

# £1 million for innovative student mental health projects

Student groups most at risk of poor mental health will benefit from more targeted support through a £1million government funding boost, it has been announced on University Mental Health Day (5 March).

The funding will create new projects to support groups of students research suggests could be more 'at risk' of developing a mental health condition, such as black or ethnic minority students, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, LGBT+ students or those with a disability.

The money, provided by the Department for Health and Social Care, will go to the universities regulator the Office for Students (OfS), who is inviting bidders to submit proposals that will target and help students who might be at greater risk of mental ill health or who may face barriers to getting support.

In a 2019 survey, 17% of students reported having a mental health condition (up from 12% in 2016) and one in four students say they often or always feel lonely, according to a report by HEPI.

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan said:

Going to university can be a really challenging time, especially if you face added pressures or if you are balancing studies alongside other commitments like carers and mature students.

It is vital no student is put at risk by not getting the help they need. Universities must step up to this challenge, and this funding will help them and the sector by looking at ways support can be better targeted and improved.

OfS data has highlighted how outcomes for some student groups are more likely to be impacted by mental health problems. For example, the degree attainment gap between black and white students with a reported mental health condition is 26.8 percentage points.

Successful projects will also target groups of students who might face barriers in accessing support, like carers, part-time and international students and those on placements as part of their course.

The projects will also be judged on how they use innovative and technological approaches to addressing mental health issues, in line with the new NHS drive for improvement in digital support.

Chris Millward, Director for Fair Access and Participation at the OfS, said:

All students deserve the opportunity to thrive at university and college, but for too many mental ill-health remains a significant barrier. We know that there are many factors which can impact the wellbeing of students and situations where students may be or feel more vulnerable. Through this funding we want to support innovative and strategic solutions that can help ensure that all students, regardless of their background or how they study, get the support they need.

By working together with partners including the NHS and charities, universities and colleges have the power to address the complex issues associated with student mental ill-health. We will be sharing the effective practice that comes from this funding and driving improved mental health support for all students.

The Government also has an ambitious programme supporting good mental health in schools and colleges, implementing a range of measures outlined in the 2018 Green Paper. This includes introducing new Mental Health Support Teams, training for mental health leads in schools and colleges, and the £9.3 million Link Programme to ensure more joined up care with specialist NHS services.

This is alongside all children in schools being taught how to look after their mental wellbeing through compulsory relationships and health education, before university.