

Case Study

Improving Mental Health Services for Students

The challenge

Universities are under increasing pressure to support students and staff dealing with mental health challenges – this has only been amplified by the Covid-19 crisis. Among some of the concerns facing our members and clients are:

- > Increasing demand for and cost of mental health services
- > A lack of clarity about the purpose of therapeutic support and modes of delivery
- > The need to ensure students know how to access the right support
- > The increasing demand for more specialist services
- > Inadequate management information and data to inform strategic decision making
- > The need for more joined-up services and collaborative working with NHS services.

Even those universities that have heavily invested in mental health training, mental health first aid and other support services

now want to review the structural and organisational factors which may have an impact on the emotional wellbeing and mental health of its community. Universities have approached SUMS to provide independent reviews and to consider a strategic approach that will be fit – not just for the next few years – but for the decade to come.

What happened?

Working with a wide range of universities across the UK, including post-92 and Russell Group institutions, SUMS has led strategic reviews and designed new ways of working for universities to ensure their mental health provision is fit to meet the evolving needs of students.

Our specialists, Principal Consultant Helen Baird and Associate Consultant Dr Alison Oldam facilitated a range of consultative discussions with stakeholder groups within our client and member universities and their

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NHS partners. They gathered insight via data analysis and qualitative interviews and group discussions to support the review and feed into the development of new strategies and action plans.

Using this feedback and by examining the structures, processes and services already in place, our consultants provided recommendations to make tangible improvements for students and staff.

The outcome

SUMS' work has supported universities to design new strategies and operating models for staff and student mental health and wellbeing services. We have conducted robust and impartial assessments using UUK's Stepchange Framework: Mentally Healthy Universities, complemented by our knowledge of innovative and effective practice and what works across the sector.

Our reviews identified priorities for action and made recommendations on how to take a more strategic 'whole university' approach to supporting staff and student mental health and

wellbeing. We supported universities in reformulating their student support services particularly through partnership working, including enhanced partnership working with the NHS - a key to success.

We have also helped universities adjust their

focus with more attention given to transitions, prevention and early intervention – helping to reduce the long-term crisis support required down the line. Within the sector, there is a need for the emerging field of 'wellbeing analytics' to identify and provide early intervention and support to at risk students

– this is an area in which we encourage our members and clients to invest. Through our holistic approach and comprehensive assessment, universities are getting objective insight from mental health and HE sector experts to make lasting changes that will improve outcomes for students and staff.

