

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

2015-2016



Contents

Staff Counselling Report 2015 - 2016	2
Staff Counselling Statistics 2015 - 2016	8
Appendix A	11

Staff of the University Wellbeing Service

2015 - 2016

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Staff Counselling Report

2015-2016

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 36 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. Although outside the time frame of the report I would like to include feedback on recent two workshops targeted at post docs and staff returning from maternity leave.

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. It was also very pleasing to have our sessional counsellor Sarah Robinson take on a more permanent role as Staff Counsellor. We make up a small but dedicated team!

ANALYSIS OF STATISTICS

Staff Numbers

The numbers of staff accessing the Service continues to increase year by year: **111** in 2012/13, **121** in 2013/14, **134** in 2014/15 culminating in **151** for 2015/16. This increase created pressure on existing resources and in the past year resulted in longer waiting times than usual. Whilst clients are still offered an initial appointment 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 more sessions. 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 attending rose from 69% in 2014/15 to 74% this year. There is always the perennial challenge on how to make access easier for men. However, the reality is that men nationally do not tend to seek counselling as much as women. This is partly to do with being socialised to see vulnerability and seeking help as weak. 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 sessions offered rising to 900 from 832 in 2014/5. Clients who cancelled at short notice or who did not appear continues the trend of recent years to be in the region of 6 - 9% - **9.2 %** in 2014/15 and **8%** in 2015/16. 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 figures were very much the same from 2014/15 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 **93%** of clients identified as white (White British, White Irish and Other White).

Disability

The number of clients declaring a disability decreased from 14% in 2014/5 to 11% this year with **88%** declaring 'no known disability'. 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. The most common disability declared was 'Mental Health difficulties' making up **38%** of clients who reported a disability. In recent years clients identifying mental health difficulties as a disability has increased. This may be due to a wider societal shift from seeing mental health issues as a stigma to a greater acceptance of the existence of mental health issues and a greater willingness to seek help.

Age

The age group which made up the greatest percentage of staff was in their 30's (**34%**) followed by 20s (**25%**), 40's (**21%**), 50's (**16%**) and 60's (**3%**)

Referral Routes

Over the years there has been a shift from largely self-referral to a more spread out route of referral. This year saw a similar number to the previous year of clients self-referring - **55%** this year compared to 50% in 2014/15. This was followed by GP, manager and friends and family. In the feedback forms it is significant that **63%** reported hearing about the service through word of mouth. A good sign of an embedded service is where it is seen as an integral part of referral system.

CLIENT THEMES

Work Related

Supporting Staff during a time of Crisis

The service is an important part of the support structure at UEA particularly when there is a crisis caused by a student or staff death. Whilst many people can cope well in these situations using their own support network it can be helpful for some clients to come and talk through the impact of such events. It can often involve just one or two sessions and can help the client to process what has happened. For others depending on the event and their relation to it the experience can be quite traumatising and the client can need a period of counselling to process the trauma.

Women returning from Maternity Leave

In last year's report 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.

One group of women coming back from maternity leave were those on ATR contracts who reported feeling discriminated against, being given the message that their maternity leave had disrupted the teaching and research schedule of their school. This caused a lot of stress at an already stressful time of managing a return to work feeling often exhausted, and adjusting back into the workplace. It is important that schools follow the guidelines set down in supporting women back into the workplace and particularly in relation to their workload and submission to the REF.

Management skills for Academics

Academic staff in line management roles and staff being line managed acknowledged that often they were put in such a role without much experience or training. Staff can feel out of their depth when in such a role and can then not offer those in their line management the support they need in their role.

Inductions for New Staff

A recurrent theme connected with the previous point is the experience of staff starting at UEA and often feeling left to fend for themselves. This cuts across all staff categories but seems particularly pronounced amongst academic staff who often have moved city or country to be at UEA. Whilst often very experienced there can be an assumption that people can adapt easily. But as in any transition there is often a period of loss and confusion and unsteadiness as people negotiate the process of settling in. This is often happening just as a heavy teaching load is kicking in, and as people are getting to know the policies and procedures and the particular culture of the school they are in.

Workshops

We identified two groups of staff who were presenting with particular issues – Post Docs and women returning from maternity leave so we decided to run workshops to support these staff categories. The post doc workshop was run by Eamonn O'Mahony and the Returning from Maternity leave workshop was run by Sarah Robinson.

Post Doc Workshop

This client group reported feeling overwhelmed and isolated so it was decided that a group experience might help post docs feel supported and less alone. All the participants reported in their feedback forms the main benefits of attending was that they felt they were not the only ones struggling to adapt to the world of work from intense individual study. Participants were asked what feedback they would like to give to the university on how to support post docs. Participants identified there needed to be better communication and guidance from the schools on what support is available i.e. counselling, Staff Development, university support networks. The need for some guidance on the role of a post doc and how it differed from the PhD role was emphasised.

Returning From Maternity Workshop

Responding to a question on what feedback would they give to the university in supporting mothers returning to work after maternity leave participants identified the following: better pre-planning of the return to work with manager, better training for managers on how to respond to women coming back into the workplace after maternity leave, a review with line manager after a few weeks and then a few months back in the job, a support network of mothers who have just returned to work. They also felt that provision of more workshops with more time would be helpful.

Personal

Chronic Health Conditions

Clients presented with a variety of chronic health conditions that impacted on their ability to function. Such conditions were: Fibromyalgia, chronic pain, ME/Chronic fatigue, various forms of cancer treatment, and migraines. What often was difficult for clients in these conditions is the invisibility of their health conditions, creating feelings of isolation and stress. This invisibility also mirrored clients' experiences with mental health conditions. Sometimes clients felt like failures for having to disclose their conditions with fears of being seen as unfit for their work or unable to meet the standard required, particularly in research and academic posts. Some clients reported feeling their manager did not understand the impact of their condition on them. However a majority of clients reported that they had been dealt sensitively and with understanding.

Anxiety and Depression

Many clients reported struggling with feelings of anxiety and depression. For some this was a recent experience but for many clients a recent episode was part of a longer pattern often stretching back years and decades. Despite the relative short term nature of the counselling it was often possible to help with managing the condition but also helping to understand and work with the underlying reasons which helped clients feel more accepting and in control.

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' 24 out of the 36 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' 24 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 21 clients 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 -29 out of 36 affirmed this was either a significant or most important factor.

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. In September 2015 we organised a Staff Counselling Networking day bringing together staff counsellors from both HE and FE.

Careers

Alongside the provision of 1-1 counselling the Staff Counselling Service has over the years provided support

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

With the constant increase in referrals, 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.

Essentially what is effective in counselling is being able to provide a safe confidential non-judgemental space for staff to talk through their difficulties and to be listened to in a compassionate and caring way by the counsellor. This form of listening is what creates meaningful change. It is not primarily about acquisition of skills although this often becomes an essential component of the work as attested by the feedback forms. Kindness, patience and empathy are central to the counselling experience but these qualities can be extended to one another whatever role we are in during our work lives.

Eamonn O'Mahony

Staff Counsellor

11/04/2017

Staff Counselling Statistics 2015-16

	2014--15		2015-2016	
	No.	% of UEA staff	No	% of UEA staff
Total no clients:	134	3.8	151	4.5

	2014-15		2015-16	
	No	% total sessions offered	No	% total sessions offered
Session Statistics				
Sessions including exploratories	755		828	
Full sessions	649		719	
Exploratory sessions	106		109	
Total sessions offered	832		900	
Cancellations	53	6.3	45	5
Failure to appear	24	2.9	27	3
Average no. of sessions per client	6.2		5.96	

	2014-15		2015-16	
	No.	% of clients seen	No	% of clients seen
Gender				
Female	92	69	111	74
Male	42	31	40	26

	2014-15		2015-16	
	No.	%	No	%
Full Time	101	75	112	74
Part Time	29	21	39	26
Not stated	4			

Clients by Staff Group	2014-15			2015-16		
	No	% of UEA staff by category	% of total staff clients seen	No	% of UEA staff by category	% of total Staff clients seen
Academic (ATR)	17	2.8	13	23	3.7	15
ALC & Related	15	3.2	11	24	5.1	16
Research & analogous	13	3.4	10	14	3.6	9
Secretarial and Clerical	49	6.4	37	53	6.7	35
Technical and Manual	7	3.3	5	9	4.2	6
General Grades and Other	12	3.0	9	8	1.9	5
ATS (Academic, Teaching & Scholarship)	14	3.7	10	10	2.5	7
Associate Tutor	2		1.5	6		4
Casual Staff						

Referrals In	2014-15		2015-16	
	No of clients	% clients	No of clients	% clients
Self	67	50	83	55
GP	14	10.4	16	11
Occupational Health	12	8.9	5	3
Human Resources	5	3.7	1	0.6
Manager	8	5.9	15	10
Colleague	6	4.4	6	4
Friends / family	12	8.9	13	7
Outside Agency	1	.07	2	1.6
Other	1	0.7	1	.6
Not recorded				

Review of 36 Feedback Forms

1. How did you learn about the Counselling Service?

Website: **10** leaflet: **2** Word of Mouth: **23** Other: **5**

2. How did you make your first appointment?

In Person: **4** Telephone: **8** By E-mail: **23** someone else: **1**

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

1. Excellent: **27** Very Good: **8** Good: **1** Not good: **0** Poor: **0**

Comments:

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

Waiting time: 1-3 Weeks: **8**, 3-6 weeks: **12**, 6-9 Weeks: **15** Did not answer: **1**

Reasons for coming to counselling:

'Bullying and Harassment'

'A life situation'

'Very stressed due to complex family crisis'

'Bad break up (of relationship) x 3

'Family bereavement. x 2

'Managing grief and reassessing my own life'

'Increasing anxiety around the subject of death'

'Struggling with emotions

'I was feeling very depressed'

'Originally went to get help with anxiety' x 5

'Conflict with a colleague at work'

'Relationship and family worries'

'Recurrent depression and problems at work'

'Depression and anxiety'

'Advised by OH'

'Complex personal issues impacting upon professional life'

'To explore coming off anti depressants'

'Emotional Crisis'

'Stress and irritability'

'Stress'

'Overwhelmed with several life situation'

'Low mood following loss of family member'

'Low mood/Depression'

'Life changing circumstances'

'Pregnancy and problem with an abusive ex-partner'

'Not coping with the multiple situations in my life'

'Anxiety and issues from childhood'

5. Are there things that could have been different?

No x 26

I would have liked an update whilst I was waiting. I became anxious that I had been 'forgotten'. I did phone and was reassured.

A shorter waiting time

Quite a wait for regular appointments but this was clearly communicated

More than 8 sessions

Could have done with an interim contact

6. Why did your counselling come to an end?

You decided to end it: **2**

Mutually agreed with your counsellor: **12**

You left UEA: **4**

You had run out of sessions: **18**

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: 4 3: 5 4: 17 5: 7

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

1: 0 2: 2 3: 10 4: 16 5: 8

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

1: 0 2: 5 3: 10 4: 16 5: 5

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

1: 0 2: 3 3: 4 4: 18 5: 11

8. Any other comments?

Really helpful for both work and outside of work. Thank you!

The counsellor was very intuitive and helped me reflect on my situation. She provided me with helpful information. The sessions felt like a safety net which I really needed.

The counsellor was fantastic. Really helped me through a difficult time and develop techniques to manage my thoughts /feelings. Very grateful for all their support.

I have benefited hugely from my sessions. I wholeheartedly value the space that UEA and my counsellor have created.

The counsellor was very easy to talk to and helpful. Helped me understand why I feel the way I do and that it's ok. Very appreciative of their help.

My sessions have had such a positive effect on many aspects of my life and I feel the service has a massive help to me.

Counselling came at just the right time for me and has played a big part in my decision to move to a job outside the university.

Gave helpful tips: reading, writing/noting emotions and experiences in a journal, how to try and understand that is ok and how to stay positive if I experience another depressive episode again, gave me the courage to seek help from GP to get antidepressants

The counsellor was incredible and really helped me deal with my anxiety. As a result I feel a lot better prepared to face it and have helpful tips and tools to help.

The counselling was a positive experience and I am pleased I went through with it despite prior reservation. It helped me see things in a different way. With the help of the counsellor I am feeling much more positive. I am very grateful for their support over the 8 sessions.

It has been useful to develop skills such as self-understanding and increase my confidence. I feel an improvement on how to deal with the difficult situation I faced and how to balance personal and professional life.

The counsellor was fantastic – kind patient and non-judgemental; helping me understand myself better and greatly improve my ability to cope with life generally. I feel really grateful I have been offered support of this kind from my place of work and really believe that many others would benefit from this service. I appreciated the fact that I could ask for help without my manager and colleagues being involved and it has allowed me to be more resilient at work and at home.

I'm very grateful with the counselling appointments I had. I wish I were allowed to carry on with more appointments. My counsellor was very kind and helpful.

I feel a lot better from when I started my sessions. Been very useful to talk to someone impartial and nice to know I can come back if needed.

I have benefited intensely from the counselling sessions. I am appreciative that UEA feels it is important to invest in the wellbeing of its employees.

Very useful. The counsellor helped me see where I needed to adjust my boundaries with students and staff.

This has been an impactful experience and I would definitely not be where I am now without these sessions.

Great service. Really helped to work through things and provided ideas to consider for similar situations that may arise in the future.

Having my sessions each week gave me a 'goal', so I knew that if I had been feeling low I would have an opportunity to discuss.

I am very appreciative for the assistance the counselling service has given me. I think it is fantastic of UEA to offer this support to their staff. I have recommended the service to other colleagues.

Thank you. The counsellor has helped me to get through another difficult period in my life which has helped me to stay at work and kept me in better mental health than had I not access to the service.

Excellent as in previous times. Helped with 1) explanations/factors contributing to my anxiety 2) Acceptance of my anxiety as part of me and 3) identifying strategies to manage and 4) self-compassion

I had intermittently tried counselling elsewhere but didn't feel comfortable but my counsellor was very kind, patient and empathic and offered some useful tools for coping with my emotions.

The sessions have given me the ability to cope with my problems better. It has given me the skills to counteract my anxieties. I valued the opportunity to speak to someone confidentially who was non-judgemental.