

SAMH'S VIEW:

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

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CRAIG SMITH

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ABOUT THE SAMH'S VIEW SERIES

SAMH's View statements set out SAMH's position on a particular policy topic. They are produced by the Public Affairs team.

Context

Support for student's 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 provides expectations and funding to universities and colleges through the Scottish Funding Council. Funding Council guidance for 2018 includes a requirement for Universities and Colleges to develop a Mental Health Strategy.²

The Scottish Government's 2017-2027 Mental Health Strategy supports the Nation Union of Students Scotland (NUS) Think Positive project.³ The 2018-19 Scottish Government's Programme for Government announced funding for 80 additional counsellors for higher and further education institutions.⁴

Key points

- A 2013 National Union of Students (NUS) survey found 20% of students consider themselves to have a mental health problem, while 13% have experienced suicidal thoughts.⁵
- Poor student mental health is associated with increased withdrawal from study; lower academic achievement; and greater physical ill health and disability.⁶
- 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.⁷
- Student counselling and support services are the responsibility of each individual institution, with access to counselling and support inconsistent.⁸
- 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, with only 60% of students trying to access support receiving counselling in 2017.⁹

- Scottish colleges have less counselling provision than Scottish Universities. Only 11 out of 24 colleges have dedicated on-campus counselling services, compared to 16 of 18 universities.¹⁰
- The NUS Scotland Think Positive project works with colleges and universities to improve student mental wellbeing and reduce stigma.¹¹ This includes assisting the development of a 'whole institution approach' through Student Mental Health Agreements and building capacity within the student and staff body through delivering Scottish Mental Health First Aid training.¹²

SAMH calls for:

- All university and college Mental Health Strategies to include provisions for:
 - Access to student counselling
 - A programme of mental health training for staff
 - A programme of mental health training for students
 - A campus wide programme to tackle stigma
 - Support for students when transitioning to higher and further education
- Suicide prevention and support for students bereaved by suicide
- The 80 additional counsellors for Further and Higher education institutions, announced in the 2018/19 Programme for Government, to be deployed according to need, with a focus on college provision, recognising the disproportionate availability of counsellors available in colleges.
- The Scottish Government to continue to support the Think Positive programme.
- Findings from the forthcoming evaluation of the SAMH Glasgow Clyde College Mentally Healthy College project should be used to inform practice across all Scottish colleges and universities.
- To support transitions to university and college the Scottish Government should 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)



Further details

GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

- [Mental Health Strategy 2017-27](#)
- [NUS Scotland Think Positive](#)

Notes

- ¹ NUS Scotland [Demand for Student Mental Health Services skyrockets](#) [accessed September 2018]
- ² Scottish Government [SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL – LETTER OF GUIDANCE 2018-19](#) 2018
- ³ Scottish Government [Mental Health Strategy 2017-27](#) 2017
- ⁴ Scottish Government [Delivering for Today, Investing for Tomorrow Programme for Government 2018-19](#) 2018
- ⁵ NUS [20 per cent of students consider themselves to have a mental health problem](#) 2013 [accessed June 2018]
- ⁶ Student Minds [Student Mental Health: The Role and experiences of Academics](#) 2018
- ⁷ Universities UK Minding Our Futures: [Starting a Conversation about the Support of Student Mental Health](#) 2018
- ⁸ NUS Scotland [Demand for Student Mental Health Services skyrockets](#) [accessed September 2018]
- ⁹ NUS Scotland [Demand for Student Mental Health Services skyrockets](#) [accessed September 2018]
- ¹⁰ NUS Scotland [Demand for Student Mental Health Services skyrockets](#) [accessed September 2018]
- ¹¹ NUS Scotland [Think Positive](#) [accessed September 2018]
- ¹² NUS Scotland [Student Mental Health Agreement \(SMHA\)](#) [accessed September 2018]