**GSA Overview of students experiences on
University Mental health Services and Proposal**

16th February 2020

Purpose of this paper
- To inform the members of the group on the key findings of the GSA survey on Students Experience of Mental Health Services at UoY.
- To provide recommendations in regards to the Student Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy, as informed by our survey, informal reports made by students to the VP Wellbeing, and informal reports made to the GSA Advice Service from students.

Summary and key findings
The GSA survey on students' experiences of university mental health services ran from the 15th of August to the 15th of September 2020 and it was taken by 78 participants. No incentives were given for participation in the survey, so all participants were voluntary and wished to give their experience.

The key findings of the survey were as follows:
1. Students struggle to seek support for their mental health and wellbeing (62 students from 78).
   - Students with diagnosed mental health conditions were more likely to report that it was *extremely likely* that they would seek support (36% of students with a diagnosed condition, 38% of students diagnosed with a long term mental health condition) than students without a diagnosed mental health condition (12% of students without a diagnosis).
2. Students struggle to disclose their disability to university services.
   - Of the 34 students this applied to, only 53% (18) reported that they had disclosed their condition to disability services. When asked why they did not disclose their condition to the university, the most cited reasons included that students *didn't want to be treated differently to everybody else*, and that *they didn't want the university to know*. When given the *other* option, students freely wrote their thoughts, which perhaps highlights a culture of shame (taking resources), or a "carry on" attitude (see appendix for more insight).
3. Students are not aware of the support available to them, but when students are aware of the services available to them, they tend to use these several times.

- The most known support service, with 21% of students knowing about it is the *GP/Doctor*, which is followed by three university internal services. It is worrying that the most known of all the services listed seemingly only has reached 20% of students.
4. Students feel their needs are mostly covered by the services, although satisfaction rates are not high.
    - Students were asked whether they felt that the service they used were appropriate to their needs. Overall, the response was vaguely positive, with most services having above 50% satisfaction ratings from their users (those who said probably or definitely yes), except for three outliers: Student Hub, Open Door & Disability, and SHOUT, which all received lower than 40% satisfaction rate. The table on the appropriate section of the appendix exemplifies the approval rating for each service, and how many students rated each service.
    - A particular focus of the survey included student satisfaction with counselling available from the Open Door service. 26 students chose to disclose that they had received counselling through the university. While students generally reported good and appropriate practice from their counsellor, they were less likely to agree that they were able to fully express themselves, and that they had an appropriate amount of time to express themselves. 64% report that the counselor listened carefully to them; 60% reported that they had confidence and trust in their counsellor; 89% reported that the counselor treated them with respect and dignity while 53% reported that they were given an appropriate amount of time to discuss their condition and 53% of these students report that they were able to express themselves in their session
5. Open comments regarding the services include:
    - In regards to supervisors - comments suggested that supervisors were helpful and supportive but sometimes lacked the proper tools/training to support students in a mental health capacity.
    - Regarding the college welfare team: positive comments were left by students regarding the positive impact of the service on their University experience.
    - In regards to Open Door - some positive comments were received regarding the service, but the main theme of comments left were in regards to a criticism of wait times and of the amount of sessions offered.

Proposal of improvements
Based on the survey results, reporting through informal reports to the VP Wellbeing, and informal reports made by students to the GSA Advice Service, there are three key areas of development identified:
- Conduct a periodic evaluation of students' mental health and wellbeing services such as the College teams, Student Hub, ODD and SWOs, and use this information in order to implement improvements to these services.
- Further investigation of the barriers students face when attempting to access support and disclose their difficulties, with appropriate action then being taken in order to reduce and remove these barriers.

- Adopting a whole-University approach to mental health and wellbeing (including curricula and academic content).

Below we have provided a breakdown of suggested actions in order to address the key areas of development above:

> Conduct a periodic evaluation of students' mental health and wellbeing services such as the College teams, Student Hub, ODD and SWOs, and use this information in order to implement improvements to these services

1. To conduct an annual evaluation of mental health and wellbeing services and initiatives, such as the College teams, Student Hub, ODD and SWOs. Evaluation should include service user and student consultation.
2. For mental health and wellbeing services within the University to design and implement robust feedback gathering mechanisms in order to inform the above.

The improvement of services should be informed by the data gathered by the suggested actions above. However, from consideration of survey results, informal reports made by students to the VP Wellbeing, and the experience of the GSA Advice Service, indicative actions may include:

3. Expansion of the ODD Team, including the recruitment of more practitioners and thereby increasing the number of appointments available and expanding the number of appointments available for individual students.
4. Consideration of in-person/online "face to face" triage of student cases, rather than reliance on data gathered via the current self-referral form.
5. A review of the use of self-help resources in regards to coping mechanisms and mental wellbeing - i.e. do these meet the needs of the students concerned
6. To develop a baseline level training for supervisors on first response to students distress (i.e. how to respond to students in distress, a basic understanding of the services to which supervisors can refer students, and how referrals can be made).

> Further investigation of the barriers students face when attempting to access support and disclose their difficulties, with appropriate action then being taken in order to reduce and remove these barriers.

1. To conduct further intersectional research, including consultation with the student body, in regards to the barriers faced in regards to accessing support and disclosure of difficulties. This may include, for example, surveys targeted at students from different demographics and backgrounds who have made use of University wellbeing services. Data should also be gathered from students who have not made use of these services, in order that barriers can be identified appropriately.
2. To develop across the academic year a targeted communications strategy attending the several students demographics regarding the wellbeing and mental health support at the University. As above, this should be informed by the findings of the proposed research. However, indicative actions include:

a. A University Wellbeing Support training module on students' VLEs with information about practitioners, SWOs, college tutors, DCCs, etc similar to the Consent Matters programme or the Academic Integrity module, and a direct link to students support, wellbeing and health pages.
b. Disclosing your disability to University services: what does it mean? A campaign regarding what is considered a disability in the UK, what kind of support is available at a University and city, with whom the information is shared with, data protection and storage. It is proposed that disabled students who are open about their disability (i.e. Disability Officers) could be approached to be the "face" of a destigmatising campaign. The University may also wish to explore a peer-to-peer mentorship programme for disabled students.
c. A campaign for international/EU students in regards to external mental and physical health services available to them, including how to register with a GP, access to translation for NHS services, use of 111/999, etc. It is proposed that this is designed with Unity Health.
d. Currently, multiple members of staff and teams across the University and unions provide mental health and wellbeing support to students, which may leave students confused as to where to turn to in regards to their specific concerns. It is therefore suggested that a communications campaign is designed in order to inform students of the support available from each service.

Adopting a whole-University approach to mental health and wellbeing (including curricula and academic content).

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1. For a review of curriculum design and teaching practices in regards to student mental health to take place, in consultation with students and relevant practitioners
2. For a review of relevant University procedures (i.e. leave of absence, extension, appeals) in regards to their impact on student mental health and wellbeing to take place, in consultation with students and relevant practitioners
3. For improvements to be implemented in regards to curriculum design, teaching and University procedures following this review.
4. The GSA is aware that the University is already working with both unions in order to increase students' sense of belonging, reduce loneliness and to create student communities. We recognise that this can be a significant factor in increasing student wellbeing, and therefore welcome continuing collaboration on this work.

Appendix:

Copy of the questions of the survey
In depth breakdown of the results of the survey