

News story: New package of measures announced on student mental health

Universities will be called on to dramatically improve their mental health offering for students, and will be awarded with a new recognition for meeting new mental health standards.

The Universities Minister Sam Gyimah will announce a new charter that will be developed in partnership with leading charities and Higher Education bodies, outlining the criteria that universities need to meet to gain the recognition, and will call on them to sign up to 'avoid failing a generation of students'.

It comes on the day that he will host a student mental health summit at the University of the West of England. As part of a new package of measures announced by Sam Gyimah on student mental health:

1. The announcement of a University Mental Health Charter will see the development of new standards to promote student and staff mental health and wellbeing.
2. The set-up of a Department for Education-led working group into the transition students face when going to university, to ensure they have the right support, particularly in the critical in their first year transition.
3. Exploring whether an opt-in requirement for universities could be considered, so they could have permission to share information on student mental health with parents or a trusted person.

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah said:

We want mental health support for students to be a top priority for the leadership of all our universities. Progress can only be achieved with their support – I expect them to get behind this important agenda as we otherwise risk failing an entire generation of students.

Universities should see themselves as 'in loco parentis' – not infantilising students, but making sure support is available where required. It is not good enough to suggest that university is about the training of the mind and nothing else, as it is too easy for students to fall between the cracks and to feel overwhelmed and unknown in their new surroundings.

This is not a problem that can be solved overnight, but we need to do a better job of supporting students than is happening at the moment.

Student Minds, the UK's student mental health charity, will lead a

partnership of organisations in the development of the charter. Partners will include the UPP Foundation, Office for Students (OfS), National Union of Students (NUS) and Universities UK.

The Charter's development, which is supported by a £100,000 grant to Student Minds from the UPP Foundation, the registered charity founded by University Partnerships Programme (UPP), will recognise and reward those institutions that demonstrate making student and staff mental health a university-wide priority and deliver improved student mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Rosie Tressler, CEO of Student Minds, said:

As the Minister has recognised today, there is much work to be done to ensure that institutions make mental health a strategic priority, supporting the 1 in 4 students and staff experiencing mental ill health and the 4 in 4 with mental health, at universities across the UK.

Student Minds are delighted to have the support of the UPP Foundation and our partners to co-create the University Mental Health Charter with students, and university and health communities. This programme will stretch and reward universities that commit to the improvement required, providing tools and support to help them get there.

Together we will transform the futures of the 2.3 million students that are in Higher Education, whilst equipping the doctors, teachers and business leaders of the future to continue the positive change in wider society."

Izzy Lenga, Vice President Welfare at NUS:

I am so pleased to support to the launch of this Charter, and specifically the commitment to reach out to underrepresented groups within the student population, to reinforce the importance of having culturally competent support services. Student mental health must be a priority for all institutions and this Charter presents a welcome opportunity for students to co-produce the definition of excellence in the field.

The working group looking at transitions will be based within the Department for Education and the work undertaken will be in tandem with the sector.

They will look at the role universities can play in the often difficult transition from school to university and becoming independent students. It will form a number of recommendations for schools, colleges and universities to adopt.

Sam Gyimah will also outline plans to explore opt-in requirements for universities could be considered, so they could have permission to share

information on student mental health with parents or a trusted person.