



## **Association of Colleges (AoC) survey on students with mental health conditions in Further Education**

**Summary report, June 2015**

The Association of Colleges (AoC) carried out an online survey in response to concerns about the increasing number of students with mental health difficulties in further education colleges. The purpose of the survey was to gain a clearer picture of the range of students with mental health conditions and how support for these students is funded and managed.

The findings from the survey informed the design of an AoC conference on Mental Health in Further Education and will help to provide an evidence base to share with staff at the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health (DoH).

The survey was emailed to principals, special educational needs contacts and student support contacts in colleges in England on 3 June 2015, with a two week deadline. It was also sent to AoC regional directors to follow up with colleges in their region and included in AoC briefings. 127 providers responded, 123 were colleges in England - 37% of the total number of colleges in the sector.

Key findings:

### **Students with mental health conditions**

- 66% of respondents said that the number of students with mental health difficulties had 'significantly increased' in the past three years with a further 20% saying they had 'slightly increased'.
- Moreover 75% felt that their college had 'significant numbers' of students who had undisclosed mental health difficulties.
- 75% felt that pressures of social media were having an impact on students' mental health. Other reasons given by colleges for the possible increase in the number of students with mental health conditions were 'Exam pressures' (60%) and 'Financial concerns' (61%).
- All respondents reported having students with depression, anxiety, and those were self-harming. 97% reported having students with psychosis.

### **Funding**

- 43% had no full-time counsellor or mental health support worker and 55% had experienced cutbacks to the support they could offer over the past three years.

### **Links with health authorities**

- 60% of respondents said they had a 'good' or 'very good' relationship with their local health authority



- 55% reported a 'good' or 'very good' relationship with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- 60% reported that their relationship with local adult mental health services were only 'fair' or 'not very good'/'non-existent'
- Only 26% had joint provision with local health services although evidence shows that this is one of the most effective ways of supporting people with mental health difficulties in education.
- Only 19% said that they were 'always' able to have 'timely referrals' of their students to primary and secondary services outside the college.

### **College policies and staff**

- Only 35% of respondents reported having a mental health policy.
- The majority of colleges (69-75%) reported that only some front-line staff (e.g. reception staff/security staff/first aiders), teaching staff and other staff had been given mental health training.
- 93% reported having structures in place to support the mental health and well-being of their staff.

### **Health and wellbeing sessions**

- It was apparent that, within their limited resources, colleges were very concerned about the mental health needs of their students; 52% were providing health and wellbeing sessions for all their students with a further 40% providing them for some students.
- 66% of respondents said they were aware of the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' – a set of a set of evidence-based actions, developed from evidence gathered in the UK government's Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing, to promote people's wellbeing. They are: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give.
- 88% reported that their wellbeing sessions included ways to deal with stress-related situations such as exams or financial difficulties and 86% said they included a focus on physical activity and healthy eating.

### **Recommendations for colleges, funding and Government**

Examples of good practice given both in the survey and at a subsequent AoC conference on Mental Health in Further Education on 1 July 2015 revealed that good practice requires both a clear college wide strategy on mental health and also close collaboration between local Health Authorities and colleges. Highbury College in Portsmouth, Hackney College and The City of Liverpool College have all created joined up provision with their local Health Authorities whereby college and Health Authority funding is brought together in order to provide appropriate support for students. These colleges have also developed college wide strategies on mental health whereby



mental health difficulties are not seen simply as requiring support for individual students but instead college policies, procedures and curriculum delivery are adapted to be inclusive of students with mental health difficulties. Good practice requires a mental health strategy which has implications for colleges, funding and Government policy and procedures.

### **Colleges**

Individual colleges need to develop a mental health policy and to ensure that they adapt their procedures so that they work in ways which best support students with mental health difficulties. There needs to be a college wide approach whereby mental health is seen as everyone's responsibility and all staff (teaching and non-teaching) receive mental health training. Colleges should also seek to create workable links with local mental health teams (both CAMHS and adult mental health teams) and look to ways of creating jointly funded provision.

### **Funding**

Allocation of funding needs to acknowledge the large increase in numbers of students with mental health difficulties. Funding should be allocated in ways which recognise that resources need to be available not just for individual support but also to allow for wider changes across the college.

### **Government**

It is important that there is clarity as to which section of the DfE is responsible for overseeing support for people with mental health difficulties in further education colleges. Colleges have duties under the Equalities Act to provide 'reasonable adjustments' for students with mental health difficulties and also have a duty to use their 'best endeavours' to provide an inclusive offer for all students with learning difficulties and disabilities under the Children and Families Act. The DfE Children and Young People's Mental Health Department has responsibility for young people with mental health difficulties, but reports and documents put out by this department have until now been solely focused on schools despite the fact that many more 16-18 year olds are studying in colleges. It is essential that there is clarity as to which section of the DfE is responsible for these students in college and that any resources available to schools should also be accessible by further education colleges.

The DfE needs to put forward a clear vision and strategy with measureable outcomes which recognise and facilitate the importance of structural links between colleges and local health authorities.