



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Student Counselling Service

Annual Report 2022-2023

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Director



The Report

This annual report covers the academic session from August 2022 to July 2023.

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This report can be provided in alternative formats on request.

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“The service was excellent and it really targeted my needs. I am hugely grateful to the therapist who helped me see a better way of dealing with things”
Student feedback

A. Summary of the impact of activities from the previous academic year on the student experience and how these contribute to the University’s Strategy.

1. **Remote delivery of evening appointments** continued during 2022-23. Despite the challenges to recruitment experienced in 2021-22, we were able to fill the vacancies we had for sessional counselling staff with applicants who had the requisite training and experience we require. We recruited from a wider pool of applicants from across the country interested in working remotely. The service delivered c1200 evening appointments over 2022-23.
2. **Same Day Appointments** have continued, with usage increasing by 18%.
3. The Skills for Life and Learning programme delivered 48 psychoeducational workshops (2 per week) across both semesters on 12 topics, most repeated 2 to 3 times each semester. New workshops were introduced: **Up-Write Yourself: An Expressive Writing Workshop** and **Overcoming Social Anxiety**.
4. **Further procurement of Problem Shared** has not been required as we still have capacity for additional counselling provision available from the funding in 2021-22.
5. In the light of the improvement of response times, reviewed on a monthly basis, our **KPI for response times has remained unchanged**.
6. **NHS partnership working**: an information sharing protocol between NHS Lothian and Edinburgh Universities was agreed. This has improved the ability and willingness for NHS staff to share information (mainly from the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Mental Health

Assessment Service, Psychiatric Liaison at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, Community Mental Health teams and GPs) through secure shared NHS email accounts made available to the Student Mental Health Coordinator and our clinical managers. This facilitates our capacity to work with students, Schools, Colleges and Residence Life, to ensure that appropriate support is provided for students, especially those being discharged from hospital.

7. **SFC funding** for three fulltime counsellors on three-year fixed term contracts was due to end this year. The Scottish Government has provided additional funding for c70% of the cost for an additional year, but the University has committed sufficient funding to move these staff onto open ended contracts.

How we link to the University's Strategy 2030

As a professional counselling service, and an integral part of the University's student wellbeing provision, we reflect the University's Strategy 2030 particularly in our values and people.

Values

- We aim to achieve excellence in all that we do, always being principled, considerate and respectful.
- We are ambitious, bold and act with integrity, always being willing to listen.
- We foster a welcoming community.
- We are a place of transformation and of self-improvement, driven to achieve benefit for individuals, communities, societies and our world.

People

- We continue to welcome and bring together people from a wide range of backgrounds and experience, both close to home and across the globe.
- We encourage and take care of one another. We will provide support in times of difficulty and celebrate every success. We will build relationships that are mutually beneficial and constructive.
- We value the contribution of every individual, regardless of whether they are students, staff or other contributors. We support each other's development and career progress.
- We set an example for others by conducting ourselves with integrity, transparency, honesty and clarity.
- We are open to change to best support the academic mission of the University and ensure we have policies and procedures that are people focused, efficient and effective.

“From the initial form on the website to arranging a consultation online (via email and on teams) the whole process was simple and accessible. The overall experience was very supportive. Everyone involved is very kind and considerate”
Student feedback

B. Measures of Success

Reflection on user engagement and feedback, service use, partnership working and externality.

The Service gathers evaluations and feedback on three activities:

1. We send all students who have had one or more appointments with counselling an online evaluation form.
2. We invite feedback from the online Skills for Life and Learning workshops
3. We get hard copy feedback from the Paws Against Stress/Therapy dogs events we run.

All our evaluations are anonymised, with general feedback given via our published Annual Reports [student-counselling-annual-reports](#) and FOI FAQ page [student-counselling FOI FAQs](#)

2022-23 Service Evaluation results based on 45% return rate

Student feedback on their experience of contact with the Service. Students found the Service

- Informative – 96.5%
- Approachable – 97%
- Responsive - 97%
- Accessible- 94%

Experience of waiting times for service

Waiting time experienced	Too short	Just right	Too long
From self-referral to initial appointment	1%	70%	18%
From initial appointment to counselling	nil	60%	31%

" I feel that counselling has given me a lot of support and confidence that I have never had before in my life, it was very helpful to receive professional support on behalf of the university. My counsellor was fab and she truly gave me important guidance I can use to heal from trauma in the past. I would recommend the service to anybody who needs it."

Student feedback

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

To what extent would you say that counselling...	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Helped you stay at university?	68%	74%	77%
Helped you do better in your academic work?	87%	64%	69%
Improved your overall experience of university?	92%	77%	84%
Helped you develop skills that might be useful in obtaining future employment?	89%	81%	84%

CIAO responses vary annually based on individual student concerns.

Skills for Life and Learning evaluation summary

- 92% rated content and style of presentation was good/very good
- 92% would recommend SLL workshops to other students
- Top three benefits gained from the workshops: 'new ideas', improved knowledge and understanding' and 'refreshment of existing skills and knowledge'.
Most useful/positive aspects of the workshops: 'sharing with others'/'acknowledgement of not being alone' 'finding out that there are people who have the same struggles', 'ability to bond with other students who feel the same and share our stories'; 'practical tips/'coping mechanisms'
- The counsellors presenting the workshops were often noted for making the session 'relatable', creating a 'safe' space, being 'engaging' and 'motivational'

Paws Against Stress/Therapy events evaluation

- 99% felt strongly or very strongly it acted as a useful break from study
- 99% would do again
- 99% would recommend it
- 86% felt less stress after the event
- Best thing about it was interaction with dogs (36%), followed by interaction with dog+handler (28%)

Reflecting on evaluation and feedback, students clearly express a range of satisfaction and positive outcomes from their experience of the Service. Where dissatisfaction continues to be expressed is on (a) response times and the length of wait for services and (b) the number of sessions available through the brief therapy model of delivery. There is no 'one size fits all' number of sessions, and within the context of brief therapy sessions are arranged on the basis of assessed need. There is a strong evidence base for positive outcomes through brief therapy, and as the University is a Higher Education Provider, not a Mental Health Provider our services are aimed at supporting students through their programmes of study. We are not attempting to replace or make up for shortfalls of NHS services.

C. Analysis of service use

Students accessing the service:

1. 3533 New referrals (down 11% on 2021-22)
2. 175 Students attended Same Day Appointments
3. 440 attendances at SLL workshops
4. 102 students were seen by the Student Mental Health Coordinator
5. 250 students attended four Paws Against Stress events across the central campus and Kings Buildings.
6. The profile of student users of the Service remains consistent with previous years (2021-22 in brackets):
 - male 25%/female 75% (no change)
 - UG 61% (60%) PGT 27% (27%) PGR 12% (13%)
 - UK 48% (50.4%) International 52% (49.6%)

International students using the Counselling service were from 110 different nationalities.

Two student groups that persistently under present are male students and Chinese students. Male students form 38% of the student population. Studies have shown that 40-41% of men in a general population will not talk to anyone about mental health concerns or seek support when they need it. We welcome efforts across the University community to encourage early help seeking behaviour, and reduce stigma, especially when aimed at male students. Our information page for male students is recognised as an example of best practice <https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling/help/male-students> Chinese students are proportionally underrepresented in the user population, however the proportion of Chinese students using the service grew again to 16.8%. We collaborate with other services and the Chinese Students and Scholars Association in producing information leaflets about student services in Chinese.

However, for both these populations, there are complex reasons why both under present related to culture and the prevalence of common mental health problems being disproportionately experienced by young women in the general population.

” Counselling has helped me to feel more settled at university and happier. It was good to receive counselling because it made my problems and their repercussions on my performance and attendance at uni feel valid. Before this I thought there was no way for someone in my situation to gain back the necessary energy and motivation to do uni.” Student feedback

Students presented with a range of issues, but with no significant changes in the proportion of the most common issues:

2022/23	Anxiety 29%	Depression 15%	Academic 9%	Abuse 6%	Relationships 8%	Self and Identity 8%
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%

Key Performance Indicator – Response Times

Referral to Assessment	2022-23	2021- 22	2020-21	Assessment to Counselling	2022- 23	2021-22	2020-21
1 week	64%	53%	49%	1 week	28%	31%	28%
2 weeks	22%	10%	15%	2 weeks	24%	20%	20%
3 weeks	9%	5%	13%	3 weeks	23%	7%	8%
4 weeks	3%	5%	9%	4 weeks	9%	6%	5%
4+ weeks	2%	27%	14%	4+ weeks	26%*	36%	39%

*Although the percentage of students waiting longer than four weeks reduced, the period of wait that this reflects also reduced. In 2022-23, this ranged from 5 to 7 weeks, mainly arising in semester two (following the University closure period over the winter break). In 2021-22, the wait over four weeks ranged from 5 to 16 weeks.

Students continue to make good use of the digital supports available:

Togetherall 812 registrations over the year

SilverCloud 605 users

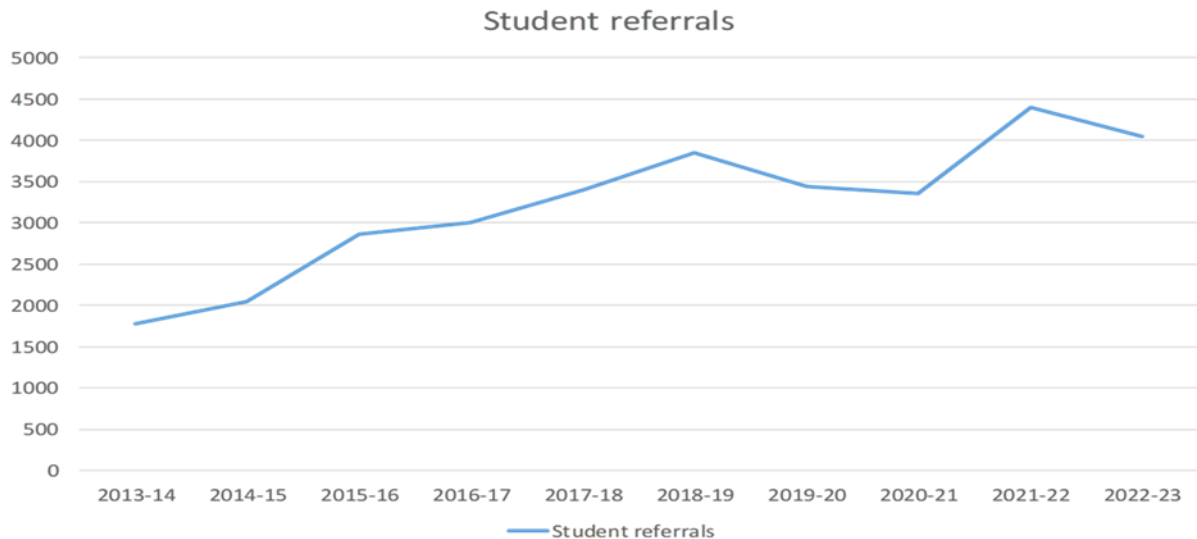
Feeling Good App 384 student users

Counselling Outcomes

Severity Rating	Pre-Counselling (recorded at initial appointment)	Post-Counselling (recorded at last counselling session)
Mild – ranges from normal issues of living to issues having a negative but limited impact	4%	36%
Moderate - experiencing anxiety and distress, affecting one or more areas of functioning significantly.	70%	59%
Severe - severe anxiety and distress affecting all areas of functioning; limited coping; may self-harm; acting out; hopelessness; overwhelmed; suicidal thoughts/intent.	26%	5%

” I was always hesitant to take up counselling. I had preconceived notions on what it would be like. However, I unfortunately experienced some really traumatic things and it became necessary, I can say – without a doubt – counselling saved my life. I was treated with the greatest respect and kindness. I would urge everyone to take the help available if they need it.” Student feedback

Overall trend of student referrals/usage* of SCS ten-year view:



*Includes new referrals and attendances at psycho-educational activities

Reflection on user analysis and outcomes:

- The overall trend of demand on the service is upwards. The significant increase in referrals over 2021-22 is likely to be related to the anticipated wave of anxiety and poor mental health within the population in general (and student population in particular) post COVID.
- KPI response times improved as outlined above.
- Pre and post counselling severity ratings demonstrates the positive impact of the service on the student experience.
- The wide range of services provided by or through the Student Counselling service are well used, enhancing the accessibility of mental health and wellbeing support available to students

Partnership working: with Schools, Colleges and other services

Our primary role in collaborating with Schools and Colleges is in responding to student referrals, often prompted or encouraged by School staff. Our secondary role is through offering advice and consultation to staff in relation to escalation of concerns about students, which is delivered by our clinical management team (Director and Assistant Directors) and the Student Mental Health Coordinator (mental health nurse) through individual consultations case conferences and Support for Study panels.

Over the course of the year we (a) contributed to the training of new Student Advisers and Wellbeing Advisers and (b) collaborated with both Student Advisers, Wellbeing Advisers and the new Student Wellbeing Service as a whole, in sharing appropriate information and providing joined up support for students on a case-by-case basis.

We maintain our link with the Vet School, who fund the delivery of counselling one afternoon per week at the Easter Bush campus.

In collaboration with colleagues in the Disability and Learning Support Service we co-facilitated the Student Mental Health training aimed at academic and student support staff to 200 staff over the year.

Members of the Counselling Service team provided non managerial supervision /reflective practice support to staff of the Chaplaincy and the Equally Safe Team.

Our collaboration with Problem Shared continued over 2022-23. A total of 108 students used 385 counselling sessions. Five students accessed the provision to receive counselling in Mandarin.

The Director collaborated with Rebecca Shade, Senior Policy and Project Adviser in Student Experience Services, and Jackie Williams (Charlie Waller Memorial Trust) in the production of an animation explaining the enhanced support available to students as a result of the Cost-of-Living Crisis

The Director meets regularly, three times per week, with the Director of Student Wellbeing, and the Heads of DLSS, Student Wellbeing Service, Chaplaincy, the Senior Policy Adviser and the Head of Residence Life as required, to share information on our services and to coordinate our support for students presenting with escalated concerns.

We work closely with colleagues in the Equally Safe Team, and provide the team with administration support.

Dr Jenny Leeder, Assistant Director, collaborated with colleagues in the School of Health in Social Science on the Paws on Campus project [Paws-on-campus](#) and also delivers training on breaking bad news to patients to the students on the BSc Oral Health Sciences programme in Edinburgh Dental Institute.

Externality

BACP Accreditation

Since 2006, the Service has had Accredited Service status awarded by the BACP. The BACP Service Accreditation Scheme provides status and validation for the accredited service, and provides robust evidence of service quality and professionalism. BACP accreditation demonstrates that an organisation offers an ethical and professional counselling service for clients, staff, volunteers and stakeholders. In addition, accredited services are bound by the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions. All BACP Accredited Services have demonstrated a high quality of service delivery, meeting benchmark standards that are maintained by annual monitoring and reporting.

The Service successfully met all criteria for our BACP Accredited Service Annual Rolling review. The assessor commented: "Thank you for your considered responses to all of the criteria which are fully met in this review. The University of Edinburgh are clearly continuing to offer a grounded, professional service to staff and students. Well done and we look forward to your next Annual Rolling review."

The University of Edinburgh is one of 12 UK Universities whose counselling services are accredited by the BACP (the only one in Scotland), and we are one of only two counselling services in Scotland to be accredited.

At the 2022 St Andrew's Day Graduation Ceremony, the Director and the Student Counselling Service team were awarded a Principal's medal in honour and recognition of the

Student Counselling Service Team's consistent and excellent compassionate service to students and the wider University community.

The Service takes part in the activities of Heads of University Counselling Services (HUCS) and HUCS Scotland. The Director is also a member of the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD), and is able to benchmark service activities with similar services in North American universities. Participation in the annual conference of AMOSSHE also allows for networking and exploring best practice in counselling and student support in general.

D. Staff development activity

The Service has a Staff Training Policy which meets our BACP Service Accreditation requirements.

All our staff undertake a range of mandatory trainings provided by the University.

All our counselling staff are qualified, experienced counsellors who are registered and/or accredited by the BACP or equivalent professional bodies. As a BACP Accredited Service we work to the Ethical Framework, and counsellors are required to have a minimum of 30 hours CPD per year. This is tailored to the development needs of individual counsellors.

It is difficult to demonstrate the overall impact of staff development on the experience of students, but what we can demonstrate is that our team are developed to maintain and enhance their skills in working to the highest standards with the student population.

In May 2023 our annual Training Day was "Autists In and Out of the Therapy room". The trainer was Max Marnau – a former member of our counselling staff and an autistic counsellor who now has a private practice working with neurodivergent and neurotypical clients.

During the year, two of our administration staff undertook training in BSL.

E. Opportunities and Enhancements

Reflection on service, changes, new ways of working and efficiencies.

Overall, this has been a successful year with significant achievements by and recognition of the Service and the team.

As noted above our KPI response times improved over the previous two years. Although we did have 11% fewer referrals, we also had a large number of students who had referred at the end of the previous academic year and who had sessions delivered in 2022-23, not included in the number of new referrals.

Extending the Skills for Life and Learning workshops, both in range and frequency, has increased the opportunities to access psychoeducation, which is both proactive and preventative support.

SDA uptake improved by 18%. 89 of those students seen on the day required no further support from the Service.

Our FOI FAQ page continues to reduce the amount of time spent on responding to FOI requests. FOIs requiring specific responses were down by 32% to 15.

With the roll out of the new Student Support model, and the launch of the Student Wellbeing Service, our collaboration with Wellbeing Advisers and Student Advisers has gone well. We signpost students to these teams, and have made referrals to the Student Wellbeing Service as appropriate, as well as responding to requests for information, advice or discussion from these teams.

We were able to recruit successfully to the vacancies that arose across the year.

Finance processes through People and Money proved to be complicated and delayed which had a negative impact on our suppliers and the resource required from our administration team.

Our top priorities are as follows:

1. Consolidation of the team, and the leadership team in particular. Over the past year we have experienced turnover on our management team, through retiral and change of work responsibilities, and to a lesser extent in our counselling team. As a result, we have recruited two new Assistant Directors over 2022-23, and a new Administration Manager at the start of 2023-24. We are recruiting for another Assistant Director to start in December, when one of our management team is leaving to take up another role within the University. In collaboration with HR, we are having a 'mini-restructure' of our admin team, promoting two staff to new Grade 5 posts (Senior Administrator and Finance Administrator). We are also recruiting for counsellors to join the service over the course of semester one.
2. Continue to develop the Skills for Life and Learning programme, with additional workshops being planned and developed.
3. Continue to monitor demand and capacity, with a view to maintaining or improving KPI response times, aiming to provide support as close to the point of need.
4. Continue to explore with Director of Student Wellbeing and NHS Lothian models of pathways to facilitate referral and access into NHS secondary care/Community Mental health Teams.
5. Like other teams within the University Secretary's Group (and across the University) the implementation of the Finance part of People and Money has been challenging. Our budget and spending information has not been transparent making it difficult to plan and deliver services, when the resource available to us is not clear. Going forward it is to be hoped that this can be resolved so that we can be clear what resources we have to meet the level of demand, which we cannot predict.

"Counselling gave me a safe space to openly think through some of my challenges and receive supportive, honest feedback."

"It helped me to work with uncertainty and personal life challenges whilst having to commit to finishing my studies."

Student feedback

F. Risk Analysis

The most significant risk to achieving service core activities remains the potential for demand to exceed our capacity and resource to meet the demand. If Service core

activities are not achieved then ultimately the risks for both users and the University are:

- risk to students' safety
- risk to students' academic failure/retention
- risk of students' deteriorating mental health
- risk of diminishing the student experience and student satisfaction
- consequent reputational, compliance and financial risk to the University.

The ongoing challenge for the Service remains the same: to respond to the demand, particularly for individual counselling, that continues to put pressure on resources, and to offer interventions that are evidence based, meet students' needs, and that students are willing to engage with. We welcome efforts aimed at reducing stigma, encourage help seeking and promote awareness of mental health issues. However, these initiatives can only be successful if resources are sufficient to meet the demand for services.

G. Student Support Services Quality Assurance Annual Review

Peer Review comments and commendations

- **Exploring innovative ways to enhance provision and student experience.** The use of evening sessions with remote counsellors is an example of this. It exploits the established ability to work effectively remotely, diversifies the counsellor pool and offers support out-with class times. Enhanced provision of same-day appointments is another example of excellent needs-based student support.
- **Expansion and effective delivery of the workshop programme aimed at enhancing resilience.** This suite of events (including the Paws for Stress pet therapy) improves self-awareness and self-management of mental health.
- **Metric-based assessment of effectiveness.** Several strands of feedback collection provide data to assess current performance and drive future direction. Overall, the data provide evidence that this service is performing strongly to support our students.
- **A very good level of self-reflection:** the Service are tuned into the student population and have noticed, for example, examples of under-represented groups in the students that use the service.
- Actions are appropriate and there is focus on i) team development reflecting changes in the senior team; ii) streamlining interaction with NHS based services to prioritise positive outcomes for individuals.

Summary

Specifically commend the service for continued development of a high-quality portfolio

that supports and enhances our student experience. There are very positive indicators that students find the service approachable, responsive and effective.

Noted also is the 45% response rate, exceptional in the context of student feedback.

This tells us that students are engaged: they are motivated to tell the service it is doing a good job.