

## **Universities Wales response to the Health and Social Care committee's inquiry into suicide prevention.**

Universities Wales represents the interests of universities in Wales and is a National Council of Universities UK (UUK). Universities Wales' Governing Council consists of the Vice-Chancellors of all the universities in Wales and the Director of the Open University in Wales.

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Shifting attitudes towards mental health is a challenge for society as a whole and universities can lead the way in this area. Universities have a duty of care to their populations. Good mental health has a positive impact on learning, the ability to concentrate, and overall performance levels.
- 1.2 The progression to university is an exciting time but for some it can be very challenging, especially where students are separated from familiar support mechanisms and services. Welsh universities are absolutely committed to understanding and responding to the pressures students face both during periods of transition and while at university. As part of this they strive to ensure that the right support, including mental health support, is provided for their needs, and that students are aware of the support available.
- 1.3 Universities are working on this issue with immense care and sensitivity, and each university has their own institutional policies and procedures for student support, examples of which are given in appendix 1. Universities see the pastoral care of their students as a central and core responsibility, and take it very seriously.
- 1.4 However universities cannot address these challenges alone and we will continue to work in partnership with parents, schools, employers and with NHS Wales and other statutory services to coordinate care for students.
- 1.5 This submission details existing and future work by institutions in Wales and Universities UK.

## 2 Universities Wales

- 2.1 Universities Wales is working with Universities UK to explore how best to support Welsh universities to engage with UUK's programme of work on Student mental health and wellbeing; particularly to ensure the recommendations of the Minding our future report can be adapted and applied within Wales.
- 2.2 There is a sector-wide commitment to working on this issue and it is being addressed at all levels by Universities in Wales. Unis Wales Pro Vice Chancellors for learning and teaching group have taken on this work at a senior level, with the group committing to working with Higher Education Funding Council for Wales to establish a sector-wide approach to this work.
- 2.3 It is timely that the Welsh Government has remitted HEFCW to develop further work into Well-being, particularly student mental health, which we welcome. Universities in Wales are committed to working with HEFCW and the National Union of Students in Wales on this vitally important agenda to ensure students can access the care they need.

### HEFCW remit letter

*“Well-Being 14.1 Through our new action plan for schools, ‘Education in Wales: Our National Mission’, I have committed our system to excellence, equity and well-being. I expect the Council and higher education sector to also recognise this emphasis on learner outcomes and wellbeing. I am keen to see you work with partners in Wales and beyond, on strengthening the approach to enhancing safeguarding practices and resilience, supporting employee and student initiatives that tackle violence against women, harassment and address other adverse factors affecting mental health in particular.”*

2.4 Universities are already working with Public Health Wales and the Welsh Government through the ‘*Healthy and Sustainable Higher Education / Further Education Framework*’, to ensure all aspects of university life are designed to provide the greatest level of support to students.

### Healthy and Sustainable Higher Education / Further Education Framework’

- Launched in 2015 the Healthy and Sustainable Higher Education/Further Education Framework was developed as an extension of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS) into Higher Education and Further Education settings.
- The framework is split into six health topics and four aspects of college and university life. The health topics cover mental and emotional health and wellbeing, physical activity, healthy and sustainable food,

substance use and misuse, personal and sexual health and relationships, sustainable environment.

- The aspects of college and university life cover; governance, leadership and management; facilities, environment and service provision; community and communication; and academic, personal, social and professional development.

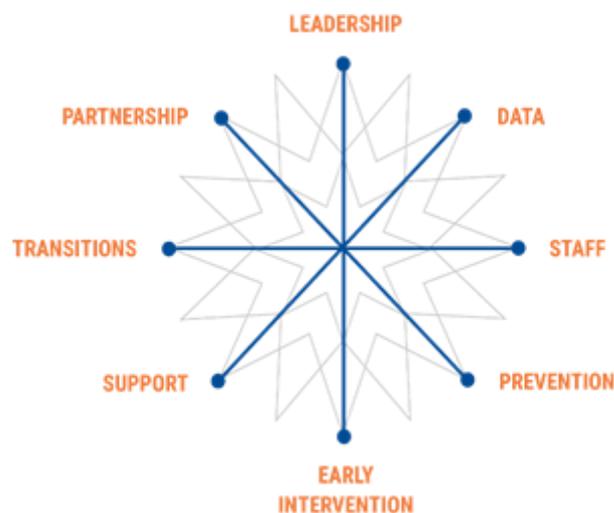
### 3. Work by Universities UK.

3.1 As the representative body of universities across the UK, Universities UK leads on developing policy and supporting institutions in this area. They have been leading a programme of work on student mental health and wellbeing since 2016.

3.2 One outcome of this programme of work is to develop a mental health framework for universities to embed mental health and wellbeing across all university activities.

#### UUK StepChange framework

- In September 2017, UUK launched the StepChange framework encouraging university leaders to adopt a strategic approach to the issue. Aligned with similar approaches developed for schools and colleges, the whole university approach looks to embed mental health across all university functions and aspects of student and staff experience.
- The framework sets out eight domains and proposes a continuous improvement process driven by sustained leadership focus, engagement with students and staff and comprehensive audit (see below).





## **Appendix 1. Examples of institutional policies and practices.**

*Please note institutions are happy to be contacted on the details provided in their submissions for further information on anything mentioned.*

### **Health, Social Care and Sport Committee inquiry into suicide prevention: a response from the Open University in Wales**

The Open University is a world leader in modern distance learning, the pioneer of teaching and learning methods which enable people to achieve their career and life goals studying at times and in places to suit them. Our students do not attend a campus; they live in their own homes throughout Wales and the rest of the UK. There is no typical OU student. People of all ages and backgrounds study with us. In light of this, our students use support networks and mental health services in their own communities across Wales.

However, we take our responsibility for student welfare very seriously and have developed a number of policies and procedures for supporting our students. These include:

#### **Online resources**

We offer information and advice for students managing mental health conditions and signpost students to sources of support. Our Studying and staying mentally healthy booklet is available in hard copy and electronic format and recognises Students who experience periods of mental health difficulty can face particular challenges in their studies and their everyday lives. It offers opportunities for students to reflect on how best to respond to the demands of their course and the study pressure points they will encounter. The booklet makes suggestions for developing techniques to enhance the learning experience and for seeking further support to help students maintain mental well-being.

In addition, the Open University Students Association (OUSA) promote Nightline Services, a confidential listening and information service run by students for students between the hours of 6pm to 8am. Recognising that we all have mental health whether or not we consider it a problem, they highlight the particular stresses faced by OU students (studying hard; working full or part-time, have caring responsibilities and coping with a range of other anxieties) and encourage students to talk. Any students who call outside of the operational hours are signposted to the Samaritans.

In addition, OUSA take part in the national campaign University Mental Health Day and provide a range of resources and opportunities to engage.

#### **Student Recruitment & Support Services**

Staff in Student Recruitment Support Services based in Cardiff offer information, advice and guidance to students with mental health difficulties. This support is mostly offered by phone and email, but occasionally we do see students face to face. The focus is on overcoming barriers and identifying adjustments we can make to enable students with mental health difficulties to

achieve their study goals. We signpost to external agencies for specialist mental health support.

This year the University has invested heavily in Mental Health First Aid training which includes a section on suicide prevention. Half of our specialist Educational Adviser team in Cardiff have benefitted from this training this academic year and it is anticipated that all these staff will be fully trained during the 18/19 academic year.

In addition, the university provides in-house training for frontline staff on how to work with distressed and suicidal students. This includes an exploration of 'myths and facts' around suicide and detailed guidelines for staff on how to respond to a student who expresses suicidal thoughts or intentions at a distance. There are also detailed Health, wellbeing and fitness to study guidelines which staff employ to support students.

The University also employs a specialist Mental Health Adviser who works full time based in Milton Keynes to support staff to support students with mental health and well-being issues across the whole of the UK. The role involves planning and delivering training to student-facing staff as well as offering one to one advice and guidance to those staff if they need specialist input with student case work.

The Mental Health Adviser also contributes to the formulation and implementation of university guidelines and procedures in this area e.g. Health, wellbeing and a fitness to a study procedures, Distressed and Suicidal Student Guidelines.

### **Tutor Support**

OU students are supported academically by tutors who often act as a first point of contact for queries or concerns. Our tutors are supported to support students in a range of ways and will often refer students with complex problems to our Student Recruitment & Support Team in Cardiff.

### **Support for Staff**

Senior Managers are acutely aware of the emotional impact supporting students can have on staff. All staff who speak with a student expressing suicidal thoughts are offered an opportunity to 'de-brief' with their line manager and we also offer an Employee Assistance Programme. This is a free and confidential service available to OU employees and their immediate family members. It offers expert advice, information, counselling and support to help with life's challenges and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week online or via a Freephone number.

### **Research & Curriculum**

Health and Wellbeing is one of the 5 key research themes at The Open University. Within the context of an ageing demographic, and a corresponding focus on evidence-based interventions to reduce the disease burden, prevent ill-health and promote wellbeing, The Open University has set up the Health and Wellbeing research area. This includes Special Interest Groups on *Mental Health*, *Digital Health and Wellbeing*, *Health Discourses* (which includes a strand on how stigma around mental health can be understood and reduced) and *Death & Dying*.

These research interests have filtered through into our curriculum and we offer a range of modules which examine how biological, social, environmental, economic and political factors shape and constrain our understandings and experiences of mental health and distress.

Examples include:

D240: Counselling: exploring fear and sadness

K240: Mental health and community

SDK228: The science of the mind: investigating mental health

K314: Approaches to mental health

### **More information**

Please contact: [REDACTED] Acting Assistant Director for Student Experience, Teaching & Learning

[REDACTED]

### **Cardiff Metropolitan university.**

- Emergency referral/self-referral form available 24 hours a day for all students/concerned staff. The form triggers an immediate alert to relevant staff who will respond the same working day, ensuring that a student is safe and referring them to appropriate external support services if required.
- 24/7 access for Cardiff Met students to Big White Wall [bigwhitewall.com](http://bigwhitewall.com) an online, fully-moderated peer support site where our students can share feelings, chat with peers and undertake practical training on coping mechanisms. Since its launch in December 2017 over 5% of the student population have used the system, on average logging in 2-3 times per week and staying on the site for 20-30 minutes. We believe that this forms a useful part of our multi-channel approach to supporting students. Moderators ('wall guides') will intervene if they see any disturbing or concerning language from any user.

This work sits on top of the usual work of supporting students with mental health issues with academic adjustments, mentoring and regular contact to ensure that they are well and succeeding in their studies. Those students who are struggling the most, especially if there are concerns for their immediate welfare, are supported through our Fitness to Study procedure which puts in place an action plan, regular scheduled contact points and measurements of how they are progressing. The aim is always to ensure that students are physically and mentally well enough to thrive in the university environment, or to support them to return home if this becomes untenable.

Contact: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

## **Health, Social Care and Sport Committee inquiry into the extent of the problem of suicide in Wales: Cardiff University response**

The following provides details of current and planned activity at Cardiff University to (i) support staff and students experiencing suicidal thoughts or otherwise affected by suicide and train staff in identifying and supporting colleagues and students who may be at risk of suicide.

### **1. Current support arrangements**

#### Students

- As part of our commitment to helping students look after themselves at university, the Student Support and Wellbeing Division provides a wide range of services, information and events to help support emotional, mental and physical health. Services include: face-to-face counselling and wellbeing appointments; daily walk-in sessions; a new Residence Life Team; mental health advice and reasonable adjustments; therapeutic courses, workshops and groups, online workshops and self-help materials; a peer-to-peer support network and promotional programme; and peer-mentoring.
- More recently the University has participated in a sector-leading OfS-funded project with York, UWE, Student Minds and Universities UK to launch a new mental health strategy based on a Whole University Approach. This will include a longitudinal research project, initiated in partnership with the National Centre for Mental Health, looking at measuring and monitoring the mental wellbeing of all new students. We are also currently piloting Emotional Resilience training for students.
- We have a thorough suicide postvention response that includes: specific support groups/ pastoral care for communities / individuals impacted (house mates for example); internal communications and advice; and liaison with family (where appropriate).
- A series of online workshops for students about coping with suicidal thoughts has been created and will be rolled out in September 2018.

#### Staff

- The University's Employee Assistance Programme, currently provided by 'Care First', is a free and confidential health and wellbeing 24/7 service that offers support to all University staff. This includes counselling, management, crisis and post-incident support.
- Online (Staff Intranet) 'Dealing with Suicide' guidance for University staff, with sections on: 'If you're feeling suicidal' and 'If you're concerned about someone'.

- The University's internal Health, Safety and Environment audit process includes 'Wellbeing'. The aim is to continue to raise awareness within Schools/Departments of internal support available to University staff including the University's Employee Assistance Programme as well as stress management training, for example the 'Managing Stress in Others' workshop.

### Staff training and development

- Suicide Alertness Workshops (SafeTALK) have been attended by 289 staff fulfilling a variety of different roles across the University, with a further 129 booked to attend before the end of June 2018. The Workshops provide people with the skills, confidence and competence to identify signs that somebody may be considering suicide, take action to help and connect the person to specialist support. A programme of further SafeTALK Workshops has been scheduled to run over the summer, specifically for all staff in the School of Medicine. Expressions of interest to attend more intensive Suicide Prevention Skills training have been recorded at every SafeTALK Workshop and will feed into the development of a more sophisticated training plan during 2018/19.
- Mental Health First Aid Workshops are delivered to help University staff to recognise the warning signs and symptoms of suicidal thinking and behaviours and to engage such persons in conversation, primarily focussing on sign-posting to specialist support.
- We also run 'Managing Stress', 'Managing Stress in Others' and 'Resilience' workshops which includes advice on avoiding and responding to a crisis (including suicide prevention) and how to access further specialist support.

## **2. In development**

### General provision

- A Suicide Safer Strategy focussing on prevention and postvention is currently in draft format.
- New 'Suicide Safety Skills' training workshops to be available for students and staff to raise awareness and provide skills and information to support themselves and others if they are thinking of suicide.
- More intensive training workshops will be available incorporating enhanced skills and information to work with individuals at risk of suicide to create plans that support their immediate safety and to connect them to further specialist support. This more intensive training will also be available to additional interested staff members (and/or students) on a nominated basis, as a 'next level up' training.
- There will be a targeted intranet page relating to Suicide Safety on both the Student and Staff intranet, linking to a range of internal and external support and information.

- A social media campaign will be launched in September 2018, focussing on mental health and stigma and will include ways to talk about suicide.
- A designated 'Safe Place' will be created in every school, in collaboration with the Residence Life Team, Wellbeing Champions and the whole-University approach to Mental Health Project.
- The University will engage with the Public Health Wales Regional Suicide Prevention Strategy Group to foster ongoing liaison and collaboration.

#### For students

- A series of online workshops will be available at the Counselling, Health and Wellbeing Service.

#### For staff

- New 'Mental Health for Managers' training recently piloted will be available to raise awareness of mental health in general, including how to respond to staff who are thinking of suicide, including offering support and signposting to other specialist services.

## **University of South Wales**

### **Introduction**

The Wellbeing Service has been at the forefront of USW's mental health agenda for many years. It has developed and evolved its services quite considerably over the last 2-3 years to reflect the changes to the wider population's experiences and needs regarding mental health; this has brought about a 'whole organisation' approach to supporting the mental health of USW students.

The UUK's recent '#Stepchange MH in HE' initiative clearly provides a framework that USW can work towards in supporting its students with their mental health concerns.

*Below is a list of what is currently taking place at USW to support the mental health of its students as well as what is planned for the coming academic year (2018/19).*

Embedded in USW's Student Experience Plan is the university's vision regarding supporting the mental health of its students; the PAC initiative and the existence of Student Services is representative of this. However, USW funding resources may need consideration, in order to reflect and adhere to the UUK's proposed #Stepchange framework.

The framework's 8 key themes (Leadership, Data, Staff, Prevention, Early Intervention, Support, Transitions and Partnerships) are considered/addressed in the list below, but there is obviously room for further growth and development.

Student-focused – at present

- Self-help material – a wealth of this is on the Wellbeing Service website
- Help Out of Hours information is on the Wellbeing Service website
- Mental Health Service – 50min appointments with a MH Adviser. Advisers liaise with CMHTs and GPs to support students with more severe mental health concerns
- MH Mentoring Scheme – DSA/USW-funded MH Mentor – hourly appointments
- Counselling Service – 50min appointments – up to 6 consecutive sessions
- Wellbeing Service Advice 20min appointments – relevant MH advice/referral
- Health Service – Nurse Adviser appointments, GP surgery (Treforest campus only)
- Anxiety Awareness workshops
- Mindfulness Awareness workshops
- Resident Tutor Service – often FPOC for referral/signposting to support services (Wellbeing Service Manager also manages this service)
- Unilife Promos – often coinciding with national MH campaigns such as University Mental Health Day and World Suicide Prevention Day
- Wellbeing Service stands – promoting services and self-care/raising awareness re MH and support
- ‘Don’t bottle it up...’ campaign across all campuses – promoting services and self-care/raising awareness re MH support
- Liaising with external partners such as Valley Steps and Stepiau (training arm of CMHT) to provide Groups/workshops Mindfulness and Stress Control – and to promote their courses that take place in the community
- Liaised with Cameron Grant Memorial Trust to obtain 2000 free beer coasters that raise awareness of mental health and support
- Student Services promoted during Academic Induction for new students and also during Halls of Residence Induction Talks
- Worked collaboratively with SU to reinstate the Nightline Service
- Worked collaboratively with SU in discussions with Student MIND, with the view to the SU starting a Student Peer Support Group during 2018-19 – this would be external to USW Professional Services

Student-focused – *planned* for 2018-19

- To continue present initiatives, services, events and campaigns
- Programme of Groups/Workshops/Courses to include:
  - Anxiety Awareness
  - Stress Control
  - Mindfulness
  - Live Life to the Full
  - Colour therapy

- Drama therapy
- Look After Your Mate – 2 MH Mentors are now trained to deliver this

- Events:
  - Student Services Rocks – painting rocks activity to raise awareness of mental health/support services
  - Welcome Weekend – Wellbeing Service presence at Treforest campus to raise awareness of support for new students (their parents)
- Student of Concern Group – to start during 2018-19. This would be a 'multi-disciplinary' group that would lead to early intervention, support and possible Fitness to Study/Fitness to Practice processes

Staff-focused at present and planned for 2018-19

- Mental Health website page on staff intranet (The Hub) – advice/referral/support services
- 'What to do with a Student of Concern regarding Mental or Physical Health – Guidelines for staff' document – including advice, protocol (emergency/no immediate risk) and appropriate signposting
- ASIST training – frontline staff/academic staff
- MHFA training – frontline/academic staff
- Mental Health Awareness training (2hrs) – academic staff (in collaboration with PAC initiative). Includes: Referral, Signposting, Boundary-setting, Self-care and awareness of Student Services
- Staff Health & Wellbeing Group – Wellbeing Service staff are part of this group and offer guidance, resources and support regarding USW's Time to Change Pledge
- Participate in staff 'wellbeing' events – Wellbeing Service stand promoting awareness of mental health, services for students, Self-care and delivering a Talk on Stress
- Student of Concern Group – to start during 2018-19. This would be a 'multi-disciplinary' group that would lead to early intervention, support and possible Fitness to Study/Fitness to Practice processes

██████████ – Wellbeing Service Manager

### **UWTSD Briefing / Information paper: suicide prevention**

- This brief paper provides further information on suicide prevention at UWTSD and provides further details on a range of relevant initiatives;
- UWTSD acknowledges the issue of suicide amongst young people and its impact on families, friends and colleagues concerned. At UWTSD, there have been 3 instances of student suicide in the last 6 years, including a female first-year residential student at our Lampeter campus (17.11.12), a male second year, non-residential student studying at Swansea (26.4.16) and a male, first year, non-residential student studying at Swansea (12.2.18);
- UWTSD has developed a range of initiatives to try and address this issue. These include:
  - A team of professionally qualified (BACP accredited) counsellors at each of our main campuses. Currently there are 7 part-time counsellors available to see students (and staff) for confidential appointments. This provision is advertised to students via our Student Services department, with students being made aware at welcome / induction events and confidential appointments are made via Student Services receptionists;
  - Number of students accessing the Counselling Service at UWTSD is as follows:

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| 2013/14 | 419   |
| 2014/15 | 574   |
| 2015/16 | 528   |
| 2016/17 | 593   |
| 2017/18 | final figures not yet available but anticipated increase on those for 2016/17 |
- UWTSD has a team of 3 professionally qualified, fractional, Mental Health Advisers (MHA's)– one each at the Carmarthen, Lampeter and Swansea campuses. These MHA's focus specifically on those students with mental health issues, including those with a mental health diagnosis. The MHA's supervise a team of 20+ externally-funded Specialist Mentors (Mental Health) and also provide interim support to those students with mental health issues who have not yet had their externally-funded support confirmed. Currently there are

c225 students in receipt of funded 1:1 mental health support via the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA);

- Number of UWTSD students accessing 1:1 mental health support is as follows:

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| 2013/14 | 103   |
| 2014/15 | 182   |
| 2015/16 | 213   |
| 2016/17 | 225   |
| 2017/18 | final figures not yet available but anticipated increase on those for 2016/17 |

- Weekly drop-in well-being sessions at each of our main campuses staffed by a Specialist Mentor (Mental Health);
- In November 2016, a new Fitness to Study policy was implemented as part of a range of new student-facing policies. This policy has proved very useful in enabling the University to intervene in situations where there is a significant cause for concern e.g. a student who may have taken an overdose, self-harmed or who has suicidal ideation. The policy enables the University to implement a precautionary suspension of studies but with a focus on investigation and case review so that students can be supported. There are several instances where this policy has proved useful in providing an opportunity for students to access relevant support prior to returning to study;
- There has been significant investment in staff training including: promotion of an online mental health awareness module by the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust for HE staff – <http://learning.cwmt.org.uk> . This is now available on UWTSD’s online Staff Development Hub and has been promoted through e.g. staff bulletins. Other developments include the provision of an in-house “Supporting Students in Distress“ workshop, the provision of a 2-day external Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) course to staff at the Faculty of Art and Design, and several front-line staff who have attended ASIST (Suicide Intervention) training or other mental health training programmes e.g. SURE for Mental Health;
- UWTSD is currently arranging the roll-out of the “Supporting Students in Distress” workshop to all Faculties;

- UWTSD has a comprehensive and well-regarded personal / year tutor system which provides each student with pastoral support from a member of academic staff;
- UWTSD Student Services has a Senior International Student Support Officer whose role includes the provision of pastoral support to international students. The Senior International Student Support Officer is able to refer students to other professionals within the wider Student Services team e.g. financial support, counselling, mental health advisory service, disability support as required;
- The University's Chaplaincy provides an additional source of support for students. The Chaplaincy offers a confidential, bilingual ministry, available to all students and staff, regardless of religious background and affiliation.

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**Director of Student Services**  
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