



# Students Services in Higher Education

- Improving the Learning Environment

Background to the current situation in the UK:

Significant changes to HE since 1960s:

- 1995 – the Disability Discrimination Act – HE Institutions have a ‘Duty of Care’ to respond to mental health in student by making adjustments in the study environment to account for disabilities
- 2001 Special Education Needs and Discrimination Act – Disabled Students should not be substantially disadvantaged (particularly financially) in comparison to those who are not.

- 1997 – National Committee of Enquiry into HE introduced the concept of Widening Participation to encourage those students from socioeconomic backgrounds to enter HE. E.g. KCL has introduced an Access to Medicine Course, an Enhanced Support Dentistry programme and a K+ Scheme aimed at disadvantaged youngsters.

As a result:

- Enormous changes in the demographic characteristics of students, mental health status and disability of students.
- 2010 – 11: 2,501,295 HE students in UK (1,912,580 undergraduate; 558,720 postgraduate) studying in 161 universities and College of Higher Education.

Changes in ages and background of undergraduates

- Large numbers of mature and part-time students
- Those who have taken gap years
- Increasing numbers of Widening Participation Students
- Increasing numbers of international students

# International Students

- Ref UKCISA (UK Council for international Student Affairs) 2010-11: 428,225 international students in the UK;
- An increase of 6% from 2009-10
- 17% of total student UK population
- 13% of all first degree students
- 46% of all taught postgraduates
- 41% of all research postgraduate
- 130,115 were from the EU
- 298,110 were from overseas
- 2010-11, at Kings College London – 6,100 students = 24% of student population at KCL

<b>Top 10 non-Eu Senders</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2009-10</b>
China (PRC)	67,325	56,990
India	39,090	38,500
Nigeria	17,585	16,680
United States of America	15,555	15,060
Malaysia	13,900	14,060
Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region)	10,440	9,945
Saudi Arabia	10,270	8,340
Pakistan	10,185	9,815
Thailand	5,945	5,505
Canada	5,905	5,575

<b>Top 10 EU senders</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2009-10</b>
Republic of Ireland	16,855	16,595
Germany	16,265	15,425
France	13,325	13,780
Greece	11,630	11,785
Cyprus	11,320	11,160
Poland	7,330	8,415
Italy	7,100	6,650
Spain	5,795	5,720
Romania	4,625	3,190
Bulgaria	4,615	3,395

International students come from a wide range of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds and may face additional challenges adjusting and studying in the UK

- They may experience loneliness, disorientation and experience psychological problems as a result of the pressures of being away from home

Enormous pressure to succeed which may result in them becoming very troubled if their academic performance falls short of their expectations.

At KCL, there are orientation and cultural awareness programmes.

# Government Responses

- ◎ Government has reduced funding to HE institutions, resulting in trebling of tuition fees to £9,000 per annum
- ◎ Cuts in staff/student ratios increase pressures for staff – knock-on effect on students?
- ◎ Academic staff under constant pressure to maintain and improve research output as well as develop their teaching.

# Social and psychological changes

- Higher rates of family breakdown, economic recession, changes to the immigration visa system, increases pressure on existing systems.
- UK National Studies have demonstrated that students are a vulnerable group in terms of mental health difficulties.
- 63% of universities report an increase in psychological distress amongst students (AUCC 1996-7)
- Schizophrenia is the most common form of mental illness with the first severe episode occurring between the ages of 18 – 30 years (IRSS Project, 1994)
- Manic depression commonly begins between the ages of 16-25 with one in every 100 individuals being diagnosed as suffering from this illness (Manic Depression Fellowship 1990)

What more can and should universities do to facilitate development and learning?

- Research at the University of Westminster (2012) reports that belonging to a peer group and to an institution are significant factors in student physical and psychological health (Ref Hixenbough et al, January 2012)

- The largest group of males who attempt suicide are between 20 – 24
- Suicide, second to accidents, is the second largest cause of death in 15-24 year old men
- Between 1985 – 2005, suicide attempts increased by 170% (Royal College of Psychiatrists Report – ‘Transitions in Young Adults with Troubled Lives’)
- 2000 - 2004 – a survey of 18 universities reported a 20% increase in students needing psychological counselling.
- 2011/12 - Kings College London Psychological Counselling Service saw 1,927 students = 7.9% of the KCL student population of 24,550. An increase of 7.9% on 2010/11
- It is estimated that 1 in 4 students will experience some form of mental distress during their time at university.
- Mental health – no longer a minority issue

# **Structures and Best Practices in UK Higher Education (HE) Institutions to deal with Student Mental Health Problems**

## **Mental Health Policies and Reports**

- ◎ **2000 – Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) now Universities UK require universities to produce a mental health policy.**
- ◎ **Features of the KCL Policy include:**
  1. **Duty of Care to the KCL community**
  2. **Information for staff about the various types of mental health problems**
  3. **What to do in an emergency/crisis**
  4. **What do to if a student refuses help**
  5. **What to do when a student discloses a disability**
- ◎ **2002 – Universities UK published a report on reducing the risk of student suicide**
- ◎ **2003 – Royal College of Psychiatrists Report recommend University Counselling Services should be adequately resourced**
- ◎ **2011 – Royal College of Psychiatrists Report made 14 recommendations relating to the changing demography of the student population**

# Student Counselling Services

- ⦿ **First University Counselling Service established 60 years ago at the University of Leicester**
- ⦿ **AUCC (Association of University and College Counselling) established 40 years ago – a sub-group of BACP (British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists)**
- ⦿ **2002 AUCC Report all UK universities except two have psychological counselling services – all funded by the individual institution**
- ⦿ **Average ratio of students to counsellors approximately 1 FTE to 3500 FTE students**

## **Work of University Counselling Services:**

- ⦿ **Related to the demands of the different student groups including mature and post-graduates**
- ⦿ **Role of counsellors helps maintain student retention rates by helping students connect between mental health and their ability to learn**
- ⦿ **Work of counselling services – provide a range of interventions from brief drop-in services to brief focal and longer-term therapy and psychiatric support**

# KCL Counselling team

- ⊙ Multidisciplinary – psychoanalytically trained psychotherapists, counselling psychologists, group analysts and a consultant psychiatrist/psychoanalyst
- ⊙ Individual and group work (including CBT),
  - ⊙ psycho-educational groups -  
e.g. study/exam anxiety, procrastination and study difficulties for postgraduates, insomnia, loss and bereavement, low self-esteem and how to cope with anxiety and depression
  - ⊙ ‘Coping with University Life’ workshop for first year students
  - ⊙ Participation in a ‘preparation for professional practice’ course for final year medical students
- ⊙ A cross-cultural awareness programme for undergraduate and postgraduate international students
- Some university services use e-technology e.g. Online multi-media programmes such as CALM or online discussion boards
- Evaluation techniques include CORE – Clinical Outcome Routine Evaluation
- 2002 – A study of 360 students found a link between ill-health, financial instability and low student retention

# Training offered to staff and students

- ◎ 2002 – HUCS (Heads of University Counselling Services) report showed that 80% of university counselling services offer training in mental health issues to staff and over 50% to students
- ◎ Counsellors in HE understand the connection between psychological and academic difficulties and their knowledge of the educational context is essential in preventing students dropping out and providing appropriate advice for all staff

## **Kinds of training offered**

- ◎ Consultation
- ◎ Risk assessment and referral where appropriate
- ◎ A range of therapeutic work to students and staff
- ◎ Consultation with staff concerned about students
- ◎ Training including suicidal awareness for students and staff
- ◎ Workshops for students and staff relating to mental health issues
- ◎ Peer Support programme for students
- ◎ Online information about how to help with study and mental health difficulties
- ◎ Contributions to institutional policy on making decisions relating to mental health matters
- ◎ Collaboration with others with a responsibility for mental health wellbeing

# Training for Students

- Students may be the first to notice that a fellow student may be experiencing mental health difficulties
- Literature provides guidelines
- Counselling Service offers guidance to students worried about fellow students
- Some universities have a 'buddy' programme
- Universities of Oxford, LSE, Reading and KCL have Peer Support Programmes which offer training to students on non-judgemental listening and communicating
- Student Unions are a powerful lobby in students' interests and have information and welfare sabbaticals
- At KCL, liaison with Students Union and Counselling and Health Centres to promote campaigns relating to mental health, drug addiction, coping with exam anxiety, anti-smoking campaigns etc
- Many universities have a 'Nightline' Service which is run for students by students usually between 6.00pm and 8.00am and offers confidential listening and information
- Induction programmes for all 1<sup>st</sup> year students introduce them to the services of the university and academic departments
- At KCL international students are invited to join a 3 day orientation programme to the UK, London and the university.

# KCL Peer Support Training

- **Two schemes currently in existence:**
  - School of Law – 7 trained peer supporters, funded by Counselling Service.
  - School of Medicine – 17 trained peer supporters – funded by KCL Annual Fund (supported by alumni, staff and friends of the College).

Scheme extending on 3 main campuses and in student residences by September 2014

All these students are volunteers who have been equipped with highly transferable skills in listening, communicating and relating to others. They will form a panel on hand to help or guide their peers through presenting problems or difficulties, with the knowledge and awareness to refer on to professionals when appropriate.

# Student Support Services

Most psychological counselling services within UK universities operate within a framework of Student Support Services which at KCL include:

Disability Service; Accommodation Service (including Halls of Residence staff); Chaplains, Careers, the Health Centre, Fitness and Sport, Welfare and Financial Advice and International Student Advisors

There is also a general information service called 'The Compass' all under the umbrella of the Directorate of Students and Education Support

# Disability Service

- Established 2005 as a result of the DDA to develop and deliver policy for any student with physical or mental disabilities or learning difficulties – cross referrals with the Psychological Counselling Service

## Student Health Centre

- At KCL, good liaison between the Counselling and Health Centres – regular referrals to the Counselling team and the Consultant Psychiatrist – example of an excellent good practice
- In university counselling services where there is no psychiatric provision – referrals will be made to NHS Psychiatric Services or to a university mental health advisor whose function is to liaise with external mental health services

# The Student Experience

- A significant wide-ranging term with the aim of addressing the needs of the wide variety of students in UK HEIs
- An increasing emphasis on students being 'consumers'
- Pressure on universities to provide excellent teaching, support and facilities within the constrained funding environment
- The effect of the increasingly competitive market place is to expect students to engage in extra-curricular activities
- As a result students have additional pressures to balance non-academic activities with academic work
- Increasingly, extra-curricular activities are an essential part of the student programme
- Establishment of the Student Charter which sets out the Institution's mutual expectations of its students

# Outcome measures and reporting back

- In 2011, AUCC research into the impact of counselling on academic outcomes – including retention, achievement, student expectation and employability (Data from 1,263 students from 42 universities)

## Pre-existing evidence

- 75% of students were improved or recovered as opposed to 71% in primary care

## Waiting Times

- Average waiting time in HE Counselling – 9 days – Primary Care Counselling – 63 days
- Average waiting time between referral and first counselling session in HE – 16 days – in Primary Care Counselling - 84 days

# Quantitative Findings

## Retention

- 58.3% indicated counselling was an important factor
- 25.3% , one of many factors in helping them stay at university
- Total 83.6% considered counselling to have helped them stay at university

## Achievement

- 51.9% indicated that counselling was an important factor
- 29.4% one of many factors in helping them do better in their academic work
- Total = 81.3%

# Student Experience

- 58.4% indicated Counselling was an important factor
- 26.8% one of many factors in improving their overall Student Experience
- Total = 82.5%

## Employability

- 57.1% indicated counselling was an important factor
- 23.4% one of many factors helping them develop skills – useful for obtaining future employment
- Total – 80.5%

# Qualitative Findings

- Counselling Interventions which were most valued were emotional containment, understanding, being offered new perspectives and new tools for coping
- Main impact of counselling – students developed increased understanding and increased ability to cope
- Their outlook was more confident, more optimistic and more hopeful about the future
- 16.8% found counselling unhelpful

## Reporting Back

- These and other research findings generally form part of an Annual Psychological Counselling Report to the University Management.
- Thus providing an evidence-base for the value and effectiveness of in-house counselling in universities
- National organisations – AUCC, BACP, AMOSSHE (Association of Managers of Student Support in Higher Education), report to Universities UK (Vice-Chancellors) which in turn reports to the Government Department of Higher Education.
- Students are the wealth, creators and providers of the future – we neglect their mental health at our peril!