

**Edinburgh Napier  
University/Edinburgh Napier Students'  
Association  
Student Mental Health Agreement  
2019 – 2020**

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## Introduction

The Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA) project (co-ordinated by NUS Scotland) aims to bring student associations and their University together to collaborate on mental health initiatives. The agreement documents the activities the Institution organises to improve student mental health.(1)

At ENU, the SMHA is an integral part of, and integrated into, the Counselling and Mental Wellbeing Service and ENSA's objectives. The Agreement ensures that the Service, together with the Student Union, is actively achieving its goals to promote the importance of student mental health by challenging stigma, raising awareness of mental wellbeing and thus promoting an open and inclusive University community. The Agreement encapsulates this ongoing work from 2019-2020.

In addition, it develops a reciprocal relationship where students (through ENSA) can feed into service developments and the Service can support ENSA by offering advice, and when needed, a level of mental health expertise.

The SMHA will also help highlight new objectives and priorities for the next academic year, based around the evolving needs of the student community. The SMHA will be reviewed annually and will become a vital component of the University's wellbeing strategy.

Examples of shared objectives;

- Increased suicide prevention awareness
- Increased awareness of self-care through a plethora of holistic health-related activities in Feel Fab Feb
- Increased awareness of how to seek support for all students, including increasing communication with International Students
- Increased student psychological wellbeing through the expansion of psycho-educational workshops.

In addition, the Scottish Funding Council has furthered the SMHA significance highlighting the strategic role it plays in student's mental health provision, by making the SMHA report part of the requirements to access additional funds made available for HE Student Counselling.

The Agreement breaks down into key sections identifying priority areas that the C&WT have been working on together in partnership with ENSA.

As the wider Student Wellbeing & Inclusion service is also involved in many of the University's wellbeing objectives, the report will highlight University-wide activities as well as ENSA and Counselling & Mental Wellbeing teams work.

It is essential to acknowledge that during the development of the SHMA the COVID19 Pandemic unfolded with unprecedented global impact resulting in Edinburgh Napier University moving into lockdown, along with the rest of society in Scotland. We have thus dedicated a whole section to Counselling & Mental Well-

being's response to the ongoing situation - specifically, the adaptations made by the Counselling and Mental Well-being Service, which enabled continued student support.

## Background

There has been a significant increase in the numbers of students disclosing Mental Health Issues. The BBC reported that the numbers of students seeking mental health support rose from 7,000 in 2012-13, to more than 11,700 in 2016-17. (2) The NUS reported in 2016 a 47% increase in students trying to access mental health support (3). Within the student population itself, there is some evidence that there is a higher presentation of mental health issues, comparative to other sections of society (4).

These figures mirror the number of students contacting the Counselling and Wellbeing team (C&WT) at Edinburgh Napier University, which saw a 60% increase in counselling demand 2018- 2019.

### Counselling

Month	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
September	68	41	74
October	63	60	97
November	51	61	87
December	15	11	32
January	45	37	56
February	54	46	63
March	36	31	68
April	22	27	31
May	18	21	28
June	10	5	17
July	18	18	18
August	12	17	20
Total	412	375	591
% Increase	3	-9	58

**The impact of mental health issues** can be overwhelming and painful. In the academic year 14/15, the number of students dropping out due to mental health issues increased by 210% compared to 2008/09 (5). This demonstrates the strategic importance of developing a comprehensive Student Mental Health Agreement.

There are a significant number of unique pressures facing the student body, such as academic and financial pressures, which can negatively impact on mental health. University life is also a time of transitions both socially and culturally, such as leaving home or moving to a different country which can bring additional challenges.

In addition, the teenage years up until the age of 25, is often the first-time people report experiencing mental health difficulties, coinciding with a time when the prevalence of diagnosis of more severe mental health conditions is more common. Thus, the time of starting University can coincide with a time of potential mental

fragility which can be exacerbated by transitional and academic pressures. Therefore, understanding the uniqueness of the student body experience and pressures is necessary when developing effective student support.

Also, there are sections of the student population who face extra discrimination and challenges, which may further increase their likelihood of experiencing mental health issues, such as LGBTQ+ students, international students, those with care experience and mature students. These groups face additional barriers to accessing support, and University services must familiarise themselves with the specific needs of each group and exercise flexibility in how to meet them.

## **COVID 19 lockdown**

For the University community, lockdown brought its specific challenges, the foremost being moving an entire learning institution online. This challenge was met with a great deal of creativity, flexibility, adaption and resilience by members of the University community, staff and students alike.

For the Counselling and Wellbeing team, the Service and its practitioners had to familiarise themselves with phone support and online video-call working, all while working from home.

Lockdown has required the development of new protocols and therapeutic ways of engaging with students online, on the phone or over email (Appendix 1). This development, together with ongoing evaluation of our online support, has ensured the delivery of safe and ethical practice (further information below).

Unfortunately, lockdown directly impacted on some of the planned initiatives by C&MW, for example, the popular Therapets event and plans related to Mental Health Awareness week were not possible due to campus closure.

The C&WT continues to plan for the next academic year, within the context of a wider University response to COVID19, on how best to meet the ongoing needs of students. The Service will operate in the current context of a new hybrid model of teaching, which compromises a mix between online and on-campus teaching. In addition, most professional services will continue to stay online.

In this new and ever-changing landscape, the Service needs to be adaptable and flexible, ensuring that we do not inadvertently create new barriers to access support. An example of learning is the development of “safe spaces” for when the campus is opening more fully, i.e., rooms from where students who do not have a confidential or safe space at home can access support (online or phone ) from within the University.

## **The Student Mental Health Agreement**

1. COVID 19 (Lockdown Response)
2. Promoting Overall Wellbeing
3. Yearly events and activities related to challenging stigma associated with mental health
4. International Students
5. Big White Wall (rebranded asTogetherall August 2020)
6. Peer Support
7. ENSA Safer Taxi Scheme
8. Gender-Based Violence Strategy
9. Developments within the Wellbeing & Inclusion service
10. Appendices

## 1. COVID 19 (lockdown response)

- **Moved all services online/phone** – The Service moved all its existing support to be either online or over the phone. It also developed new initiatives such as therapeutic support and new psycho-educational workshops, as a response to how the pandemic impacted on student mental health (as below).
- **Service Assessment** – a new online therapeutic, evidence-based assessment was developed and delivered online or via phone to assess students ability to undertake support from their home, overall student wellbeing, problems, functioning and risk. The outcome of the assessment is a referral to a range of options which include therapeutic support, counselling, CBT, or to Mental Health Advice (internal to the Service). In addition, students may also be referred to the Academic Skills team, Disability Inclusion service or the Student Funding team. Referral out to specialist community support is also an option (a network of services in Edinburgh specialising in addiction, self-harm and crisis services). Furthermore, with student consent and adhering to safeguarding guidance, we actively liaise and refer to NHS services often through the student's GP or psychiatric services.
- **Therapeutic support** - developed as a response to the COVID19 pandemic – this is made up of 1 to 5 30-minute sessions of crisis intervention, goal-orientated support focusing on coping strategies in the here and now.
- **Counselling** – 1 to 5 sessions of a goal-orientated framework (with the possibility for an extension when clinically needed). Counselling focuses on relationships, increased resilience, processing historical experiences which are impacting on the here and now, including, working on healthier ways of coping with academic demands.
- **Mental Health Advice** - offering practical and emotional therapeutic support to students with enduring mental health difficulties. During the pandemic, Mental Health Advisers have offered more frequent sessions to deal with the ongoing impact of the lockdown. MHA aims to increase the ability of students to cope by developing new strategies, accessing support within their community, as well as actively liaising with the student's academic staff. Mental Health Advisers can also liaise with external agencies and the NHS. They will work with the student on understanding the impact their mental health has on academic issues and how to mitigate these/ increase overall coping and resilience.
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy**- 1-5 sessions (with some space for an extension when required). CBT works on changing thought patterns and behaviours, which increases overall wellbeing by managing emotional responses. CBT is an evidenced-based approach particularly suitable for presentations of low to moderate anxiety and depression.
- **Online Psychoeducational Workshops** – these hugely popular workshops aimed to increase understanding of emotional and cognitive coping strategies against the background of the COVID19 pandemic on mental health
- **Mindfulness Groups** - Online mindfulness groups offering evidenced-based mindfulness as a way of coping through the lockdown and beyond.

- **Wellbeing Drop-In** - Phone wellbeing drop-in/ service triage offering students 20 min sessions of phone support and signposting to other internal and external sources of support.
- **Big White Wall Online** – All students and staff can access this well renowned online support community (24/7). Users can access Wall Guides (trained counsellors) 24/7 for online support, as well as accessing CBT based work programmes and support from peers. In addition, the Service has purchased an online therapy package from BWW, allowing more choice about late-night counselling appointments. This therapy package will work as an additional resource when the Service becomes busier during term time.
- **Email advice for students abroad:** For students who have moved back home/ abroad due to the pandemic the Service offers email advice and Big White Wall. Currently, the Service is exploring the options of moving towards offering online support to these students while upholding a safe and ethical practice.
- **Shelf Help** - this online information and resource library consists of books, articles, information and TED talks. The library is organised to cover a comprehensive selection of topics such as anxiety, specific mental health difficulties, insomnia, LGBTQ+ etc.
- **Service promotion during the pandemic:** The Service promotes support and new initiatives through its web pages on MY Napier, through staff communications, and through targeted social media and emails, ensuring students and staff are made aware of how to access support throughout lockdown and beyond. The Service also communicated updates and changes to colleagues within the university community through the use of specific staff communications, by attending staff webinar meetings and opening up online psycho-educational workshops to staff as well as students (ensuring wellbeing for all and cascading of information).
- **Development of new online protocols** –Specific online protocols have needed to be completed (including additional online safeguarding measures) to ensure safe and ethical practice for online support,
- **Effective training was delivered to practitioners** to ensure the ethical provision of online and phone therapy, and specific higher education expertise was identified. In addition, training packages that focused on mental health support and counselling online were purchased, and staff were required to attend. Moreover, mandatory online PVG training and GDPR training, as well as specific working from home training (University-wide) was required of staff to ensure safe practice for student's as well as staff.
- **Liaising with the University community** – The Service has continued to liaise with student-facing services within the University, enabling a comprehensive wrap-around service. This includes ENSA, the Disability Inclusion team, Student Funding team, Student Experience team (School of Health and Social Care), Student Accommodation, Widening Participation, Academic Skills, and School Support Services.
- **Review of the services offered to students** – ongoing adaption and response to the impact of lockdown have ensured that the Service is able to act in support of students identified need. The Service achieved this by monitoring student emotional and psychological presentations and taking part in sector-wide discussions and engaging in networks such as NUS,

AMOSSHE, UHMAN and SHUCS – ensuring that best practice and learning is maintained.

- **Confidentiality**- using safe online video conferencing platforms, with guidance from Information Services and Governance.
- **Staff Support/guidance** – Following lockdown and campus closure, the Service opted to increase staff clinical supervision, peer supervision, team and student-focused meetings ensuring staff were offered increased support and opportunities to process and learn from events as they unfolded. In this ever-changing environment, this has also allowed the Service to act on changes to student's identified needs as they continue to arise.

### **Priorities for 2020/21**

- The C&WT will continue to adapt and develop its services in line with the University's response to Covid19.
- Continue to respond and adapt to the "New Normal" following COVID 19 and be flexible and seek to identify relevant new models of working with students and their changing needs.
- Develop safe and ethical online support for students abroad.
- The C&WT will implement more frequent service evaluation to seek student feedback.
- Continue to liaise with our student association and benefit from engagement with AMOSSHE (the Student Services Organisation) and Heads of University Counselling Services (HUCS), ensuring best practice around student wellbeing and support.
- Continue to follow the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's Ethical Guidance, especially regarding online counselling and support.
- Work with the University to create "safe spaces" for students where they can access online/telephone counselling or therapeutic support, i.e., for students who do not have a safe or confidential home setting or lack the necessary technology to receive online support.

## 2. Promoting overall wellbeing

- **Psycho-education Workshops** –The Service has delivered a series of psycho-education workshops. These were very well received and covered topics such as Sleep, Self-Care, Coping at University, Managing Thoughts and Overthinking. The workshops are reviewed, and feedback provided has enabled their ongoing improvement, and since lockdown, they have moved online. (Appendix 1).  
The psycho-educational COVID19 related workshops were delivered online and focused on how to cope with the impact of lockdown on mental health. Future pandemic related workshops will focus on transitioning back into University and society.
- **PhD Students** – The Service delivered a stress management/self-care awareness raising session to PhD students. This session allows PhD students to focus in on their wellbeing, understand signs of stress and learn new ways of coping.
- **Staff Mental Health Awareness Raising workshops** –These workshops focus on increasing staff awareness around students' mental health and how to refer a student for support internal and external to the University. (Appendix 1)
- **Feel Fab Feb**- The C&WT and ENSA organised a month-long wellbeing campaign in partnership throughout February (Appendix 2). Feel Fab Feb is a holistic campaign which engaged with a broad range of wellbeing topics across all three campuses. Topics included: self-harm, sexual health, drug and alcohol use and LGBTQ+. This included involving external mental health agencies as well as engaging with internal partners such as ENSA student societies/sports clubs and the University's Gym (Engage).
- **Mindfulness** – the C&WT delivered several Mindfulness groups and individual sessions to students. This evidence-based approach to health is a popular and growing part of the Service. Also, during the lockdown mindfulness sessions moved online with a resulting increase in registrations. (Appendix 1).
- **Counselling and Wellbeing team** –the Service streamlined the registration and assessment processes to ensure ease of access for all students, i.e., one gateway for online service registration and the implementation of a self-service booking for assessments (based on Service need and student feedback).
- **Wellbeing Drop-ins**- As a response to student demand and feedback (staff and students) the Service increased the frequency of the Wellbeing Drop-Ins to three times a week during term time.
- **Therapets (Paws against Stress)**- due to the lockdown, the three Therapets sessions had to be cancelled. This popular Service is not likely to be able to transfer online, which means it will be put on hold until the University campus reopens, and it is safe to run them.
- **Edinburgh Nightline** – hosted Edinburgh Nightline training sessions, recruitment sessions and their annual conference. These are important events, and by Edinburgh Napier supporting Edinburgh Nightline, the University is part

of ensuring the continuation of this important, and at times, lifesaving student support.

- **Big White Wall (Togetherall)** – see section 5.

### **Priorities for 2020/21**

- Continue to review and adapt services in line with the University's response to COVID 19.
- Continue to develop and deliver psycho-educational workshops considering student feedback, the new hybrid learning model and student needs arising from the ongoing pandemic.
- Liaise with the new incoming ENSA Student President and sabbatical team to assist in the continuation of the successful Feel Fab Feb with its wide-ranging wellbeing activities.
- Continue to run specific events and campaigns such as World Mental Health Day and University Mental Health and Wellbeing days.
- Introduce "Silver Cloud" recognised and clinically proven online CBT programmes that assist with managing stress, anxiety and depression (accessible to all ENU students).
- Update the ENU Supporting Distressed Students Guide, ensuring safety for students through further clarity for staff who deal with students in crisis.
- Together with the School of Health and Social Care develop specific support and links for student nurses and explore a benchmarking exercise of student peer support models.

### **3. Yearly events and activities related to challenging stigma associated with mental health**

- **Tea and Chat stalls - to mark World Mental Health Day and Suicide Prevention Week** the Service ran its popular wellbeing stalls in partnership with ENSA offering tea, cake and conversation around wellbeing across all three campuses.
- **Mental Health Training** – delivered mental health awareness-raising sessions for staff from across the University. These events are open to all staff with a student facing role (Appendix 1).
- **Suicide Prevention Week** – The Service organised events highlighting how to access support if affected by suicide.
  1. The Service involved the University’s Marketing and Communications team to assist in developing a campaign on social media and on-campus screens. It also made use of NHS posters highlighting the topic across all three campuses.
  2. Information stalls delivered on each campus
  3. The Service invited community partners into the University, e.g., Crew (Drug Charity) and the Crisis Centre (mental health crisis support).
- **Feel Fab Feb/Psychoeducational workshops** – In addition to the focus on wellbeing, an essential part of these events is tackling stigma and discrimination by generating conversation and awareness around mental health and wellbeing (Appendix 2)
- **Student Inductions** –The Service has updated its student induction content and delivered introductory sessions to new and returning students at the start of the academic year. These sessions promote the Counselling and Wellbeing team and de-stigmatise the topic of mental health by bringing in the topic at the earliest opportunity (Appendix 1).

#### **Priorities for 2020/21**

- Continue to deliver online inductions and to ensure their ongoing use by recording them. Add to Moodle for staff and students increased access to the material.
- Plan how to deliver the service wellbeing events online, ensuring we continue to be active in tackling the stigma surrounding mental health.
- Create a yearly online planner with all events visible on the Service MyNapier site.

## 4. International Students

- **International Team** –The Service worked with the International Support Officers ensuring that they were made aware of support on offer and referral pathways.
- **International students' welcome events** – the wellbeing team is involved in various welcome events for international students. These are essential avenues to promote wellbeing and highlight what the Service offers.
- **Information** – The Service promotes a wide range of diverse information and resources reflecting the wider student community and its needs, such as agencies with a specialised focus on the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic population.
- **Information and communications** – Service promotional material reflects a more diverse student demographic, ensuring that students from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds can recognise themselves, which will hopefully increase the likelihood of seeking support.
- **Multifaith/belief support (Chaplaincy support)** - this new development enables students from a wide range of faiths, and none, to access appropriate support/guidance and opportunities to practice their beliefs. Faith support can play an essential role for international students and assist their ability to integrate into their new surroundings as well as providing support around their spiritual and mental health.

### Priorities for 2020/21

- Develop partnerships with external agencies and community resources that can enhance the support for our international student population.
- In conjunction with ENSA, the Service will continue to develop further links and seek specific feedback from international student societies. The aim is to strengthen relationships with international students, enabling improved feedback on existing services and promotion of current services.

## 5. Promotion of the Big White Wall (BWW)

- **Promotional campaign** – The University’s Communication and Marketing Department and the Service developed a marketing strategy for the promotion of the BWW. This strategy is a multi-layered ongoing campaign including leaflets, posters and an online presence.
- **The development of an actual white wall** – in partnership with the Design School a portable white wall was developed for the C&WT to use at various campaigns and events (e.g. Feel Fab Feb). This white wall allowed students to record their ideas and wellbeing strategies and to further the promotion of BWW. However, perhaps as important, the idea is also to strengthen the University community and peer interactions while also normalising mental health struggles.

### Priorities for 2020/21

- **Continue to monitor** and promote the use of the Service provided – this has changed its name from Big White Wall to **Togetherall** in August 2020.
- **Online Therapy** – continue to evaluate the use of the online therapy option provided by Togetherall to ensure it meets student need and enhances the student experience.

## 6. Peer Support

- **Edinburgh Nightline** - The Service continues to work closely with this student-led organisation, and they were involved in various campaigns such as Feel Fab Feb. We have also supported Edinburgh Nightline by offering (when possible) space to meet and undertake training events.
- **Supporting Student Coursework Submissions** – The Service worked closely with several student-led academic projects focusing on Student Mental Health. Student projects around wellbeing have led to some creative developments, e.g., one project set students the brief to “design a prototype C&WT Website”. This team used their own and fellow student’s experiences to develop a prototype website for a University Wellbeing Service. The ideas developed within this project are an example of the creativity, knowledge and expertise within the student body.

### Priorities for 2020/21

- **The Service will identify peer support models** - A priority for next year will be to identify what the Service means by peer support and what model of peer support is best suited to ENU within the context of wellbeing. The most successful peer support models are integrated within existing services where they form part of a triaging system (6). Peer support models can be informal, group or online and may be set solely within the Service or in conjunction with other parts of the University, e.g. library services or specific Schools.
- **Benchmarking exercise** - To benchmark against other HE successful peer support models and scope best practice.
- **Partnerships within the University** – working closely with other areas of the University to look at how the development of peer support can fit specific Schools/Programmes. There is an opportunity to develop a model with the School of Health as Social Care, working in partnership with the new Student Experience team.

## 7. ENSA Safer Taxi Scheme-

- The ENSA Safer Taxi Scheme has been in development throughout this year, as part of the Sexual Assault and Gender-based Violence Strategy. This scheme has proven to have significant benefits for students who are at risk of sexual assault. The scheme aims to ensure safety for students by allowing them to order and use a Taxi with the use of their student card (the bill being charged to and paid by ENSA). The hope is that ENSA will be able to move from a development phase to implementation stage next year.

### Priorities for 2020/21

- **The Service will support** the implementation of the Safer Taxi scheme with ENSA.

## 8. Gender-Based Violence Strategy

- **Sexual Assault Prevention Strategy** – The University has developed a cohesive University-wide strategy
- **Report and support** – the University launched the Report and Support website in November 2019 (<https://reportandsupport.napier.ac.uk/> )
- **Zero Tolerance Campaign** – the Zero Tolerance Campaign was launched in November 2019.
- **The Consent Collective** – the University has partnered with the Consent Collective who deliver training, events and information around all aspects of sexual violence and consent. All staff and students can access their materials online. (<https://www.consentcollective.com/> )
- **Promotion and advertising the above across all campuses** – not only for students but for staff.
- **Training on Consent and Active Bystander Intervention** – this is delivered each year to ENSA Clubs and Societies members and to the Student Accommodation's student Resident Assistants.

### Priorities for 2020/21

- **Monitor** – continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of these developments. Consider additional ways to reach out to students and staff.
- **Sexual Violence and Misconduct Liaison Officers-** The employment of a Student Safeguarding and Equalities Manager will enable the further development of this role.

## 9. Developments within the Wellbeing team -

- **Chaplaincy service** – this new Service supports the student community to reflect on life events and spiritual matters. This Service consists of honorary Chaplains and Belief Contacts from a wide range of faith and belief communities.
- **Keep on Track** – the Keep on Track Adviser supports students to explore their options if they are thinking of leaving their course or the University. In addition, if the student wants to leave ENU, they will support them to exit safely. The Adviser will direct students to a wide range of support options within and out with the University and actively liaise with academics, Schools and Professional Services.
- **CBT Lead Practitioner & a 3<sup>rd</sup> Mental Health Adviser**- Due to a significant increase in demand in the academic year of 2019/20, the Service employed a CBT Lead and a third Mental Health Adviser. It is worth noting that this has been made possible due to the ongoing support from the University Leadership Team and their unwavering commitment to student mental health.
- **Four new guaranteed hours staff employed:** The Service employed three new Counsellors and 1 CBT practitioner. These posts will ensure that the Service reaches its waiting list target, with a direct positive impact of reducing waiting times to access support.
- **Suicide Prevention strategy** – The Service has led on the development of a new University Suicide Prevention Strategy that will be implemented from academic year 2020/21. This strategy is based on the recent UUK/Papyrus Guidance – Suicide-Safer Universities (2018).
- **School of Health and Social Care** – The University has supported the development of a larger Student Experience team based within the School. This team will build on the work of the Pastoral Support Officer and lead on the development of several projects and add to the availability of support within the School.

### Priorities for 2020/21.

- **Continue to monitor and evaluate the Service** – The Service needs to continue to gather and evaluate statistics and student feedback. Thus, enabling responses and developments to be led by identified need.
- **Added Value** – continue to develop and modify the services we offer students such as psycho-educational workshops or group support.
- **Advertise and employ an Evening Counselling Lead:** This is to develop further and co-ordinate the Service's evening provision, leading to increased capacity and student choice regarding appointment times.
- **Respond to COVID 19** – continue to adapt and review the services we offer, to meet the challenges and guidance of the University and its response to COVID 19.

- **Mental Health Strategy** – The Service will be involved at the core of the development of a new University Mental Health Strategy.
- **Suicide Prevention Strategy**- The Service will be involved in the completion and delivery of the Suicide Prevention Strategy.

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