

Student Mental Health Action Plan

Equality Impact Assessment Results

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Title of Policy: Student Mental Health Action Plan

Summary of aims and desired outcomes of Policy: The Action Plan seeks to further support student mental health and wellbeing, in a trauma-informed way.

Directorate: Division: Team: Lifelong Learning and Skills, Learner Experience Division, Student Equalities and Fair Access; and Mental Health Directorate

Executive summary

The Student Mental Health Action Plan (the 'Action Plan'), which builds on the broader Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (June 2023) and its companion documents, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Action Plan (November 2023) and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan (November 2023), seeks to further support student mental health and wellbeing, in a trauma-informed way.

It recognises the critical importance of early intervention and prevention, ensuring effective access to a diverse range of community-based services, and providing timely clinical acute care for those who require it.

The Student Mental Health Action Plan and its five actions are informed by Public Health Scotland's [Three Levels of Prevention](#). The five actions are:

Action One: Better access to local and national prevention and early intervention services

Action Two: Robust institution-wide planning, local cooperation, and support for students through Think Positive and Student Mental Health Agreements.

Action Three: Facilitate and enhance access to mental health resources and training for all university, college and PBSA staff to continue to become mental health aware.

Action Four: Explore mechanisms to improve data sharing between schools, colleges and universities.

Action Five: Better access to clinical support and acute services.

The Action Plan is informed by research, in particular, the Thriving Learners research which sets out the significant impact of mental health challenges on students. Nearly three-quarters of university students, for example, reported low wellbeing, over a third experienced moderately severe or severe symptoms of depression, and nearly half felt the need for professional help due to a serious psychological issue. A similar trend was observed in a 2022 Mental Health Foundation survey of college students.

Background

The [2021/22 Programme for Government](#) committed to 'developing a student mental health action plan' (A Fairer, Greener Scotland, page 46).

The development of the Student Mental Health Action Plan (the 'Action Plan') follows on from the completion of the Government's commitment in relation to additional counsellors in colleges and universities (AY 2019/20 – 2022/23) with an investment of almost £16 million and the one off, [Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Transition Fund](#). The aim of the £3.21 million Transition Fund was 'to provide financial support for a transition from the previous arrangements to one which helps institutions diversify their support offering to students and explore delivery models which meet student needs and integrate with local services.' (Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Transition Fund in Academic Year (AY) 2023-24, page 4). The Fund concluded in July 2024 at the end of AY 2023-24.

The Scope of the EQIA

The EQIA covered all the protected characteristics with the exception of Marriage and Civil Partnership as the Scottish Government does not require assessment against this protected characteristic unless the policy or practice relates to work, for example HR policies and practices.

Key Findings

The EQIA highlighted that the proposed measure would have a positive impact on all the protected characteristics.

Age: The measures should enable, through an inclusive approach to the development of Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA), all students, the majority of whom (60%) are under 24, to access, in line with the general population, preventive and acute services.

Disability: The measures should enable disabled students to better access a range of preventive and acute services by involving them in the Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA) process.

The Thriving Learners Survey for colleges highlighted that “the largest identified disability or long-term health condition was ‘Mental health difficulties’ with over a third (36%) of respondents identifying with it. The next largest category with nearly 1 in 5 (17%) was a learning difficulty”. In universities, the largest identified disability or long-term health condition was “Mental health difficulties’ with a quarter (25.2%) of respondents identifying with it. The next largest category with just under 1 in 10 (9.4%) was unseen disability or health condition”.

Sex: The measures apply to all students but recognise that there is a gendered component to mental health conditions and the stigma, especially for men, in talking about such conditions and getting help. The Action Plan highlights the importance of collaborative working across the public and third sector, including SeeMe, on this issue.

Pregnancy and Maternity: The measures should enable pregnant students to also access a range of preventive and support services.

Gender Reassignment: The measures should enable all students to access a range of preventive services, with a particular focus on addressing access and stigma by involving them in the SMHA process. It recognises that young trans people have significant mental health issues when compared to the general population, with LGBT Youth Scotland reporting that 1 in 5 leave education as result of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia.

Sexual Orientation: The measures should, by improving access to services for all students and by LGB+ student involvement with SMHAs, enable the needs of LGB+ students to be addressed. The measure recognises that LGB+ students face significant issues around self-harm and stigma.

Race: The measures should enable improved access to culturally appropriate services by involving black and minority ethnic (BME) students in SMHAs. The measures recognise that BME students face a number of issues in relation to mental health in accessing culturally appropriate services and which may include communication issues.

Religion and Belief: The measures should ensure that SMHAs continue to reflect the diversity of their student population - over one third have a religious belief or faith identity. SMHAs should include information on how students can support their own mental health and wellbeing through access to, and participation in, student clubs and societies, including sport and culture, peer support, and the provision of opportunities for students, if they so wish, to identify with and participate in a faith community of their choice.

Student Mental Health Agreements (SMHAs)

The measures envisage a key role for Student Mental Health Agreements, building upon the inclusivity of their approach and for the Scottish Government in bringing together NHS Scotland, local authority and third sector organisations to better facilitate student access to local services and acute services for those who need them.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The EQIA process did not identify indirect or direct discrimination through measures. It did highlight the positive impact of the measures across the protected characteristics. The Action Plan had been informed by research and data sources and these are referenced therein.

Although the EQIA highlighted the positive impact of the measures, in line with best practice we will keep this under review as part of the monitoring of this EQIA.

January 2025

Sign Off

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Date: February 2025



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