



Project Embrace Workshops: mental health awareness and wellbeing for students.

Introduction

The aim of the project was to develop and pilot a pre-emptive approach to support and empower students to:

- Evaluate, assess and manage their mental health and well-being
- Form practical strategies to manage
- Communicate their experience with more confidence to others.
- Take ownership of their mental health and wellbeing
- Provide family, friends, and university staff with a better understanding of their personalised needs.

How did we do this?

Stage 1: The Focus Group In consultation with two members of staff and six students from BA (Hons) Interaction Design Arts (IDA), The Pocket Advocate was adapted to the specific needs of students over the course of three two-hour meetings.

Stage 2: The Pilot Group The student - specific version of the Pocket Advocate was then delivered as a series of four one-hour workshops, to a pilot group of eleven, self-selected, first year students from IDA Year One (2017/2018).

Both Stage 1 & 2 were audio recorded.

Stage 2 was filmed.

Release Forms that consent to the use of all recorded (audio & filmed) content being used for training and promotional purposes have been handed out for students to sign.

The Focus Group: the consultation & development process

Staff and students from Interaction Design Arts (IDA) Years One, Two and Three provided the initial feedback for the development of The Pocket Advocate.

The focus group concluded that:

- The natural starting point for the adapted model of The Pocket Advocate should be the illustrative 'map', used as an interactive chart to reflect/document/explore life's challenges.

- Once the map has been engaged with, the written side becomes the ‘key’ to the map, defined by the user. This happens once they have explored their own relationship with what feels comfortable, uncomfortable and overwhelming.

The adaptation, to date, focuses on:

- an adjustment of the wording so that it points and prompts rather than leads
- less definition around how a user responds to prompts
- more space created for writing and drawing
- illustrative map redefined to allow for a wider spectrum of experience and interpretation
- the directional prompts have been discarded from illustrative map
- a simple scale has been re-introduced on the illustrative map that is loosely defined by wording from the written side and numbering. See Appendix IV

The Pilot Group: the workshop process

Over the course of the workshops, the background to the project and several key areas were introduced to the students using a combination of group work, discussion and play:

- **Triggers:** Understand what ‘trigger’ means. Explore personal trigger points and how this relates to the experience of stress.
- **Signs:** Greater awareness of the physical, mental and emotional responses we have to triggers and stress.
- **Levels of comfort:** Identify how our signs/responses can be interpreted as either comfortable, uncomfortable or overwhelming
- **Actions:** Understand how our level of stress/comfort can help to determine the action we then take
- **Trust & Support:** Establish different levels of support within various networks (family, friends, professionals etc.) based on our levels of stress/comfort.
- **The Pocket Advocate:** Create a self-directed tool that can be used to support, explore and communicate all of the above.

Students were given personal reflective exercises to complete between each workshop. This was not included in the analysis. The intention of this was to give them time and space to consider what they had learnt from a personal viewpoint and away from the group dynamic. The intention of this process was to lead each student towards the completion of their own Pocket Advocate, which was presented to them in the final workshop.

Attendance

Workshop 1: 11 attendees
Workshop 2: 7 attendees
Workshop 3: 7 attendees
Workshop 4: 4 attendees

Reminders were sent out for all workshops except when there was a flood in the building the day before Workshop 4, which meant that students were not reminded. With the exception of one apology for illness given for Workshop 3, no reasons were given for non-attendance.

How was this work measured?

Level One: Pre-intervention questionnaire. Online survey collected before the workshops began.

During the consultation process the focus group requested that survey questions were measured on a sliding scale between 0 – 100 (rather than the proposed approach: strongly agree/agree/disagree/strongly disagree), to allow for a more ‘creative’ response.

Students were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

Statement 1: *I know when things are getting tough.* (Correlates to: evaluate, assess and manage their mental health and wellbeing).

Statement 2: *I know what helps me get through difficult times.* (Correlates to: form practical strategies to manage).

Statement 3: *I feel comfortable talking to others when things get tough.* (Correlates to: provide family, friends, and university staff with a better understanding of their personalised needs).

Statement 4: *I know who to turn to when things get tough.* (Correlates to: communicate their experience with more confidence to others).

Responses to each question showed a range of knowledge and confidence levels.

See Appendix III Fig 1

Knowledge and confidence levels varied considerably within the group for each question.

See Appendix III Figs. 2-5

Level Two: Workshop feedback forms.

Students were asked after each workshop if they agreed or disagreed that the workshop was useful and asked to score this on a scale of 0-100

See Appendix III Fig 6

They were also asked to comment on what was useful/not useful; what could be improved and what would help their development? This qualitative data produced helpful and constructive feedback which will inform the development of future workshops. See Appendix I

Level Three: At the beginning of each workshop participants were asked ‘What do you remember from the previous week?’ and ‘Has anything happened in which you have used what you learnt?’ This has been completed. See Appendix II

Level Four: Post-intervention questionnaire. Repeat level one online survey collect at the end of the workshops to bring comparative measure. Data to be collected.

Level Five: Online Survey: qualitative evaluation of workshop delivery. Data to be collected.

Level Six: 3 - month follow up with a Survey Monkey questionnaire asking participants what influence the process has had, if any?

Level Seven: Revisit in 6 months.

Conclusion – Key Findings

Although this was a small pilot and the students self-selected, the indications are encouraging. There is a range of knowledge and confidence levels among the group which changes over time showing a definite improvement. This is captured in the following feedback:

‘Prior knowledge, so good to be reminded’ Workshop 1

‘this has opened our eyes to problems that we have never realised.’

Workshop 1

‘the workshop helped me understand what helps you and what doesn't in a bad situation.’ Workshop 3

Even with pre-existing awareness there is clear change around the management of mental health issues & the implementation of appropriate and timely strategies as illustrated in the following comments:

‘it taught me to differentiate what helps and what doesn't when I'm stressed.’

Workshop 3

‘It helped me during difficult times to stay calm and keep going’ Workshop 4

The purpose of the second survey, which is a repeat of the first, will be used to measure changes resulting from engagement with the workshops.

The students processed the material at a faster pace than expected. Fun activities worked particularly well. Suggest we condense the workshop content/material into 2 – 3 workshops to create a more dynamic and varied approach that is a mixture of group work and pair work, combined with games.

‘It was really interesting to play the game’ Workshop 4

Shared experiences were particularly meaningful. The group appeared to bond and become closer over the course of the workshops.

'Just seeing that other people have problems' Workshop 1

'to know people and understand humans more.' Workshop 2

'it allowed me to share things' Workshop 3

'we can share points of stress, peace and challenges.' Workshop 4

There were increased levels of awareness and insight about their behaviour described as follows:

'I became aware of triggers' Workshop 1

'actually realising they were triggers.' Workshop 1

'there are so many things and activities that can help me' Workshop 2

'knowing what's not good for me will benefit' Workshop 3

'I've noticed different sides of people that I had misjudged' Workshop 3

'Gave me fundamental understanding' Workshop 4

The group also faced and reflected on social isolation through the sharing and peer-support process modelled in the workshops:

'We are all struggling, and that is okay' Workshop 1

'I am not alone. We can deal with our triggers together.' Workshop 1

'there are bumps on the road of life and everyone has them.' Workshop 2

'Knowing that you are not the only one' Workshop 2

Future

A green paper published in early Decemberⁱ sets out proposals incentivising every school and college in England to have a senior lead for mental health, creating new mental health support teams to liaise between schools and the NHS, and piloting a maximum four-week waiting time for CAMHS in some areas. Children and young people in England will be able to access mental health support in their school or college under Government plans to transform the treatment of mental illness in young people. The Pocket Advocate goes a considerable way in addressing these issues.

Other peer-support and counselling programmes are being piloted around the UK in various academic institutions. Some of these are highlighted in the HEPI reportⁱⁱ, and have been a useful source of information and comparison. The Pocket Advocate is unique in its approach and how it interacts with its users.

In discussion with the Dean of the Design School, Nicky Ryan, the successful project will be used as a template for other courses at LCC to implement across the board, guided by the workshops and processes developed between Interaction Design Arts and Danielle Singer Moore.

The subsequent information will also prove invaluable for the NUS and their concerns for student wellbeing as highlighted in their Mental Distress Surveyⁱⁱⁱ. Initial contact has been made with the NUS and we are in the process of arranging an official meeting in the wake of the funding bid.

Eleanor Pirie, head of H&S at UAL who has voiced support for the project, is keen to explore our findings and work on its broader UAL wide implications as there are no current policies/projects covering this area of focus.

Appendix I

	Explain why the workshop was useful/not useful?	How could this workshop be improved?	What could you use from the workshop to help your development?
Workshop One	Don't always get a chance to talk about things that stress me	Faster pace, more conversation, interaction	Nothing yet, but with more sessions it will be more helpful.
	It made me understand that there are many people who share the same triggers as I do. I am not alone. We can deal with our triggers together.	Good content	To remember that we all have very similar problems and triggers
	Prior knowledge, so good to be reminded	So far, I am happy and satisfied with what this workshop has.	I would like to use some guidance for self-help when I'm in trouble or problem.
	I guess I don't feel like I am alone and the only one struggling. I realised that I get triggered by small things too.	People need to communicate more.	To see that we are not alone about feeling stressed/ overloaded.
	Good start, but I look forward to deeper discussions the next times.	I felt as though we were speaking about a lot of problem but not the solutions (Maybe this will be covered in another session)	I actually wrote most of my triggers down without actually realising they were triggers. Acknowledging that can help me work on them.
	It made us open our eyes to problems that we have never realised.		The circle of triggers
	We are all struggling, and that is okay		Just seeing other people have problems
	Because it allowed me to realise that, allow things to trigger one and many others do too. But, can change now, read to my triggers (hopefully)		Being more aware of triggers
	Because it allowed me to realise that, allow things to trigger one and many others do too. But, can change now, read to my triggers (hopefully)		
	Just nice to see thing in a different way		
	I felt as though we were speaking about a lot of problem but not the solutions (Maybe this will be covered in another session)		
It was very obvious, I already knew I'm not alone with my triggers, I'm more interested in coping mechanism.			
Workshop Two	Good to put your thoughts (struggles) down on paper in front of us	Maybe it could be worth it putting music on as a background any kind (relaxing, calming)	To acknowledge that there are bumps on the road (life) and that everyone has them.

	I remembered that there are so many things and activities that can help me to set through the life bumps and sad moments.	Yet again, I am really pleased and there is nothing else to improve in.	I have my own solutions and no one is living their lives in peace.
	I remembered who I am and I am capable to do better and move with life. I know there a troubles and problems but I realised that I have my own solutions.	More energetic and sharing vocally	Knowing my own comforts.
	It let me think about what I've always taken for guaranteed		Knowing that you are not the only one
	It allowed me to know people and understand human more. I also understand myself a lot more.		
	Just in a difficult situation in life.		
	Gives a chance to talk about things you can't always bring up in a regular conversation.		
Workshop Three	I've noticed different sides of people that I had misjudged.	Work on solutions not just acknowledging things	Think more.
	It was analytical and helped me differentiate what helps and what doesn't when I'm stressed.	Love as is	Self-awareness.
	It was very similar to the previous one.	More working as pairs because it can be better talking 1 to 1	Become more economical to void solutions for situations
	Puts things into perspective. Become faster to come to solutions	Maybe giving advice to each other?	knowing what's not good for me will benefit.
	Because it allowed me to share things		Think more positively about my past.
	Was interesting to reflect on personal times I have struggled as I never do that, the pain is usually buried in my mind.		
	You think of what helps you and what doesn't in a bad situation.		
Workshop Four	It was nice to see a physical journey with people	Have an even amount of trigger cards in the game	Reflect more regularly
	Playing the game was live experiencing what we have talked about in more concrete way.	Satisfied this far	Don't judge.
	Gave fundamental understanding and listening that we can share points of stress, peace and challenges.		It helped me during difficult times to stay calm and keep going. Peace will come.
	It was really interesting to play the game.		

Appendix II

	What do you remember from the previous week?	Has anything happened in which you have used what you learnt?
Workshop Two	Discussed in terms of triggers and understand what triggers are	The things that made me stressed this past week and I tried to figure it out and most of my triggers were in the extreme experience
		One was in the street it is so noisy in London, the other was in my home it was filled with people and I just needed quiet it was a subtle trigger
		My friend was teaching me how to use one of the old cameras and I messed up one of the shots the one that I was really excited about and I was frustrated
		When I have a trigger or irritation I just know its going to pass, I know I will get it and that it will be fine
		I noticed at work I get really stressed, especially the shouting I feel the pressure and I get triggered
Workshop Three	When we wrote down our positive emotions when we are on a good roll.	I noticed myself getting a bit agitated with anti-social behaviour. (An example of when being uncomfortable is positive) Sometimes it uncomfortable to reveal personal things about yourself but when you do it, it often pays off.
	Lots of words	I reflected on what we had learnt. (An example of when being uncomfortable is positive) Being uncomfortable is the first to getting better and improving yourself I get uncomfortable when I start to think too much about what other people think of me. Being out of your comfort
	Writing down things about what we do when things go well and not well	- (An example of when being uncomfortable is positive) Push you to approve or to do what you have to do because you are out of your comfort zone and you have to get further out when you realise it
	What activities we do when we are sad or stressed to help us, like drinking tea.	I noticed I drank more tea than usual. I had this idea of being calmer with the tea, that somehow by drinking the tea things will get better. (An example of when being uncomfortable is positive) I felt really uncomfortable in high school doing all of these exams and I was progressing a lot and then I felt so uncomfortable that I did everything I was supposed to do.
	What makes me comfortable, uncomfortable and stuff like that.	I was really thinking that I was always comfortable but I realised that when I feel guilty that's the point when I am most uncomfortable, and yeah so I am a person that can feel uncomfortable. (An example of when being uncomfortable is positive) I felt uncomfortable when I walked into this room and there was a girl who started crying and it was just me and her and I didn't know how to handle it I went through and comforted her normally I would ignore that but being one to one I was able to help and it benefited me
	Uncomfortable. Being put on the spot and having a ball thrown at me, that makes me feel uncomfortable.	Take myself out of that situation to deal with it better. (An example of when being uncomfortable is positive) I used to be really shy as a kid and I auditioned for a role in a play and was really uncomfortable and nervous but I got the part and so it was a positive experience.
		Being uncomfortable is good when you have a lot to do and need to get

		stuff done
Workshop Four	Talked about what makes us uncomfortable. Different zones red zone green zone orange zone. We talked about what we learnt from discomfort	I have been quite chilled and happy, more than usual, definitely been in my comfort zone – it's been a good week.
	Different zones we described which was quite pleasurable to think about actually	Last week was quite difficult I had a bit of a melt down it was all getting to me about work but then I realised I am not the only getting stressed which appeased me
	We talked about what makes us feel stressed and writing all these things down it reminded me of the session the week before	I have had a lot of stress in the past week and nothing helped me.
	I found it surprising to see how some things are comfortable for some people and the same things are uncomfortable for others	Pretty intense week, and I really worked on my behaviour in the place I am working and feeling a bit shy and going through that limit and I understood that things are good.

Appendix III

The graph (Fig 1) below shows the separate, individual responses to the four questions from each of the nine students. Their responses to each question show a range of knowledge and confidence levels within the group as a whole and within each student.

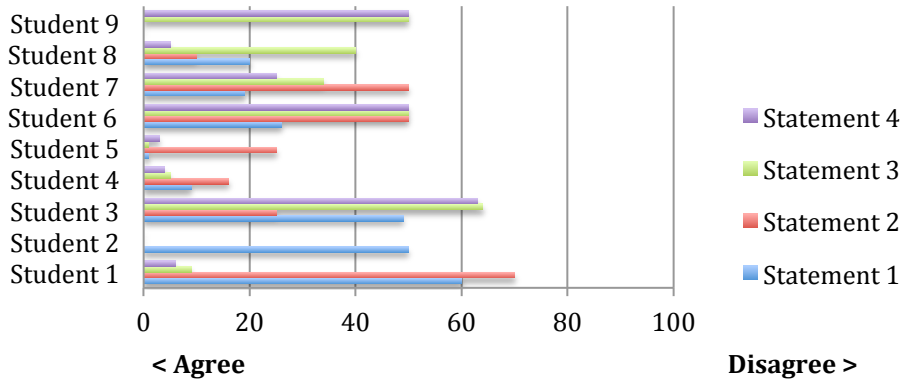
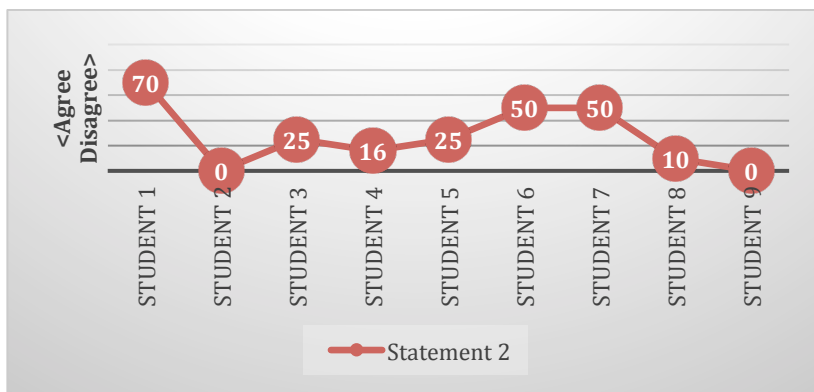
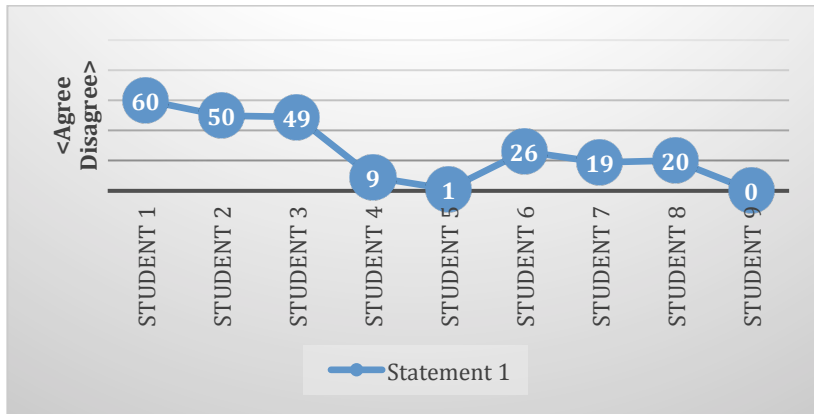


Fig 1.

The following four graphs, Figs. 2-5, collate the nine responses to each of the four questions separately. They illustrate more dramatically how knowledge and confidence levels vary considerably within the group for each question.



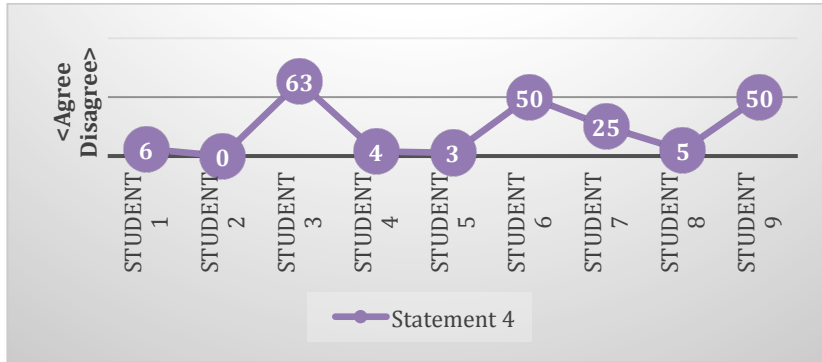
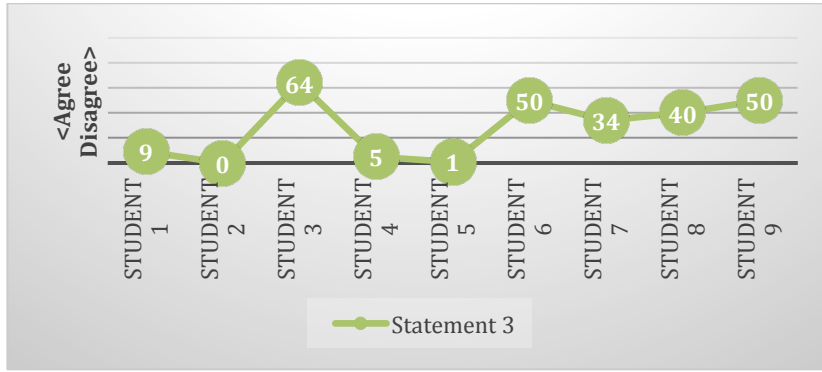
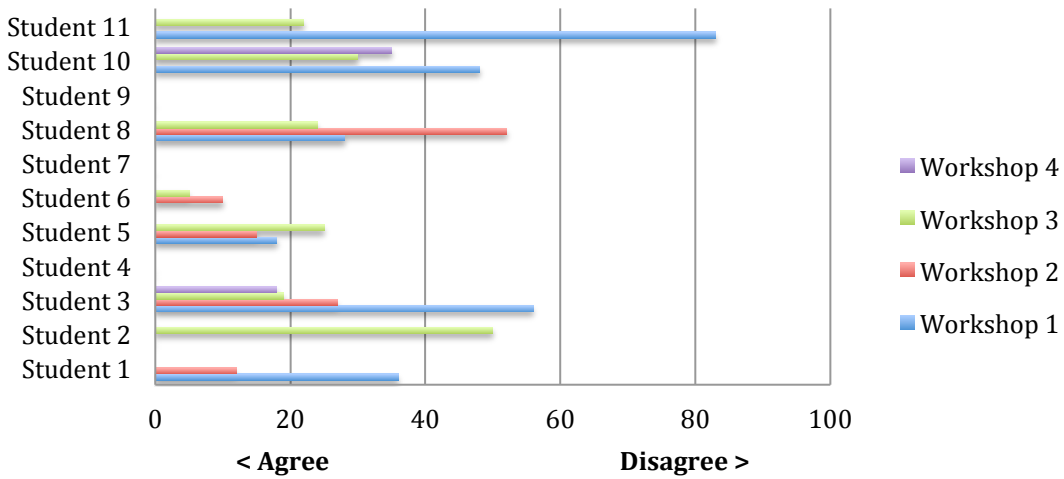
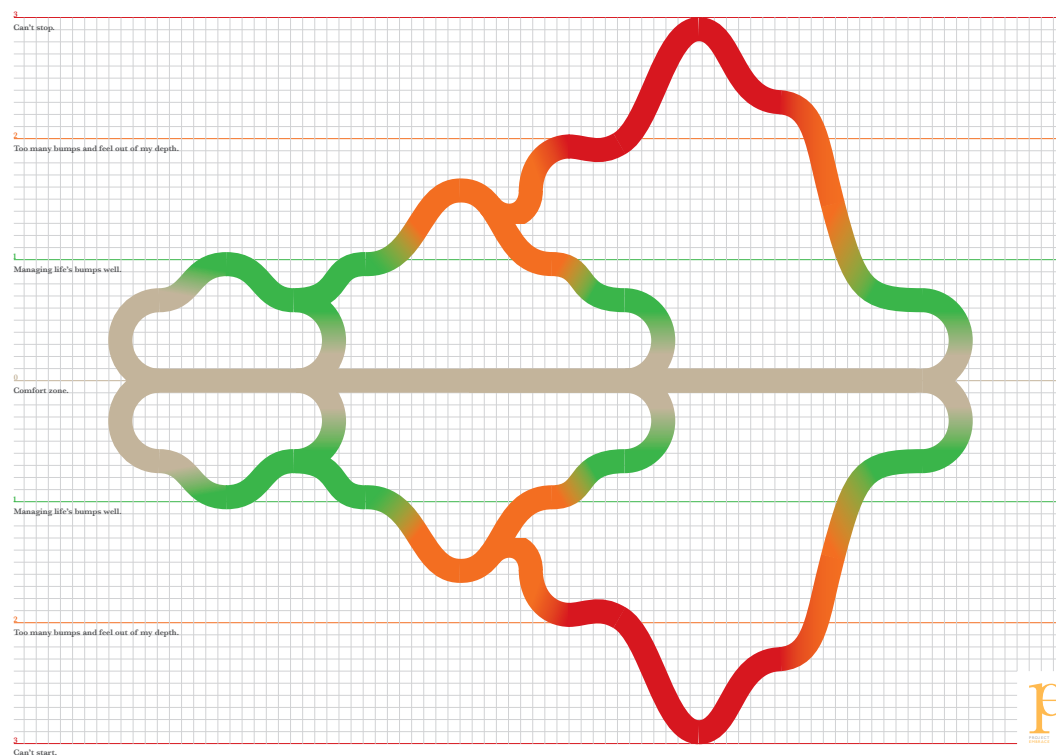


Fig 6
Students were asked after each workshop if they agreed or disagreed that the workshop was useful



Appendix IV



References

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[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664855/Transforming children and young people s mental health provision.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664855/Transforming_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_provision.pdf)

ii HEPI report 88 The Invisible Problem? Improving Students' Mental Health Sept 2016 <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/STRICTLY-EMBARGOED-UNTIL-22-SEPT-Hepi-Report-88-FINAL.pdf>

iii Mental Distress Survey NUS May 2013

<https://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Campaigns/20130517%20Mental%20Distress%20Survey%20%20Overview.pdf>