

1 Situation

Widening participation students are disproportionately affected by mental health issues whilst at university.

2 Aims

To use a peer support model to provide early intervention mental health and wellbeing support for students.

7 Inputs

5 Activities

6 Outputs

3 Outcomes

4 Impact

Process

Impact

- Summer Working Group
- 1 Coordinator and 1 Practitioner to manage the project and 3 other Practitioners to support the drop-in
- Budget of approximately £10,000
- Interview panel for group activity and individual interviews and suitable rooms on Campus
- Dedicated Peer Wellbeing Adviser time in staff diaries on a weekly basis
- Dedicated Teams Site to liaise with the Peer Wellbeing Advisers
- Method for tracking expenses
- Team members and Peer Wellbeing Advisers set up on Blue Arrow and payment processes in place
- Receipt of satisfactory references for Peer Wellbeing Advisers

- Recruit and train up to 4 Peer Wellbeing Advisers
- Design a comprehensive training and induction package for the Peer Wellbeing Advisers
- Peer Wellbeing Advisers design a series of peer-led interventions
- Peer Wellbeing Advisers organise campaigns and activities which promote positive mental health and wellbeing
- Peer Wellbeing Advisers offer student voice e.g. review internal processes/support offer and make recommendations
- Design methods for capturing student feedback regarding Peer Wellbeing Adviser-led interventions

- Each Peer Wellbeing Adviser attends 20 hours of training
- Each Peer Wellbeing Adviser works up to 120 hours
- Each Peer Wellbeing Adviser facilitates a minimum of 10 drop-ins
- A series of wellbeing interventions delivered by the Peer Wellbeing Advisers
- Mechanism in place for capturing student feedback
- Students signposted to internal and external mental health support
- Peer Wellbeing Advisers embedded within the Mental Health and Wellbeing Team

- Increased sense of belonging and reduced isolation for the Peer Wellbeing Advisers
- Increased sense of belonging and reduced isolation for other students
- Students who access the interventions feeling better equipped to manage their mental health and wellbeing
- Increased visibility of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Team helping to reduce the stigma of accessing mental health support
- Peer Wellbeing Advisers are knowledgeable about the Mental Health and Wellbeing Team and able to support early intervention and preventative work
- Enhanced skills and career outcomes for the Peer Wellbeing Advisers

- Greater awareness of mental health and wellbeing support amongst Northumbria students including widening participation students
- Student voice and representation embedded within the Mental Health and Wellbeing Team
- Increased accessibility of early intervention mental health and wellbeing support across the University
- A whole university approach to mental health and wellbeing
- More effective signposting to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Team
- Early intervention enables students to better engage with their studies leading to better outcomes
- Increased social mobility

8 Rationale & Assumptions

Early intervention is a necessary step to improve national mental health – Student Minds, Peer Support for Student Mental Health (2014), p.3.

- Tackling mental health difficulties early in life will improve educational attainment, employment opportunities and physical health, increasing economic productivity, social functioning and quality of life – Ibid.
- Improving student belonging is a priority for improving student retention and building supportive peer relations is one strategy towards improving student belonging – Ibid.
- Peer support can empower individuals to overcome the stigma and social isolation associated with mental health difficulties – Ibid, p.4.
- Peer-supporters learn new skills through their experience, contributing to their personal development and employability – Ibid, p.6.
- Over the last decade there has been a significant shift in the willingness of students to talk about their mental health – the number of UK applicants to UCAS that shared a mental health condition has increased by 450% in this time – UCAS (2021), accessed Nov 2024.
- Students find peer support easy to use, and recent research suggests it can increase support service accessibility – J. Pointon-Haas et al, A systematic review of peer support interventions for student mental health and well-being in higher education (2024), p.1.
- Students disclose more to peers than to their HEIs: 75% of students who experienced mental health difficulties reported telling a peer. Since students prefer seeking help from friends more than professional services, HEIs want to harness this natural preference through peer support, as recommended in the University Mental Health Charter – Ibid.
- Widening participation students are more at risk of having poor mental health – 'Risk 8: Mental health', Office for Students (2023), accessed Nov 2024.