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Northumbria University to lead transformation in how the Higher Education sector identifies mental health issues in students

A sector changing project using advanced data capture and student facing educational analytics will help to generate early warning signs for students' mental health and wellbeing.

The way in which student mental health and wellbeing is approached by the sector will be transformed following a successful bid [by Northumbria](#)

[University to identify how big data, technology, educational analytics and student facing interventions](#) can be used to recognise and support students with mental health issues.

The challenges facing the sector are well-known, with the rates of students disclosing mental illness continuing to rise, [and 95 students took their own lives in England and Wales in 2016/17](#).

A £2m project supported by the OfS will use innovative integration of technology, advanced educational data analytics, student relationship management and student support to provide an understanding of the opportunities to predict whether a student is already experiencing or will have a mental health crisis. The purpose of the study is to identify actionable insights to deliver holistic approaches to student health, wellbeing and education. This will be done in collaboration between nine partners from the Higher Education, charity and technology sectors and Students' Unions.

By 2021, the project will provide answers to the questions the sector is asking on how best to identify and respond to students with poor mental fitness. All outputs from the project will be scalable sector wide, giving providers mechanisms to make positive interventions and tools to engage their whole student community.

Professor Peter Francis, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Northumbria University and project lead, said: "This project brings together the best ideas alongside cutting-edge analytical technology to support all students, with the goal of seeing how big data can support a thriving student community. We will build an understanding of how a student gets into a state of crisis and whether joined up collected data can generate the targeted personalised support that they require."

"We are taking a pioneering and sector-leading approach to this very serious issue, and one which will provide all universities with the mechanisms to help those most in need"

Professor Andrew Wathey CBE, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Northumbria University, said "Northumbria's lead role in this project demonstrates clearly the University's commitment to tackling this key sector-wide issue. The extremely complex issue of student mental health is a strategic priority for the whole of the Higher Education sector: our lead role

in this project signals our determination to improve the lives of all students by tackling this issue.”

With innovative technology central to the aspirations of the project, leading Higher Education specialists have been engaged to provide their expertise. These include world-leading experts in student data, Civitas International Learning and The Student Room, who run the biggest and most popular student online community in the UK as well as education apps.

Dr. Mark Milliron, Chief Learning Officer and Co-Founder of Civitas Learning said: “We help Higher Education institutions make the most of their learning data so that they know what is working for their students and can better personalise and scale student supports. The Office for Students and Northumbria University are addressing the critical challenges on differential attainment, holistic support and student thriving. We’re honoured to be a part of this important work.”

Chris Newson, CEO of The Student Room comments: “Last summer, The Student Room, and our five development partner universities, began a journey to create Enlitened, an innovative continuous improvement platform for student engagement and wellbeing. We’re delighted to now have this support from the Office for Students, to help Enlitened, Northumbria University, Universities UK and all the collaborative partners involved in the bid, have an even more transformative impact on student wellbeing for the wider Higher Education sector.”

Acknowledging this successful sector leading and collaborative proposal as part of the [Universities UK #StepChange framework](#), John de Pury, Assistant Director of Policy and mental health policy lead for Universities UK, added: “UUK is delighted to be working with Northumbria and other partners on this ambitious project to harness leading digital analytics to realise our shared vision – set out in UUK’s Stepchange framework – to transform health and educational outcomes. This reaffirms that the UK sector is taking a leading approach to mental health in higher education.”

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