



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Student Counselling Service

Annual Report 2024-2025

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Director



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Service



The Report

This annual report covers the academic session from August 2024 to July 2025

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This report can be provided in alternative formats on request.

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"I would definitely recommend the Student Counselling Service. It's a supportive and confidential space that truly helps students navigate personal and academic challenges. My experience was very helpful and I believe many others could benefit from it as well." Student feedback

A. Summary of progress on Service priorities for this year:

1. Our KPI response times measuring from assessment to offer of a first counselling appointment improved (see below), with 80% of students being offered a counselling appointment within four weeks (our key performance indicator) and 59% within in two weeks of assessment. This improvement was also reflected in students experience of waiting times (see below).
2. We developed the Skills for Life and Learning programme further, by adding the workshop on 'Supporting Others'. The programme is both a form of outreach, and preventative support, and is complementary to counselling. The workshops can be a way for some students to experience the counselling team before they refer.
3. We implemented the next step with the Reducing Digital Distraction Programme (ReDD) through training and collaboration with other departments (Student Wellbeing Service, Disability and Learning Support Service, Careers Service) aiming to reach a different and extended cohort of students.

"" Great people to talk to, the wait wasn't long and I felt like my issues were heard and seen and I didn't feel like an inconvenience for reaching out for some help"
Student feedback

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, people and focus;

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.

Focus

- In line with the Strategy's Teaching and Learning focus, we will improve and sustain student satisfaction and wellbeing.

“I would recommend as the support was super professional as well as friendly and helpful, It was accessible and easily personalised to fit individual needs such as Teams calls.” 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 [SCS Annual Reports](#) and FOI FAQ page [SCS FOI FAQs](#)

2024-25 Service Evaluation results

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

- Informative – 96%
- Approachable – 97%
- Responsive -97%
- Accessible – 95%

Experience of waiting times for service

2023-24 figures in brackets

Waiting time experienced (last year's figures in brackets)	Too short	Just right	Too long
From self-referral to initial appointment	Nil (1%)	80 % (70%)	14% (21%)
From initial appointment to counselling	Nil (Nil)	65% (59%)	25% (33%)

“Very grateful for the service and how quickly I was given my initial consultation and appointments as well as further direction for counselling after these sessions.”
Student feedback

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

To what extent would you say that counselling...	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Helped you stay at university?	74%	77%	73%	78%
Helped you do better in your academic work?	64%	69%	70%	73%
Improved your overall experience of university?	77%	84%	86%	84%
Helped you develop skills that might be useful in obtaining future employment?	81%	84%	87%	81%

CIAO responses vary annually based on individual student concerns.

“I’ve used the counselling services at the University and found the service and the counsellor to be excellent.” *Student Feedback*

Skills for Life and Learning evaluation summary

- 95.5% overall satisfaction rate
- 96% would say it was either ‘very good’ or ‘good’ when rating workshops for fellow students
- Top two benefits gained from the workshops: ‘improved knowledge and understanding’ and ‘new ideas’

Some student quotes on the workshops:

'I realise I'm not alone in feeling the way I do many times and it is all so reassuring'

'Addressing the issue in a collaborative way'

'Participation was a big element for me, usually these are just us being talked at...I appreciated that the structure took other methods into account rather than cramming information into a package'

'Input then reflection – becoming aware of my own distractions; assessing my current strategies; having takeaway points and new techniques I could try that could help'

'It was a nice opportunity to reflect without feeling the pressure of having to share'

'It felt like everyone was listened to and made a contribution'

'Networking with peers – we created a chat group'

Paws Against Stress/Therapet events evaluation

As a consequence of building issues in the Chaplaincy we held two events at Kings Buildings, with 91 students attending the sessions in total.

- 98% felt strongly or very strongly it acted as a useful break from study
- 100% would do again
- 100% would recommend it
- 93% felt less stress after the event
- Best thing about it was interaction with dogs (41%), followed by interaction with dog+handler (19%)

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 (though our response times have improved over the past year) 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. Over the year 30% of students had over four counselling sessions. 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.

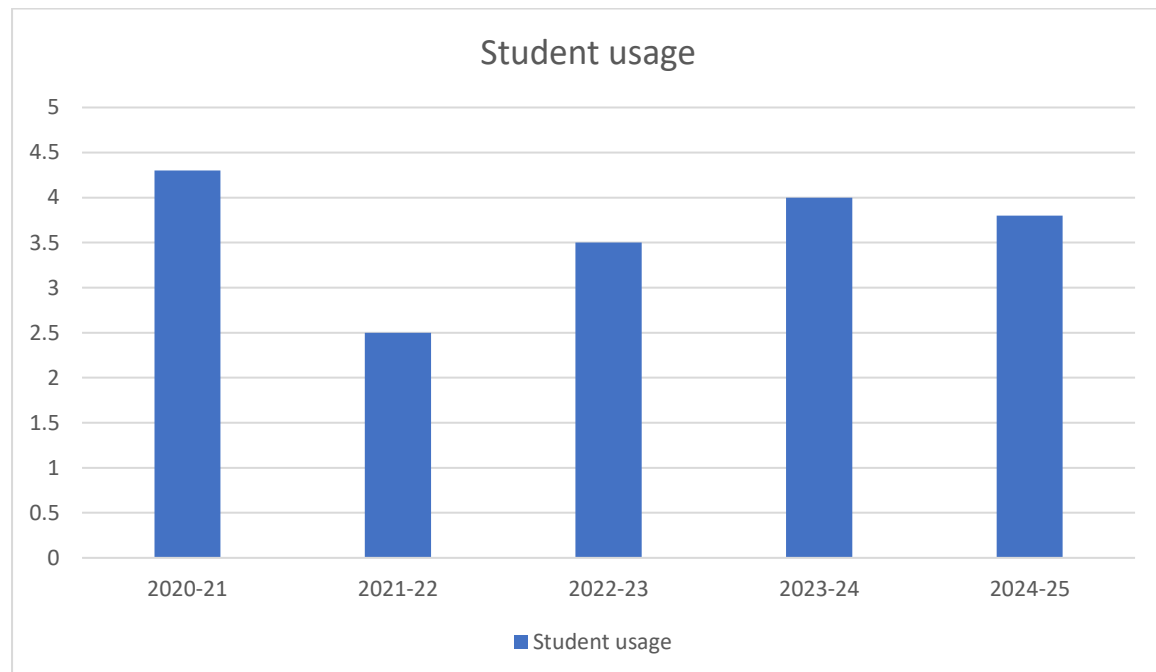
. 'I will definitely recommend the service to more people in the future as I had a great experience with the SCS and really value everything this time has given me/equipped me with' Student feedback

C. Analysis of service use

Students accessing the service:

1. There were 3393 new referrals
2. 156 Students attended Same Day Appointments
3. There were 386 attendances at SLL workshops
4. 95 students were seen by the Student Mental Health Coordinator
5. 163 students attended Paws Against Stress events
6. The profile of student users of the Service remains largely consistent with previous years (2023-24 in brackets):
 - male 25%/female 75% (no change)
 - UG 63% (61%) PGT 26% (26%) PGR 11% (13%)
 - UK 51% (47%) International 49% (53%)

International students using the Student Counselling Service were from 105 different nationalities. The largest group were Chinese students who formed 15% of our referrals.



Students presented with a range of issues. We saw a gradual change in the proportion of students presenting with anxiety and depression, and increases issues around relationships and self and identity in the overall reporting of the most common issues:

2024/25	Anxiety 26%	Depression 10.5%	Academic 9.7%	Loss 7.9%	Relationships 10.4%	Self and Identity 10.7%
2023/24	Anxiety 28.5%	Depression 13%	Academic 8%	Loss 8%	Relationships 9%	Self and Identity 8.5%
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%
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Key Performance Indicator – Response Times

Referral to Assessment	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	Assessment to Counselling	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
1 week	65%	65%	64%	1 week	33%	33%	28%
2 weeks	18%	15%	22%	2 weeks	26%	23%	24%
3 weeks	10%	12%	9%	3 weeks	12%	13%	23%
4 weeks	5%	6%	3%	4 weeks	10%	9%	9%
4+ weeks	2%	2%	2%	4+ weeks	20%	24%	26%

These figures show some improvement in the number of students being offered an assessment within 2 weeks of referral (83%) and 80% of students being offered a counselling appointment within 4 weeks of assessment (our KPI).

Students continue to make good use of the digital supports available. Our contract with SilverCloud ended in February, as NHS Scotland is now providing SilverCloud across the country which University of Edinburgh students and staff can access freely.

‘Everything is well managed. Everyone at the wellbeing centre is very nice. I never once felt unwelcome or judged’ Student feedback

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	3%	40%
Moderate - experiencing anxiety and distress, affecting one or more areas of functioning significantly.	68%	56%
Severe - severe anxiety and distress affecting all areas of functioning; limited coping; may self-harm; acting out; hopelessness; overwhelmed; suicidal thoughts/intent.	29%	4%

Students presenting in the severe category are seen urgently. Although we are not a crisis service, we do work with students experiencing mental health crises.

‘My experience has been beyond what I could have expected and I have been exceptionally well supported by my counsellor, who created a safe and nurturing space in which I was able to talk freely about the things affecting me. She offered kindness and support, as well as targeted, wise questions and alternative ways of thinking about things, which helped me reflect enormously. I had never had counselling before, so I didn’t know how it would go (and honestly was sceptical of

the benefit it would bring when I started), but I would now advise anyone struggling to approach the service' Student feedback

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 collaborated with Student Advisers, Wellbeing Advisers and both the Student Wellbeing Service and the Residence Life Team, 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 during semester times at the Easter Bush campus.

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

Sharon Wagner, Assistant Director, provided non managerial supervision/reflective practice support to staff of the Chaplaincy.

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 (Students) 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 administrative support. The EST Manager is line managed by the Director of the Student Counselling Service.

Externality

BACP Accreditation

Since 2006, the Service has had Accredited Service status awarded by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. 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 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 three counselling services of any kind in Scotland to be accredited by the BACP.

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 and internationally.

D. Staff development activity

Staff attended a Continuing Professional Development training provided by Gendered Identities on the topic of working with Trans and Non-binary students in counselling.

All staff completed the University's mandatory online training packages.

E. Opportunities and Enhancements

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

What has worked well:

- As reported above our KPI Response times improved. Having the necessary resources to keep waiting times to a minimum, including have some of our sessional counsellor team working over the spring vacation and into the summer months, resulted in us starting the new academic year with effectively no waiting list.
- Skills for Life and Learning: as noted we introduced a new workshop entitled "Supporting Others". This workshop is for students impacted by the mental health of someone they care for or live with. This can be a frightening, lonely and isolating position. This workshop provides an opportunity to explore the impact of being a supporter, offers ways to safeguard our own mental health; and also provides some practical information on signposting and how to take next steps when the supported person needs professional help. On average we offer three different workshops (out of 16 titles) each week of semester time.
- Same Day Appointments: for 51% of students, attending these shorter appointments met their needs and they did not need additional appointments, with 49% going on to self-refer to the Service.
- The ReDD project discussed above. In 2023-24 the Reducing Digital Distraction project approached the Service with a view to see if the results achieved at the University of Oxford could be achieved at other institutions, and if the ReDD workshop could be effectively delivered by non-expert facilitators. In 2023-24 we delivered 7 workshops (80 attendees). By the end of 2024-25 25 workshops had been delivered with 120 participants. Feedback from participants: 97% would recommend to a friend; 73% average increase in subjective ability to control device usage;

"The journey I have been on this past 8 weeks has been remarkable – and beyond what I could have imagined. When I began my sessions, I was dep in grief, couldn't face even thinking about my PhD studies, in and despair about who I was and what to do. Counselling has helped me learn how to process my grief, to become 'friends' with my PhD again, and to develop compassion for myself. I have learned tools to

recognise and acknowledge my own emotions, to let people in without feeling like a burden, and to put boundaries into some of my relationships in order to protect my own wellbeing.' 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 of students' deteriorating mental health
- risk to students' academic failure/retention
- risk of diminishing the student experience and student satisfaction
- consequent reputational, compliance and financial risk to the University.

In the course of the academic year, the University set out a Voluntary Severance scheme for staff, in light of the considerable budgetary pressures on the University. Two part time sessional counsellors and one part-time administrator were accepted for the scheme and left the University at the end of March 2025. These posts cannot be recruited to, and the loss of counsellors providing c.20 appointments per week during semester time will inevitably impact adversely on our response times.

We anticipate 2025-26 will be particularly challenging in view of budgetary pressures in light of the financial pressures on the University as a whole. There are very limited savings to be made that will not have a direct impact on students' experience.

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.