Supporting student mental health: Managing transitions and partnerships

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- Set up in 2009
- Working to encourage peer interventions for student mental health
- National network of student-led peer support groups and campaign groups

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Today's session...

- **The state of student mental health**: key research and recent sector developments
- **University transitions project**: from research to campaigning for change
- **Managing partnerships**: working collaboratively with universities and students
- **Q&A and group discussion**

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The state of student mental health

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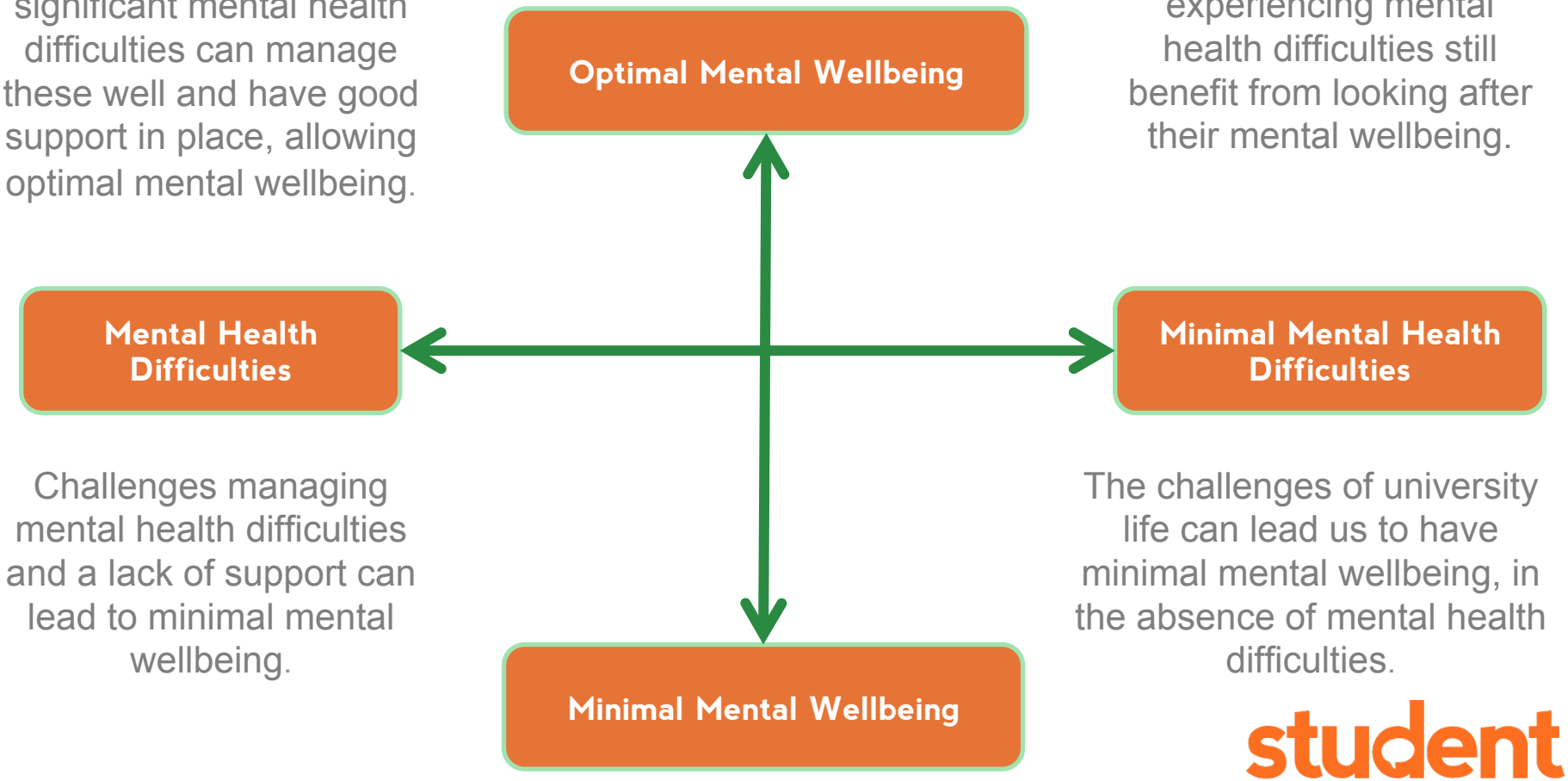
The mental health continuum

A person experiencing significant mental health difficulties can manage these well and have good support in place, allowing optimal mental wellbeing.

People who are not experiencing mental health difficulties still benefit from looking after their mental wellbeing.



Challenges managing mental health difficulties and a lack of support can lead to minimal mental wellbeing.

The challenges of university life can lead us to have minimal mental wellbeing, in the absence of mental health difficulties.

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The student experience: a few quick stats…

- **1 in 4** adults experience mental health difficulties at some point during their lifetime, and **1 in 6** experience symptoms at any one time (Department of Health)

- **49%** of young people (17-30) enter HE and the age of onset of many difficulties overlaps with the student years. It is estimated that **29%** of students experience clinical levels of psychological distress (Bewick et al.)

- Only **1 in 125 students disclose** a mental health difficulty to their university, but in a recent ECU survey **75%** of student respondents who had experienced mental health difficulties had disclosed to a fellow student

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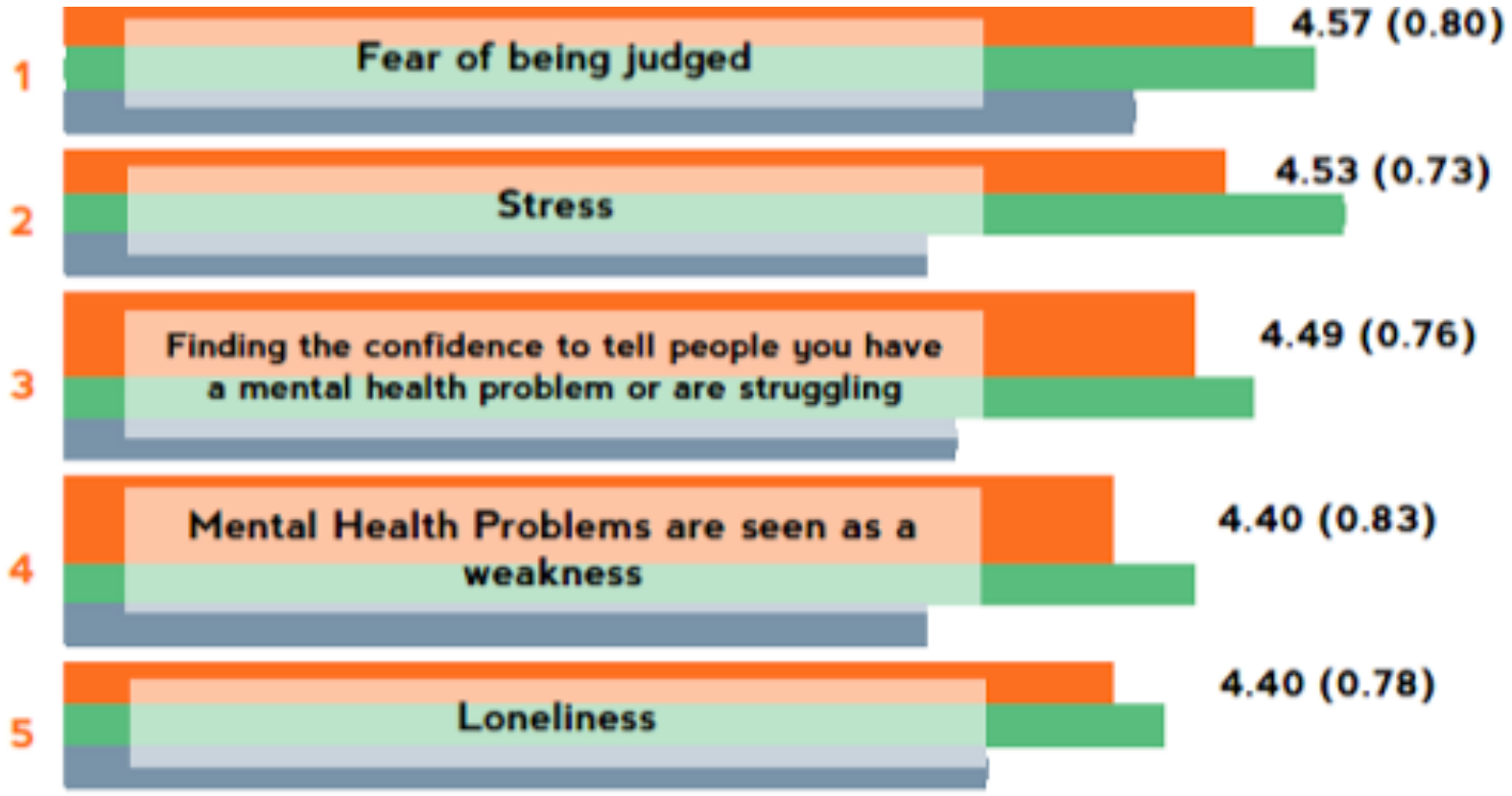
Grand challenges research



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Research published in 2015

Universities UK commissioned the Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Working Group to update the existing guidance:
Student mental wellbeing in higher education: good practice guide

The Equality Challenge Unit carried out research into disclosure and support mechanisms for staff and students experiencing mental health difficulties:
Understanding adjustments: supporting staff and students who are experiencing mental health difficulties

Post election: HEFCE is reviewing the provision and support for disabled students in the HE sector as part of the Government's proposed changes to the DSA. This research will provide HEFCE with evidence to support future policy.

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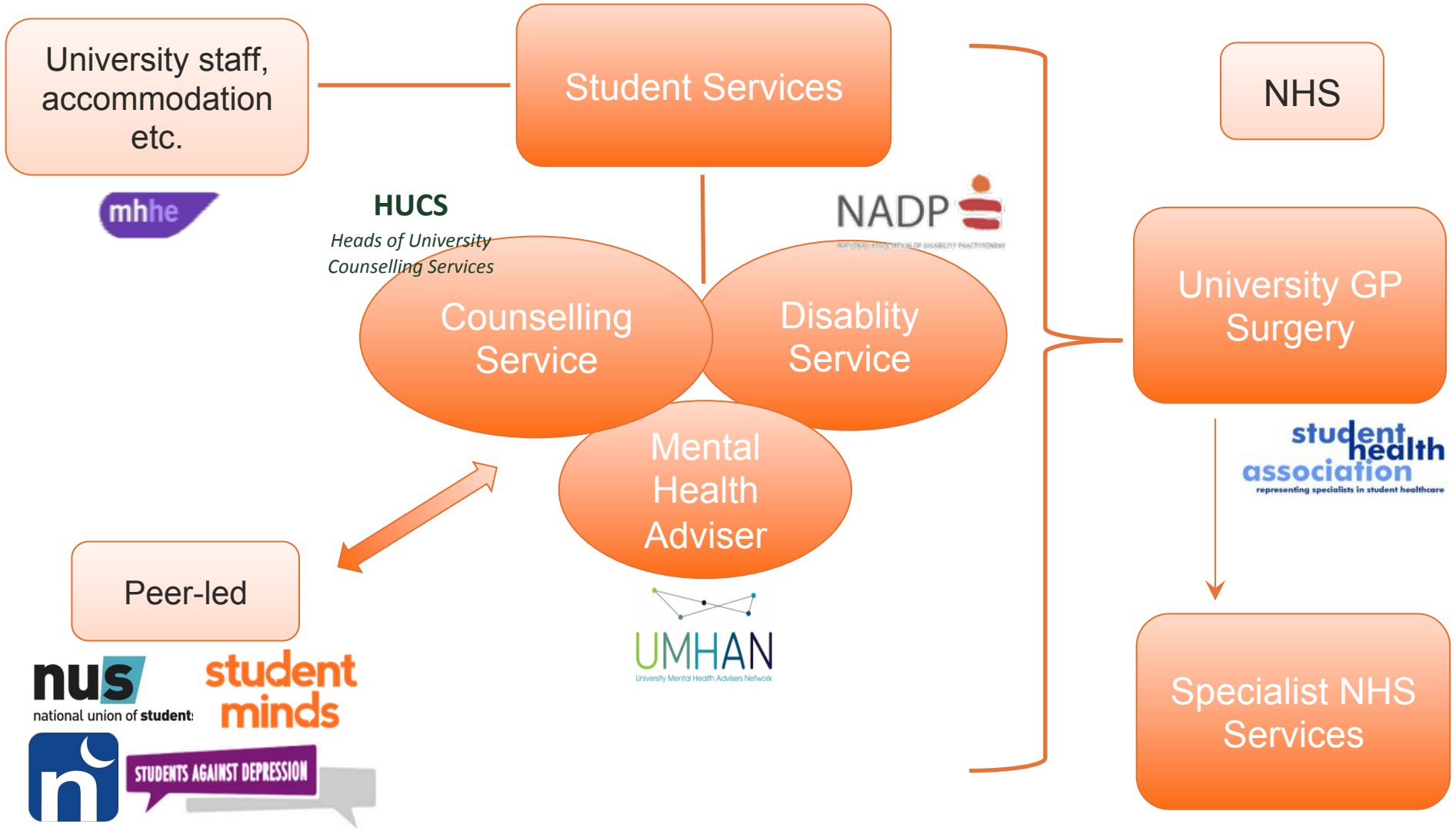
The support landscape



Transitions project

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Research findings

- Led by Dr Nicola Byrom and Ellie Hambly
- Questionnaires and interviews
- Thematic analysis

92%

of professionals surveyed felt that a student's treatment is negatively affected by moving between home and university

96% of PROFESSIONALS

told us that students do not get specialist care as quickly as they would like

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Research findings

Students:

- **25% waited over 6 months, average 18 weeks**
- **39% felt their mental health had declined during the wait**
- **Half needed access to home GP & university GP**
- **83% had problems accessing home GP**
- **70% had mental health difficulties prior to university**

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"I have had to take 5 years in total out of university due to my eating disorder… I have experienced great difficulties in transferring my care and getting enough support… It frustrates my family and I so much that despite the best efforts of some very supportive professionals, the rules regarding referrals from out of area and waiting lists can have such a devastating impact on those with eating disorders"

"We have experienced the gap and lack of support as a family. My daughter ended up not coping and has not been able to finish her course. The delay in accessing services was too long … due to a lack of joined up services between home and her uni GP"

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Consultation period

1. These issues affect students with all mental health difficulties, not just eating disorders.

2. Rather than calling for fundamental changes to the system (dual registration), our priority should be to promote awareness of existing guidance and to make sure services have the resources they need to act on this guidance.

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Report recommendations

1. Access to care at home & university
   - Adherence to NHS guidelines – GPs to give equal services to permanent and temporary residents
   - Shared access to notes
   - Investigate barriers for professionals
2. Support in place before students arrive at university
   - National register of support
   - Care plans & communication
   - Case coordinator
3. Utilise new technology e.g. SHaRON

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Scoping work

Speaking to Clinical Commissioning Groups:

- **The Department of Health does not currently provide guidance to CCGs on student needs**
- **A postcode lottery for student support exists**
- **Best Practice: Leeds Student Health and Wellbeing Partnership, Nottingham (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment devoted to students, Eating Disorders in Students service on campus)**

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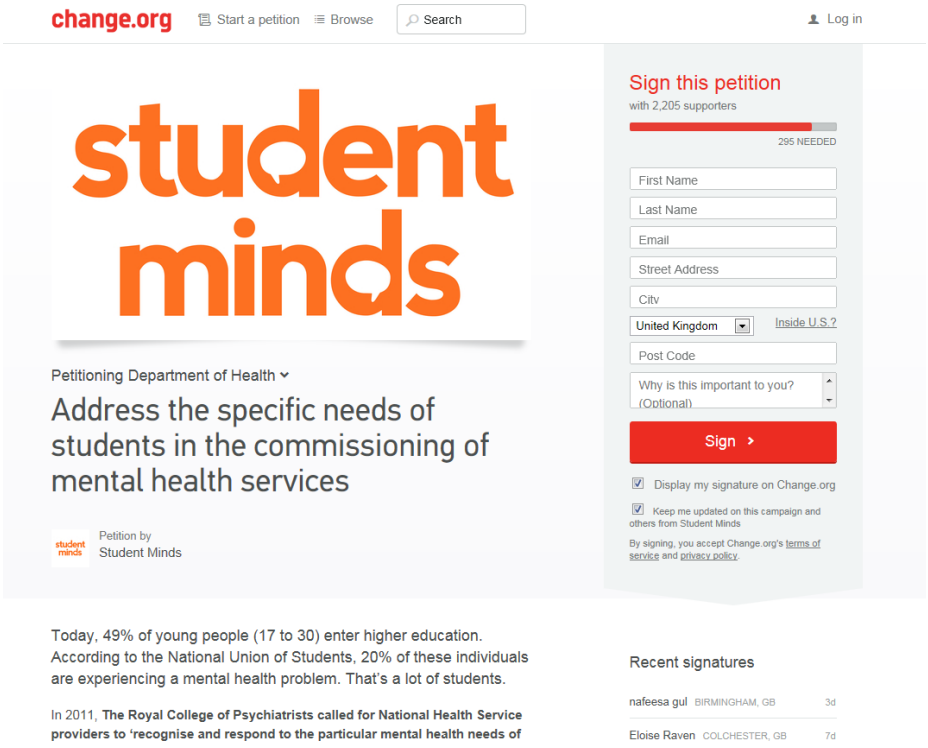
Petition campaign

- Launched in Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2014
- Calling on the Department of Health to support the development of best practice guidelines on this issue for CCGs, so that across the UK all students have access to consistent care pathways catered to their needs



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Support

Over 2,000 signatures

Supported by:

UMHAN
University Mental Health Advisers Network

mwbhe

Heads of University Counselling Services

nus
national union of students

student health association
representing specialists in student healthcare

OPEN MINDS

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Meeting with Norman Lamb

Presented petition and report to Norman Lamb at our meeting on 13th March 2014. Secured two clear commitments:

1. **The policy team at the DoH will put together a briefing about the impact of university transitions and what can be done to support students**
2. **Norman Lamb's policy team will meet with NHS England to discuss next steps in putting together guidance for CCGs on supporting students.**

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Where are we now?

- It hasn't happened yet!
- Follow up meeting: RCGP is bought in and is interested in student health guide from NHS England; still need clarity about student registration
- C&YP task force report should provide some impetus for how new minister should follow up
- DOH: Who is putting guidance together? What should be included?
- Next stage would involve lobbying to ensure that local changes are being made – local organising (DoH grant) How can we ensure student needs are represented locally e.g. as in Leeds?
- What about Wales/ Scotland/ NI?

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Working with students: Peer support

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The benefits

To those receiving support: empowerment; social support; empathy and acceptance; reducing stigma; hope and motivation

To peer-supporters: empowerment and self-esteem; turning difficult experiences into a positive; personal development and employability

To the university community:

- A large number of students experiencing clinical levels of distress are not accessing support - peer support is on the individual's own terms and can act as a 'stepping stone' into professional support.
- Integrating peer support as part of a triaging system with existing services enables professionals to dedicate more attention to students with complex needs while simultaneously reaching more students and providing support over a longer period of time.

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Managing peer support safely

In general this includes: having a recovery-focussed session, having systems in place to effectively signpost those in need of further support and ensuring that adequate training and supervision is in place for peer supporters:

- **Comprehensive training**
- **Ongoing support and supervision**
- **Boundaries for peer-supporters**
- **Ground rules for conversations**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Effective signposting**

Student Minds training covers: listening skills & motivational interviewing; confidentiality, ground rules and the importance of boundaries; structuring a group session & practicalities of running a student-led project; how to manage difficult conversations including talking about suicide and enforcing ground rules.

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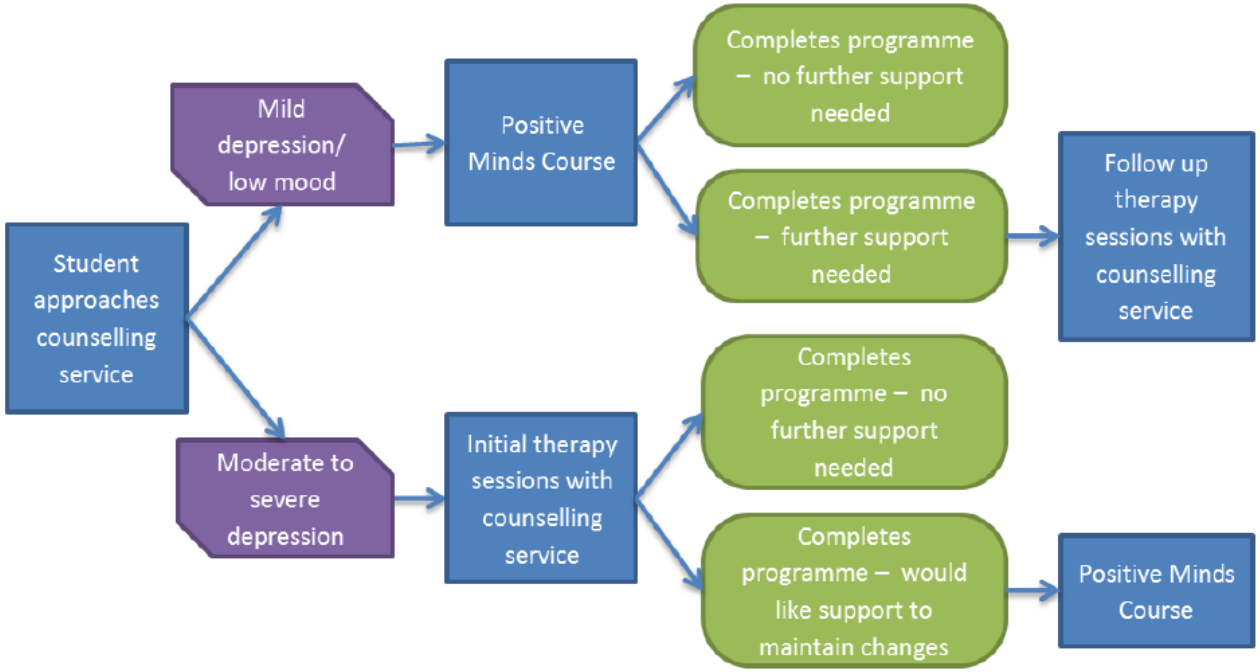
Conditions for success in an HE setting

- **Integration with existing services/ full stakeholder engagement**
- **Comprehensive volunteer support - for sustainability**
- **Student-facing promotion**
- **A little patience!**



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Eating disorder support groups

Informal support groups offering students with eating disorders support and encouragement to keep motivated through recovery.

"The support group was absolutely amazing and I think it's the single biggest contributor to my recovery this year"

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A six-week course for students with mild depression, launched in autumn 2014

Supporting supporters workshops

Piloted at 4 universities, supporting 35 individuals

"I would definitely recommend to anyone supporting someone with an eating disorder"

60% increase in confidence in supporting a friend with an eating disorder

'Skills-based learning for caring for a loved one with an eating disorder: the New Maudsley Method' (Treasure, Smith and Crane, 2007)

"The organisers were thoughtful, well-informed and encouraging"

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Look After Your Mate campaign

- **Local action:** Over 25 universities
- **Guide for friends:** Over 4,000 downloads
- **Workshop pilot:** 227 students across 11 workshops at 9 universities. Average 30% increase in students' knowledge of how to support a friend at university
- **Positive feedback**: student specific case studies & group discussion; comms skills & opportunity to put skills it into practice; approachable trainers
- **Look After Your Mate survey**

Key practical tips for supporting a friend

- Motivational interviewing and reflective listening
- The student journey: understanding the issues affecting students
- Signposting to support
- Looking after your own wellbeing as a supporter
- Interactive case studies

Kick-starting further action

- Preparing a 'look after your mate' action plan
- Mental health campaigns training

Further information…

Peer Support Report:
studentminds.org.uk/university-peer-support

University Staff Webpage:
studentminds.org.uk/for-university-staff

Transitions & Grand Challenges Reports:
studentminds.org.uk/research

Eating Disorders Content:
studentminds.org.uk/understanding-eating-disorders

Look After Your Mate Guide:
studentminds.org.uk/look-after-your-mate

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Q & A

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Discussion 1

What challenges are there in working collaboratively with local partners e.g. universities, student groups & CCGs?

How could we overcome these challenges: if there could be more partnership working, what might this look like?

e.g. being able to easily find out who the right contacts are at the university

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Discussion 2

As part of our transitions work, RCGP have expressed an interest in co-producing a student checklist (or e-learning resources) for GP surgeries to help disseminate best practice.

We know that members of the Student Health Association are working hard to overcome challenges around student transitions and would love to hear your thoughts on how we might help disseminate this best practice:

What is really important to capture? Do you have any other suggestions on what we should be doing?

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Thank you!

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