



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Student Counselling Service

Annual Report 2021-2022

Ronnie Millar

Director



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Service



The Report

This annual report covers the academic session from August 2021 to July 2022.

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This report can be provided in alternative formats on request.

Student Counselling Service, Health and Wellbeing Centre, 7 Bristo Square
Telephone: 0131 650 4170 Email: Student.Counselling@ed.ac.uk



"I have had extremely positive experiences with student counselling. I would have no hesitation recommending the service to other students and would assure them of the judgement free, supportive and highly professional service I received." Student feedback

1. Summary of Key Developments

Doing New things

There were two specific innovations within the service in response to increased demand, and the return of students on campus.

1. **Same Day Appointments.** To increase capacity for an initial quick contact with a member of the counselling team we introduced Same Day appointments over the last academic year. Three appointments were available each day, Monday to Friday. These are bookable, but only on the day, and can be in-person or by MS Teams. These 20-minute appointments offer a brief helpful conversation to explore students' issues causing difficulty or distress and look at the next best steps to take. They are aimed at students who may be unsure of what, where or how to gain support and feel the need to talk to someone quickly. They are not available to students already receiving support from, or who have submitted an online self-referral form to, the Student Counselling Service.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling/services/same-day-appointments>

Over the course of the academic year 2021-22, we offered 440 Same Day Appointments of which 116 were used.

2. **Partnership with ProblemShared** - in response to the significant increase in demand and the subsequent challenges to response times, we obtained additional resources to procure the services of ProblemShared <https://www.problemshared.net/> to provide increased remote counselling capacity at peak times of demand. We started offering students sessions through Problem Shared from mid-March. The criteria for referring student to ProblemShared are:
 - Students agree to remote counselling and to the referral
 - Students are not assessed as being at risk
 - Students are living in the UK

About 30% students chose to accept the offer, while 70% wanted to wait for SCS. We initially had resourcing for c.100 students to have counselling through Problem Shared, and reached this before the end of semester 2. Further funding was made available for a further 100 students.

3. In collaboration with the University's Records Management Section (RMS) we developed a **Freedom of Information Frequently asked Questions** page on our website <https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling/about/freedom-of-information-frequently-asked-questions> This was in response to increasing numbers of FOI requests, many asking for the same or similar information. In 2019-20 we had 43 individual, multi-question FOI requests, averaging c.7 hours' work per request to answer. We now pre-publish answers to FAQs which are updated quarterly or annually, and which RMS can refer to, reducing workload. In 2020-21 there were 22 individual FOI requests that required a tailored response.

“Counselling gave me the tools to better cope with my depression and anxiety, depressive episodes have decreased, nightmares have almost completely gone, suicidal thoughts have gone, better self-esteem and helped with trauma massively.” Student feedback

In person counselling activity has been available on campus in the Health and Wellbeing Centre from September 2020, but over the past year we have extended this provision across four sites (HWBC, Holyrood campus, Kings Buildings and Easter Bush Veterinary Centre), with clinical staff working a minimum of 60% of their time on campus. Our evening counselling provision continued to be delivered remotely. 85% of student users were looking for on campus in-person sessions.

We offered a full programme of our **Skills for Life and Learning** psychoeducational workshops online, which saw increased uptake. 24 sessions were offered each semester. These were generally oversubscribed, but with an average attendance of 9 per workshop. The sessions have received very positive feedback from those attending the workshops. In total there were **431** attendances with the most popular being workshops on procrastination, anxiety, perfectionism and imposter syndrome. From the workshop evaluations the overall satisfaction rate is **90%**.

We were able to hold two on campus in-person **PAWS against stress** therapy events again in March/April. **143** students attended over the 2 days at events on Central campus and Kings Buildings. **91%** of participants reported feeling less stressed after attending the sessions.

SilverCloud online CBT modules: the option to use SilverCloud is part of our Matched Care model of service delivery. Students can access SilverCloud directly or can be supported in working through the modules after assessment by the counselling team, as an alternative to counselling sessions. **658** students have worked on SilverCloud unsupported and **101** have worked on SilverCloud supported by a counsellor, an increase in supported use from 69 in the previous year to 101. The most popular modules are ‘Space from Depression and Anxiety’ followed by ‘Space from Anxiety’. **89%** of users agree or strongly agree the modules are interesting, relevant and helpful.

The **Wellbeing Lounge** in the Health and Wellbeing Centre was opened to students from September 2021, and is well used, mainly for quiet study space.

Students continue to make good use of the digital support available via **Togetherall** and the **Feeling Good App**.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling/self-help/togetherall>

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling/self-help/apps-podcasts-ted-talks-relaxation-recordings/feeling-good-app>

“I would really like to just say thank you as just a few months ago I had been suicidal but just having someone to talk to every week gave me so much relief and has really built my confidence back up to voice my needs and work through anxiety - I feel so much more able to concentrate and improve my academic work because my personal foundation is strong. It's improved my experience at university as counselling increased my confidence meaning I've made friends which continues to give me a support network in a city i didn't feel at home in before.” Student feedback

2. Key User statistics for 2021/22

Overall the number of students accessing the service for assessment and/or counselling increased by **31% to 4397**. This was the busiest year in the Service's 52 year history.

- There was no significant change in the issues students present with.
- We did see an increase in the number of students presenting as being at the highest levels of risk of suicide or significant self-harm to 472 students (up 7.25% on 2020/21). We have also seen an increase in the number of students presenting as survivors of sexual or gender based violence, **likely linked to the introduction of Report and Support and the establishment of the Equally Safe Team** Students in these categories are regarded as needing urgent support, but this can have an impact on other student populations who may have to wait longer for appointments.
- Students presented with a range of issues, but there were changes in proportion of the most common issues:

2021/22	Anxiety 33%	Depression 16%	Academic 8%	Abuse 8%	Relationships 7%	Self and Identity 7%
2020/21	Anxiety 31%	Depression 20%	Academic 17%	Abuse 5%	Relationships 6%	Self and Identity 10%

The profile of student users of the Service remains consistent with previous years: male 25% female 75%; UG 64% PGT 24% PGR 12%; UK 57.5% International 43.5%

Service Evaluation

We continued our Service Evaluation online. Feedback is in line with previous evaluations: Students rate the service very highly in terms of the Service being informative, approachable, responsive, and accessible, and where dissatisfaction is expressed, it is in relation to the experience of waiting times.

The online evaluation includes the **Clinical Impact on Academic Outcomes (CIAO)**:

To what extent would you say that counselling...	2020-21	2021-22
Helped you stay at University?	68%	74%
Helped you do better in your academic work?	87%	64%
Improved your overall experience of University?	92%	77%
Helped you develop skills that might be useful in obtaining future employment?	89%	81%

CIAO responses vary annually based on individual student concerns.

"I think everyone should seek out help if they need it, particularly when taking part in a rigorous course of study. It's been a highlight of the last few months for me, as I would come away from each session feeling much better than going into them. I've been really impressed by the quality of the care I received in my sessions" Student feedback

3. Key Performance Indicator

Key Performance Indicator – Response Times

Referral to Assessment	2021-22	2020-21	Assessment to Counselling	2021-22	2020-21
1 week	53%	49%	1 week	31%	28%
2 weeks	10%	15%	2 weeks	20%	20%
3 weeks	5%	13%	3 weeks	7%	8%
4 weeks	5%	9%	4 weeks	6%	5%
4+ weeks	27%	14%	4+ weeks	36%	39%

Despite the significant increase in demand over 2021-22, averaging 130 new referrals per week in semester one and 100 per week in semester two, we were able to improve our response time for the offer of assessment appointments within one week, to just over half of new referrals, and marginally improved the percentage of students being offered a first counselling appointment within our Key Performance Indicator of 4 weeks. However, the number of students waiting longer than 4 weeks for assessment increased. At the assessment, appointment students are signposted to other forms of support that they can access immediately.

Generally, waiting times for appointments vary widely across the year and are dependent on a number of variables including such factors as student-stated availability for appointments (which can be very limited or very open), students choosing to wait longer than we are able to respond; students' stated preference to work with a certain type of counsellor or model of counselling; the triage process and level of failed appointments.

"I would have failed out of University without the help of the counselling service" Student feedback" Student feedback

4. Challenges and Opportunities

What has worked well

- Staff flexibility over hybrid working (in-person on campus, location and the complexities in hybrid delivery)
- Co-facilitating the Understanding and Responding to Student Mental Health training for staff online with Student Disability Service colleagues continued to work well over the course of the year, with an uptake in attendance and highly positive feedback about the training
- Partnership working with Problem Shared: as third party providers working remotely they are able to offer quick access to counselling for students already assessed and meeting the criteria, and in a greater range of languages.

"Brief therapy can be life changing and for people who are open to help and already moving in the right direction it can provide invaluable advice that can make the greatest difference." Student feedback

What worked less well

- Challenges to recruitment: we were not able to fill the vacancies we had for sessional counselling staff with applicants who had the requisite training and experience we require. We are not unique in this experience, as it is being reported by other counselling services in the sector. Exploring the option of agency counsellors with a sector leading Recruitment Agency ultimately proved unfruitful.
- Project with Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre: the project, funded to October 2022, by the four Edinburgh universities, whereby ERCC would allocate a specific counsellor to work with University students in deliver longer term counselling for students who had received trauma informed counselling via University services, has not been successful. ERCC was not able to meet the service level agreement.

“The counsellor I saw was incredibly helpful, she was really easy to talk to and very direct but still kind. Really surpassed my expectations of the kind of counselling I could receive from the university which is why I would recommend it to other students.” Student feedback

5. Going Forward

Going forward into 2022/23, we will continue with:

1. Remote delivery of evening appointments
2. Same Day Appointments
3. Developing Skills for Life and Learning
4. Investigate further procurement of ProblemShared or other third-party provider to enhance capacity at peak times of demand.

We will work with the new Deputy Secretary, Students on a review of the KPIs and service generally with regards to waiting times and Student expectations. The Deputy Secretary, Students and Director of Student Wellbeing will also look at wider cross-Edinburgh partnerships with other HEIs and the NHS, following other models piloted in the UK.

Ronnie Millar LLB DipLP BD PgDip MBACP (Accred)

Director of Counselling Services

“I felt I was well understood by my therapist and she was extremely helpful in my time of need. Every single staff member I interacted with was so lovely and comforting. The process was easy to follow and the service was very understanding and accommodating to any location requests, daytime availability etc.” Student feedback