**Introducing a new approach to Student Mental Health**

There is significant coverage and activity around the Higher Education sector relating to supporting student mental health.

Student wellbeing is a priority for USW which is adopting a whole University approach based on the UUK Framework [#stepchange](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange/Pages/default.aspx), to combine existing work with new positive initiatives which will enhance provision for staff and students.  The topic of Mental Health was discussed at a recent Academic Board meeting and has the support of senior leaders. The University is engaging in conversations with key external partners and peers to shape the long term agenda for the University, Wales and HE.

There have been considerable changes to provision for students in recent years, including the reshaping of Student Services to contribute to early intervention opportunities with the introduction of a new front-line approach and on-line enquiry system, alongside cohesive support across specialist areas which impact on mental health.

In addition, there has been a positive change and increase in counselling opportunities available for students. Counselling is just one aspect of mental health support and this is supplemented by workshops, group forums and tools to assist students and staff self-manage issues such as anxiety and stress, and working with the Students Union on initiatives and activities around the subject of mental health. [#USWrocks](http://studentnews.southwales.ac.uk/news/2018/sep/14/student-services-rocks/)

Love or hate them, we shouldn’t ignore the profusion of statistics cited on the topic of student mental health. The following is a small digest of some relevant local metrics:

* Between 2014/15 and 2016/17 the students declaring a mental health condition in Welsh HEIs increased by 53% which is a rise from 1.6% to 2.5% of the student population.
* This is compared to a 61% increase in other UK HEIS. However, the percentage of the overall student population are the same.
* Currently, at USW 1.5% of the student population has declared a mental health condition.

Of course, declared mental health conditions are only one proxy measure of student wellbeing. We recognise that a vital starting point in adopting a whole University approach such as the [#stepchange](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange/Pages/default.aspx) framework is to define and analyse appropriate metrics, in conjunction with scrutiny of policies, processes and systems. This work will be picking up momentum over coming months. If you would like to contribute or have any questions about the topic of student mental health, please contact Sharon Jones or Sid Kennedy.

In the meantime, as a reminder you can find useful guidance on referring a student for support with mental or physical health needs on the [hub](https://thehub.southwales.ac.uk/Interact/Pages/Content/Document.aspx?id=10445).