

# HE Mental Health First Aid training course

## Summary

The University of Chester, together with Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England, has developed a mental health training course tailored to the HE sector. This case study looks at the pilot study created by the University and MHFA England, which contributed to the design and delivery of the new of Higher Education (HE) Mental Health First Aid (HE MHFA) training course.

## Aims/Objectives

- Can a Mental Health First Aid England course designed for Higher Education improve knowledge and confidence for specific use within a University.

With the hypothesis that this research is aiming to evidence:

- The Mental Health First Aid course for Higher Education (MHFA – HE), will be beneficial in improving the knowledge base and confidence of participants in relation to a variety of mental health issues.

## What did you do?

To explore how it could build MHFA competence within the organisation, the University of Chester worked with MHFA England to launch a pilot study exploring whether a HE- tailored MHFA course would improve the knowledge and confidence of those taking part. The course material was developed in partnership with leading student mental health charity, Student Minds.

## What was the context / background?

The biggest cause of sickness absence in 2014-15 for HEIs was mental health, with 20.7 per cent of days lost for employees' mental health. Like employees, students are also affected by mental ill health, with mental health and social/communicative impairments having doubled since 2008/09. The level of absence caused by mental ill health and the increasing numbers affected is placing significant stress on institutional services and support structures.

The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) also reported that 60 per cent of students and 50 per cent of staff within HE are not getting the support or adjustments needed to fully engage in the education or employment opportunities.

## How was it organised and who was involved?

The study recruited 173 staff and 17 students from 16 institutions, including the University of Chester, to take part in the one-day course pilot.

The trainer was provided with an envelope per participant. The pre and post questionnaires were placed into the envelope by the participant for ease of transportation for analysis. The questionnaires were anonymous, but participants were asked to add a six figure reference number on each form to ensure pre and post data comparisons could be made.

## What resources did you need?

A Pre (survey 1) and post (survey 2) questionnaire was developed in conjunction with MHFA and current MHFA trainers. The questionnaire was based on the current MHFA evaluation with additional questions sourced from section E of the Wise Project : Wellbeing in Secondary Education staff questionnaire (Kidger J & Gunnell D 2015). The questionnaire used both likert and free text response options dependent upon the question. The appropriate questionnaire was administered to University staff and students in different institutions across the United Kingdom at the beginning and end of the day/training. The surveys were completed between the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2016 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016 in each pilot site.

## Has it been evaluated? How successful has it been?

Bristol Online Survey software was used to design, administer and collate categorical responses, data was then transferred into SPSS for statistical analysis. Pre-post test data on whether the participants agreed or disagreed with a statement was compared using McNemar's test and ordinal data (Likert scale; 1= Not at all, 2= A little bit etc.) was tested using a Wilcoxon signed ranks test. This allows us to see if the knowledge, confidence and attitudes of the participants were affected as a result of the course.

The descriptive statistical analysis examined responses in the participants knowledge and experiences of mental health and the participants own personal resilience in providing guidance to others within the University community. Free text responses were also thematically analysed. Examples of tests used included the **McNemar** test and the **Wilcoxon** test.

The analysis concluded that completing the HE MHFA course significantly increased the participants' understanding of mental health as well as their confidence in being able to help those with signs of ill mental health.

## How did it draw on or contribute to a Healthy University Whole System Approach?

The positive results of the pilot study will mean that the HE MHFA course will be rolled out across the sector from February 2017. The training will be a one-day course specifically designed for HE and will cover understanding mental health, anxiety, depression, suicide, self-harm and eating disorders.

## Future Plans

Publications and conferences to highlight the importance of supporting mental health in Higher Education

To develop a guidance booklet for Higher Education institutions on how the MHFA-HE course can support mental health strategies.

To conduct future research which continues to evaluate the impact that the MHFA-HE course has within the HE community.

## Key Learning Points

Encouraging students to participate in the course was a challenge. Student participation in this type of courses/activities to support improvements in Mental Health within Higher Education is an important area to address especially given that some University groups suggest that counselling services for students will experience an annual rise in demand for services of at least 10% over the coming years (Coughlan, BBC 2015).

## Thematic Categories (tick any that apply to your case study)

Method	Topic	Population Group
Campaign / Event <input type="checkbox"/>	Alcohol /Substance Misuse <input type="checkbox"/>	Staff <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/>	Built Environment <input type="checkbox"/>	Students <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Food / Healthy Eating <input type="checkbox"/>	Wider Community <input type="checkbox"/>
Policy / Procedure <input type="checkbox"/>	Mental Health <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
Whole System Approach <input type="checkbox"/>	Physical Activity / Active Transport <input type="checkbox"/>	
Other <input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual Health <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Sustainable Development <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Tobacco <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Other <input type="checkbox"/>	

## Contact Details

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