



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

AoC Mental Health Survey Report

March 2023

Foreword

When we published the last report in 2020, it made for difficult reading, with the data pointing to some chronic needs, and shortages in support and funding for mental health in colleges. Two years on and issues have become both deeper and more widespread. Much of this amplification comes from sources in wider society “beyond the college gates” such as changes in home circumstances, legacy of Covid-19 and the increasing cost of living. Other issues have begun to be more relevant, such as those relating to environmental crisis or gender identity. The 2023 report identifies over fourteen influences reported by colleges, with the reality being that for those students finding themselves in, or heading towards, crisis, it is often a combination of factors leading to them requiring intervention and support.

The national picture remains hugely challenging for students. Statistics from organisations such as the Mental Health Foundation, Papyrus, Charlie Waller Memorial Trust and Mind continue to paint a desolate and sad picture which can feel, and be, overwhelming. Colleges, across all age ranges, are dealing with increasing numbers of students experiencing mental health and wellbeing difficulties. The precarious position for staff working in our sector continues to deteriorate with pressures around workloads, cost of living and increased requirements to respond to student support needs.

While colleges face this tsunami of need, we must take a moment to take pride in the proactive and essential response from colleges across the land. Colleges have continued since our 2020 survey to increase services such as counselling and transition support. They have increased the number of designated leads for mental health. Training for staff has become more common and wide ranging. Mental health is now routinely handled as a strategic issue in colleges, with data recording and regular reporting to governing bodies. Partner organisations to AoC have continued to work to find vital funding to develop new resources and training. Our sector has a strategic coalition with third sector organisations and government with success in increasing understanding and complexity of our sector and influencing of emerging policy around mental health for staff and students. Front line teachers and support teams are pushing aside our sector concerns over chronic underfunding on a daily basis to provide increased volumes of support, sadly sometimes at increasing personal cost.

We should deeply thank everyone for their endeavours, they are hidden heroes of our sector. If colleges did not do this work, there would be cause to worry gravely for the mental health outcomes of many displaced or forgotten sections of society now supported by their local college. In the arena of mental health, FE colleges continue to positively impact communities and wider society. The majority of this work remains not just underfunded, but in reality unfunded, an issue that must be urgently addressed. This work continues to be challenging – but it is vital. It makes a huge difference every single day.

Stuart Rimmer MBE, CEO East Coast College and Chair of the AoC Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy Group

Mental health in colleges

It's rare to have a conversation now where the focus does not turn to mental health and wellbeing at some point. How do we begin to recognise and comprehend the impact of the perma-crises we are living through, on top of life's day-to-day challenges? Many sectors are facing unprecedented demand on their services and support, and further education is no different.

Colleges continue to report an increase in the number of learners presenting with disclosed mental health conditions. Worryingly, although perhaps not surprisingly, as we address the lasting impact of lost learning and lockdowns throughout the last two years, our survey highlights that the biggest increase of disclosed mental health difficulties is among 16 to 18-year-olds, with 95 per cent of colleges reporting a significant or slight increase within this cohort. Additionally, the report also highlighted that 82 per cent of colleges are encountering a significant number of learners experiencing mental health difficulties without a formal disclosure. Later in the report, we address the impact of patchy funding slowly coming into the health care sector, and what this means for colleges trying to meet this extraordinary demand right now.

While Covid-19 has clearly had a significant impact on our mental health and wellbeing, we cannot afford to take our focus off the wide range of issues and challenges college learners experience. Additionally, it was noted that it is common for learners to not know what the root cause of their mental health difficulty is. Relationships, peer pressure, self-esteem, resilience, confidence and lived experience of trauma are all cited as significant influences.

Colleges are clearly making mental health and wellbeing a priority issue, with 90 per cent of survey respondents appointing a Senior Mental Health Lead, and many expanding their wellbeing teams. 75 per cent of colleges state that they had dedicated mental health policies for both staff and learners, and 94 per cent of colleges regularly report to College Corporations on this matter. Despite this investment, the survey highlights the challenge of the current demand on services and increasing complexity of mental health difficulties, surpassing college capacity and experience. With continued financial pressures and uncertainty across the sector, some colleges recognise the difficulty to provide consistent and timely support across all campuses.

Despite the challenges, colleges continue to expand their support services, invest in staff development and are now rethinking their approach to wellbeing, with 76 per cent of colleges adopting a whole-college model and trauma-informed approach to mental health and wellbeing. 100 per cent of colleges are running wellbeing sessions for students, which include activities on dealing with stress, coping strategies and developing resilience. An increasing number of colleges are adopting social prescribing into their practice, which helps improve mental health by connecting people to community services, reducing pressure on GPs and overprescribing. This approach has been recognised by the [Department for Health & Social Care, who announced in December 2022 that over £3.6 million of government funding](#) is to be awarded to the [National](#)

[Academy of Social Prescribing](#) to support mental health and wellbeing. This investment includes an academic collaboration to develop a robust evidence base for social prescribing and the benefits it can bring to the nation's health.

There is also a clear link between mental health and physical health. 96 per cent of colleges report running wellbeing sessions with a focus on physical activity. With such a wide range of causes of poor mental health and recognising the diversity of further education learners, it's positive to report that 70 per cent of colleges involve students in the design of their pastoral and mental health services.

Investment in college-run support services and staff development is evidenced by 68 per cent of colleges now employing their own counsellors, which on average equates to two part-time counsellors and one full time counsellor per college. A further 36 per cent of colleges buy in counselling support from external organisations (and some colleges will do both). On top of direct counselling provision, 86 per cent of colleges also provide general mental health awareness training for all staff, complimented with focused mental health training for pastoral staff (90%) and teaching staff (69%). Additionally, 96 per cent of colleges now have trained Mental Health First Aiders. There is perhaps a need to expand Suicide First Aid training, with only 61 per cent of colleges citing this as part of their staff development programme. The commitment to train and support staff will be bolstered by the welcome announcement from the Department for Education during Children's Mental Health Week 2023 to commission the curation of a Senior Mental Health Lead Hub and Toolkit for Schools and Colleges. This follows the [DfE's commitment to provide a grant to eligible schools and colleges to cover the cost of SMHL training](#), supporting a whole-college approach to mental health.

The investment in mental health support services, and the creative and responsive actions taken by colleges is positive and deserves recognition for the impact it is having; yet it is still not enough. The survey highlights clearly that demand for mental health support is far greater than current capacity. Even though 83 per cent of colleges have improved their mental health resources in the last three years, 80 per cent of colleges report working with other local and national mental health providers and charities to try to meet the demand from learners. Unfortunately, the level of integration of local services, transition data from schools and engagement with local Mental Health Support Teams varies significantly depending on location. Colleges also work within a range of systems, including Public Health services run by local authorities, NHS Children & Adolescent services, Integrated Care Partnerships, and other voluntary and community providers. The opportunities to engage are not always consistent or well known, with 72 per cent of colleges reporting that they do not have joined up mental health provision with their local NHS system, and 47 per cent colleges are not aware of local mental health support teams. Of the 53 per cent of colleges who reported knowing about their local mental health support team, over a quarter are not yet linked up with said team.

The [National Audit Office issued a report in February 2023](#) to acknowledge that even though funding and staffing levels for mental health services are slowly increasing, millions of people with mental health needs are still not accessing services, and many are facing lengthy waits. NAO interviews with stakeholders highlight that some groups have poor access to services, including children and young people, and those from minority groups. Between 2016-17 and 2020-21, the percentage of local funding spent on mental health services only rose from 11.0% to 11.4%. The report also notes that following the pandemic, demand for mental health services is higher than anticipated by the 2019 NHS Long Term Plan, particularly with regards to young people. For example, between 2017 and 2022, the proportion of young people with probable mental disorders increased by 50 per cent for 7 to 16-year-olds and more than doubled for 17 to 19-year-olds.

There continues to be an increase in attempted learner suicide. Over nine in 10 of colleges say they are aware of attempted suicides by learners in the last 12 months, with 70 per cent of colleges reporting an increase in the frequency of these occurrences, while 27 per cent have seen their numbers remain the same. Only 3 per cent report a decrease. In total, colleges are aware of 1,357 suicide attempts by learners in the last year. Colleges are experiencing far higher numbers of learners presenting with low mood, suicidal ideation and self-harming behaviours, showing the need to do more to strengthen local collaboration with support services. A third of colleges state that they are not engaged in their local Suicide Prevention Plan and a further 15 per cent of colleges say they are not aware of the postvention services available to them.

Notably, eight in 10 colleges have made a referral to A&E in the last year related to learner mental health, totalling 560 referrals. That translates into 9 referrals per provider on average. With referrals to A&E increasing and a significant spike in demand for mental health support in colleges, it's vital that our local systems are collaborative and accessible. It is welcome that the Department of Health and Social Care has committed to "deliver an additional 27,000 mental health professionals and give two million more people the help they need" by 2024. It is vital that this investment reaches our communities and involves colleges in the provision of connected local services.

While this survey has largely focused on learners, it also shed some light on the mental health and wellbeing of staff. While there is fantastic practice in place to support positive mental health and wellbeing in colleges, there is evidence of an emerging crisis within college workforce. The AoC survey reports that 62 per cent of colleges have seen a significant or slight increase in staff accessing mental health and wellbeing services, but with 35 per cent of colleges not regularly collating data on staff MH and wellbeing, it is not surprising that 15 per cent of colleges acknowledged that they do not know if there has been an increase in use of support services.

When asked what has likely influenced the increase in number of staff accessing support services, colleges pointed to a "recurrence of an existing mental health condition" (81%) and "workload" (78%) as the top two causes, significantly above "Covid-19" (60%) and the "cost of living" (58%). This is echoed [in Education Support's Teacher Wellbeing Index, 2022](#), where 78 per cent of education staff reported that they have experienced poor

mental health due to their work, with symptoms including anxiety, exhaustion, burnout, depression and acute stress. Staff working in education reportedly experience higher levels of depression and anxiety than the general population, which carries implications for the education workforce. Crucially, Education Support also observe that “staff who have good organisational support feel more confident in being able to disclose unmanageable stress or mental health problems”.

Colleges are gathering more data on staff mental health, and many are expanding their support programmes for their employees. Almost all colleges in the survey say they have structures in place to support the health and wellbeing of staff, including mentoring, counselling, Employee Assistance Programme (87% of colleges), signposting to services provided by the charity Education Support and non-managerial supervision. Whilst there is room to develop robust mental health policies and practice for staff, 87 per cent of colleges say they are confident that staff know how to access services if they need them. Additionally, 86 per cent of colleges run health and wellbeing sessions for staff, focusing on areas like the benefits of physical activity, healthy eating, developing resilience, coping strategies, dealing with stress related activities, coping with the pitfalls of social media, and maintaining good sleep patterns.

Summary

Demand for mental health support in colleges is at an unprecedented high and is far greater than the capacity in this area. There is a lack of specialist support and timely access to it, both within colleges and throughout wider community health services. Although it is clear that colleges are increasing their investment in staff development and re-thinking their approach to mental health and wellbeing, the limited funding and challenges in engaging with local support services is impacting the overall effectiveness to an ever more complex array of need.

Work continues on attempting to break down the stigma of mental health, and there is growing recognition of the varying influences on wellbeing, such as the impact of social media and causal links between mental health, the increasing cost of living and Covid-19. This is welcomed and should continue to be supported as a normalised conversation. It is important to recognise and respond appropriately to different learner cohorts, and this survey highlights a gap in our focus and specialist support for neurodiverse students and learners on EHCPs.

Consideration for learners with complex social and emotional mental health needs is vital ensuring all learners are able to access education, highlighted by one respondent who commented that “*mental health is the biggest determinant of student success*”. Regional and national conversations are welcomed to ensure closer integration with CAMHS and other health services.

While staff development and training to be able to better support learners is needed and welcomed, this must be balanced against staff’s own needs and wellbeing. AoC and

Education Support undertook a joint project, funded by the Education & Training Foundation, to create space for FE leaders to reflect on their own wellbeing, in order to lead the way to foster a culture of positive mental health throughout their organisation. In February, the programme put a spotlight on staff, highlighting the risk of burnout and the impact of secondary trauma, as staff respond to increasing learner demand and the pressures of increasing workload. Further research into staff wellbeing is needed to ensure the challenges are acknowledged and addressed.

The [DHSC's announcement in January 2023 to invest £150 million by April 2025](#) to build 150 new facilities to support mental health urgent and emergency care services is welcome and will provide support in the community through specialised mental health ambulances, more crisis services, and improved health-based places of safety. It will also use capital funding (announced in the 2021 Spending Review) to fund 150 new projects centred on supporting the provision of mental health crisis response and urgent mental health care. The government has committed to increase mental health spend to 8.9% of all NHS funding – and we have a role in ensuring some of this reaches our sector, our staff and our learners.

Our survey highlighted some clear asks, largely for improved resources and funding for colleges – and the government's announcement will help, but does not go far enough. The survey also contains a call for a robust and consistent infrastructure for mental health support, improved communication, and better integration and collaboration with external support services. There is a wealth of effective practice in colleges, often unfunded, that needs to be recognised and celebrated, and a continuation of opportunities provided to share approaches and offer support to one another. The willingness and drive to work out the answers collectively is clear in the responses received from colleges and so there is a need to be firmly committed to shaping and influencing how the investment into mental health services is directed and applied, so that college communities benefit. As an organisation, AoC is grateful for the effort, the hours and the heart that you all put into supporting your colleagues and your learners. You are already making a big difference and we will continue to work together to achieve even more.

Survey Asks & Recommendations

For AoC to have an evidenced position that demonstrates the increase in mental health difficulties experienced by learners in further education; specifically highlighting that the increase in demand is far greater than current services (both internal and external) can meet.

- Strategic lobbying & influencing across government departments to make connections between education, employment and health
- Dedicated research on learner mental health in further education
- Shape investment in mental health and wellbeing to recognise and include further education colleges
- Improved communication of services and embed a partnership approach between local health care and education providers
- Articulation and celebration of the impact of colleges on the mental health and wellbeing of learners

For AoC to spotlight, with evidence, the concerning decline in staff mental health; specifically acknowledging the impact of workload and the risk of burnout.

- Regular reporting on the emerging issues, making use of a wide range of data and evidence
- Dedicated research on staff mental health in further education
- Promote wellbeing services and support available to further education staff

For AoC to champion and resource opportunities for staff development, to ensure appropriate staff have skills and confidence in dealing with increasing numbers of learners experiencing mental health difficulties.

- Dedicated SMHL training for further education staff
- Develop a national SMHL Toolkit to support whole-college and trauma-informed practice
- Accessible training for different roles (generic training, specialist training, academic & support staff roles)
- Development of shared mental health resources and template policies & procedures
- Responsive workshops and resources to address emerging issues
- Provision of conferences, projects and networks to share effective practice
- Introduction of professional supervision for further education staff

For AoC to develop dedicated resources and create opportunities for peer-networking to ensure specific mental health training for staff supporting neurodiverse students.

- Dedicated training in supporting neurodiverse students with their mental health and wellbeing
- Creation and curation of specialist resources and guidance
- Spotlight and campaign on the impact of Social & Emotional Mental Health on SEND learners and learners on an EHCP.

For AoC to develop a suite of resources, lesson plans, workshops and awareness campaigns aimed at learners, addressing highlighted challenges related to the mental health and wellbeing of students (including anxiety, suicide & suicidal risk, social media, stigma of mental health, and impact of Cost of Living)

Commitment

AoC will:

- Continue to work with national stakeholders, including DfE, OfS, DHSC and NHSE to make an evidenced argument, articulating the current landscape of mental health in further education
- Nurture partnerships with sector experts and organisations to develop specific resources for use in further education.
- Seek opportunities for further research linked to MH of staff and learners in FE settings
- Establish relationships locally with strategical health service teams to drive better communication and collaboration with colleges
- Celebrate the positive impact of colleges, creating opportunities to share effective practice and bring colleagues together across the sector to support continued innovation

Colleges can:

- Sign the AoC MH charter and annually evidence how they meet all 11 commitments*
- Conduct regular surveys of staff and learners to build an evidence base and understand emerging trends and the efficacy of different interventions
- Broaden staff development opportunities to offer relevant training to meet emerging and increasing demand, such as suicide awareness training
- Continue to engage with local health services, teams and initiatives aimed at the mental health of young people and adults (including Mental Health Support Teams and Suicide Prevention Teams)

Policy makers should:

- Ensure funding and initiatives reach further education providers and meet the needs of the sector's diverse learners
- Continue to review the data and evidence of the impact of Covid-19, cost of living and other emerging crises on mental health and wellbeing of staff and learners in further education

Appendix A

The AoC Mental Health & Wellbeing Charter

As a college we will:

- Ensure that wellbeing and mental health work is led by a senior manager supported by a member of staff with particular responsibility for mental health
- Have a wellbeing and mental health policy accompanied by a clear implementation action plan which is monitored regularly and reviewed annually
- Create an open and inclusive college ethos which includes respect for those with mental ill health
- Promote equality of opportunity and challenge mental health stigma through curriculum teaching and also promote wellbeing through tutorial programmes
- Provide appropriate mental health training for staff
- Encourage and collect student views on mental health and wellbeing by working with the Students' Union and other student representative bodies
- Ensure a consistent and positive approach to staff wellbeing
- Provide targeted individual mental health support where appropriate or alternatively signpost to external support services
- Provide relevant information to parents and carers
- Establish effective links with local health and voluntary sector mental health groups
- Promote the benefit that physical activity and sport has on mental wellbeing.

Appendix B

AoC Mental Health Survey Results

The mental health and wellbeing of further education staff and learners is on every agenda, and while demand is noticeably outstripping capacity our survey does spotlight where effective practice is making a difference. With recognition, investment and consistent, joined-up services, this impact can reach more and more people. Over 200 colleges have now signed the AoC Mental Health Charter and both the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care have made commitments to resource a variety of initiatives to bolster mental health and wellbeing services, some specifically for further education colleges. There's a lot more to do but there is also a will and determination collectively as a sector to rise to the challenge, with hope.

This year's survey took place during November 2022, based on previous surveys for comparison, with some new questions to reflect on emerging trends observed post-pandemic in an environment of unprecedented perma-crises (cost of living, energy costs, war, climate).

Who responded?

In total we received 105 survey responses. 82 of these were from General Further Education Colleges (51% of all GFEs), 13 Sixth Form Colleges (30%) and 6 specialist colleges (26%). In addition to this we had 4 additional responses from academies and independent specialist colleges within the UK.

78 per cent of respondents have signed the AoC Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter.

Results:

Change in number of learners with diagnosed MH conditions

14 to 15-year-olds

54 colleges that responded had learners in this age category. 31 per cent of those who responded stated that there had been a significant increase whilst another 28 per cent stated there had been a slight increase. 31 per cent stated numbers were about the same and 9 per cent were unsure.

16 to 18-year-olds

103 colleges gave a direct response to this question with 76 per cent stating that they had seen a significant increase and a further 19 per cent stating that there had been a slight increase. 3 per cent of colleges stated that the numbers were about the same, with 1 per cent stating a slight decrease and 1 per cent stating a significant decrease.

19+

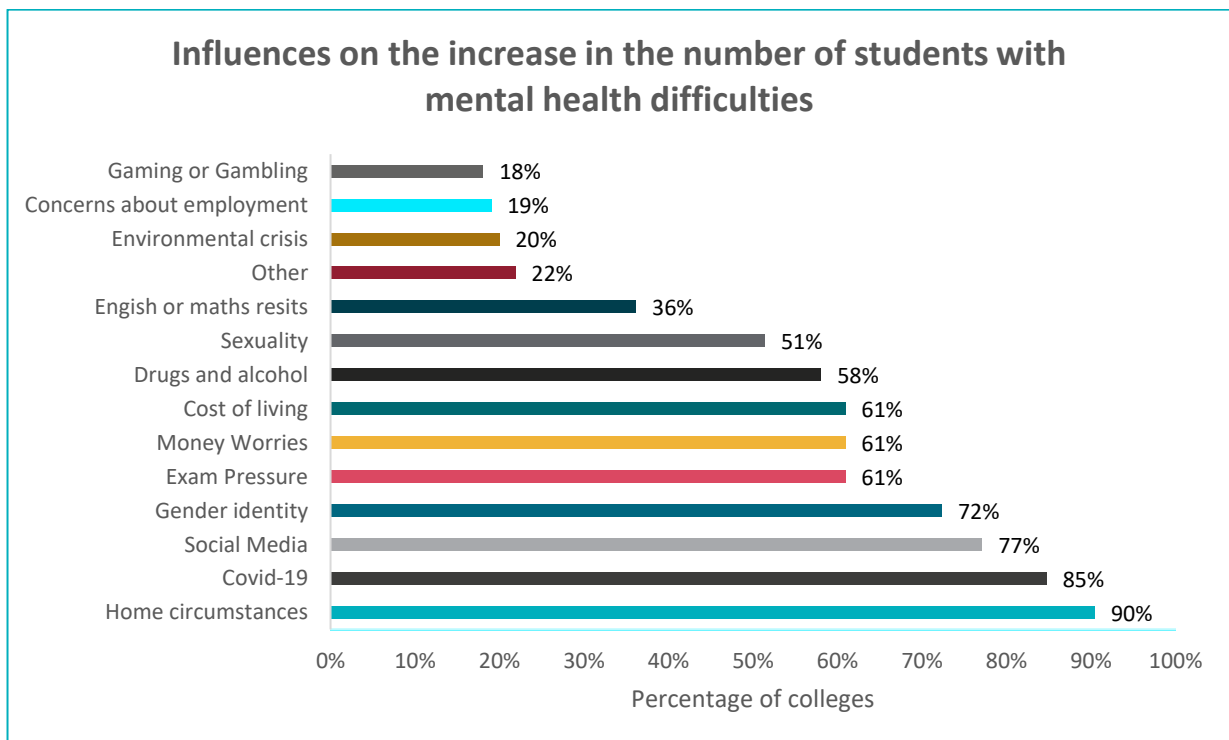
Of the 96 respondents to this question, 53 per cent stated that there had been a significant increase and a further 38 per cent said there had been a slight increase. 6 per cent of colleges stated that the numbers were about the same. Similarly, 2 per cent of colleges said there had been a slight decrease and 1 per cent saw a significant decrease.

Encountering learners who are experiencing mental health difficulties even if not formally disclosed

All colleges reported seeing an increase in learners experience a mental health difficulty outside of a formal disclosure. 82 per cent of colleges stated that this increase was significant.

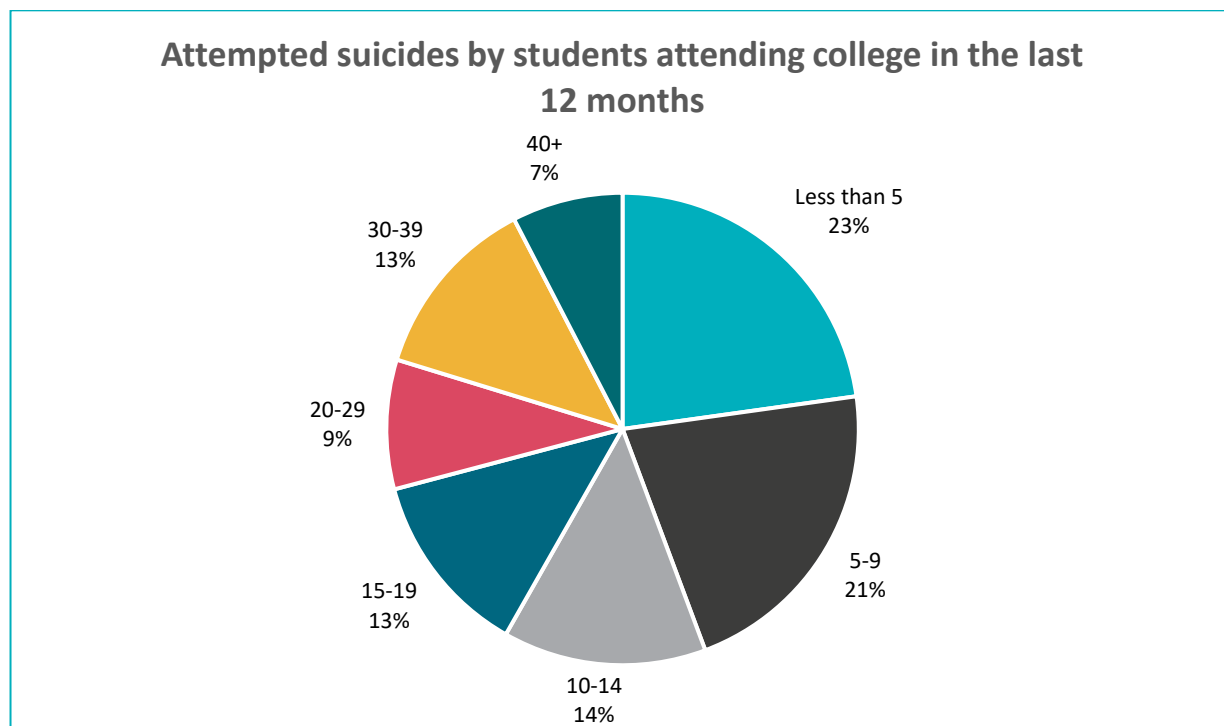
What is causing the increase?

Similar to previous years, the table below highlights “home circumstances” and “Covid 19” as the main significant causes of mental health difficulties in college learners. Additionally, colleges note that it is common for learners not to know what the root cause is. The inability to overcome a setback is noticeably challenging for some learners. Relationships, peer pressure, self-esteem, resilience, confidence and lived experience of trauma are also cited as significant influences on learners’ mental health and wellbeing.



Attempted suicides by learners

Similar to last year, 93 per cent of colleges stated that they were aware of learners who had attempted suicide in the last year. 70 per cent of colleges have seen an increase in the number of attempted learner suicides, 27 per cent have seen numbers remain the same, with only 3 per cent seeing a decrease. The number of attempted suicides ranged from fewer than 5 to over 40. The mean number of attempted suicides per college from the 79 colleges that responded to this question, was 17.



The survey highlighted that 30 per cent of colleges are not engaged in their local Suicide Prevention Plan and 15 per cent of colleges are not aware of the available post services available to them.

Data Collection & Support Services

92 per cent of colleges collect data on learner mental health and wellbeing utilising a range of methods, including an annual survey (48%), a termly survey (25%) and focus groups (55%). 70 per cent of colleges involved learners in the design of their pastoral and mental health services. Additionally, 95 per cent of colleges run special programmes to support transition into college for vulnerable learners.

College Senior Mental Health Lead (SMHL)

90 per cent of colleges surveyed now have a Senior Mental Health Lead appointed within their institution. This remit of this role varies between colleges – some colleges allocate responsibility for mental health to an Assistant Principal or Head/Director of Student Services, while others have a dedicated Wellbeing Manager/Senior Mental Health Lead role. 70 per cent of respondents with a SMHL have accessed the DfE grant to fund SMHL training. It is noted that there has been mixed reviews of existing training to-date, with

the main issue being the relevance and applicability of training. Dedicated SMHL training for further education is now being rolled out and ongoing collaboration with DfE will see further resources for FE disseminated this year.

Resources, Internal & External Services

Counselling

68 per cent of colleges employ their own counsellors and 36 per cent pay for an external service (several colleges do both). On average, colleges that employ their own counsellors have 2 part time counsellors and 1 full time counsellor. Of the 78 colleges that provide an in-house counselling service, there was a total of 3,267 hours of counselling provided, which is an average of 42 hours per college per week.

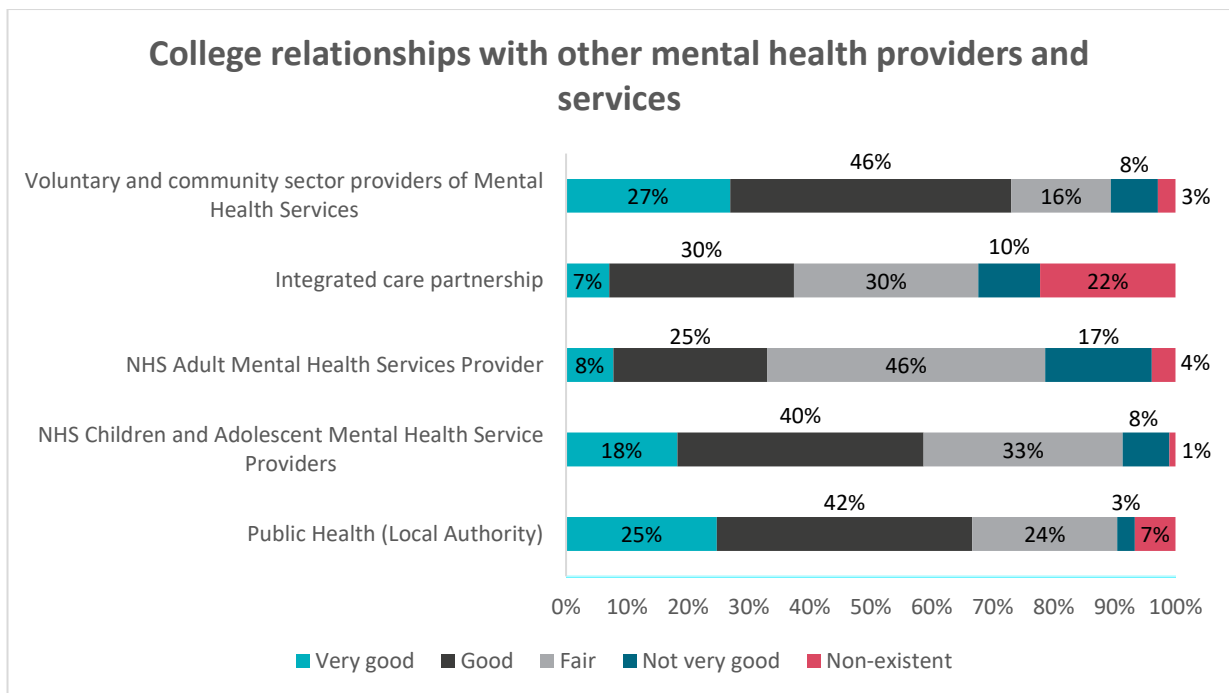
Funding

We asked how resources to support mental health and wellbeing have changed in the last three years. 83 per cent of respondents said resources had increased, 15 per cent said they had stayed the same and only 2 per cent said they had decreased. As noted at the top of this report, we continue to navigate an unprecedented environment of financial and social crises, notwithstanding cost of living, energy prices, the Ukrainian War, and the impact of the pandemic, the sector is also undergoing significant reform which continues to put considerable financial pressure on colleges. Not surprisingly, the increase in demand for mental health support services runs parallel to this, and yet, colleges are finding ways and means to ensure their staff and students are supported to the best of their ability.

Relationship with the health system

67 per cent of colleges stated that they have good or very good relationships with Public Health, compared with 87 per cent in our previous survey. 24 per cent state that the relationship is fair and 10% now report that this this relationship is not very good or non-existent. The decline in this relationship is concerning but perhaps speaks to the pressure all services are experiencing due to the current unprecedented demand.

Across the rest of the system there is a similar picture in terms of a variation in local engagement and collaboration, as the table below highlights.



72 per cent of colleges do not have joint mental health provision with their local NHS system and 47 per cent of colleges do not have or do not know if there is a local Mental Health Support Team to support schools and colleges. Of the 52 per cent of colleges who have a local MH Support Team, 72 per cent are linked into the team. Additionally, 80 per cent of colleges work with other local and national mental health providers and charities. Many local charities were mentioned and the most common partners remain Samaritans, Mind, Student Minds, Togetherall, Kooth, Charlie Waller Trust, 42nd Street and Papyrus. It is possible that some of these services may be commissioned by the local health service, but colleges are not aware of the link.

Wellbeing programmes

100 per cent of colleges run wellbeing sessions for learners, 99 per cent offer sessions on dealing with stress related activities, 98 per cent run sessions on coping strategies, 97 per cent place an emphasis on developing resilience and 96 per cent run sessions with a focus on physical activity.

93 per cent of colleges say there are some or good relationships between staff responsible for physical activity and staff supporting learner wellbeing, with only 7 per cent saying there are no links.

A&E Referrals

81 per cent of colleges stated that they had made referrals to A&E related to learner mental health, up from 73 per cent last year. Of the 61 colleges that reported that they had made a referral, there were a total of 560 referrals, which is an average of 9 per provider.

Policy & Processes

75 per cent of colleges have a mental health policy for learners, which is a 10 per cent increase on last year and 75 per cent of colleges have a MH policy for staff, which is up 7 per cent on last year. 94 per cent of colleges regularly report on mental health to their governing body.

96 per cent of colleges have staff trained in MH first aid, with 83 per cent of colleges delivering Mental Health Awareness Training for all staff (up from 71 per cent last year). 90 per cent have implemented specific training for pastoral staff and 69 per cent have carried out MH training for teaching staff. 61 per cent of colleges are also delivering Suicide First Aid training to their staff and 76 per cent of colleges are training staff in trauma-informed approaches.

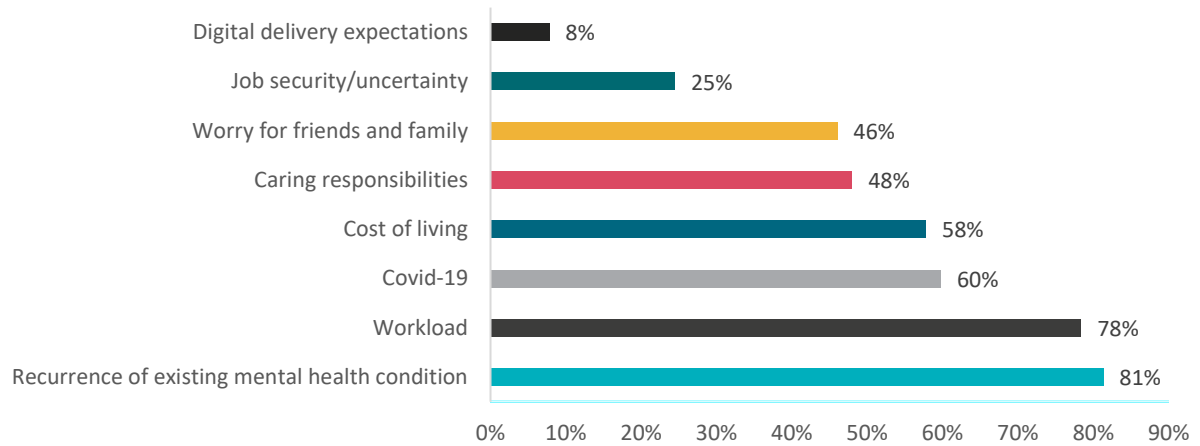
Staff Mental Health

65 per cent of colleges regularly collect data on staff mental health, with 70 per cent stating that they undertake an annual wellbeing survey. While perhaps there is more work to do to support the 35 per cent of colleges with their processes to monitor staff wellbeing, 99 per cent of colleges have structures in place to support the mental health and wellbeing of all staff. 87 per cent of colleges state that they have an Employee Assistance Programme in place whilst 56 per cent have counselling and support services available in college. 31 per cent of colleges signpost staff to the charity Education Support and 50 per cent offer staff mentoring support.

86 per cent of colleges run wellbeing sessions for staff, 91 per cent run sessions with a focus on physical activity, 87 per cent offer sessions on dealing with stress related activities, 83 per cent run sessions on coping strategies and 80 per cent on developing resilience.

87 per cent of colleges are confident that staff know how to access the support available to them, but it's noted that only 53 per cent of colleges collect data on the causes for staff referrals to support services and resources. 62 per cent of colleges have seen a significant or slight increase in staff accessing mental health services and resources. The main reasons for these increases were "recurrence of existing mental health condition" (81%) and "workload" (78%).

Causes of staff referrals to mental health and wellbeing resources/services



What are the biggest challenges facing colleges?

- Demand for services outstrips college resources and capacity
- Lack of specialist support & timely access to it
- Lack of funding
- Anxiety and suicidal risk
- Breaking down the stigma of mental health
- Impact of social media on mental health
- Impact of Cost of Living
- Ensuring staff have the skills to manage learners presenting with MH difficulties
- Pressure of workload on college staff mental health
- Appropriate support for neurodiverse students, and students on EHCP

What would be helpful to you from AoC on the issue of mental health and wellbeing?

- In person training and workshops for learners & development of age-appropriate resources
- Dedicated training for FE (teaching, pastoral and wider college service roles)
- Support with campaigning for dedicated college funding & better services
- Recognition of impact of support and services that colleges provide that are not funded
- Awareness of impact of social media
- Toolkit for implementing a Whole-College Approach to Trauma-Informed Practice (with recommended trainers)
- Provide access to shared resources & signposting to training
- Support with understanding emerging issues
- Share effective practice and identify national themes via conferences, funded-projects and networks
- Training to include strategies to support young people identified with SEMH and dealing with daily MH issues
- Model for supervision for staff across different roles
- Framework for wellbeing and mental health delivery – commissioning health & wellbeing services for the sector. Better joined up work between organisations and services.
- Template policies and procedures
- Guidance on capturing data and evidencing impact
- Lobbying and influencing government policy
- Recognition that mental health is the biggest determinant of learner success


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