



QUEEN'S
STUDENTS'
UNION

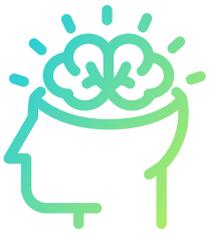
omni

all in for mental health

Action Plan

Mental health is repeatedly identified as a priority issue for students, and this has been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Queen's Students' Union relaunched the OMNI campaign in 2022 to raise awareness of mental health and to gain specific insight into the mental health of Queen's students.

Some Key Points



85%

were concerned about their mental health over the past 12 months



2,164

students completed the survey



79%

reported feeling regularly concerned (at least once a week or more) about their mental health



74%

reported struggling with burnout while at university



Students were more likely to seek support from a friend or fellow student than anyone else



The following were identified as the top 5 ways in which students felt that their mental health could be improved when asked to rank a series of options:

1. Investment in mental health services and talking therapies
2. Increased financial support for students in the immediate term
3. Reducing future levels of graduate debt
4. Improved quality / cost of housing for students
5. Changes in the language and culture of the university e.g. around 'students as consumers and products'

The key themes that emerged from students' qualitative feedback on what schools/ faculties could do to improve or support student wellbeing were to:

- Be on the students' side
- Improve academic structures and support
- Organise more social opportunities and wellbeing events
- Provide better pastoral support and improve signposting
- Actively work to remove stigma around talking about mental health and struggles more generally

Key statistics related to specific student pressures

Relationship / social pressures

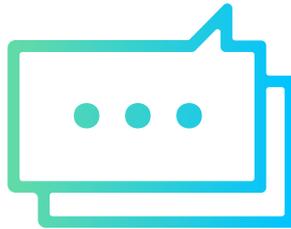


63%

reported that online learning had made it difficult to make friends

41%

reported that there were not enough social (extracurricular) opportunities on their course



29%

reported that they did not make new friends easily



19%

reported that they rarely or never engaged in non-physical social / extracurricular activity



17%

reported they only engage in non-physical social / extracurricular activity a few times per month

Academic Pressures



62%

struggled with
deadline pressure



47%

felt their academic
workload was too much
to manage



43%

struggled with the
method of teaching

39%

struggled with issues
surrounding academic
feedback

Financial Pressures



38%

worry about their
levels of future debt

49%

regularly worry about
basic living expenses

73%

struggle to balance
work, life and study
commitments



55%

felt that either society or
the University sees them
as a customer

The Plan

In addition to the existing work that we do to support our students' mental health via our Clubs and Societies, Student Voice, Volunteering, Enterprise, and Advice services, The Union will commit to further actions to better support student mental health and wellbeing, based on the OMNI 2022 findings. Here's what we will do to better support you.

1 There is a high frequency of mental health concerns, and a priority is investment in mental health services and talking therapies.

What we will do...

- **Employ several strategies to try to reduce the frequency and extent of student mental health concerns.**
- **Focus on investment in mental health services and talking therapies.**

How we we will do this...

- We will continue to grow the SU mental health and wellbeing offering focusing on engagement and student community, in addition to strategic change. This includes delivering our three-year mental health and wellbeing action plan.
- We will increase signposting internally and externally in addition to focusing on preventative measures.
- We will lobby the university to either expand its relationship with Inspire for more extensive counselling provision for students or consider additional partnerships with external organisations.
- We will introduce a social prescribing project aimed at prevention and early intervention. There will be a dedicated development worker who will create a network of social prescribers across campus. This will include implementing a social prescribing digital platform to support student progress and facilitate access to social prescriptions across the SU, the University and with the third sector.
- We will explore and pilot innovative mental health and wellbeing projects.
- We will lobby the university to continue to support the Student Disability & Wellbeing Service and provide additional resource where required.
- We will lobby for continued mental health and wellbeing budgetary support.
- As a union, we will continue to ensure mental health and wellbeing is embedded within our departments with each department having plans to realise this. Examples of how this could be realised include attending mental health training each year or working on a new mental health and wellbeing initiative.
- We will continue to listen to students around their mental health and wellbeing concerns and tailor our support as concerns/needs evolve.

2 Burnout is a real issue.

What we will do...

Address student burnout by working hard to tackle the systemic issues that contribute to burnout, such as the ones listed above, in addition to offering students opportunities to focus on wellbeing and develop/hone skills to try to prevent burnout.

How we we will do this...

- We will work on the actions outlined above to address systemic challenges.
- We will organise more relaxation and destressing events, aligned with the Public Health Agency's Take 5 steps to Wellbeing, to support students, particularly during busy exam/assessment periods.
- We will lobby the university to ensure Wednesday afternoons are free from class so students can avail of more relaxing /extra-curricular activity.
- We will offer mental health and wellbeing training that is tailored for students to support and promote wellbeing. This will include coordinated efforts to signpost to existing wellbeing support services.
- We will create new training / workshop opportunities that support the reduction of academic pressures that are modifiable at a personal level, including stress management tips and effective study skills. This will include coordinated efforts to signpost to existing academic support services. These should be offered at multiple dates and times to afford more students with the opportunity to attend.
- Offer /promote free events on weekends.
- We will run focus groups with staff from core internal academic and pastoral support services to discuss and reflect how to respond to the OMNI findings.

3 Academic pressures such as bunched deadlines and student workload need to be addressed.

What we will do...

Work to tackle bunched deadlines and student workload issues at both an organisational and school level.

How we we will do this...

We will lobby the university and schools to address the issue of bunched deadlines. This will be realised by:

- Requesting a review of academic timetabling in each school, with an improved deadline management system for all but particularly joint degree programmes and programmes with placements.

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- All students should be made aware of deadlines well in advance to facilitate planning. Deadlines across different modules needs greater transparency, such as an academic calendar with deadlines for the submission/examination dates, and expected feedback dates where applicable.
 - Improved communication.
 - Ensuring the issue of bunched deadlines is a standing item on Faculty Education Committees, School Education Boards, Education Committee Student Experience, and Deans and DE forum.

We will lobby the university and schools to address the issue of student workload. This will be realised by:

- Requesting that a best practice model for student workload is created in each school, based on a review of the sector. Each school should create a guide of what a manageable workload looks like for their students to facilitate programme / module planning.
- Ensuring the issue of student workload is a standing item on Faculty Education Committees, School Education Boards, Education Committee Student Experience, and Deans and DE forum.

4 You want changes in the language and culture of the university e.g. around ‘students as consumers and products’

What we will do...

Fight for changes in how the university approaches students as consumers.

How we we will do this...

- We will lobby for the heavy focus on recruitment numbers to be appropriately balanced with quality education and quality student experience. We will ask for a review of recruitment KPIs in line with this principle.
- We will lobby for ethical and responsible global recruitment practices, in particular how such strategies are applied in ‘new markets’. This again requires a review of current strategies and a balance between student welfare and admissions figures.
- We will request that commercial services review their offering and pricing structure to provide better options for our students, especially considering the current cost-of-living crisis.

5 Immediate financial pressures and reducing student debt are issues that need to be tackled.

What we will do...

- **Explore ways that we can best support our students in the COL crisis.**
- **Create upskilling financial awareness opportunities for students.**
- **Address the issue of student debt.**

How we we will do this...

- We will lobby the university to remove unnecessary fees and charges for students.
- We will run more cost-of-living related initiatives for students, including longer term initiatives.
- We will lobby the university to run longer term cost of living initiatives and provide sustainable financial support beyond 2022/23.
- We will lobby for improved promotion and ease of application to the hardship fund.
- We will request a review of the eligibility criteria for students who cannot apply for scholarships, maintenance, and the hardship fund.
- We will lobby the university to review the cap on student workers' hours.
- We will continue to build the cost-of-living support section on our website.
- We will heavily promote Blackbullion, a student digital education tool purchased for all students to access.
- We will highlight ways to reduce student debt on an individual level – as outlined in Blackbullion.
- We will lobby the government to reduce student debt.

6 You want several changes from school / faculties. There are a broad range: academic, pastoral, social, and active work around stigma-reduction.

What we will do...

Hold schools / faculties and the university to account for the changes needed to better improve student mental health.

How we we will do this...

- We will lobby the school /faculties and the university to make changes and improvements based on your feedback.
- We will also consider these changes from an SU perspective and determine how we can better support these changes.
- The SU will evaluate its outreach activities within different faculties and its involvement in improving student engagement on a school-by-school basis.

7 You are more likely to seek help from a friend or fellow student than anyone else.

What we will do...

- **Explore peer mental health support initiatives.**
- **Increase and improve signposting of on-campus and external supports.**

How we we will do this...

- In the short-term, we will grow the new Look After Your Mate peer mental health support programme by training more staff and offer more sessions across campus.
- In the longer-term, we will work with the university to embed peer mental health support, exploring innovative ways to achieve this. We will also work closely with Student Minds to keep abreast with research, policy, and practice across the sector. This will include exploring new training initiatives.
- We will run events to facilitate peer mental health support, such as monthly coffee mornings in the SU.
- We will increase our signposting of internal and external supports at OSU events (both academic and pastoral) but also in collaboration with other areas of the university for greater reach and consistency of approach.

If you are affected by any of the content in this document, please don't
hesitate to contact the following organisations:

QUB Student Wellbeing Service: 07387 546 123

Inspire – (24/7 helpline – Freephone) – 0808 800 0016 (Wellbeing Support)

Lifeline – (24/7 helpline – Freephone) – 0808 808 8000 (Crisis Support)

Samaritans – 116 123

SU Advice: su.advice@qub.ac.uk