



Aldo Murillo/Getty

Mental health at university

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BBC Local News partnership

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Background:

What's the story?

For many young people, going to university is an expectation, almost a rite of passage. It's a time of huge change, taking those first steps into the world of adulthood and independence.

With newfound freedom and fresh pressures away from parents, those changes can pose challenges.

Since 2016, [11 Bristol University students have taken their lives](#) highlighting the importance of mental health support for students.

Are mental health services adequate in UK universities or are young people being failed at a pivotal point?

Our dataset lets you search for information on mental health services for universities in your patch.



Vasyl Dolmatov/Getty

The BBC's Shared Data Unit sent a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to 172 UK universities. Nine were exempt as they were private institutions not subject to FOI and 162 universities responded out of the remaining 163.

This story pack highlights the change over five years in budgets for university mental health services and the changes in numbers of students seeking help with their mental health. The tables in this pack highlight institutions with significant rises and drops in budgets and student numbers.

The accompanying spreadsheet gives specific data for each university in your area on mental health services covering budgets, staffing, service details, student numbers, student demographics and waiting times where available.

It is not possible to compare between universities as the data supplied by each university is different in nature and recorded in various ways.

The images are **not included for use and are subject to copyright.**



Methodology and dataset notes

Universities without five years of complete data have been removed from the analysis looking at budgets and the numbers of students seeking help over the five-year period. This is to ensure the data compares changes over time consistently. Analysis of budgets covers 85 universities and 82 universities are represented in the number of students seeking support.

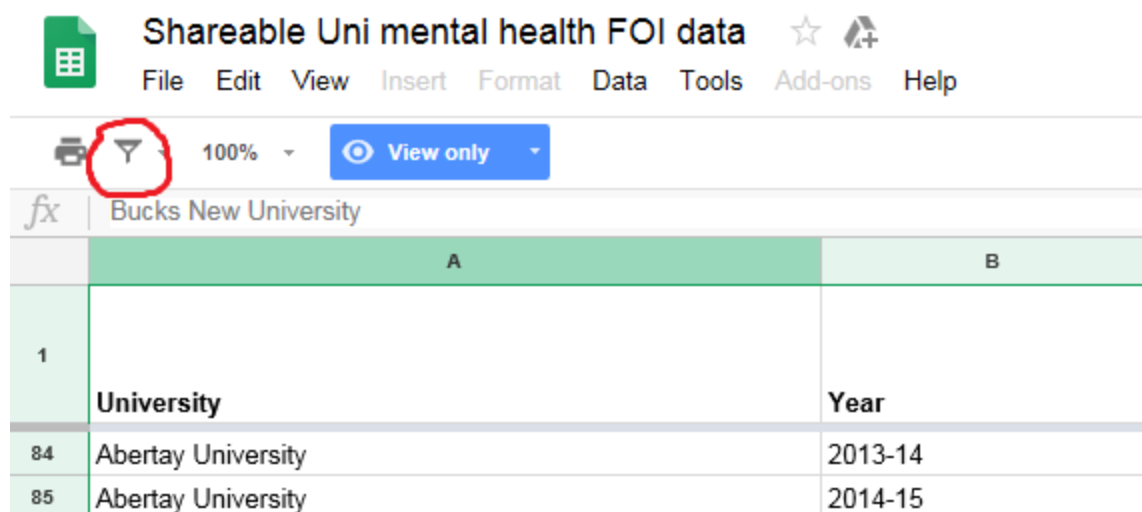
Percentages and totals within the dataset may not add up either to a full 100% or to the totals provided for a year. This is either down to rounded totals, the universities collating data from multiple datasets or students not fully answering demographic questions.

Student population figures were worked out using the [release from the Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#), which is the body responsible for collecting UK wide official education statistics.

How to use the dataset

Please read the first tab of data notes as it contains important information about the data. Not all universities have submitted complete figures or information which is reflected in the dataset. There may also be relevant notes listed in the final notes column.

How to look for universities in your patch:



Shareable Uni mental health FOI data

File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Add-ons Help

100% View only

	A	B
1	University	Year
84	Abertay University	2013-14
85	Abertay University	2014-15

Click on the funnel button circled in red in the image above.

Shareable Uni mental health FOI data ☆ 🗑️

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Step 1 - click on the funnel tab
Step 2 - select 'Create new temporary filter view'

	B	C
1	Year	Number of staff
45	2014-15	1
46	2015-16	1
47	2016-17	3
48	2012-13	9
49	2013-14	9
50	2014-15	8
51	2015-16	9
52	2016-17	9
53	2012-13	4.8

This will bring up the menu above, select 'Create new temporary filter view'.

Click on the inverted green triangle as shown below.

Shareable Uni mental health FOI data ☆ 🗑️

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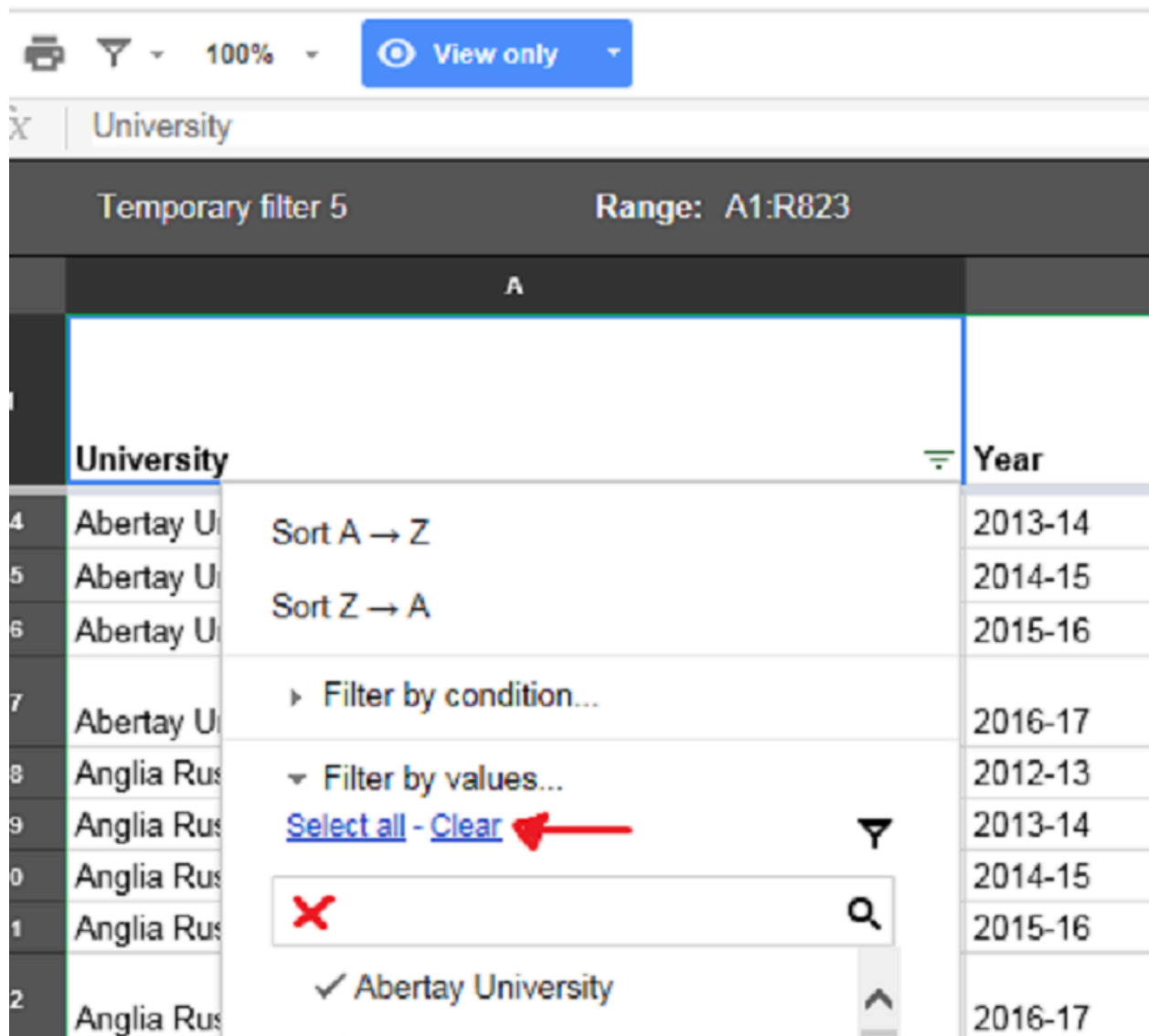
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Aston University

Temporary filter 4 Range: A1:R823


Click here to search and filter for universities in your areas


	A	B	C	D
1	University	Year	Number of staff	Full or part time
84	Abertay University	2013-14	1.8	No data
85	Abertay University	2014-15	1.8	No data
86	Abertay University	2015-16	1.8	No data




Temporary filter 5 Range: A1:R823

	A	
	University	Year
4	Abertay U	2013-14
5	Abertay U	2014-15
6	Abertay U	2015-16
7	Abertay U	2016-17
8	Anglia Rus	2012-13
9	Anglia Rus	2013-14
0	Anglia Rus	2014-15
1	Anglia Rus	2015-16
2	Anglia Rus	2016-17

Filter by values...
[Select all - Clear](#) 



Abertay University 

Click 'Clear' and type the name of the university you want in the box marked X - select it and it will be ticked off. You can add several universities to your ticklist. Select OK and it will bring up information for your selection.

Demographic information:

In the 'Student demographics' tab under the blue age columns as shown below, if it states 'Age categorised differently'- the university has recorded their age ranges which do not fit into the 17-24 and 25+ - the ages of students in this case will be in the tab called 'Age range differences' circled in red.

A	B	C	H	
University	Year	Total	Age 17-24	Age 25+
University College Birmingham	2013-14	194	Age categorised differently	Age cate
University College Birmingham	2014-15	218	Age categorised differently	Age cate
University College Birmingham	2015-16	238	Age categorised differently	Age cate
University College Birmingham	2016-17	301	Age categorised differently	Age cate
Edge Hill University	2012-13	No data	No data	No data
Edge Hill University	2013-14	No data	No data	No data
Edge Hill University	2014-15	No data	No data	No data
Edge Hill University	2015-16	685		417
Edge Hill University	2016-17	826	No data	No data

Navigation: Age over time ▾ Student demographics ▾ **Age range differences** ▾ Student seeking help totals over years ▾

Where it states 'No data' and is circled blue in the image above - it is worth noting that a university may only give partial data throughout the dataset. In the example above, Age data for Edge Hill University is only available for 2016/17.

< Numbers:

Numbers with '<' reflect numbers fewer than the number following it. This is usually used to protect identities, especially in demographic information. The image below shows both <10 (fewer than ten) and <5 (fewer than five) in answers relating to demographics.

In the example here, in the 6th column, the numbers covering one area of demographic information has been provided in chunks which can't be combined in one total.

<10	<10	<10	<5	No data	pg 1,2 18, <10, phd ,5
<10	<10	<10	<10	No data	pg 1,2 18, <10, phd ,5
10	13	<5	<5	No data	pg 1,2 31, 8, phd <5
13	<10	<5	<10	No data	pg 1,2 21, 16 <5 phd
<10		11	<10	No data	pg 1,2 30,17 phd <5
20	14		8	5	0
					5

Colour coding for questions:

B	K	L	M
Year	Number of students accessing other service	Total number seen across services	Student population
2014-15	No data	218	No data
2015-16	No data	238	No data
2016-17	No data	301	4935
2012-13	No data	No data	No data
2013-14	No data	No data	No data
2014-15	No data	No data	No data
2015-16	No data	685	No data

You'll find answers relating to one area will be grouped by colour as above.

Numbers of students accessing services:

The image below shows the number of students seeking help for mental health issues in an academic year. The first column reflects the counselling service and the second column is for other services such as mental health advice. Data isn't available for the counselling service for some years but information is available for the other service and vice versa. The third 'Total number seen' column shows the overall number of students seeking help that year - this may be information for one service only, ie the counselling service or for counselling and another service totalled up.

Number of students accessing counselling	Number of students accessing other service	Total number seen across services
No data	470	470
No data	414	414
No data	328	328
No data	699	699
390	No data	390
405	No data	405

Increases and decreases in analysed data:

Shareable Uni mental health FOI data ☆ ↗

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100% View only

	A	B	C
1	University	Year	Total students seeking support across services
10	Bangor University	2012-13	675
11	Bangor University	2016-17	1194
12	Bishop Grosseteste University	2012-13	60
13	Bishop Grosseteste University	2016-17	135
14	Brunel University	2012-13	719
15	Brunel University	2016-17	1117
16	Bucks New University	2012-13	331
17	Bucks New University	2016-17	270
18	Cranfield University	2012-13	130

Total numbers seeking help % change over time Student demographics Age range differences Stud

For both the 'Total numbers seeking help % change over time' and In the tab - 'Budget changes over time'- universities with notable increases are shown in green and decreases are shown in red.

Our findings



Sam Edwards/Getty

The national picture:

1. In the five academic years from 2012 to 2017, there has been a 53% increase in the numbers of students seeking help for mental health issues from 50,901 to 78,061 (actual figures rather than rounded).
2. The total budget spent on university mental health services has gone up from £25.5m in 2012/13 to £36.6m in 2016/17 which is an increase of 43%.
3. Student population has dropped by 1% in the same five year period.

This will not reflect the complete picture due to some institutions being omitted because of incomplete data. Therefore, numbers and budget increases will be higher but without complete data, solid conclusions covering all universities can't be made.

Budgets and funding:

Of 85 universities out of 163, the national trend shows a 43% increase in funding for mental health services from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

Universities with a drop in budgets over five years

University	Budget overall in 2012/13	Budget overall 2016/17	Budget decrease in % over time
Guildhall School of Music and Drama	£17,269	£10,469	-39%
Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance	£28,000	£17,000	-39%
University of Leicester	£549,328	£412,549	-25%
University of Strathclyde	£148,197	£122,080	-18%
Bucks New University	£147,692	£127,942	-13%
Canterbury Christ Church University	£644,624	£600,944	-7%

Universities who have increased budgets by double or more in five years

University	Budget overall 2012/13	Budget overall 2016/17	Budget increase in % over time	Increased by how much?
Swansea University	£66,271	£268,021	304%	Quadrupled
Falmouth University	£222,346	£869,309	291%	Nearly quadrupled
University of Salford	£76,502	£243,213	218%	Nearly quadrupled
Middlesex University	£123,406	£356,096	189%	Over triple
St Mary's University, Twickenham	£69,500	£197,000	183%	Near triple
University of Suffolk	£51,362	£144,105	181%	Near triple
University of Kent	£238,963	£659,486	176%	Near triple
University of Reading	£549,700	£1,347,396	145.00%	Near triple
Keele University	£158,000	£342,000	116%	Over double
University of Bristol	£426,371	£852,548	100%	Doubled
University of Chichester	£38,000	£76,000	100%	Doubled

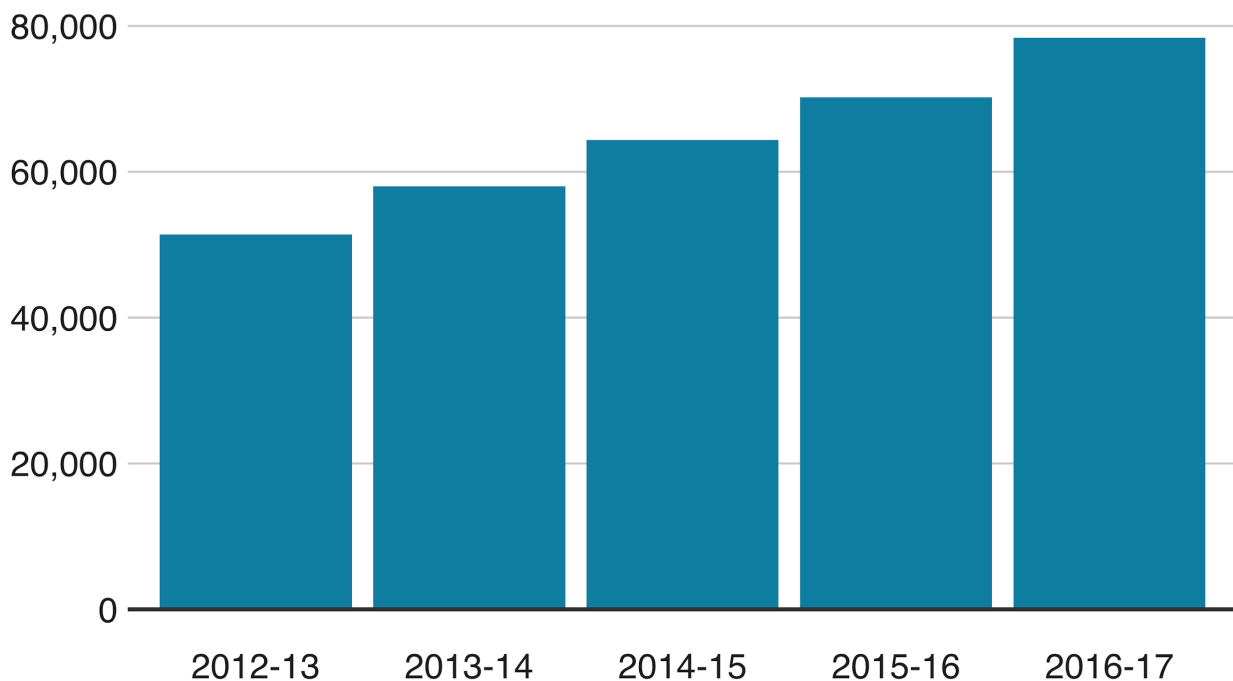
Student numbers

Of 82 universities out of 163, the national trend shows an increase in the number of students seeking help for their mental health from 50,901 in 2012/13 to 78,061 in 2016/17.

In the same period, there has been a 1% decrease in the national UK student population, meaning fewer students are going to university. For each university, there will be differences in student populations - where available, 2016/17 information has been provided in the dataset.

More students seeking mental health support

Number of students who accessed treatment during the year



Source: FOI responses from 82 of 163 universities by the BBC Shared Data Unit **BBC**

High increase in numbers of students seeking help over the five year period:

University	Total students seeking support across services 2012/13	Total students seeking support across services 2016/17	Total seen over time increase or decrease	Increased by how much?
Hartpury College	33	188	469.70%	Over five times
University of Sunderland	185	884	377.84%	More than four fold increase
University of Winchester	117	523	347.01%	More than four fold increase
University of Chester	373	1112	198.12%	Nearly tripled
St Mary's University, Twickenham	168	477	183.93%	Nearly tripled
University of Southampton	142	360	153.52%	More than doubled
University of Warwick	1397	3514	151.54%	More than doubled
University of Exeter	1003	2457	144.97%	More than doubled
Harper Adams University	424	971	129.01%	More than doubled

University	Total students seeking support across services 2012/13	Total students seeking support across services 2012/13	Total seen over time increase or decrease	Increased by how much?
University of Surrey	646	1474	128.17%	More than doubled
Lancaster University	579	1308	125.91%	More than doubled
Bishop Grosseteste University	60	135	125.00%	More than doubled
University of Gloucestershire	433	943	117.78%	More than doubled
University of Worcester	369	785	112.74%	Over double
Sheffield Hallam University	910	1904	109.23%	Just over double
University of Bristol	1375	2827	105.60%	Over double
Southampton Solent University	188	380	102.13%	Just over double
University of Edinburgh	1493	3002	101.07%	Over double

Decrease in numbers of students seeking help over the five year period:

University	Total students seeking support across services 2012/13	Total students seeking support across services 2016/17	Total seen over time increase or decrease
University of Northampton	1144	707	-38.20%
University of Essex	958	670	-30.06%
Cranfield University	130	104	-20.00%
Bucks New University	331	270	-18.43%
University of Leeds	1790	1486	-16.98%
University of East London	1040	1002	-3.65%
Queen Mary London	685	664	-3.07%
Queen's University Belfast	922	914	-0.87%

Student bodies and government comment:

National Union of Students - NUS

Eva Crossan Jory - NUS Vice President (Welfare):

“There is evidence that much of the recent investment into mental health services has been directed towards student wellbeing projects. Although worthwhile, these can be by no means a substitute for much-needed professional counselling services. On many campuses, we hear that these services are chronically overstretched and underfunded.

“Although a greater number of students are attempting to access mental health services, there are still structural issues that present barriers to others. There is a stigma attached to mental health: Figures from Universities UK (UUK) found that 40% of students who had attempted to take their own lives had not come forward before. This suggests a much larger, hidden problem of acute stress that is reaching crisis point. There are also cultural issues, reflecting the diversity of the modern student body, which can be poorly understood and often inadequately accommodated for. It can also be a consequence of policy decisions, such as the PREVENT agenda, which can particularly deter Muslim students from seeking mental health support. How services are perceived can also be a factor: The relationship between university and NHS services is often poorly understood. Solutions often appear to be short-term, and negative experiences of accessing the services they need can deter them in future.

“There is a growth in demand over the last decade, in part, because the reality of studying in the UK has changed so much. Students have far less money in their pockets than in previous years. Many are balancing work, study and caring responsibilities. With fees so high, and the job market so competitive, students feel they have to continually push themselves, perhaps more so than before. Many are chronically sleep deprived and overworked – there is also an increase in reports of loneliness, isolation, depression and anxiety.

“There has been much public discussion about university mental health, however we are yet to see the requisite action. Universities are taking ownership of the issue of student mental health, and a commitment from Vice Chancellors is a step in the right direction. Any initiatives must be based upon proper research involving a diverse range of students, consultation with staff and their trade union, and a willingness to consult with best practice when designing services.

“Cuts to NHS services have led to real-term reductions in professional services available to students. We know that there are students who, through lack of access to a GP, find themselves in A&E. This clearly cannot go on. There needs to be urgent, joined up thinking between

institutions and Government departments to deliver a clear plan of action which should include significant investment. This is now essential before this crisis can escalate.”

Universities UK (UUK)

Advocacy organisation for universities in the UK

“Universities take seriously their duty of care to students and staff. We are proud of the work done by student support and welfare services around the country.

“But we know that universities cannot address these complex challenges alone. In particular, as set out in our recent [report](#), we are working to improve the links with local health services. As the UK government details its 10 year funding plan for the NHS, we urge them to consider the particular health needs of the 2.3 million students across the UK.

“With fifty per cent of school leavers now entering higher education, our mentally healthy universities will play a leading role in supporting a generation of young adults to thrive and succeed.”

Student Minds

UK student mental health charity

“We need to see an increase in funding not only for the provision of support in services, but also to support the partnerships between student support services and other aspects of the university such as academic departments, accommodation and activities to promote mental health literacy. Improving student mental health lies in a whole university approach, which looks holistically at all aspects of the student experience.

“All aspects of the university experience must be supportive to students' mental health, through supporting the transition into university, maintaining good wellbeing during studies, providing support for mental health difficulties and being responsive in a crisis. Key to this approach is ensuring that young people have agency, whilst empowering the community around them to have the health literacy and tools to respond. Universities must ensure students have access to timely, youth-friendly support and resources.

“A range of support that is appropriate for students needs must exist and be widely communicated at university. Students identify that the fear of being judged, and the worry that mental health may be seen as a weakness can impact on their ability to seek help. Universities must work to dispel the stigma associated with mental health difficulties. All members of staff at a university must be able to signpost students to relevant support. For this to be effective, three conditions must exist:

1. The student must be able to identify that they need and may benefit from support.
2. The student must be able to identify, understand and access the relevant support service.
3. The student must believe that the support service can help to improve their situation.

“So for university staff to be able to facilitate students to access support, they must:

1. Be able to identify when a student is experiencing problems that would benefit from support.
2. Be aware of and able to identify services to students and explain how they can be accessed.
3. Be able to outline how and why a service could help a student and encourage enough hope to motivate the student to access support.

“This can be achieved through a whole university approach that creates a vision for all staff and students of a campus where all are given the opportunity to thrive, and supports staff accordingly.

“As the IPPR, Not By Degrees report says "As numbers have grown, the student population increasingly resembles the wider young adult population in its diversity and characteristics. Support within universities and NHS services needs to build from a nuanced understanding of the differing identities and characteristics of individual students.

“In the wider young adult population, there is a rise in common mental disorders, driven particularly by increased depression and anxiety in young women. Work is being done to further understand what is distinctive about the student mental health experience, by the new [Student Mental Health Research Network](#).

“The University Mental Health Charter will recognise and reward those institutions that demonstrate good practice, make student and staff mental health a university-wide priority and deliver improved student mental health and wellbeing outcomes. In 2017, Student Minds took part in the Universities UK (UUK) led programme to develop a strategic framework - ‘Step

Change', aiming to encourage more universities to take a 'whole-university approach' to student wellbeing. With the support of Student Minds and UUK, a pilot implementation programme (funded by The OFS) is now reviewing this framework and the process of developing a university-wide mental health strategy at Cardiff, York and UWE.

“We are much encouraged by the progress being made on this issue over the last decade, and the Charter will be an important tool to support cultural change in universities for students, university staff and their local communities.”

Department for Education:

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah:

“Since I have been in post, I have made student mental health one of my top priorities and I have heard first-hand from both students and institutions about the challenges they have faced in this area. Students invest a considerable amount of money through university fees and should rightly expect mental health support in return should they need it. This isn't about a set figure being spent on wellbeing services – universities must be responsive to the needs of every student.

“To make sure this happens, leadership from the top is vital and student mental health must be a priority – there is no negotiation on this.

“University is supposed to be an assault on the senses. It should be demanding and disorientating, and with that should come adequate pastoral care for students. This does not mean mollycoddling or cushioning students from the experiences that are part and parcel of university life, it means making sure support services are available if they need them.

“In recent years we have seen more cases of people reporting poor mental health. This is, in part, because the stigma surrounding mental health issues is diminishing and people now feel more comfortable to disclose their struggles. Getting individuals to admit to suffering from poor mental health is, however, just one half of the battle; the other is ensuring we have the services in place to support them.”

The Department of Health was approached for comment but did not provide a response.