

It's #TimetoTalk Mental Health

Policy Title:	It's #TimetoTalk Mental Health	Date Policy Proposed:	02/12/2014
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Union Notes:

CONTENT WARNINGS: References to Suicide and Self Harm*

- 20 percent of Higher Education (HE) students consider themselves to have a mental health problem, with only half of these students having a current diagnosis. [1]
- 92 per cent of students have experienced feelings of mental distress during their studies. [1]
- The most common feelings of mental distress are; stress (80 per cent), lack of energy or motivation (70 per cent) and feeling unhappy or down (66 per cent). [1]
- 13 per cent of respondents reported having had suicidal thoughts during their studies and 14 per cent had had thoughts of self-harm. [1]
- The main causes of these feelings of mental distress were reported to be course workload and deadlines (65 per cent), exams and revision (54 per cent) and balancing study and other commitments (52 per cent). Financial difficulties also featured prominently (47 per cent). [1]
- Just 21 per cent of students experiencing mental distress shared this with their institution or students' union, with only 17 per cent having accessed support services available through their place of study. [1]
- On August 2014, an Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) alumni had been reported missing after reporting poor exam results to the worry of parents, siblings, and members of the ARU community. It is unknown whether they were receiving support for mental health at this time. [2]
- We know that there are huge problems with mental health services across the nation - individuals with mental health issues have been reported to be put in jail cells during times of crises with untrained police forces, mental health services are being shut down by austerity and budget cuts [3], and other horror stories within the system [4]
- The Student Union (SU) Academic Officer Aisha D'souza stated in their manifesto that as part of academic welfare, one of their points was to "have a focus on mental health and overall happiness" and "organise activities aimed at happiness such as: puppy therapy". [5]

Union Believes:

- People with mental health conditions and/or issues face stigma within society - in line with our Student Union values, to not take action in supporting students in our community with mental health issues would violate our own Student Union values of being **Inclusive, Accessible and Supportive**.

- The Student Union, and all its associated clubs and societies, have a duty of care to its membership. We already cover the physical health aspect through the provision of optional First Aid Training for students. Mental Health is and should be equally important to overall happiness and wellbeing.
- Whilst studies do show that puppy therapy is positively correlated with reducing stress, it is an overused gimmick (Many doge, such reductionism, wow). It is a simplified approach to 'treating' mental health issues, trivializes the actual complexities of mental health, and is not logistically viable in the long term mental wellbeing of students on our campuses. We need to encompass a wide range of mental wellbeing support strategies.
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an approved course developed in Australia (2000) and internationally recognized in twenty three countries. MHFA training can be applied to any aspect of daily life, and has a course to train instructors. [6]
- By having students have some form of training in MHFA, not only does it cover all bases in securing the welfare of our membership, but it also promotes personal development and is something to positively reference on a CV.

Union Resolves:

- To lobby the university in providing funding specifically designed to provide both university staff, SU staff and executive officers the option to engage in MHFA training, either as learners or as future instructors.
- To lobby the university to actively encourage University staff to become trained in MHFA, either as learners or as future instructors.
- For Executive Officers to be advocates of MHFA training and to encourage SU staff to take part in MHFA training.
- To actively develop MHFA training session(s) similar in structure to the current physical first aid course provided to club and society committee members, and non-committee students.
- To develop a toolkit of resources that assists clubs and societies in supporting students with mental health issues alongside other standard procedures (such as informing the student of the Wellbeing and Counselling Service).

References:

[1] Points 1-6 taken from the NUS 'Time to Change' report:

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/open/healthcare/NUS-Time-to-Change-guide/>

[2] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/11013759/Student-goes-missing-after-warning-parents-of-failed-degree.html>

[3] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-26453052>

[4] <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/ng-interactive/2014/oct/08/scandal-mental-health-care-uk>

[5] <http://www.angliastudent.com/elections/manifesto/2139/>

[6] <http://mhfaengland.org/>

[7] <http://www.angliastudent.com/represent/campaigns/>

Examples taken from the 'No Platform Policy':

<https://www.angliastudent.com/pageassets/represent/councilsandforums/policy/No-Platform-Policy-14-11-2013.pdf>