

SAMH'S VIEW:

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

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POLICY LEAD

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ABOUT THE SAMH'S VIEW SERIES

SAMH's View statements set out SAMH's position on a particular policy topic.

In developing SAMH's position the effect of equalities, diversity and human rights is investigated.

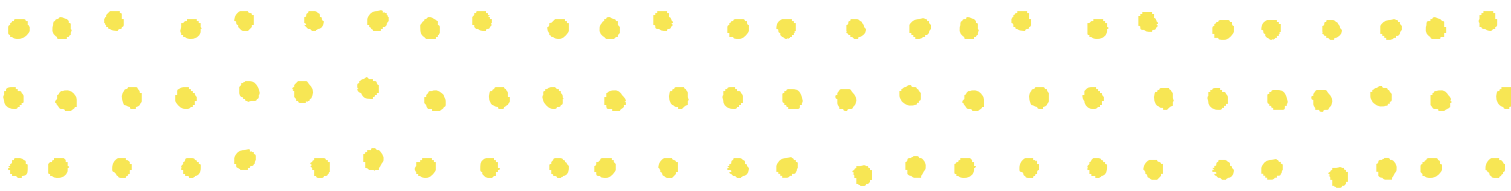
SAMH Views are produced by the Public Affairs team.

Context

Support for students' mental health at college and university is not consistent across Scotland, with demand for services such as student counselling outstripping availability.¹ The Scottish Government sets out expectations and provides funding to universities and colleges through the Scottish Funding Council. Funding Council guidance for 2019 includes a requirement for universities and colleges to develop a Mental Health Strategy and a Student Mental Health Agreement.² The Scottish Government's 2017-2027 Mental Health Strategy supports the National Union of Students Scotland (NUS) Think Positive project.³

Key points

- Poor student mental health is associated with increased withdrawal from study; lower academic achievement; and greater physical ill health and disability.⁴
- The number of first degree entrants in Scotland declaring a mental health condition has trebled over the last five years, now making up over 3% of first degree entrants. Degree outcomes are worse for people with mental health conditions compared to non-disabled students.⁵
- Transition to higher and further education can be challenging for people with existing mental health problems. Continuity and coordination of care between term and home residences is often lacking.⁶
- Students from minority groups, including the LGBTQ+ community, experience higher rates of mental health problems. NUS UK found that 42% of LGBTQ+ students reported experiencing depression or anxiety, compared to 29% of non-LGBTQ+ respondents.⁷
- Current provision of student counselling services does not meet demand. A 2018 NUS Freedom of Information request found a 76% rise in students trying to access counselling services between 2012 and 2017. Only 60% of students seeking support received counselling in 2017.⁸
- The Scottish Government is funding 80 additional counsellors for universities and colleges, to be in place between 2019 and 2023.⁹
- Scottish colleges have less counselling provision than Scottish universities. Only 46% of colleges have dedicated on-campus counselling services, compared to 89% of universities.¹⁰

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- A whole institution approach to mental health can increase staff awareness and confidence in supporting students with mental health concerns. SAMH's Glasgow Clyde College Mentally Healthy College Project resulted in 76% of staff feeling more confident about responding to a student talking about their mental health concerns.¹¹
 - Evidence shows that university and college staff are increasingly experiencing poor mental health. Between 2009 and 2015, counselling referrals for staff across UK universities rose by an average of 77%.¹²
 - There is a lack of data collected and published regarding student suicides.¹³
 - SAMH's College Connect project supports young people transitioning from school to college as well as increasing awareness of mental health and tackling stigma in the college environment.¹⁴

SAMH calls for:

- All university and college Mental Health Strategies to include provisions for:
 - Access to student counselling
 - Programmes of mental health training for staff and students
 - A campus-wide programme to tackle stigma
 - Support for students transitioning to higher and further education
 - Accessible support, tailored to minority and high risk groups
- Universities and colleges to have suicide prevention strategies and provide: this should include recording deaths by suicide wherever possible
- Universities and colleges to provide support for students and staff bereaved by suicide.
- The college sector to be supported by the Scottish Government to increase counselling provision to reach parity with the university sector and meet student demand.
- The Scottish Government to continue to support the Think Positive programme.
- The Scottish Government to pilot a financial Student Premium Top-Up for GP Practices with high proportions of student patients, as called for by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), to support transitions to university and college.¹⁵
- All colleges to adopt a Mentally Health College approach including provision of dedicated transition support, such as the SAMH "College Connects" project.



Further detail:

GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

- [Mental Health Strategy 2017-27](#)
- [NUS Scotland Think Positive](#)
- [Scottish Government Programme for Government 2019-20](#)

Notes

- ¹ NUS Scotland [Demand for Student Mental Health Services skyrockets](#) [accessed September 2018]
- ² Scottish Government [SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL – LETTER OF GUIDANCE 2019-20](#) 2018
- ³ Scottish Government [Mental Health Strategy 2017-27](#) 2017
- ⁴ Student Minds [Student Mental Health: The Role and experiences of Academics](#) 2018
- ⁵ Scottish Government [Commissioner for Fair Access. Discussion paper: Disabled Students at University](#) 2019
- ⁶ Universities UK Minding Our Futures: [Starting a Conversation about the Support of Student Mental Health](#) 2018
- ⁷ NUS [Education beyond the straight and narrow](#) 2014
- ⁸ NUS Scotland [Demand for Student Mental Health Services skyrockets](#) [accessed September 2018]
- ⁹ Scottish Government [More mental health support for students](#) [accessed January 2020]
- ¹⁰ NUS Scotland [Demand for Student Mental Health Services skyrockets](#) [accessed September 2018]
- ¹¹ Mentally Healthy College Project a partnership project between SAMH and Glasgow Clyde College. Evaluation Report
- ¹² HEPI [Pressure Vessels: The epidemic of poor mental health among higher education staff](#) 2019
- ¹³ The Ferret [Nearly all Scottish universities fail to record student suicides](#) 2019
- ¹⁴ SAMH [College Connect](#) 2019
- ¹⁵ IPPR [Not by Degrees: Improving Student Mental Health in the UK's Universities](#) 2017