

‘Bridging the gap’

**A qualitative analysis of Mental Health
Support Services for students in
Manchester.**

February 2024

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Introduction

1.1 This report aims to present the findings and recommendations from a review using qualitative research methods. This review concerns Manchester's student population and their understanding and awareness of Mental Health Support Services (MHSS) available to them in the city.

1.2 Healthwatch Manchester (HWM) held in-depth conversations with a total of 47 students currently studying at a range of Universities and Colleges in Manchester.

1.3 This report will outline the key findings from these conversations with Manchester students.

1.4 This report also presents an opportunity to compare this study with a similar study conducted by HWM in 2020.

Background & rationale

2.1 This piece of work was included in the HWM 2023-2024 work plan after the March 2023 priority setting board meeting.

2.2 The continuation of this work had been pre-approved by the board in 2022. Initially, HWM started a similar project to this in 2020 however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the work stalled and was never completed.

2.3 The data from 2020 cannot be fully used as a comparative study as the questions are too dissimilar but some of the findings from both years can be usefully compared.

2.4 In 2020, HWM staff had gathered data from students in Manchester about their understanding of MHSS by conducting surveys in a similar fashion to that of this report.

Methodology

3.1 HWM conducted three engagement sessions with students in central Manchester between November 2023 and February 2024.

3.2 In order to engage with as many students as possible, we decided upon two venues to conduct our interviews. We initially held a stall on the University of Manchester Campus at University Place.

3.3 After two visits to University Place, we held a further engagement session at Manchester Central Library in one of their study carrels. We did this to engage with students who told us they felt apprehensive speaking about this sensitive subject at our stall on campus.

3.4 We used a survey of 3 questions to guide our conversation as well as asking a further question regarding contacting the students in the future in regards to the outcome of this report.

3.5 After the reviews were completed, the responses were compiled and are used later in this report.

Key Findings

Q1. Are you aware of the mental health support services available to you as a student in Manchester?

The majority of respondents (61%) said they were aware of the MHSS available to them. Some of their comments went as follows:

- 'I know of them but I don't know the website or where to get them from'
- 'Yes, we can book counselling sessions'
- 'It's a lot of work (to contact them) but I do know who to speak to'

The remaining 39% of respondents said they were not aware of the MHSS available to them. Some of their comments went as follows:

- 'I only know of services for disability, not mental health'
- 'I have been here for three months and I am not very familiar with them, I haven't heard of any information about this'
- 'I have no idea how to access them'

Q2. Have the University/College provided support and information regarding these services?

A slight majority of students (51%) said that their University/College have provided support and information regarding these services. Some of their comments are as follows:

- 'I think so, via emails'
- 'They (The University) spoke about them quickly and briefly'
- 'Some emails however they are not obvious'

The remaining students (49%) who said that their University/College did not provide support and information regarding these services made comments such as:

- 'They (Their University) took no initiative (in promoting these services)'
- 'The university needs to do more promotion on social media via the student union pages by promoting events'
- 'I don't have information about that, I would like to know more. If I was struggling with my mental health, I would isolate myself and worry too much'

Q3. Are you aware you can use mental health services outside of your University or College? How do you access them or how would you like to receive information about them?

The majority of respondents (58%) said they were not aware that they could use MHSS outside of their University or College. These students said the following about how they would like to receive information about these services:

- 'Social media is better than email as emails can be missed easily or just put into a junk folder'
- 'I would like talks and events'
- 'Posters around campus'

The remaining students (32%) who told HWM they were aware of the MHSS available outside of their University or College mentioned the following as examples:

- 'I'd go to a GP'

- ‘There is a promotion from the dormitory about mental health services but I haven’t accessed them’
- ‘I know about Samaritans but not how to access them’

Comparison with the data from 2020

We can compare Question 2 (2023-24 Survey) to Question 5 (2020 Survey) to demonstrate that mental health service access has not improved since 2020. Q5 from 2020’s survey asked; ‘To your knowledge, does your university provide MHSS?’.

The results from that survey showed that a large majority of students (85%) knew that their university or college provided MHSS. This is a much higher figure than was recorded in 2023-24’s survey. The most recent survey data shows that only 51% of respondents knew that their university or college provided MHSS.

Conclusion

The majority of students we spoke with are aware of the MHSS available to them in Manchester.

The majority of students we spoke with believe that their university or college provided support and information regarding these services.

However, the majority of students we spoke with were not aware that they could use MHSS outside of their university’s or college’s provision.

Many students we spoke with revealed that despite being aware of MHSS being available, they did not know how to access them or know where they were situated.

Students we spoke with prefer to receive information about MHSS through social media rather than through their emails.

Despite the majority of students we spoke knowing their university or college provided MHSS, this number has significantly decreased since 2020.

Recommendations

Universities and colleges in Manchester should in future promote MHSS services to students via social media as well as through other channels.

Universities and colleges in Manchester should involve students in their methodology whereby MHSS are promoted in this way.

Universities and colleges in Manchester should include information regarding how to access MHSS including location and time of operation.

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Appendix

2023-24 HWM Mental Health Support Services Survey

1. Are you aware of the mental health (MH) support services available to you as a student in Manchester?
2. Have the University provided support and information regarding these services to you?
3. Are you aware you can use Mental Health Services outside of the University?
 - A. If Yes, how do you access them?
 - B. If No, what would be the best way to receive this information?

2020 Student and Mental Health Survey

1. Which university or college are you currently a student of?
2. Do you suffer from mental health issues? (diagnosed or otherwise)
3. Has any aspect of attending university negatively affected your mental health?
4. To your knowledge, does your university provide mental health support services?
5. As a student, how did you find out about the service(s)?
6. Are there services you would use if you had access to them?
7. If the accessibility or format was different, would you use a university mental health support service? e.g. different time, place?



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