

News release

Date: 17 June 2020

Title: Additional support for student mental health during pandemic

Students at higher education institutions in Wales will be able to access additional innovative support for their well-being and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Student Space, developed by Student Minds, will receive £190K from HEFCW, in addition to funding by the Office for Students (OfS), and will provide additional support at this exceptional time to ensure that more students can access the support they need.

These new bilingual, online services - to be launched in July - are designed to complement the well-being and health, including mental health, support already in place at universities, colleges, the National Health Services in Wales and in England and other local and national third sector organisations.

Support will include:

- immediate help for students through therapeutic interventions, including text support, phone listening and guided cognitive behavioural therapy.
- educational resources to help students to manage stress and maintain good mental health and well-being in the current climate.
- a range of quality-assured online resources, such as guidance, apps, peer support platforms, and volunteering opportunities.

Student Space will aim to limit the impact of the pandemic on students and deliver support where it is most needed, including those experiencing loneliness, isolation or are challenged by the new learning experiences.

Dr David Blaney, chief executive of HEFCW, said: “We are committed to working with HE institutions to ensure that students are supported during this time not only in their learning, but very importantly in their well-being and health. This new service will work collaboratively with providers in Wales to provide a wide range of national support to reach out to all our student populations, regardless of their need or location.

“We know that HE institutions provide extensive support systems for students, but the current pandemic requires new ways of reaching out to students and this online service will contribute to this. We are working with our HE providers and the Office for Students to support student learning and student lives, and we must do our utmost to ensure that we deliver support in ways that respond to the lived experience of students.”

Kirsty Williams, the Education Minister, said: “Meeting peers and lecturers day-to-day on campus is an integral part of university life. We know that the need to limit those interactions is a real challenge for both students and staff.

“I’m pleased that, through HEFCW, we’re supporting students at Welsh Universities through this difficult period, in addition to the funding we’re providing this year to support mental health in higher education.”

An NUS Wales spokesperson said: “This is a welcome investment in the health and well-being of students in Wales. Student Space will help students manage their mental health more effectively during this difficult and disruptive period. The pandemic has highlighted the need for bespoke online support for students who are learning away from traditional support networks at their institutions.

“As well as facing loneliness and isolation in lockdown, students are also worried about the impact of this crisis on their finances, the economy and their career prospects. It is vital that students are given the tools to safeguard their mental health at this time, and this funding will help achieve that.”

Amanda Wilkinson, Director of Universities Wales, said: “We welcome this announcement of additional support for student mental health during the coronavirus pandemic. The health and well-being of students is of the highest priority for universities in Wales and we look forward to working with partners and stakeholders in the development of this work to ensure that students can access the support they need during these difficult times.”

Ends

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1. The Student Space programme will run for six months, from around July to December 2020. It is a short-term, targeted intervention to respond to the particular challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. The platform will be developed sustainably, with a view to leaving a long-term legacy of good practice and information about students' well-being and health needs. Student Minds plan for many of the resources to be useful well beyond the initial six-month period. Resources created through this programme will be available to all providers across Wales and England.
2. A beta version of the platform will be complete by end July, with a more comprehensive version by mid-August. The programme will be overseen by Student Minds and connect with universities, NHS Wales and NHS England, and third sector support services. Specialist partners will be commissioned to deliver components of the programme as appropriate, which will be overseen by the Office for Students and HEFCW. The programme will be responsive to needs of students, with evaluation, needs assessment and impact assessments being carried out on an ongoing basis.
3. The project is led by the higher education regulator in England, the Office for Students. HEFCW has contributed to this project and support will be available for students at HEFCW regulated institutions. We have provided additional funding to make resources available bilingually.

4. We allocated £2 million to five well-being and health projects in 2019/20, in addition to £1.5m to support safeguarding and period dignity in HE. HEFCW also provides funding for disabled students, and for widening access and retention, which is often affected by well-being and health issues.

About HEFCW

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales – HEFCW – is the public body operating between Welsh Government and higher education providers. We regulate fee levels at higher education providers, ensure a framework is in place for assessing the quality of higher education and scrutinise the performance of universities and other designated providers. We also provide funding for higher education teaching and research, and apply our influence and expertise to help deliver Welsh Government priorities for higher education that also have wider societal and economic benefits.