**HELOA Conference 23rd – 25th January 2019**

**Friday 25th January – Session 4.1**

Supporting Students with Mental Health Conditions.

London South Bank University – Student Services.

This session will cover the transitions into higher education, the concerns of students entering higher education with mental health problems.

**Activity:**

Log onto Menti.com ‘mentimeter’ and enter the code.

Question: ‘What worries might individuals have as they transition into higher education?’

Answers appear on the board in the form of a mentimeter. Themes included:

* Making friends
* Money
* Fitting in
* Independence
* Academic

Speakers refer to the Student Minds charity (a mental health charity ran by students, for students). They have a resource which has been produced through a project ran alongside universities regarding transition. They have separate resources for school leavers preparing for the transition to university and one for current university students to help them with the continuing transitions that they make year to year.

Their resource focuses on 6 key areas:

Identity

Independence

Relationships

Education

Mental health

Sexual health

Transition Theory:

There are key ways of looking at transition:

Institutional

Learner identity

Transition of becoming

Psychological perspective

Supporting Transition -

Learner Identity Building: It is important for universities to offer longer transitional support. Most providers just have one transitional event (usually within the first week). It could be beneficial to do this in schools, providing support earlier to aid the transition.

Supporting students with specific needs: The best way to approach this is to create a menu of activities which students can choose from to tailor support to everyone’s needs without singling them out.

Student Led Induction: Giving control to students about the support/information provided. This can be done through ‘mentimeters’ – that way everyone can submit an answer to a question i.e. ‘What are your worries about beginning university?’. This is an anonymous way to normalise fears, as students will be able to see that everyone has similar concerns. This can also be used to tailor support and guidance to the main concerns of the students in the session for example, if lots of people are concerned about money then a budgeting session might be beneficial.

Overview of London South Bank University mental health services:

* Available to all LSBU students
* Do not need a diagnosed mental health condition to receive support
* Confidential and collaborative (with other departments in the university)
* Face to face or over the telephone

Most universities teams are called the ‘Mental Health and Wellbeing team’ to make a link between the two areas and not isolate them.

Each student receives different advice or a plan depending on their circumstances. Reasonable adjustment can be made on the course and in formal assessments.

Students can lead their own plans (student led approach).

All of these interventions can be in place before a student begins their course if their mental health condition or disability is disclosed prior to starting. The main message is tell students to disclose as early as they can. This can be done through UCAS or by contacting the university directly.

It does not matter if the university is not their first choice, from students services perspective it is better to have a plan in place early rather than later, even if it is not needed in the end.

**Q.** How early is support put in place?

**A.** As early as the university is made aware. The student will be contacted in order to start formulating a support plan.

**Q.** Does your universities marketing team ask students to disclose?

**A.** Yes, all of our applicant communications have an encouragement to disclose as well as a link to a webpage with advice for students about when to disclose and how they can do so.

**Q.** What if they do not disclose through their UCAS application? Is there another opportunity?

**A.** They can contact the university in another way to let them know and support will be put in place.

Statistics from LSBU:

666 students seen

410 were assessed through an online mental health assessment (which is becoming more popular)

64% was a one-off appointment

14% of LSBU students have disclosed a disability.

These statistics are just the tip of the iceberg. Mental health is massively underreported as a disability.

Some of the activities to help all students (regardless of if they access support or not):

* Weekly wellbeing events
* Staff training
* Peer support – ‘look after your mate’ campaign
* Wellbeing podcast
* Content in lectures

Student Advisors:

These individuals are available across the university and can give advice on debt, care leavers (bursaries available), gender identity and any other queries. They can engage with anyone, whether they are current students or applicants.

**Activity:**
Identify what your team currently provides to support student’s mental health and transitioning. What is missing from this provision?

**Themes:** Giving support to teachers about helping students to disclose and the process involved in this.

Peer mentoring schemes (normally ambassadors going into schools)

Culture of action within the university – peer referral is important, not just awareness but acting upon knowledge to help others.

Smaller universities tend to be able to provide more support in comparison to larger universities because of the culture and the weighting of resources.

LSBU ran an effective intervention based on students most common fears:

Concerns about courses (academics, choosing the right course etc), living independently, the university environment.

From this they were able to create a 3 day activity to provide students with a greater insight of what university will be like. This included course taster sessions, talks from the money advice team, accommodation, student support etc. Students found that this eased their fears around university.

**Q&A session:**

**Q** – Do LSBU recruitment officers do any transitional activities?

**A** – Unlike some universities our department is situated within student services to track the full student journey. As a result, widening participation work very closely with student recruitment. LSBU also work closely with Aim Higher (NCOP) and this is how most of the transitional events are facilitated. NCOP also support disabled students and students with mental health conditions.

Demonstration of LSBU online referral system. Academics (or other members of staff) can refer a student, or they can refer themselves or a friend.

The majority of students who access emotional support and list ‘academic stress’ as one of their reasons. This is largely because university is an environment which places great emphasis on academic achievement, and therefore it can be stressful to try and keep up with these demands. It is important for universities to instil resilience. No students are expected to get high grades as soon as they start. University is a journey whereby individuals improve over time. Sometimes students need reminding of this in order to feel confident in their abilities.

A useful tip for student recruitment and widening participation teams is to understand what services their student support team offers in order to sign post these to current and perspective students. Early intervention is essential for retention.

**Q** – Do you notice a difference between referral from different academic departments? Do they know where/who to signpost too?

**A** - Students often disclose to a member of staff outside of student support. There is a tool on the website to help them to make decisions and signpost to the correct services. This is similar to the NHS symptom checker. Academics can access this whilst a student is with them to help them to feel confident having difficult conversations. It gives them advice of what they can do next which is relevant to the situation. The website is interactive and gives them direct instructions of questions to ask, referral procedures and providing support.

This covers all areas, such as mental health, finance, careers, independence issues etc.

Speakers thank everyone for attending.