



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Student Counselling Service

Annual Report 2019-2020

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Service



The Report

This annual report was produced in November 2020 and covers the academic session from August 2019 to July 2020, and up to October 2020.

Contents

1. Summary of the impact of Covid-19 on how the Service operated in 2019/20 focussing on the student experience.
2. Key user statistics
3. Key Performance Indicator – response times
4. Challenges and Opportunities
5. Going Forward

This report can be provided in alternative formats on request.

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“Thank you so much all at the Counselling Service. I am now able to look at my problem with a different perspective. I am able to get over my anxiety and at least know how to deal with it. I am very thankful for my counsellor being patient and helping me look at things in a positive way” Student feedback

1. Summary of the impact of Covid-19 on how the Service operated in 2019/20 focussing on the student experience.

Summary of key developments

- The Service moved to remote delivery and hybrid delivery (counselling now delivered by video, telephone, email and face to face)
- The Service is now at its most accessible, though with some limitations to students overseas depending on location and local licensing laws (e.g.USA)
- The Service's main office and central hub of service delivery relocated from the Main Library to the Health and Wellbeing Centre August 2020
- We will be renewing our BACP Service Accreditation during 2020/21

The Key development for the service in response to the pandemic was a rapid pivot towards developing initially (a) remote service delivery model and subsequently integrating (b) a hybrid delivery model in line with the University's approach to learning and teaching. We did this in a series of steps, all in line with sector best practice, within the guidance from our professional body the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, and within Data Protection requirements to maintain a confidential service.

In response to the developing pandemic, the University's decision to close buildings had a significant impact on the Service, starting with early closure of the Main Library (curtailing our evening service provision at short notice) followed by our other campus centres (Easter Bush, Murchison House, Moray House Lodge, Paterson's Land at Holyrood campus) though we remained open at the Main Library until 23rd March. Ending the evening sessions meant a loss of c.90 appointments per week, and the evening counsellors were unable to return to work until Semester 1 2020/21.

At lockdown we quickly moved to a **Crisis Intervention Model** (the crisis being the pandemic) based on international best practice. The model was based on 30 minute telephone consultations. The Crisis Intervention Model:

1. Telephone triage
2. Identifying the need
3. Assessing risk
4. Establishing existing supports
5. Exploring new supports or coping strategies
6. Signposting
7. Follow up call where appropriate

We contacted all students who were mid-therapy, those who were waiting for a counselling or assessment appointment, and were also able to offer this to new students referring to the service. From lockdown through to the end of semester 2 we conducted 627 telephone

consultation sessions with students using this model, establishing their whereabouts and their immediate needs, and signposting to online services they could access.

The next step was to introduce telephone counselling. Building on existing experience within the team, and in line with BACP guidance, we provided further training to upskill the counselling team in delivering telephone counselling. By the end of semester 2 we had delivered 1080 telephone counselling sessions, and this has continued into the new academic year with 526 sessions having been delivered to end of October 2020.

We had further training for the counselling team in delivering counselling via a video platform (using MS Teams) and following a successful pilot, we had moved to video counselling at the end of the summer vacation. We have conducted 1,125 video sessions to end of October 2020.

Throughout this period we continued to provide asynchronous email counselling and have seen an increase in its use.

Our main centre's relocation from the Main Library to the Health and Wellbeing Centre (already delayed from January and scheduled for 21st March – the weekend of lockdown), took place at the beginning of August. The counselling rooms at Murchison House were open four days per week. Face to face appointments were offered from the end of September. About 10% of our appointments were delivered in person, on campus.

We are working on moving the Skills for Life and Learning psychoeducational programme to be delivered online to be delivered via MS teams.

“Very helpful! I never thought I would get to this point in my mental health and I think counselling has a big part to play in that” Student feedback

2. Key User statistics for 2019/20

- Up to lockdown in March we were on track to experience the same level of demand as in 2018-19 (3880 individual referrals over the year)
- At lockdown demand fell, but picked up again towards the end of semester 2 and summer vacation. By the end of 2019-20 we had **3440** referrals.
- This can be seen as exceptional circumstance, and a similar pattern has been reported in other University Counselling services in the UK and North America. Students were leaving campus to return home and were likely to be focussed on meeting their basic practical needs and returning to the support of their families.
- We had **188** students participate in Skills for Life and Learning (including the CBT groups) in 2019-20.
- There has been no significant change in the issues students present with. Where Covid-19 was mentioned it was as an exacerbating factor rather than the cause of referral.
- The Clinical Outcomes Routine Evaluation (CORE) over 2019/20 saw 66% of all users participating in the evaluation reporting recovery and improvement as a result of brief therapy; for those in a clinical population (i.e. struggling psychologically more than the general population - 90% of service users) the recovery and improvement rate was 72%

“I was apprehensive about counselling at first but after talking to my counsellor it has helped me a lot and I believe it was extremely beneficial” Student feedback

3. Key Performance Indicator

Response times

Referral to Assessment	2019-20	2018-19
1 week	50%	61.5%
2 weeks	16%	27.5%
3 weeks	18%	9%
4 weeks	9%	1%
4+ weeks	7%	1%

Assessment to Counselling	2019-20	2018-19
1 week	31%	35%
2 weeks	18%	17%
3 weeks	7%	6%
4 weeks	6%	6%
4+ weeks	38%	36%

At assessment students are routinely signposted to additional sources of support they can access quickly. The Service’s capacity to maintain or improve on response times was impacted during the course of 2019-20 by (a) staff turnover and recruitment lag, and the delay in moving into the refurbished Health and Wellbeing Centre which would have increased our capacity for staff to work on campus and (b) the impact of Covid-19, lockdown and the need to pivot to remote service delivery.

4. Challenges and Opportunities

- At lockdown, with buildings being closed rapidly and in succession, the move to the Crisis Intervention Model was crucial in us being able to continue to offer support to students already engaging with us and for new referrals.
- There has been a positive transition to delivering telephone counselling and video counselling via Microsoft Teams, with video counselling becoming the most common form of service delivery. The counselling team have adapted well to this different medium of counselling.
- We are able to offer some in person on campus face to face sessions, especially for students who have no privacy at home/poor broadband/ phone connectivity
- We have worked successfully with students at risk throughout the pandemic and period of remote working, including students overseas
- We have continued to offer email counselling and are investing in training in this approach to scale up capacity. We are able to offer email counselling as a therapeutic intervention irrespective of a student’s location overseas
- Students have been appreciative of the variety of provision, and for some they have preferred the flexibility of remote access.
- Despite the impact of Covid-19 and it’s disruption to our capacity to deliver counselling, we largely maintained our response times from assessment to counselling
- We have moved the training (co-facilitated with colleagues from the Student Disability Service) on Understanding and Responding to Student Mental Health online, and have seen an uptake in attendance with continued highly positive feedback about the training

- Building adaptations:
 - (1) Adapting the Health and Wellbeing Centre for in person on campus working had particular challenges, as we were adapting a building that had not been open since its redevelopment. On a positive note all our counselling rooms are big enough to allow for 2m social distancing and we have implemented one way systems, hand sanitising and cleaning protocols and specific guidance for face coverings in the context of therapy sessions. However, the adaptations have meant that we cannot use the Wellbeing Lounge, Quiet Space, Staff tea point or group room facilities as we had hoped.
 - (2) There have been similar adaptations for Student Services accommodation at Murchison House, and I am grateful that the Careers Service have permitted us to use one of their consulting rooms as a potential waiting room.

“Very supportive and understanding environment – great counsellors that adapt support to your specific need.” Student feedback

5. Going Forward

While we hope that in due course there will be a move to a ‘new normal’ and the facilities at the Health and Wellbeing Centre can be used as originally planned, and staff will be able to returning to work on campus, we will continue to be able to offer telephone, video and email counselling to all students. We anticipate the staff training online will continue, to maximise participation, and would be able to provide a mixture of in person and remote psychoeducational groups,

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Director, University Counselling Service

“Thank you for all the support, you are making a difference” Student feedback