CYPE(6)-18-22 - Paper 1

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) i [gymorth iechyd meddwl mewn addysg uwch](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into [Mental Health support in Higher Education](#)

MHHE 04

Ymateb gan: Undeb Cenedlaethol Myfyrwyr Cymru (UCM Cymru)

Response from: National Union of Students Wales (NUS Wales)

Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad. | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.

1. **Maint yr angen | Extent of need**

The current situation with regard to the mental health of students in higher education, and any particular challenges they face with their mental health and ability to access support.

1. There is a student mental health crisis in Wales and across the UK that existed before the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, but has been exacerbated by both. Higher education (HE) students face a mixture of pressures that have become more acute, especially over the last decade. UCAS reports that the number of students disclosing mental health conditions increased 450 per cent between 2011 and 2021, with a year-on-year upward trend.

2. Young people entering HE in the coming years are experiencing higher rates of mental health issues. Cardiff University found that one in five young people in Wales had very high levels of mental health symptoms in 2020. As the 'Covid generation' – whose social and academic experiences were disrupted by the pandemic – transitions to HE, we anticipate there will be even greater pressure on mental health services on campuses and in the NHS.

3. Students face growing financial pressures as rising costs – especially rent and bills – take up more of their maintenance support. In 2018/19, the average student rent in Wales took up 53 per cent of the student finance available to a full-time, Welsh-domiciled HE student. In 2021/22, this had risen to almost 60 per cent. Since tuition fees were hiked in 2010, students have been loaded with debt and fluctuating interest rates.

4. The cost-of-living crisis is having a significant impact on student mental health. Responding to an NUS survey in June 2022, 91 per cent of students in Wales said the crisis had impacted their mental health, with 29 per cent reporting this to be a 'major' impact. Just under a third of students in Wales said they have £50 or less to live on per month after paying rent and bills. While Wales has a comparatively generous student support package, around half of HE students in Wales are not from Wales, meaning they receive less support, or no support in the case of international students.

5. Alongside day-to-day academic pressures, HE students have become increasingly concerned about the future and their job prospects, with the Mental Health Foundation reporting that three in five young people feel unable to cope with the pressure to succeed.

6. As well as contending with the social pressures of moving away from home and making new friends, more and more students are experiencing loneliness, with the ONS reporting that a quarter of students felt lonely during the pandemic.

7. 65 per cent of students in Wales say poor housing has impacted their mental health, according to an NUS Wales / Shelter Cymru survey, which also found that more than half of students have experienced damp or mould and 46 per cent have experienced disrepair in their accommodation.

Whether there are different challenges with regard to mental health for different groups of students, and if there are any groups of students in higher education who are disproportionately affected by poor mental health.

8. LGBTQ+ students report higher rates of mental health issues than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. A survey by Student Minds found that almost four in five students agreed there was a need for more support specifically for LGBTQ+ students. Transgender and non-binary students have been found to be four times more likely than their peers to report issues such as depression or suicidal ideation.

9. International students face inequalities accessing mental health support. Significantly fewer international students with a mental health condition disclose this to their education provider. International students experience higher levels of loneliness and report struggling to assimilate with student life and cultural norms.

10. Distance learners, such as those on part-time courses who are more likely to be mature students or have caring responsibilities, do not access institutional

mental health services in the same way as those on campuses. It is important institutions offer remote mental health support.

The effect, if any, that Covid-19 had generally on students' mental health and well-being and the pandemic's impact on the levels and type of support provided by the higher education sector.

11. The mental health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have been well documented. For students, who are already disproportionately affected by poor mental health, the impacts of lockdowns and isolation were particularly acute. Many students – especially first years and others living away from home and support networks for the first – struggled to make friends and engage in social activities due to social distancing measures.

12. The pandemic also significantly impacted students' finances, severely limiting their earning ability by reducing the hospitality sector that many students work in on a part-time basis. Students also reported that the finances of people who support them were negatively affected by the pandemic.

13. Responding to an NUS survey in March 2021, 64 per cent of students in Wales said their mental health was worse than before the pandemic. Students pointed to loneliness, inability to make friends, inability to see family and general anxiety about the pandemic.

14. For students transitioning to HE, research by the School Health Research Network found that the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing mental health problems in children and young people in Wales.

2. Adnabod a darpariaeth | Identification and provision

How effectively higher education providers promote an ethos of universal good mental health and well-being to all students, and whether this an integral part of the learning experience and interactions with staff.

15. While there are many examples of innovative and effective mental health projects in HE institutions in Wales, there is more to be done to ensure providers across the piece are promoting an ethos of universal good mental health to all students.

16. Surveys consistently find that students believe their education provider could be doing more to support their mental health. An NUS survey found that fewer than three in ten students in Wales sought mental health support during the pandemic and less than half of those were satisfied with the support they received.

17. More needs to be done to provide adequate support to all students and to ensure that students are aware of the support available via signposting.

18. There is still work to do to ensure that all mental health support services are inclusive and culturally competent so they can fully cater for students from underrepresented backgrounds, such as LGBTQ+ students and BAME students.

How effectively the sector ensures early identification of students who need individual and targeted support.

19. Historically, resource has tended to be allocated to reactive mental health services within HE institutions rather than prevention and early intervention. We are seeing more of a focus on early identification as more multi-year Welsh Government funding is allocated to student mental health projects.

20. We are pleased to see more of a focus on this area through programmes such as Student Space, which provides bilingual online wellbeing support to students. The myf.cymru programme is also valuable, providing wellbeing support to students through the medium of Welsh.

21. It's important that services can communicate quickly and effectively with each other, for example between on-campus services and the NHS, or between FE and HE. Too often uncertainty around information sharing leads to delays to students receiving support.

22. We would advocate for a joined-up approach in this area that brings together education and statutory health services to ensure that students have clear and signposted pathways to support.

How effectively the higher education sector and the NHS work together to deliver the right mental health support for individual students when and where they need it.

23. There is a 'missing middle' of students who fall through the gaps between institutional mental health services and statutory NHS services. It is important that service providers on both sides can share information about individuals in a quick and effective manner.

24. The Mental Health University Liaison Service (MHULS), which is available to all students living in Cardiff, has been running since April 2022 and is designed to specifically address this gap between services. The MHULS team is based on campuses in student support services and is made up of NHS clinicians.

Whether there are specific issues with access to NHS mental health support, for example the impact of changing GPs more frequently; that many students are at an age where they are transitioning from CAMHS to adult mental health services; any issues with data sharing.

25. Students who move to university from another city are not automatically registered with a GP. Students may also be required to change GPs if they move within their university city.

26. Students, who may be inexperienced or reluctant to access health services in the first place, face long waiting times to access NHS mental health services.

27. Uncertainty around data sharing risks professionals making decisions that are not in the best interest of the student. Data protection law allows organisations to share personal data in an emergency situation. It is important that there is consistency between education providers and health boards, including those outside of Wales, to ensure students' best interests are protected.

How well the wider post-16 education sector works to promote good mental health, particularly with regard to transitions.

28. The transition to higher education is a significant step in a person's life and often involves moving away from support networks and living independently for the first time. This transition may also coincide with a person's transition between CAMHS and AMHS.

29. We are encouraged by work to support young people at key transition points, as well as the introduction as health and wellbeing as an Area of Learning and Experience within the new Welsh curriculum.

30. We hope that work in schools will result in mentally healthier young people transitioning into higher education, but there is also a need to implement good practice within higher education and beyond.

3. Polisïau, deddfwriaeth a chyllid Llywodraeth Cymru | Welsh Government policy, legislation and funding

How effectively the Welsh Government's policy, funding and regulatory arrangements for the sector support the mental health of students in higher education, and whether there is more that the Welsh Government could do.

31. The Welsh Government's Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan 2019-2022 does not mention students or higher education, while the review of the plan in response to the pandemic only mentions actions in relation to further education institutions. Given the pressures that are unique to student life, we believe the next iteration of the strategy should have more of a focus on supporting students in higher education.

32. We welcome funding that the Welsh Government has allocated to student mental health in recent years. This funding has allowed higher education providers and students' unions to prioritise bespoke support for their student populations.

33. It is important that funding is long term to allow providers and students' unions to spend money with confidence and in a strategic and sustainable way.

34. We welcome the additional £10.5m investment by Welsh Government into children and young people's mental health services in this year's budget.

In the context of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill, what a whole-system approach to mental health and well-being in post-16 education may look like, and what the role of higher education and healthcare providers would be.

35. We are pleased that the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 was amended to include the effectiveness of arrangements for supporting the welfare of students and staff as an ongoing registration condition for education providers. This is an important safeguard for students and we look forward to feeding into how this registration condition is administered and

monitored in practice.

36. We hope that the Act will allow all areas of tertiary education to work more closely together on transitions between different levels of education and for information sharing to become easier.

How the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research should approach mental health and wellbeing for students in higher education, and in the wider tertiary education sector

37. The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research must ensure that the voices of students and learners are heard in all aspects of its operations, but especially in the development of its approach to mental health and wellbeing.

38. The Commission should consider what a whole-system approach to mental health looks like within all areas of tertiary education and work with providers and the NHS to ensure that all services are geared up to deal with students.

39. The Commission should consider the lessons learned from the implementation of the whole-school approach to mental health in Wales and work with schools and local education authorities to ensure the transition between compulsory education and tertiary education is one that takes mental health and wellbeing into account.

4. Argymhellion ar gyfer newid | Recommendations for change

Whether there are any recommendations that the Committee should make.

40. The Committee should consider all of the policy recommendations made by the cross-sector working group made up of NUS Wales, Universities Wales, Colleges Wales and AMOSSHE, published in May 2022.

41. The cost-of-living crisis represents a significant threat to students' mental health, so we recommend that the Welsh and UK governments put in place additional financial support in the short term and ensure student maintenance support matches inflation in the long term.

42. The Committee should consider policy recommendations that would address the underlying issues that lead to poor mental health outcomes for students in HE, particularly around student finance and the quality of student housing.

43. The Committee should consider the Mental Health University Liaison Service (MHULS) in Cardiff as a model to follow in other parts of Wales. This model should be rolled out across Wales, to ensure that students presenting with severe mental health symptoms can be seen by on-campus NHS mental health professionals in an appropriate time period that does not exacerbate their symptoms.

5. Arall | Other

Please submit any views that don't correspond to the terms of reference.

44. Given the wide remit of the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research and the requirements around welfare within the Bill, we believe the Committee could have considered mental health across all forms of tertiary education as part of this inquiry, including in colleges, sixth forms, apprenticeships and adult learning providers.

45. While the 'Mind Over Matter' report by the Fifth Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee did include colleges within its scope, we believe there is more to be done to fully explore the standard mental health provision for students in further education settings.