How Russell Group universities are supporting students to develop positive mental health and well-being

1. Summary

Russell Group universities are committed to promoting good mental health for their students and work hard to create an environment in which all students are supported to flourish. Our universities support students across their institutions and throughout their time studying, offering a range of services to all students to promote positive mental well-being as well as supporting students to overcome mental health conditions. Russell Group universities are:

- **Investing heavily in support services** - including specialist counselling - which aim to help students detect the symptoms of mental health conditions, and to help them succeed at university.
- **Working to promote awareness of support services** both within the university as well as the broader services which are available externally including through the NHS.
- **Providing a range of guidance and training to staff** about how to ascertain the most appropriate intervention for a student in distress.
- Implementing cross-institutional strategies **working with student representatives to ensure that students are supported in a holistic way** and regularly reviewing their provision to ensure it is meeting students' needs.
- **Working in partnerships with charities and other community partners** to provide a joined-up approach to better support students.
- **Generating new knowledge through research to inform health services and health policy**, and so enhance mental health and well-being for all citizens.

2. Russell Group universities are investing significantly in support services for students

Over recent years, our universities have significantly increased their investment to further enhance student mental health support services.

Our universities offer a range of services specifically designed for students suffering from mental ill health. These services aim to help students detect the signs of mental ill health and to enhance their ability to overcome mental health conditions, and to continue successfully with their studies. These services cannot however replace clinical care through the NHS, particularly in acute cases.

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*Following a review, the **University of York** is expanding its in-house counselling service to meet the growing needs of students as well as making improvements to online and mobile services. The University is also expanding its on-campus GP practice and working with the Student Union on a social media campaign to raise awareness of services to students.*

*The **University of Oxford** counselling service has been very successful in helping students to overcome mental health issues: 87% of students using the service showed significant improvement in their mental health and were much less likely to consider suspending their studies.*

Alongside this, our universities have also developed a number of strategies to support the mental wellbeing of all students across their universities and throughout their time studying. A range of services are in place to promote positive mental well-being among students, helping to equip them with a support network as well as strategies to cope with a number of challenges typically associated with university life.

> *The Student Mentor Scheme at the **University of Birmingham** offers a variety of services throughout the academic year, including mentoring support; drop-ins; and mediation to help students work through any challenges they face such as homesickness, adjusting to life in university accommodation, and dealing with exam stress. The mentoring team is comprised of 12 current students who have been trained to provide free advice and guidance to students living in university accommodation.*
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> *Universities have a key role in facilitating access to resources which can empower students to support their own wellbeing and personal development including books, online material on university websites, and podcasts. For example, the Counselling Service at the **University of Manchester** provides a range of free podcasts on relaxation, mindfulness, and how to deal with stress, anxiety and panic attacks.*

3. Our universities are taking a strategic, cross-institutional approach to meet students' needs

A number of Russell Group universities are implementing cross-institutional strategies to supporting students with mental health conditions and promoting well-being across the whole student population. Such strategies are regularly reviewed to ensure that students' needs are being met and improvements made where appropriate.

Research demonstrates that effective forms of support are best delivered through partnerships of different organisations working together – which is why our universities have developed close working relationships with student representatives, NHS Trusts, charities and other community partners to provide an informed and joined-up approach.

> *The **University of Edinburgh** has recently launched its new Student Mental Health Strategy following consultation with key groups such as Edinburgh University Students Association, the University Counselling Service and the Student Disability Service. It will promote wellbeing, improve support and counselling services and ensure all personal tutors have received mental health training by 2019. The University has committed to a further £140,000 investment in student counselling between 2016 and 2018.*
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> *The **University of Bristol** has pioneered a Vulnerable Students' Support Service which coordinates support for the most vulnerable students working closely with staff in academic schools and with students, and provides support through the most appropriate service from across the University and/or from the NHS. Bristol is also reviewing the way in which students are supporting by staff with specialist expertise with a view to ensuring individuals with the right expertise are available in each individual school and faculty and not just centrally.*

4. Research at our universities is improving mental health provision for all citizens

Research conducted at our universities across a range of disciplines – from Neuroscience to Economics – is having a positive impact on mental health provision in the UK and internationally, with knock-on benefits for all citizens including young people and students.

Russell Group universities recognise the considerable challenges posed by mental health conditions in the population and their research programmes aim to generate new knowledge to inform health services and health policy, and enhance mental health and wellbeing for all.

> *As a result of the research conducted at **Kings' College London**, personality disorders are now recognised as major mental health problems and the research has led to the development of a simple screening test for personality disorders used around the world.*
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> *Researchers at the Centre for Economic Performance at **London School of Economics** conducted a cost-benefit analysis of cognitive behavioural therapy which led to the introduction of Improving Access to Psychological Therapies - a programme which is already treating 400,000 people a year and recording 45 per cent recovery rates.*

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