Let's End this Mental Health Crisis together, once and for all

A 'composite' proposal taken from:

- *A joint proposal from Blackpool & The Fylde College, Activate Learning & Sheffield College*
- *Individual proposals by Stirling Students' Union, Trinity Saint David's Students' Union, Warwick SU*

What is the problem?

There is a mental health crisis gripping the entire education system across the UK. The issue is complex, multi-faceted and is caused by a range of different factors affecting our members differently.

Many Universities are seeing a tragic spike in the amount of student suicides including the University of Stirling, with 3 student suicides in the 2018/19 academic year alone.

The 2019 Save The Student accommodation survey found that 50% of respondents had struggled to pay rent and 63% said this had an effect on their mental health.

Many of the current support structures in our current education system are outdated and based around a 9-5, Monday to Friday campus culture, which is no longer suitable for a wide range of our members.

Many students face further challenges in life which may stem from being part of a minority group and accessing mental health support can be a huge factor in this. These could include: LGBT+ students, black students and people of colour, disabled students, care leavers, carers, mature students, students from widening participation backgrounds, first-generation students, international students, students for whom English is a second language, commuter students, placement students and so many more.

The marketised education system has eroded collaboration across the education sector and meant that student health and wellbeing has been shifted down the priority list - often underneath the accounts.

Multiple different sector bodies, organisations, universities and colleges are working in silos without leadership and a coherent national strategy. In addition to this, the NHS across all nations is overstretched, under-resourced, with unnaceptable waiting times and often refers our members back to their institutions for support.

Many front-line staff are not adequately trained and equipped to be able to support their students. Especially in Further Education. Having staff trained to support their members at a base level, a whole system approach and greater awareness will also help to tackle the stigma around mental health within the education sector.

What could the solutions be?

Better NHS funding within mental health is essential and we can't put the responsibility only on educational institutions to fund mental health services. We believe that everyone has the right to free and accessible mental health care, including international students.

There should be the choice of how to get your support – inside or outside education, out of learning hours or safeguarded peer to peer support schemes.

That mental health support must be at the core of any universities policy, as the university cannot claim to be looking after students' wellbeing if students are left unfit to study through lack of well-funded mental health support.

That the response from many universities has been too slow, putting profits over the wellbeing of students, and we should condemn this behaviour.

There should be holistic guidance on what students should demand from institutions, both in terms of funding and practical tips on activities and programmes to help improve wellbeing.

There should be guidance for the sector on the following:

• Culturally competent, sensitive, and professionally trained staff, policies and procedures.
• Free disability screening for all students and apprentices.
• Confidential counselling services.
• A 24-hour, accessible, NHS-led support service dedicated for students.
• Specific services for minority demographics and estranged students
• Kinder culture on social media, the impact it has on mental health and cyberbullying in particular

Students should have access to dual-registration at GP surgeries.

We want to be at the forefront of a partnership approach with other sector stakeholders, such as, but not limited to the Association of Colleges, Universities UK and the Office for Students. Such an approach has led to incredible work within Think Positive in Scotland and significant funding won in Wales.

That more students, University, college and students' union staff should be given the opportunity to access training from mental health training providers in order to help support both students' mental wellbeing and those of their colleagues.

Ideas for Implementation

NUS needs to identify and partner with MH training providers to offer SU's a range of training opportunities,

Some local areas give out information for young people, not just about mental health services but also about other youth services that are available – we should look at how this approach can be taken up elsewhere.

As well as engaging with sector work such as the postgrad wellbeing thesis and the student mental health charter and the Association of Colleges Mental health charter, we must work more collaboratively and follow the lead of incredible work within think positive in Scotland and significant funding won with NUS Wales.

NUS should drive a partnership approach with other sector stakeholders, such as, but not limited to the Association of Colleges, Universities UK and the Office for Students. This partnership should seek to produce a State of the Nation report every year, assessing the scale of the mental health crises in our institutions. The report should help to share good practice, identify areas for improvement and inform a nationwide strategy into combatting the mental health crisis.

Finally, NUS should work with stakeholders to look into the impact that social media has on mental health and in particular, cyber-bullying. This should inform an NUS-led campaign focusing on developing a kinder culture on social media.

We want NUS to work collaboratively with the sector to develop training for councillors and support staff to help our students. We want NUS to create resources to help SUs lobby for culturally competent mental health services on their campus.

NUS should work to show the change in student demographic and need and how support structures can be better to deliver for your members. In particular, NUS should help to produce

NUS should recommission the Pound in Your Pocket report, looking into students' experiences of the cost of study. The study should cover the entire UK post-16 education sector. The findings of the report should form a basis for exploring the differences in UK education systems, sharing good practice and exploring areas of weakness within each of the systems. The evidence can then form a basis for lobbying within each nation.

US must create a guide on what you should demand from your institutions both in terms of funding and practical tips on activities and programmes to help improve wellbeing.

NUS can lobby for greater funding for the NHS to ensure we get better mental health support, but we can also support students' unions in the immediate future.

That the influence of the individual Students Unions as well as NUS Scotland should be used to lobby universities to implement more adequate mental health facilities, with equally adequate funding.

We mandate NUS to campaign to keep our NHS in public hands and free at the point of use for all, including international students who NUS should campaign to scrap the NHS surcharge.

Sub-proposals

These are policy proposals which have been submitted on this theme. These would have been considered as amendments to the main proposal, however as we have moved the votes and discussion online the DPC has decided to make these separate votes on the subject, to help set the direction of future officer's work. So the below proposals will be considered separately rather than as 'amendments' to the main proposal.

Sub-proposal 1

Submitted by University of Leicester Students' Union Delegate

As well as diversity and cultural competence in mental health services (which is so important and something that the University of Leicester student union is lobbying for!) NUS should look into how accessible student mental health services are for mature students / part time students / students with caring responsibilities. These are all students with specific needs around mental health who may feel student mental health services are not really designed for them or with their needs in mind.

DPC Notes

Several submissions on Mental Health were received and have been merged into one policy proposal. Some of the solutions have been reframed, as they mandated NUS to carry out specific lobbying activity. They now talk about the result that the unions wanted, rather than the steps NUS will take to get there. We have put one of them in the Notes for Implementation section, so that it can steer the FTOs with developing the Plan of Action next year.