

EDC17D007 / EDC17A002



STUDENT
SUPPORT
SERVICE

**University
wellbeing
service:
staff counselling
annual report**

2016-2017



Staff Counselling Report 2016-2017

Executive Summary

Statistics

- 178 (151) clients were seen this year with a total of 897 (900) sessions offered. (*Previous year's figures in brackets*)
- Initial/Exploratory Session: 139 (109) clients
- Staff Group:

Staff Group:		Proportion of Staff Overall
○ S & C:	32% (35%)	20.4%
○ ALC:	14% (16%)	11.9%
○ ATS:	12% (10%)	10.5%
○ Research	12% (9%)	8.9%
○ ATR:	11% (15%)	17.8%
○ General Grades	9% (5%)	10.2%
○ Technical & Manual	8% (6%)	5.6%
○ Associate Tutor:	2% (4%)	12.1%
- Gender: 74% (74%) of clients were female and 26% (26%) male
- Ethnicity: 94% (93%) of Service clients declared as 'white'.
- Disability: 11% (11%) of clients declared a disability
- Referrals: 48% (55%) of clients self-referred, 11% (10%) by manager, 8% (7%) by friends and family and 15% (11%) by GP, Occupational Health 5% (3%)
- 100% of clients who returned feedback forms agreed counselling had played a part in their overall effectiveness in the workplace.

Specific Issues

- Bereavement and loss
- Support for academic advisers
- Women returning from maternity leave
- Short term contracts
- Dealing with intense emotions in the workplace

Contents

Staff Counselling Report 2016 - 2017	3
Staff Counselling Statistics 2016 - 2017	11

Staff of the University Wellbeing Service

2016- 2017

Head of Wellbeing	:	Jane Lawrence
Staff Counsellors	:	Eamonn O'Mahony Sarah Robinson
Student Counsellors	:	Catherine Atkinson Miriam Crasnow Gerry Theobald
Counselling Administrator	:	Anna Cooper

Staff Counselling Report

2016-2017

Introduction

This is my final report in my role as Staff Counsellor which I have been in for the best part of two decades. In this report I would like to reflect briefly on my experience at UEA through these years and an overview of the staff counselling service.

I will also 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 short report in the Appendix on a workshop run supporting women returning from maternity leave.

Staff Counselling 1999-2018

When I arrived in 1999 the Staff Counselling post was half time and has continued to be part time currently .6 till the present day. Over the years we have had wonderful sessional support from colleagues but with the increase year on year as indicated in this report it put huge pressure on this small service. At the time of writing this report we have been fortunate through the valued support of Jane Lawrence, Head of Wellbeing, to be able to appointment a half time permanent staff counsellor. However with my departure in terms of resources this in effect cancels out the effect of the new appointment.

In this time of transition it is important to not lose the focus on staff mental health and wellbeing. One of the main advantages of having a discrete and separate person responsible for staff counselling meant that they could completely focus on this remit. In this role I was able to represent and keep visible the needs of staff particularly through this report feeding in to the system through the Equality and Diversity committee.

As UEA has a large number of students it is right and proper to focus on their wellbeing but it is also important to give and maintain equal billing to staff wellbeing.

Reflections

Throughout my time here at UEA there have been significant changes. UEA has grown with increasing numbers of students and infrastructure. The university has had to respond to the pressures of the outside world in terms of acquiring funding, attracting students through enhancing its reputation, focusing on the rankings through the REF and Student survey. There has been a greater emphasis on seeing students as customers and consumers and an increased focus on employability.

These pressures inevitably affected staff through increased workload, causing high levels of stress. With the ensuing changes of a growing institution and its consequent restructurings these have been periods of huge stress and distress for staff some who have found their way to the Staff Counselling Service for support. One of the main challenges through periods of transition and pressure is how maintain focus on the essence of why we are here in the first place – to educate and foster growth in the individual, team and university community.

Central to this vision is the necessary emphasis on the quality of human relationships between student and staff of all categories: the relationship between student and adviser, student and supervisor, the student and cleaner and all the other myriad of relationships happening all over the University community between staff and students. Where these relationships are successful there usually is mutual respect, empathy, valuing, support and encouragement. It is when these are absent or not fostered that tension ensues and if unresolved leading to stresses in teams and amongst staff members.

Through these years also there has been the spectacular increase in technologies and communication through the internet which whilst now is taken for granted by the digital natives (born in the 90's) but was not always so for those of us who are digital immigrants!! The challenge here too is how to remain grounded in human relating within a fast changing world and maintain the essential qualities as above.

To have been able to provide such a space to the staff community over the past 20 years has been an immense privilege. It has always been our aim to provide a safe, non-judgemental, loving and compassionate space for members of staff who were struggling with personal and professional issues. Staff showed huge commitment and respect for the service and were always very appreciative of what we and the University provided. Through my time here we will have seen in excess of 1000 staff and it is gratifying to know that the service hopefully made a difference to each of these and in turn to the University community and to the wider network of these clients.

Whilst each section of the University community contributes to the overall experience at UEA I wanted to give a special mention to one category which I have particularly valued over the years. This is the cleaning staff who do such a wonderful job. They provide a very important service to the community. Our offices and spaces are clean for us in the mornings when we come in so we can do our work in a pleasant environment. The cleaning staff however fulfil a particular function which is often unacknowledged. They build up a valuable relationship with the students in residences. They provide a consistent contact for people who are perhaps struggling to settle in, are missing home and are isolated. They are the ones who notice when someone is struggling or not around. They unfortunately over the years have been the ones who have found students in their rooms in the most awful of circumstances. I have had great admiration for the resilience of this group of staff and we and the students are so fortunate to have them in our midst.

Finally, working in a university environment has been the ideal place to practice as a counsellor as our aims are very much aligned with the values of education – growth, development, curiosity. This growth is not simply about intellectual growth. Education in its widest sense needs to focus, as Cicero said all those years ago, on the 'rounded' person – enhancing the intellectual, emotional, physical, social and spiritual aspects of the person. How wonderful to have been part of this growth and also to be able through our work to promote it.

ANALYSIS OF STATISTICS

Staff Numbers

Staff numbers accessing the counselling service have continued to rise significantly in the last few years. In 2012/13 111 members of staff accessed the service, 121 in 2013/14, 134 in 2014/15, 151 for 2015/16 and 178 this year, 2016/17. This increase again 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 10-12 weeks for ongoing appointments whereas in previous years the average was around 8-10 weeks. In order to manage the waiting list there was a stricter enforcement of offering up to 8 sessions but still allowing some flexibility up to 12 where necessary. 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. The percentage of female clients and male clients was exactly as last year's figures – 76% female and 24% male. As noted last year there is always the perennial challenge on how to make access easier for men.

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

This year the amount of sessions offered is roughly the same as last year's. Last year 900 sessions were offered with 897 sessions being offered this year. Clients who cancelled at short notice or who did not appear, continues the trend of recent years to be relatively low. In 2015/16 cancellations and DNA's made up 8% of total sessions dropping to 5% this year.

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. There is also the fact that staff are generally functioning at a level where they can engage constructively with the process of counselling and often a huge amount of therapeutic work can be done with this readiness and willingness to engage. This makes for a very fulfilling experience on part of the counsellor and client.

Staff Category

In terms of staff categories the figures were very much the same from 2015/6 with 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

This year 94% of clients identified as white (White British, White Irish and Other White) compared to 93% last year.

Disability

The number of clients declaring a disability both last year and this year totals 11%. 87 % declared 'no known disability'. A range of disabilities were declared – autism, specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, mobility impairment, mental health difficulties, hearing impaired, and unseen disability and partially sighted. The most common disability declared was 'Mental Health difficulties' making up 38% of clients both this year and last year. 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. This year continues the trend though there was a drop from 55% last year to 48% this year of clients self-referring and an increase in referrals by GPs. It is very satisfying to see the variety of referrals across the organisation as it becomes more and more the norm to recommend counselling as an option for support when struggling.

CLIENT THEMES

Clients as always come to the service with a mix of personal and professional issues. We often find that clients can usually deal with difficult situations in one or the other of these parts of their lives. It is when both the personal and the professional become problematic at the same time when clients feel overwhelmed and tend to approach the service for support.

Work Related Themes

Work related issues included the following: dealing with a large workload, perfectionism and procrastination, refusal to give self permission to ask for help when struggling, disciplinary procedures, bullying and harassment, stress created by turn around marking period, team conflicts, lack of induction into role, difficulty adjusting to culture, managing retirement, struggling with roles of responsibility, lack of support in such roles, bereavement and loss, support for academic advisers, women returning from maternity leave, and short term contracts.

Bereavement and loss

This is an issue which constantly brings people to seek support. It could be the death of a parent, or indeed both, a grandparent, siblings, a child or a friend. For some losing a pet has the same effect as losing a family member as often a strong attachment has been formed and usually has helped a person cope through difficult times when perhaps they feel isolated.

Being at work whilst bereaved can be very challenging. The person who is bereaved can feel anxious returning to work and often colleagues worry how to respond.. Some people can feel awkward in addressing it. Clients often want people to ask about it but inevitably it can invoke strong feelings of tearfulness or upset which can be hard to manage particularly in the workplace.

Counselling can be a very helpful place to normalise these feelings and affirm there is no time frame or particular road map. People often find it hard a year or so after a bereavement because people talk about it less and they feel an expectation from themselves or others to be 'over' it. Grieving is a process, not an event and each person has their own unique journey in dealing with this.

Organisationally what helps is an understanding manager who can be sensitive and empathic and understand that a bereaved colleague might take some time to settle back into the workplace. In any situation where a person is affected by emotional intensity it inevitably impairs cognitive functions so it can be hard to concentrate and complete tasks. Grief and loss can be exhausting for a long time so this needs to be taken into account in terms of pacing oneself professionally and personally.

Of course loss is not just focussed on bereavement. The ending of a relationship, leaving behind ones hometown/country/culture, leaving a job, a home, retirement - all these can bring up similar feelings that one might experience in bereavement. It is worth noting that when teams or parts of the organisation are restructured there is also a period of loss in that transition as people let go of what is familiar and deal with the new.

Support for Academic Advisers

Academic advisers from time to time report how affected they are when advisees present with emotional difficulties. Whilst there is an awareness of referral routes to Student Support Services sometimes it can take an emotional toll on the adviser if they end up supporting the student long term. The academic adviser role is not, nor is it meant to be, a mental health adviser role. However the reality is that in certain circumstances close, trusting relationships are built up where students share more personal issues. The adviser can often be left holding the difficult emotions, worrying about the student and feeling helpless.

To support advisees in these situations it would be helpful to provide perhaps some forum for staff to debrief on the more difficult situations which leave the adviser affected. One way forward would be to have a monthly/termly facilitated group where if needed advisers could attend.

Women returning from Maternity Leave

In previous reports we identified the issue of the difficulties women faced managing the work and new family. This theme continues to emerge quite strongly in our work leading to the running of a workshop to help women explore this transition. The service has now run

the workshop 'Women Returning from Maternity' leave twice. On both occasions it attracted a lot of interest with the participants very grateful for the chance to explore their difficulties and challenges with others in the same situation. I attach a brief report in the appendix. One of the recommendations in the report encourages to see returning as a process with regular check-ins by the manager to see how things are going.

Short Term Contracts

Staff on temporary or short term contracts presented with a lot of stress and anxiety. Whilst always grateful for the opportunity to be working at UEA, the short term nature of contracts often created a lot of uncertainty and feeling of being on a roller coaster, aware that their contracts are coming to an end and then perhaps funding being found to extend for a while, and then again facing the uncertainty. This inevitably brought up high levels of frustration and at times resentment at the system.

Personal Themes

Personal issues included the following: breakdown of relationships, miscarriage, sickness, dealing with depression, stress and anxiety, past or current trauma through sexual, physical or emotional abuse,, low self-esteem, loneliness and isolation, suicidal thoughts, bereavement, dealing with anger, supporting others, and sleep problems.

Dealing with Anger

Clients often report dealing with intense feeling to be problematic for them whether it be anxiety, panic, vulnerability or depression. One feeling which emerged as a strong theme this year for some reason was around the issue of anger and what to do with it. For some their anger felt out of control and there was a feeling that it was destructive to others and themselves. There was often profound sense of shame around even being angry in the first place and even more so when it was clear that it harmed others in particular. One of the ways of dealing with anger can also be to internalise it. This can lead to self-harm in myriads of ways through possibly cutting, starving oneself, neglecting one's needs. Addictions in particular can become the response to shutting feelings down when they can become too intense.

Working with issue can be very rewarding. Firstly it can be helpful to normalise anger. It is a response to perhaps a threat or it is a defence against being vulnerable. It can be helpful to see anger as a positive emotion. It can be a way of asserting one's boundaries when perhaps someone has inadvertently or deliberately crossed a line.

Dealing with intense emotions in the workplace is a familiar theme that emerges regularly in our work and led to a workshop with CSED a number of years ago. How do we deal with intense emotions at work? Is it appropriate to express them? If so in what way? Counselling can be a very helpful place to work with clients to find a way to regulate their emotions, not get rid of them.

Supporting others

A familiar ongoing presenting issue is the effects of supporting a loved one who is struggling with physical or mental health issues. This could be a partner with depression and anxiety, a sibling who has tried to kill themselves numerous times, a parent who is infirm and not coping, a child who has persistent behavioural problems. The impact of being essentially in this carer role is enormous. There can be feelings of despair and helplessness as all efforts to make this better can seem to have no effect. There is the constant stream of worry and stress leading to headaches, sleeplessness, and overwhelm.

Having a supportive space can be hugely helpful in these situations. It can help feel less isolated and being able to prioritise their needs helps them to rest some control back into their lives.

Sleep Problems/Self Care

Clients at their initial session fill in a form which asks clients about various aspects of their functioning. One aspect of the clients functioning that is often marked quite highly is the statement 'I have had difficulty getting to sleep or falling asleep'. Lack of sleep can be due to many things – needing to care for young children, anxiety and racing thoughts, getting to bed too late etc. This is an area that can be very productive to explore as inadequate rest has a knock on effect on a lot of other areas of the client's life. Having a winding down time before going to bed with no screen time, not having caffeine, taking a bath/shower can all be some helpful ways of facilitating sleep.

At initial assessments it can be helpful to explore the basic self-care routines. This can be summed up in the acronym NESTS – **N**utrition – making sure you are eating healthily; **E**xercise – walking, the gym, sports; **S**leep – getting adequate rest; **T**ime for Self – putting oneself as a priority, time with friends, reading, hobby etc. and **S**upport network – having friends, family, group etc. to turn to if needed.

Feedback Forms

We continue to monitor the service through feedback forms. Feedback is consistently positive with clients affirming how helpful counselling has been. A few comments are:

'It helped me to better deal with things, to become a better me, strengthen me, enable me to work on personal issues, to improve my feelings about myself.'

'My reason for seeing a counsellor was not work related but my depression and low self-esteem was impacting on work. The counsellor has been a significant support and played a key role in any improvements I've made. Thank you so much.'

'Counselling helped steady the way I was dealing with home and work at an important transition time in my life.'

When asked if there were things that could have been different, the majority said no. However some commented on the length of the wait between initial appointment and ongoing session.

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 3 years 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.

Careers

Alongside the provision of 1-1 counselling the Staff Counselling Service has over the years provided support to the Careers advisers.

With Careers I continued 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 has been a very rewarding collaboration with a very motivated team to reflect on their practice and support students.

Conclusion

With year on year increase in referrals, the service again 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.

As I leave the service is very fortunate to have Sarah Robinson who will continue in her role as staff counsellor on one day a week along with our newly appointment colleague Tanya Augustine who works half time. I wish them well as I do my colleagues in the whole counselling team. My hope is that staff counselling at UEA will continue to grow and develop so that it can provide what it has always done, a supportive caring space for staff where they can be feel welcomed and listened to in a manner that is deeply helpful both professionally and personally.

Eamonn O'Mahony

Staff Counsellor

12/02/2018

Staff Counselling Statistics 2016-17

	2015--16		2016-2017	
	No.	% of UEA staff	No	% of UEA staff
Total no clients:	151	3.8	178	

	2015-16		2016-17	
	No	% total sessions offered	No	% total sessions offered
Session Statistics				
Sessions including exploratories	828		852	
Full sessions	719		713	
Exploratory sessions	109		139	
Total sessions offered	900		897	
Cancellations	45	5	32	3.5
Failure to appear	27	3	13	1.5
Average no. of sessions per client	5.96		5.03	

	2015-16		2016-17	
	No.	% of clients seen	No	% of clients seen
Gender				
Female	111	74	131	74
Male	40	26	47	26

	2015-16		2016-17	
	No.	%	No	%
Full Time	112	74	131	74
Part Time	39	26	47	26

Clients by Staff Group	2015-16			2016-17		
	No	% of UEA staff by category	% of total staff clients seen	No	% of UEA staff by category	% of total Staff clients seen
Academic (ATR)	23	3.7	15	19		11
ALC & Related	24	5.1	16	25		14
Research & analogous	14	3.6	9	21		12
Secretarial and Clerical	53	6.7	35	57		32
Technical and Manual	9	4.2	6	14		8
General Grades and Other	8	1.9	5	16		9
ATS (Academic, Teaching & Scholarship)	10	7	10	21		12
Associate Tutor	6		4	4		2
Casual Staff						

Referrals In	2015-16		2016-17	
	No of clients	% clients	No of clients	% clients
Self	83	55	86	48
GP	16	11	27	15
Occupational Health	5	3	9	5
Human Resources	1	0.6	4	2
Manager	15	10	19	11
Colleague	6	4	15	8
Friends / family	13	7	16	8
Outside Agency	2	1.6	1	
Other	1	0.6	1	
Not recorded				

APPENDIX A

Workshop for Women Returning to Work after Maternity Leave

The group came about from seeing clients in the Staff Counselling service who were struggling with the transition back into the workplace after having time off for maternity leave. We ran a similar group in March 2017 and felt it was well received and helped this group of staff feel more connected to others in the same situation. They were able to come together and discuss some of their difficulties. The group ran on November 14th 2017. There were 9 participants. The group was a mixture of input from the facilitators and from the participants. The main aim of the group was for the participants to identify the specific problems they were dealing with and for us, and their colleagues, to offer some possible solutions to those problems.

The participants identified the following issues: problems around time management, how to manage boundaries and work expectations when the time at work is finite. They talked about performance anxiety and how to work effectively when overwhelmed by tiredness. They talked about their perfectionism and how sometimes they need to decide what to prioritise. Sometimes this meant not seeing friends or having time for self and this left them feeling low. They discussed the difficulty of dealing with a lack of empathy from partners and colleagues and in some cases the lack of family support. They also discussed how to relinquish control to others and the guilt of not being able to do it all. They talked about the effect of tiredness on their relationships and the feeling of not being a good partner.

Many of the participants were positive about their reasons for returning to work and said they loved their jobs and came back for the sense of satisfaction, the reconnecting with colleagues and the sense of reclaiming their pre-motherhood identity but many were struggling with issues around tiredness, the volume of work and the difficulty of making choices.

We looked at possible solutions for participants. We looked at the acronym NESTS – nutrition, exercise, sleep, time for self and support network. Some participants

were particularly bad at asking for help or even saying 'yes' if help was offered. We talked about what was holding them back from embracing offers of help. We talked about how sometimes they need to drop something in order to have some 'time for self'. We talked about how sometimes the work culture needs to be ignored in order to find 'time for self' e.g. having a walk at lunchtime or taking a lunch break can be more important than working through lunchtime to catch up on work. We also looked at practical ways of dealing with the return to work process, some guidance before the process starts with reading matter titles being circulated.

Feedback on the group was positive. Participants found the following things helpful: sharing experiences and insights and getting new ideas for possible strategies to help, considering prioritising and thinking 'what will be good for me', thinking about the importance of taking small steps that can effectively produce change and finally a feeling of being understood and supported.

Responding to a question on what feedback would they give to the university in supporting mothers returning to work after maternity leave they identified the following: recognition of it as a transition, not just a 'one off' so that there was continuing support and regular catch-ups with line managers, encouraging line managers to be empathic to the new situation of their colleagues and how this may be affecting them emotionally and physically, ensuring that the culture in the office is conducive to new mothers feeling supported rather than overwhelmed, which can lead to feelings of failure.

We reminded participants of the various courses run by CSED, particularly those related to staff well-being and provided a number of books for them to look at.