

## **GuildHE response to the '*Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper*'**

### **About GuildHE**

[GuildHE](#) is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education. Our members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions from both the traditional and private ("for profit" and "not for profit") sectors. Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; education; maritime; health and sports.

### **Introduction**

1. GuildHE warmly welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation, and shares government's concern that the long-lasting impacts of mental health conditions are a 'hidden injustice'.<sup>1</sup> Students represent a growing number of the population's young people between 18 and 21, and it is therefore vital that they are a focus of the work government is doing in this area.
2. While we agree that it is important to place emphasis on provision in schools, NUS survey data suggests that eight out of ten students (78%) experienced mental health problems in 2015, and a third experienced suicidal thoughts.<sup>2</sup> These findings are concerning, and demonstrate a need for higher education providers (HEPs) to be instrumental in helping to deliver change.
3. GuildHE strongly agrees with the notion of setting up a new national strategic partnership with key stakeholders focused on improving the mental health of 16-25 year olds by encouraging more coordinated action, experimentation and robust evaluation, and would wish to be a partner as one of the officially recognised representative bodies (alongside Universities UK). We are currently conducting research around student wellbeing with our own membership (and member students' unions) which we believe will be valuable to this partnership, and complements the *StepChange* framework (which we also contributed to).
4. Only around 6% of the green paper concentrated on the 16-25 age group, and the consultation did not include questions relating to this age group. GuildHE is writing this response to contribute to the evidence base, and offers responses to point 133 - which outlines the areas government expects the strategic partnership to focus on.
5. GuildHE strongly agrees that HEPs should adopt a whole organisation approach to mental

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-unveils-plans-to-transform-mental-health-support>

<sup>2</sup> <http://appg-students.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Mental-Health-Poll-November-15-Summary.pdf>

health, as advocated by Universities UK in the *StepChange* framework. In small HEPs, students are likely to have more contact with larger proportion of staff within an institution - from lecturer to vice chancellor - so it is fundamental that everyone within an institution prioritises student and staff mental health.

6. It is also important that this coherent messaging is communicated pre-arrival. In a joint report from the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and Unite Students, only 37% of applicants who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition would disclose to their institution that they have a diagnosis.<sup>3</sup> This is a troubling statistic, indicating that institutions are unaware of students who may value additional support, and perhaps would be improved by institutions being proactive on this front.

**Data:** *'to provide a systematic strategy to improve what we know about student mental health. This means encouraging innovation in data linkage and analytics'*

7. GuildHE shares both government's and UUKs concerns about gaps in the dataset in relation to mental health and wellbeing.

8. One key outcome of our research, which has been overwhelmingly supported by both member institutions and students' unions, is measuring wellbeing against retention and attainment. As these are both core metrics in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), this would be a way of championing student wellbeing, and making it a key priority for HEPs.

9. GuildHE hopes to work with our members to find a way to measure this in a more uniform way, but current methods of collecting this data are:

- measuring student attendance with student support
- online questionnaires and psychometric tests
- learning analytics
- tutorials set up according to initial categorisation of students who are likely to drop out
- comparing mitigating circumstances and equality data
- 'exit data' - questionnaires when students do not complete their courses.

**Prevention:** *'to embed understanding throughout student populations of the importance of mental health through exploring and testing psychosocial education'*

10. GuildHE believes that preventative strategies are crucial to maintaining healthy and happy student populations. This is why we have chosen to focus our work in this area on 'wellbeing' as opposed to mental health, as preventative strategies are likely to be better for the students, and less burdensome for mental health services.

11. In a recent survey, 70% of GuildHE members said that they considered wellbeing in the development of their courses in at least one department, and 93% said that they considered student wellbeing when students are being assessed in at least one department (i.e. during exams, assignments, performance, exhibitions etc.). We believe that institutions should be encouraged to embed this across the whole institution.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Reality-Check-Report-Online1.pdf>

Do you think student wellbeing is considered when students are being assessed (i.e. exams, assignments, performance etc.)?

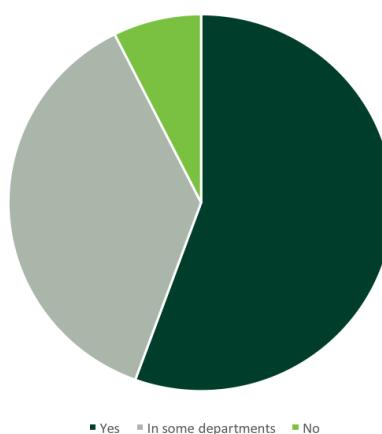


Figure 1: GuildHE

12. GuildHE also believes that government could go further in embedding wellbeing and psychosocial practices in education prior to university, so that they are already more resilient before entering higher education. Perhaps a strategic partnership in this area could extend to schools.

13. Further to this, access to arts and participation in creativity is proven to have a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> It would therefore be prudent for government to invest in arts education as means of embedding a culture of wellbeing in schools.

**Awareness and early intervention:** '*to test and promote training for staff and students on how to help those experiencing mental health difficulties'*

14. GuildHE strongly advocates for staff awareness and training around mental health conditions. 88% of our members offer training for staff - the most popular being Mental Health First Aid, and Charlie Waller. Other popular areas for awareness and training were related to sexual violence/assault, suicide prevention, and mindfulness.

15. Most of the training was offered to all staff, with some offered only to academic staff, or support staff. Some training was also offered to students (particularly students who lived in halls of residences). GuildHE strongly advocates for as many people as possible to receive the training - particularly on small campuses, with smaller communities.

16. This should be coupled with awareness raising campaigns, which aim to destigmatise talking about mental health issues. Both Student Minds and Time To Talk are widely known across the sector - by both HEPs and Students' Unions alike. Awareness raising should be embedded across an institution, and not only communicated in one off events. Some GuildHE members advocate student mental health and wellbeing ambassadors, who work throughout the year to raise awareness around mental health issues, and can explain local/internal services to students.

<sup>4</sup>

[http://www.arthealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative\\_Health\\_Inquiry\\_Report\\_2017\\_-\\_Second\\_Edition.pdf](http://www.arthealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative_Health_Inquiry_Report_2017_-_Second_Edition.pdf)



Figure 2: GuildHE

**Wider transitions:** ‘to address the key issue of moving between services – from children’s mental health services into adults’ services, and from inpatient treatment to community support – and geographies – from home to campus - making it easier for young people to make these moves’

17. GuildHE welcomes this as an area of focus, as it was highlighted as a key issue for mental health/wellbeing managers in GuildHE institutions. This was seen as particularly problematic for multi-campus institutions. We support the work Universities UK has done in highlighting the challenges in this area, and look forward to working closely with the strategic partnership to help strengthen the transition process for young people - whether they are in or out of education.

**Integrated Support Services:** ‘to reduce the variations in care for young people and to encourage local coalitions between tertiary education providers, local authorities, and health and care commissioners and providers’

18. GuildHE warmly welcomes integrated support services, and agrees strongly with the notion that there needs to be a reduction in the variations in care for young people.

19. However, members have talked about the difficulty of connecting with local services, including the NHS. This is owing to high turnover of staff within the NHS. In order to make this effective, government will need to provide significant resource in order for staff from all areas of the partnership to develop and maintain strong and cohesive relationships.

20. It is also important to acknowledge regional differences in provision. Providers in cities are likely to have access to a range of different services, whereas those in rural areas are unlikely to have such diversity. Any partnership will have to develop regional strands, and perhaps sometimes have to look at individual providers, to ensure that every young person in higher education has access to the same quality of care.

**Effective join-up:** ‘to better link student welfare, accommodation and security services within institutions so students with mental health conditions are less likely to go unnoticed’

21. GuildHE welcomes a focus on joined-up services. Our members recognise the importance of services working in a strategic, linked up way to identify a student with poor mental health and to prevent risk of deterioration and suicide.
22. Many smaller institutions and alternative providers do not own their own accommodation and their own services. This makes it more difficult to coordinate different organisations which may be able to pick up on student mental health.

## **Conclusions**

23. GuildHE welcomed the opportunity to respond to the *‘Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper’* consultation. However, it was disappointing that there were no questions relating directly to higher education provision, despite a significant young population participating in HE.
24. We strongly support a national strategic partnership with key stakeholders focusing on improving 16-25 year olds, and would like to be a partner going forward.
25. To summarise our points made on each key areas of focus:

- GuildHE supports a ‘whole provider’ approach to mental health, and believe that this should apply to applicants through to postgraduate study.
- There is a data gap in this area of the sector, and GuildHE would advocate for measuring wellbeing against retention and attainment.
- GuildHE advocates for the implementation of wellbeing strategies as well as mental health strategies, and believe that a wellbeing focus should be implemented in all aspects of HE life.
- GuildHE supports the proposal that all staff and students receive training in mental health, and HEPs should embed a culture of mental health awareness through regular awareness campaigns.
- GuildHE supports work in making smoother and easier transitions for students receiving mental health support, from early years through to the end of their studies.
- Integrated support services are very important, but will require a lot of resource and cross-departmental commitment, particularly in regions where there isn’t a range of services.
- GuildHE welcomes a focus on joined-up services, but this could prove challenging particularly to alternative providers, and smaller institutions who have to outsource a lot of their services.

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