Student Council Motion Proposal

Your Policy Motion Title Goes Here: Supporting the Improvement in Mental Health Services for PGR students

Policy Number:	2017-18_003	Policy Date	13/02/2018
Policy Proposer: (Include name and student number)	Kathryn Spicksley 2776987		
Policy Seconder: (Include name and student number)	Hilary Causer 14012199		

Summary:
Worcester SU will support Worcester University's bid for funding from the HEFCE Catalyst fund to support the improvement in mental health services for postgraduate research (PGR) students at the University of Worcester

Student Council Notes the Following Facts:
The literature and reports around the issue of student mental health and wellbeing typically focus on the challenges faced by young (18 – 24 yrs) undergraduate students. For instance the recent report, Not by Degrees (IPPR, 2017) makes very limited mention of the differing contexts and experiences of PGR students.

However, it has been found that 32% of PhD students are at risk of having or developing a common psychiatric disorder, especially depression. In addition, 51% of PhD students are at risk of experiencing psychological distress. (Levecque et al., 2017)

Postgraduate research students are exposed to specific issues and pressures which can contribute to mental health issues including depression, anxiety, or similar. These include (but are not limited to):
- Financial pressures (particularly for self-funding students, or those who have left work to complete research study);
- Social isolation (many research students will be engaged in independent research for the majority of their time) and lack of a support network (this is particularly true for PG students who have moved to a new area of the country to complete their study)

- Part-time & 'out-of-county' students are particularly challenged with isolation and limited social contact and may become 'hard to reach' due to the limited time that they are able to spend on campus.
- Identifying as both staff and student, which can lead to an unwillingness to disclose time or financial pressures;
- Reliance on a supervisory team which provides both academic and pastoral support (this can lead to fears of disclosing pastoral concerns for fear of this affecting academic support);
- The requirement to learn new research methodologies or techniques, or teaching skills, and perform these at a high standard with minimum training;
- Managing caring or parental responsibilities alongside research study.

It is accepted that some of these issues will also affect other transactional/mature students, and are not necessarily limited to PGR students. However, the nature of PGR study, which can demand lengthy periods of isolated work with limited pastoral support, means that some PGR students are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues.

Student Council Holds the Viewpoint That:

- The Postgraduate Research community at Worcester is increasing and diversifying. The University and the SU need to recognise the particular needs of this group of students by investing in mental health provision which reflects the specific nature of their study;
- Provision and signposting for mental health services at City Campus, where many PGR students are based (either at Jenny Lind or in the Business School) is limited and could be effectively improved with minimal cost;
- A peer-to-peer mentoring system could be an effective way to prevent social isolation amongst PGR students.

Student Council Resolves to Take the Following Action(s):

The student council will support the University of Worcester's bid to gain Catalyst funding in order to improve mental health services for PGR students.
Should the bid be successful, the student council and SU staff will:

- Improve visual signposting to mental health services for PGR/all students at City Campus;
- FTOs, PTOs and SU Staff to attend a short training session which will aim to highlight the specific needs of PGR students;
- Explore ways in which the SU website could facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring and/or an online community, specifically for PGR students;
- Liaise with the Research School to ensure that new PGR students are offered the opportunity to sign up to University of Worcester clubs and societies.