

**SEN17D038**

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**Author:** Dr Jon Sharp – Director of Student Services  
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#### **Issue**

A report on student welfare in support of Senate’s obligation under Ordinance 3.10 that it ‘shall ensure appropriate provision is made to promote the welfare of students’. It is intended that an annual report be provided to Senate by the Director of Student Services to enable this duty to be effectively carried out.

#### **Recommendation**

Recipients are invited to consider the report and to provide feedback with regard to current provision relating to student welfare and to the scope and format of the report in future years.

#### **Resource Implications**

There are no resource implications contained within the report that require discussion by Senate.

#### **Risk Implications**

The purpose of the report is to enable Senate to consider the appropriateness and sufficiency of current provisions for the promotion of student welfare. The report contains summary data in relation to all relevant areas of activity and so the risk of Senate being unable to exercise its responsibility under Ordinance 3.10 is Very Low.

#### **Equality and Diversity**

Issues of Equality and Diversity are carefully considered in relation to how they might influence all strategic developments related to student welfare. The Student Services senior management team work closely with the Student Union and the University’s Head of Equality and Diversity to ensure that the needs of all members of the UEA community are considered in the development of new policies and procedures.

#### **Timing of decisions**

The report contains no recommendations requiring a decision that impact on delivery of services to students.

# **First Annual Report on Student Welfare from the Director of Student Services**

## **Background**

The Director of Student Services has overall responsibility to Senate for the welfare of students. This responsibility is exercised through the delivery of a number of services to students. This report focuses on those services that are designed to either promote and support the positive welfare of students or to prevent and mitigate circumstances that might otherwise have a negative impact of student welfare. The Student Services Plan of Work and progress against that plan is scrutinised in detail at each meeting of the Student Experience Committee. In addition, particular activities such as the work around Never OK and the implementation of the Mental Health Strategy are regularly reviewed as specific items for consideration within the University committee structure. This report provides a top-level summary of activity and key outputs in each of the relevant areas within Student Services.

## **Discussion**

Student welfare comprises a number of factors each of which is supported by one or more of the functions within Student Services. It is important that we approach student welfare in a holistic manner and our Services are structured in such a way as to offer support across the full range of welfare needs. Within the overarching concept of 'student welfare', there are six key elements: Physical, financial, emotional, mental, spiritual and academic. Each of those elements contains a number of factors. For example, a student's physical welfare encompasses any particular needs that might arise from a physical disability; the student's need to be in safe environment; and the student's ability to remain healthy. There is also a significant overlap between these elements, in that the promotion of a safe environment is likely to have a positive impact on a student's emotional and mental welfare.

Consequently, rather than seeking to address each element of student welfare, this report addresses the work of each relevant section within Student Services as set out below, each of which will have an impact on multiple elements of a student's overall welfare:

## **Financial Advice & Support**

Student Services operate three distinct funds that provide support to students who find themselves in financial difficulties. In addition, we offer financial advice to students who request assistance with a range of financial issues such as debt, budgeting or signposting to external organisations. Students are seen very swiftly, with a current average waiting time of 1 day to see an adviser, which is well within the target wait time of 5 days.

The cost of life at University, as opposed to the costs of fees and direct additional course costs such as textbooks, is a matter of growing concern to students across the sector. A recent survey considered at Learning & Teaching Committee in May 2018, indicated the importance of clear information about the total cost of University life being provided to students in a timely manner. Student Services have established a Student Finance Group with the Students' Union and this group will be pulling together a suite of information and resources to help better inform our students.

The number of students seeking financial assistance is relatively low as a proportion of the total University population. Students who meet criteria set out by HEFCE can be supported through the Student Opportunities Fund. Support for students who do not meet HEFCE criteria is provided

through the UEA Hardship fund. Students with short term needs also have the option of applying for a Vice Chancellor's loan.

In the 2016/17 academic year £172,000 was disbursed through the Student Opportunities Fund to 126 students; £56,000 was disbursed through the Hardship Fund to 40 students; a total of £173,000 was disbursed as short-term loans to 644 students. The current year figures are significantly lower for all three funds, but this related to an established spike in requests towards the end of the academic year. Our expectation is that the final figures for the year will be broadly in line with the previous year. However, we have noticed a gradual increase in the number of students applying for HEFCE funded assistance who do not meet the strict criteria for funding, but are nonetheless experiencing difficulties. Thus far, we have been able to support those students through the University fund, but will continue to monitor the level of demand against the available resource.

## **Disability Support**

Support for students with disabilities takes a number of forms: the Disability team assist students in applying for DSA funding; manage the delivery of reasonable adjustments and assessment adjustments; liaise with external providers of DSA funded non-medical help; and source and provide equipment or other adjustments for students with defined needs, but for whom DSA funding is not available. The Disability team also provide on-going support to specific students with established needs through regular meetings. We develop and deliver training to other staff within the University who are likely to be involved in the provision of support.

In 2016-17 we made a number of changes to the way we manage support for disabled students. This included the introduction of more workshop activity; contracting with a major third-party provider to improve the delivery of non-medical help; and taking a more pro-active approach to provision of advice and guidance to prospective students with specific needs at open days. We have continued to make improvements to the service in the current year and have focused hard on reducing waiting times for students: the current waiting time is 7 days which is comfortably within the target time of 10 days.

Across the University and the sector more widely, there is an increasing recognition of the improvements that can be made in terms of accessibility and inclusivity. There is an expectation on the part of the Office for Students (OFS) that Universities mitigate the impact of reductions in DSA funding by improving the inclusivity of course delivery. One example of our work around inclusivity is the planned introduction of audio-capture for all lectures; a project that is being led by the Academic Director for Widening Participation(WP) with support from both Student Services staff and the Widening Participation team.

The number of students with disabilities is likely to increase over the medium term, partly due to the University's commitment to promoting recruitment of WP students. In 2016-17, 1300 students had declared a disability and in the current year this has risen to 1880, a 45% increase on the previous year. This is excellent news in terms of our ability to attract students with disabilities to UEA, but will need to be monitored in terms of the capacity to support those students effectively. We are currently providing ongoing support to 473 students and are operating at approximately 80% of total current staff capacity. The increase in the number of students declaring a disability is mirrored by an increase in the number of students in receipt of DSA funding (658).

## Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing Support

The area of Student Services activity that has come under the most scrutiny since its inception is the provision of mental health and emotional wellbeing support. Nationally, the concerns about students' mental health have been growing and the introduction of the UUK's *#Stepchange* campaign is an indicator of the importance of this issue within the sector. At UEA, significant steps have been taken to improve the quality of provision; speed up students' access to support; broaden the range of support; and to communicate those changes widely to the University community.

The improvements to the delivery of mental health support began with the development of an overarching Policy, an implementation strategy and a detailed plan of work, all of which were approved by the Student Experience Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee in 2017. As indicated above, this has led to a number of improvements to the practical delivery of mental health and emotional wellbeing services. The improvements in this area have been particularly visible in terms of the significant reduction in waiting times.

At the point of the creation of Student Services in 2016, waiting times for some services such as counselling were unacceptably high, with students waiting a number of months before seeing a trained therapist. A series of improvements to processes, resource management and booking structures has seen a gradual improvement in waiting times. The wait time of all mental health services is now within our target times:

<b>Mode of Support</b>	<b>Target Wait Time (days)</b>	<b>Current Wait time (days)</b>
Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners	10	10
Counselling	30	15
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy	20	16

In addition to significantly improving the timeliness of our service delivery, we have also expanded the range of support modes available in keeping with a stepped care model that represents sector best practice. In addition to introducing a range of therapeutic models, we have introduced on-line resources and a significantly enhanced workshop/ group provision. Online packages such as RAVI and Silvercloud will enable students to engage in self-support, while also enhancing the impact of face-to-face support that they may receive. Our service innovations are underpinned by a structured triage process. Careful triaging allows us to work with students to determine which type of support is most likely to be useful given their particular circumstances. Alongside an improvement in the range and quality of support available to students we have also extended our opening hours and introduced Saturday morning appointments. This has proved particularly helpful to those students on professional programmes.

We are committed to ensuring that all students are able to access the appropriate support in a manner that works well for them and best supports their needs. As part of that commitment we are currently looking at specific groups of students who are under-represented as users of our services or where we know that there are issues around access. We have already moved to address the difficulties faced by PGR students on the West Campus by introducing appointments at the Earlham Institute for students researching and studying at a distance from the main Student Support Centre. The Catalyst funded 'Courage' project is aimed at improving mental health support for PGR students and Student Services will be working closely with the PGR Service and academic colleagues to deliver further improvements to the support available to PGR students.

In 2016/17 Student Services provided one-to one support to 637 students while to date in 2017/18 a total of 660 students have received support through one or more of our three therapeutic routes. It

is worth noting that while the total number of students being supported has increased, the number of students with a mental health diagnosis has reduced from 375 to 282. There are a number of factors that influence these figures, ranging from the relationship between entry tariff and the proportion of students with a mental health diagnosis, to the impact of NHS waiting-times. Our expectation is that, in line with sector trends, the total number of students requiring therapeutic support will increase in the medium term. In addition, there are growing numbers of students with low-level concerns relating to their mental health and emotional wellbeing. We are responding to this growth at the lower end in terms of severity by introducing more online resources, group activities and the development of a range of tools to assist students in developing resilience skills. One initiative that deserves particular mention is the introduction of a scheme, developed in partnership with the Sportspark that provides vouchers to students struggling with anxiety and low-mood. There is strong evidence that physical activity can play a significant role in boosting the resilience of students and to date we have had 70 students take up the scheme.

## **Learning Enhancement Team**

Students' performance in their academic studies has a profound impact on their welfare and the work of the Learning Enhancement Team plays a dual role in both improving students' academic capabilities and consequently playing a positive role in boosting student wellbeing.

In 2016/17 the team supported over 3,000 individual students and the expectation is that the figures for 2017/18 will show a slight increase in the number of students accessing our services in this area. LET provides a detailed annual report on its activities to Learning and Teaching Committee, but there are some key points that have a particular relevance to the issue of student welfare.

The University PAL scheme, provides peer support to students and over 2400 students engaged with this scheme in 2016/17. In addition to the benefits experienced by those being mentored through PAL, the scheme also has a positive impact on the welfare of those students acting as mentors and officers. In 2016/17 there were over 100 students acting as mentors or officers within PAL.

The waiting time for the Learning Enhancement Team is comfortably inside the target of 10 days, with the average wait time being 4 days from the point of referral to the first appointment with a LET tutor. While the service is available to all students, those with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) have a particular need for support and LET provides specific assistance to approximately 200 students with SpLD each year.

## **Student Discipline**

The promotion of student welfare requires that we not only provide services that improve the wellbeing of students, but that we take appropriate steps to prevent the negative behaviour of a small number from adversely impacting on the welfare of the student community. The development, with the Students' Union, of the Never OK campaign has had a major impact in raising awareness amongst the whole University community about the need to challenge behaviours around the issues of inappropriate sexualised behaviour. A detailed report was provided to University Council in May 2018 on the Never OK campaign and the wider implementation of the Changing the Culture recommendations. It is worth noting that while there has been a spike in the number of reports of

sexually inappropriate behaviour, as reported in national media, this reflects a greater willingness to report rather than an increase in the number of actual incidents.

A detailed report on the number and outcome of Senate Student Disciplinary Committee (SSDC) hearings, which consider serious breaches of regulations, is provided annually to the Learning and Teaching Committee. The number of serious alleged breaches of regulations that involve potential harm to another student are very small: in 2016/17 there were 3 cases of this type heard by SSDC and in 2017/18 there has so far been one case in this category. In terms of student welfare, the roles of the Disciplinary Officer, the Accommodation Manager, and the Warden Team are as important as the work of the SSDC in promoting student welfare. It is often the low-level incidents that, if not corrected, can gradually develop a cumulative impact on the students experiencing those events.

In 2016/17 5 students had their licenses terminated for behaviour that would adversely affect the welfare of their fellow students and to date the figure for 2017/18 is also 5 students. The number of incidents reported by the Warden team for further action and/ or support that involved a welfare concern was 625 in 2016/17 and is currently 540 in 2017/18. The role of the Warden team is crucial in ensuring that we are able to take steps at the earliest possible opportunity to protect the welfare of students in University accommodation.