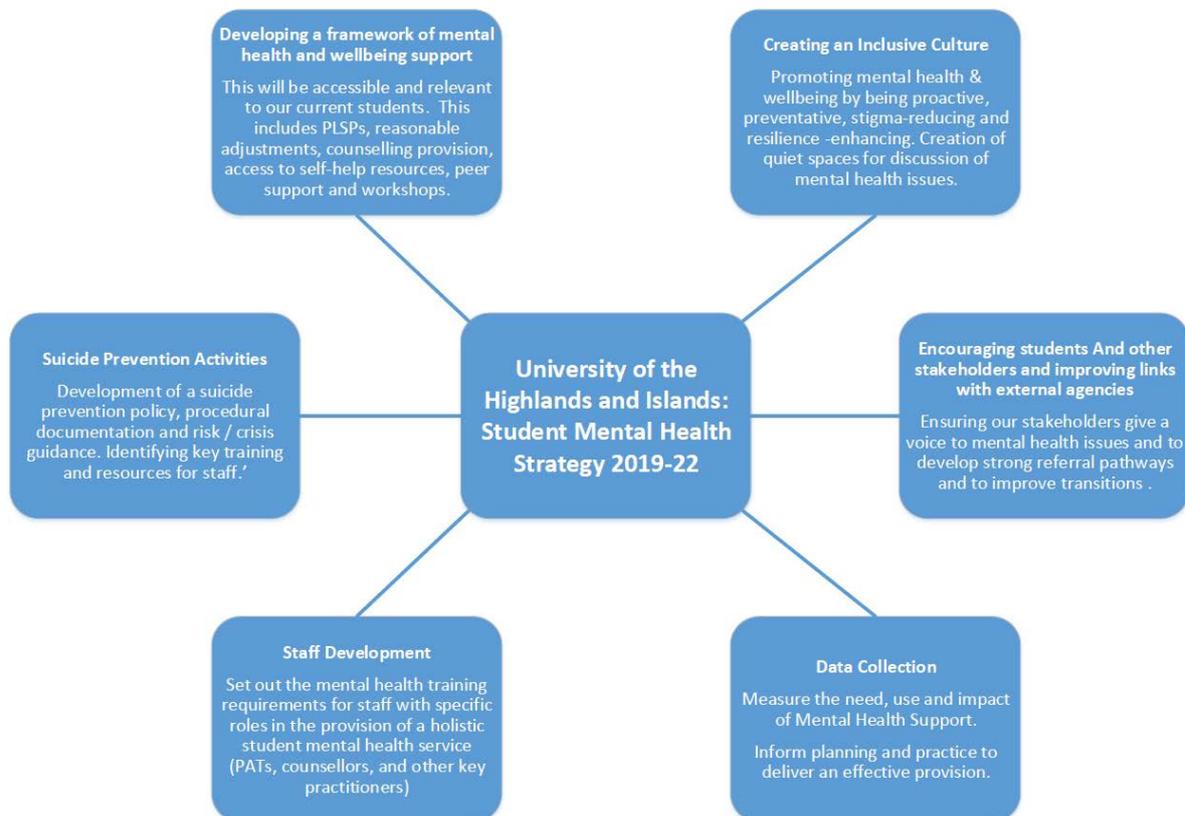


All students and staff are encouraged to contribute proactively and collaboratively in our mental health work via the promotion and awareness raising of mental health and to use the full range of Partnership and community resources in order to support and maintain their mental health.

Scope and limitations

The Partnership will support all students with mental health difficulties in a professional, kind and compassionate manner. It should be noted, however, that the University and Academic Partners are not clinical mental health providers. There are limits therefore to the type and extent of support that can be provided and no attempt will be made to replicate specialist NHS services, especially for students with severe and potentially self-harming conditions. These services are not crisis services in their purpose, competence and availability “out of hours”.

Strategic Aims 2019 - 2022



The six strategic aims are common to all institutions within the Partnership but, as stated above, there will be some variation in how services are delivered, based on the widely differing contexts and external service availability across our region. The Implementation Plan for each institution will set out the core offer of support available to all students proposed timeline for introduction of new services and performance indicators against which progress will be measured. There will be some elements of strategic aims that will be mandatory across the Partnership owing to them being legal requirements or that they are recognised as sector best practice. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Mental Health Framework

- We will increase awareness and uptake of Mental Health Personal Learning Support Plans (PLSPs)
- We will offer all students with access to counselling provision; this may be through face to face work, the University's online counselling service or through an external provider (who meet our Quality Assurance Criteria)
- We will take part in NUS Think Positive Campaigns: Healthy Body Healthy Mind and Student Mental Health Agreements

2. Creating an Inclusive Culture: promoting mental health and wellbeing

- We will be proactive, preventative, stigma-reducing and resilience-enhancing to promote a positive disclosure environment.
- We will promote initiatives and activities that reduce stigma about mental health and disability
- We will offer a holistic approach to support the wellbeing of students

3. Engaging Stakeholders and Improving Links with External Agencies

- We will train outreach, transitions and recruitment staff in mental health and wellbeing awareness, as part of ongoing mental health Continual Professional Development for key staff, to enable positive messages to be included in outreach work
- We will strengthen referral pathways with third parties to provide a wider variety of services to our students

4. Data Collection

- We will measure the need, use and impact of mental health support together with understanding the necessary resources to deliver the service to students
- We will collect data on the impact of support intervention on outcomes using our SIOA (Support Impact on Academic Outcomes) and CIOA (Counselling Impact on Academic Outcomes) Measurement tools

5. Staff Development

- We will set out the mental health training requirements for staff with specific roles in the provision of a holistic student mental health service (e.g. PATs, counsellors, and other key practitioners) together with aiming to provide relevant training to as many staff as possible.
- We will define which roles should receive compulsory mental health training
- We will work with all Counselling Staff through the Counselling Network to promote equivalence of services across the partnership

6. Suicide Prevention Activities

- We will develop a suicide prevention policy
- We will develop procedural documentation and risk/crisis guidance.

Implementation

Implementation plans listing the variety of actions referred to in the Strategy will be developed and regularly reviewed. This will include the development of common KPIs that provide evidence of the success of these plans. The Mental Health and Counselling Manager will 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 results
- CIAO and SIAO percentage ratings

The university will take all reasonable steps to provide access to support and materials in Gaelic.

Evaluation and Review

The strategy will be reviewed every three 3 years, as a minimum, to expand and further improve the strategic priorities in relation to mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, this strategy will be reviewed and updated as appropriate on an ad hoc basis. If you have a question or suggestion about improving this strategy, this should be addressed to Allie Scott, Mental Health and Counselling Manager allie.scott@uhi.ac.uk.

Continuous Development

All members of the University are encouraged to engage with this strategy and to suggest areas for expansion and development. All comments and suggestions should be made to the Mental Health and Counselling Manager.