

## EDC15D002

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### **Issue**

The Counselling Service provides the Committee with an overview of developments on an annual basis concerning the uptake of provision and key issues for staff emerging from the Service.

### **Recommendation**

The Equality and Diversity Committee are asked to consider the report and whether any action is appropriate including training/awareness raising of key issues.

### **Resource Implications**

N/a

### **Risk Implications**

The content of the report may help inform future University strategies.

### **Equality and Diversity**

The paper focusses on counselling in the context of the current range of protected characteristics

### **Timing of decisions**

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### **Further Information**

There have been previous annual reports to the Committee from the Counselling Service.

### **Background**

The content of the report links to the Staff Profile Statistics produced annually by the Committee.

# **Staff Counselling Report 2013-2015**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Statistics**

- 134 (121) clients were seen this year with a total of 932 (857) sessions offered. (*Previous year's figures in brackets*)
- Initial/Exploratory Session: 106 (91) clients
- Staff Group: S & C: 37% (32%), ATR: 13% (20%), ATS: 10% (6%), ALC: 11% (12%), Research 10% (13%) Technical & Manual 5% (2%) General Grades 9% (10%) Associate Tutor: 2% (3%)
- Gender: 69% (69%) of clients were female and 31% (31%) male
- Ethnicity: 92% (94%) of Service clients declared as 'white'.
- Disability: 14% (11%) of clients declared a disability
- Referrals: 50% (62%) of clients self referred, 6% (4%) by manager, 7% (3%) by friends and family and 9% (7%) by GP, Occupational Health 9% (8%)
- 20% (20%) of clients presented with work related issues as their primary concern.
- 81% of clients who returned feedback forms agreed counselling had improved their overall effective in the workplace.

### **Specific Issues**

- Support for post docs
- Positive feedback on support for Mental Health conditions
- Sickness/sick leave
- Work stress-workload/new staff/less student contact/career vs family
- 'Excluded' Staff

### **Collaboration with CSED/Careers**

- 'Managing emotions' and 'Stress workshop' MAHep
- Supervision for Careers Advisers

**University  
wellbeing  
service:  
staff counselling  
annual report  
2013-2015**

## Contents

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<b>Staff Counselling Report 2013 - 2015</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Staff Counselling Statistics 2013 - 2015</b>	<b>11</b>

## Staff of the University Wellbeing Service

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### 2013 - 2015

<b>Director of Wellbeing</b>	:	Stephen Messinger
<b>Staff Counsellors</b>	:	Eamonn O'Mahony Sarah Robinson
<b>Student Counsellors</b>	:	Catherine Atkinson Miriam Crasnow Gerry Theobald
<b>Service Co-ordinator</b>	:	Jane Ramsbottom
<b>Secretary/Receptionists</b>	:	Sue Hitchcock

# **Staff Counselling Report**

**2013-2015**

## **Introduction**

In this report I will undertake an analysis of the statistics including gender, ethnicity and disability. I will explore the themes and issues arising in the client work. I also include a summary of 26 feedback forms from clients. Their feedback affirms the importance of counselling for their general wellbeing but also in particular its effect on their ability to function better at work. I also look at other work carried out within and outside UEA and the importance of working collaboratively. Staff counselling doesn't operate in a vacuum so contact with national organisations that support and represent staff counselling is very important.

## **ANALYSIS OF STATISTICS**

### **Staff Numbers**

Staff numbers accessing the counselling service have started to rise significantly in the last few years. In 2012/13 111 members of staff accessed the service, rising to 121 in 2013/14 and to 134 in 2014/15. This increase created pressure on existing resources and in the past year resulted in longer waiting times than usual. Whilst clients are still allocated where possible within a week of their first contact, this past year in particular clients were waiting up to 8-10 weeks for ongoing appointments whereas in previous years the average was around 4-6 weeks. In order to manage the waiting list there was a stricter enforcement of offering up to 8 sessions where once we had some flexibility to offer up to 12 or more. In cases of clients at risk we were still able to prioritise and allocate earlier.

### **Gender**

In terms of gender as is usual a majority of clients were female. Percentages of male and female clients were the same for both years with 69% of female clients attending compared to 31% of male clients. This contrasts with the total staff numbers at UEA where 57% of staff are female and 43% are male.

### **Session numbers/Cancellations and DNA's (Did not arrive)**

This year the service saw the most sessions offered in any year rising to 932 from 857 in 2013/4. Clients who cancelled at short notice or who did not appear, continues the trend of recent years to be in the region of 6-8% - 6.9% in 2013/4 and 8.3% in 2014/15. As stated in previous reports staff tend to be highly appreciative of the service being provided by the university and take a lot of responsibility for attendance. This appreciation is also in the summary of the feedback forms in the appendix.

## **Staff Category**

In terms of staff categories the biggest change from 2013/4 to 2014/5 was in the ATR category with a drop of 7%. The Secretarial and Clerical grade again makes up the largest percentage of staff seen, a consistent pattern over the years given that this category make up a majority of UEA staff.

## **Ethnicity**

The figures for those who identified themselves as white fell from 94% in 2013/14 to 92% this year. This contrasts to the UEA figures of 89% and 88% respectively.

## **Disability**

The number of clients declaring a disability increased from 11% in 2013/14 to 14% in 2014/5. Clients who declared 'No Known Disability' dropped from 86% in 2013/14 to 78% in 2014/15. This contrasts to UEA figures of 91.8 and 90.9 respectively. A range of disabilities were declared – autism, specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, mobility impairment, mental health difficulties, hearing impaired, unseen disability and partially sighted.. Whilst clients may have disclosed this to the Counselling Service it may be the case that they did not disclose this to UEA on beginning employment.

## **Referral Routes**

Over the years there has been a shift from largely self referral to a more spread out route of referral. Whilst the majority of clients self refer, this year saw that drop to 50% compared to 62% the previous year. There was a rise in referrals from the GP, friends and family and manager. Referrals continue to come from Occupational Health and HR. The importance of a smooth institution wide referral system cannot be underestimated. It really helps staff feel they are supported. It also helps the referrer to feel they can offer added help when needed.

## **CLIENT THEMES**

### ***Work Related***

#### ***Post Docs***

This category of staff have presented with significant mental health issues, struggling with anxiety, depression, compulsive behaviours, and physical and emotional exhaustion. The period coming up to completing the PhD is intense with clients already experiencing some of the above issues. Having being immersed in a huge body of work, often working on their own, the period after the PhD can see clients almost collapse and fall apart. There is a period of letting go, almost like bereavement as clients adjust to their new reality. For many post docs there is no period of transition between completion of PhD and starting work. This is often a hugely stressful period with clients reporting exhaustion, high anxiety,

and feelings of being unable to cope. Added to this there is often insecure nature of their contracts compounding an already difficult situation.

### Job security vs Job fulfilment

For some clients the struggle between job security and job fulfilment has been really challenging. Economic considerations have played a big part in this. Clients are aware that with less 'jobs for life' being around they would struggle to find elsewhere the security UEA provides. Clients who are in debt or have a mortgage to pay can end up feeling scared to risk financial insecurity and thus end up feeling trapped in their role, unmotivated and unfulfilled.

### Stress at work

This continues to be an issue clients present with and is very evident in the feedback forms when clients describe why they came to counselling. Stress of course is part of daily life but it is when multiple issues happen in personal and professional life things can become difficult to manage.

Workload issues for Academics continue to be a great source of stress often particularly for newcomers who can find themselves thrown in the deep end. There is also the constant stress of the ever present student survey and league tables where staff often feel unreasonable demands are made on them to perform at a particular level.

For some staff the movement from smaller teams into larger teams/sections often in open plan offices has been stressful. Apart from the adjustment to a new way of working, staff in this environment can feel disconnected from the student body leaving some staff feeling like they are a cog in a machine. This can be very demotivating and dispiriting affecting performance at work.

Whatever the source of stress counselling can be a very effective way to help clients cope better. This can involve looking at the underlying causes of stress as well as exploring practical ways to reduce it on a day to day basis.

### Mental Health Support/sick leave

Whilst clients still report dissatisfaction with a lack of understanding of their mental health difficulties at work it has been noticeable in the last two years a rise in the number clients reporting how supported they have been by either their managers, HR and Occupational Health. These clients have reported being able to take time with their manager to talk things through, and have appreciated follow ups from their manager on how they are coping.

Whilst some clients have reported the sick leave guidance being implemented in a punitive way we also have noticed more clients than usual have been reporting how pleased they have felt over how their sick leave had been dealt with and how helpful their phased return to work was.

### Excluded Staff

The University provides free and confidential counselling to all members of UEA staff. However some staff are excluded from this such as other members of the counselling staff, anyone with a line managerial duty to the counselling staff, and since a closer integration of the Counselling Service into Dean of Students, a much larger group of people. This presents a dilemma for such staff in terms of equal access. All staff at UEA can self refer and no one else needs to know about their attendance at the Counselling Service including their manager. At present there is not a clear policy to address this issue. It would be helpful if there was clarity on how 'excluded' staff might access counselling on the same terms as all UEA staff- in a confidential manner. There are also budgetary implications.

### **Personal**

#### *Bereavement*

As is always the case clients presented with a whole range of issues. These include dealing with a bereavement, whether it be an elderly parent, a sibling, a friend, a colleague or a miscarriage. Dealing with a miscarriage can be a very difficult process as often others may not know about the pregnancy or if they do, not quite understand how devastating it can be for both partners.

#### *Motherhood/Work*

Another issue which clients constantly present with is the difficulty in managing a young family particularly a first child. This can be a very stressful transition and it can be very difficult for the parent to speak about how hard it is, feeling that she should be really enjoying motherhood. Added to this is the expectation that she continue to be on top of things at work and it is when this tension becomes too great that clients often seek help.

#### *Family/Relationships*

In the last report we looked at the so called 'sandwich' generation with clients struggling to support elderly parents and managing a young family. These pressures were often acute particularly where elderly parents lived at a distance and where the client was the only family member. This has continued to be a presenting issue.

Alongside this, clients also presented with the struggles they had in managing what we might call a 'blended family' – dealing with one's own children but also a partner's children from a previous relationship. It can be the case that either of the children whether teenage or grown up can struggle with depression, self-harming, drug and alcohol problems.

Again in recent years a significant amount of clients come worried about someone else in their lives and are trying to find a way to cope themselves and help the other person.

Another source of stress for clients was struggling with relationship problems whether it was an ending of a relationship, a discovery of an affair, or dealing with the reality of a long distance relationship. Whilst counselling can support the individual it can often be helpful for clients to be referred to couple counselling.

### *Other Issues*

Other issues include dealing with depression, anxiety, addiction, sexual problems, sexual orientation, past trauma such as physical violence, sexual assault, neglect, physical pain and illness, self esteem and identity, culture shock, isolation, phobias, obsessive compulsive disorders, intimacy difficulties, and self harming.

### **Feedback Forms**

In appendix A I have included a review of feedback forms that clients filled in over the past 18 months. One of the most significant aspects of this feedback is the link between attending counselling and its effect on work. In the feedback forms there are 4 work related questions where clients are asked to rate this link.

In answer to the question 'to what extent did counselling help you stay in work' 15 out of the 26 respondents replied it was either a significant factor or the most important factor. In response to the question 'To what extent would you say counselling helped you do better in the workplace' 19 clients reported that it was either a significant or the most important factor. When asked about if counselling helped their overall effectiveness in the workplace a higher number of clients -21, reported it was either a significant or the most important factor. The final question asked about the relationship between counselling and developing skills useful in the workplace. A higher number still -24 out of 26 affirmed this was either a significant or most important factor.

It is good to have this feedback. It has always made sense to me that if a staff member is supported to and listened to then they will feel less stressed, more able to cope and therefore more able to function better in their life at home and at work. One respondent explains how her experience of being listened to can be very helpful in her role as adviser helping students.

### **Staff Counselling Special interest Group**

The staff counselling special interest group is part of a division of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy called BACP-Universities and Colleges. This division supports counsellors working with students and staff within HE, FE and Sixth form colleges. For the past 18 months I have been chair of the Staff Counselling Special Interest group which focuses on supporting and sharing best practice with other Staff Counsellors around the UK. The Staff SIG held a Networking day on 16 September this year where representatives from Universities and Colleges from around Britain came to explore and discuss the issues relevant to our work. The themes and issues we explored

were around identity, boundaries, successful working practices and evaluation of service vs justification.

### **Collaboration with Staff Development/Careers**

Alongside the provision of 1-1 counselling the Staff Counselling Service has over the years collaborated with Staff Development and Careers and this has continued over the period of this report. I ran a session on 'Managing your feelings' with Gurpreet Gill and a session on the MAHep with Stephanie Aspen on stress.

With Careers I continue to attend termly case study sessions with the Careers Advisers where I facilitate the group to look at challenging issues and themes arising in their work. This is a very rewarding collaboration with a very motivated team to reflect on their practice and support students.

### **Conclusion**

The increase in numbers these past two years has been challenging. The service has worked hard to continue to provide a prompt professional service but inevitably with limited resources it has involved clients waiting longer for ongoing appointments. Reading the feedback forms affirms the value and effectiveness of workplace counselling. Having an in-house embedded service as part of the larger support structure for staff within the university creates a positive environment in which the staff member can be listened to and taken seriously when problems arise. Staff really appreciate the provision and this can often generate a lot of good will in difficult work situations.

Eamonn O'Mahony

Staff Counsellor

3/11/2015

## APPENDIX A

# Review of 26 Feedback Forms

### 1. How did you learn about the Counselling Service?

Website: 8 leaflet: 1 Word of Mouth: 12 Other: 5

### 2. How did you make your first appointment?

In Person: 7 Telephone: 6 By E-mail: 13 someone else: 0

### 3. How would you rate the way you were dealt with when you first contacted the Service?

1. Excellent : 21 Very Good 4 Good 1 Not good 0 Poor 0

Comments: 'It was quick to get my first appointment which I was happy with'

'Promptly'

'So Helpful'

### 4. Why did you go for counselling and how long did you have to wait for regular appointments

**Waiting time:** 1-3 Weeks: 9, 3-6 weeks: 7, 6-9 Weeks: 5, Didn't answer: 5

#### **Reasons for coming to counselling:**

'I had anxiety problems'

'anger and bereavement'

'Recommendation from OH that I should go during a period of psychological stress'

'anxiety – recent episode'

'to discuss anxiety , stress and how to find a greater understanding of different aspects of my personality and how to manage this.'

'Because of stress at work'

'Relationship and family worries'

'Difficult times with work, personal life having negative effect. I needed to talk to someone because it was becoming too much'

'I needed help'

'Family issues and self-esteem'

'relationship problems'

'to discuss issues in a confidential impartial setting'

'Depression'

'Struggling to cope at work. Feeling lots of anxiety'

'To assist me overcoming feelings of depression'

'Depression'

'I felt I needed to talk over with someone why I was feeling so overwhelmed'

'Depressive episode'

'Personal relationship problems'

### **5. Are there things that could have been different?**

'No' x 9

'Appointments would have been better during lunch hour but I understand the difficulty to have enough appointments at this time for everyone.'

'Unfortunately due to a combination of circumstances there was a break of 3 weeks between appointments at what was a difficult time for me'

'Initial appointment t quick to get but then a long wait till regular appointments started.'

### **6. Why did your counselling come to an end?**

You decided to end it: **3**

Mutually agreed with your counsellor: **15**

You left UEA: **1**

You had run out of sessions: **13**

### **Please answer questions 7-10 on a point scale**

1 = not at all 2 = to a limited extent 3 = one of many factors 4. =an important factor

5 = the most significant factor

### **7. To what extent did counselling help you stay in work?**

1: **2** 2: **2** 3: **4** 4: **10** 5: **8**

### **8. To what extent would you say that counselling has helped you do better in the workplace?**

1: **0** 2: **1** 3: **5** 4: **8** 5: **11**

One client put in a 3.5!

### **9. To what extend would you say that counselling has improved your overall effectiveness in the workplace?**

1: 0 2: 1 3: 4 4: 11 5: 10

**10: To what extent would you say that counselling has helped you develop skills that might be useful in the workplace?**

1: 0 2: 2 3: 0 4: 10 5: 14

**8. Any other comments?**

'The counsellor was excellent. Saved my life'

'I have found the sessions invaluable in helping me address what was a very difficult work experience. Without the support of my counsellor I would have found it impossible to have addressed this situation which is still ongoing. I have developed a better sense of my own strengths in coping.'

'Sessions were very helpful in exploring reasons for anxiety problems and how to manage them. Problems had not yet had severe impact on work but I expect the sessions will help going forward'

'A very positive and challenging experience. It has certainly helped me more than I could have hoped for despite the intensity of many of the sessions. A very professional service with a very gifted and engaging counsellor. The university can be proud of this! Thanks you.'

'Thank you so much for all your support'

'I feel a lot better from when I started my sessions'

'Counselling helped me understand my situation and to cope with it. The best part is that the counsellor was always open and sympathetic and helped me to see and accepting my situation rather than pointing out where to go (I'm sure this experience would also help me to guide students in the future)'

'It would have been useful to have had a couple of more sessions but I understand it had to end'

'Very good service. Thank you very much!'

'The counsellor has been amazing. They are a lovely person who made me feel very comfortable and at ease straight away. The counsellor's gentle tone, mannerisms and affection made me feel like I could really open up. I'm happier at the end of each session...'

'If it hadn't been for the counselling I received I would have struggled to perform my work duties as I felt my personal problems were affecting most aspects of my life. The weekly counselling session was for me the only chance to talk about and reflect on what I was experiencing.'

'I am grateful for the opportunity to see a counsellor through work'

### **Staff Counselling Statistics 2013-15**

	2013--14		2014-2015	
	No.	% of UEA staff	No	% of UEA staff
Total no clients:	121	3.8	134	4.1

Session Statistics	2013-14		2014-15	
	No	% total sessions offered	No	% total sessions offered
Sessions including exploratories	797		855	
Full sessions	706	82.3	649	70
Exploratory sessions	91	10.6	106	11.3
Total sessions offered	857		932	
Cancellations	44	5.1	53	5.7
Failure to appear	16	1.8	24	2.6
Average no. of sessions per client	7.1		6.4	

Gender	2013-14		2014-15	
	No.	% of clients seen	No	% of clients seen
Female	84	69	92	69
Male	37	31	42	31

	2013-14		2014-15	
	No.	%	No	%
Full Time	97	80	101	75
Part Time	22	18	29	21
Not stated	2		4	

Clients by Staff Group	2013-14			2014-15		
	No	% of UEA staff by category	% of total staff clients seen	No	% of UEA staff by category	% of total Staff clients seen
Academic (ATR)	24	3.8	20	17	2.8	13
ALC & Related	15	3.4	12	15	3.2	11
Research & analogous	16	4.6	13	13	3.4	10
Secretarial and Clerical	39	5.4	32	49	6.4	37
Technical and Manual	3	1.4	2.5	7	3.3	5
General Grades and Other	12	3.3	10	12	3.0	9
ATS (Academic, Teaching & Scholarship)	7	2.3	6	14	3.7	10
Associate Tutor	4		3	2		1.5
Casual Staff				2		1.5

Referrals In	2013-14		2014-15	
	No of clients	% clients	No of clients	% clients

Self	75	62	67	50
GP	11	9	14	10.4
Occupational Health	8	8.2	12	8.9
Human Resources	0	0	5	3.7
Manager	5	3.3	8	5.9
Colleague	7	5.7	6	4.4
Friends / family	9	7.4	12	8.9
Outside Agency	1	.08	1	.07
Other	2	1.8	1	.07
Not recorded				