

Board Meeting

Date of Meeting	Monday 15 May 2023
Paper Title	Thriving Learners report
Agenda Item	9
Paper Number	BM5-D
Responsible Officer	Martin Boyle, Executive Director
Status	Disclosable
Action	For noting

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Mental Health Foundation's¹ Thriving Learners report is a large, and important, study of student mental health in Scotland, engaging over 17,000 college and university students, and leading to recommendations for sector-wide improvements.
- 1.2 GCRB and the Glasgow colleges have long articulated support for student mental health and wellbeing, with a range of activity and funding. This has included engagement projects, counsellor provision, online support offering, and strategic interventions.
- 1.3 In addition, GCRB has allocated an additional £144,000 of funding to the Glasgow colleges to safeguard counsellor provision and mental health support across Glasgow.
- 1.4 GCRB and the Glasgow colleges also continue to explore other options for enhanced student support. As lead principal for this matter at Colleges Scotland, Glasgow Clyde College Principal Jon Vincent is able to provide an overview of the current national perspective, while board member Moira Connolly has engaged with Glasgow's universities and NHS Glasgow to explore pilot opportunities for coherent partnership working.
- 1.5 GCRB is delighted to welcome Christopher Maguire, Senior Research Officer with the Mental Health Foundation, to present the research, findings, and recommendations of the college-focused Thriving Learners report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Board is invited to **consider** the presentation from The Mental Health Foundation and its recommendations, particularly as they relate to the Glasgow college system.

¹ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/thriving-learners>

3. Report

3.1 The Mental Health Foundation's overarching Thriving Learners work can be found here:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/thriving-learners>

3.2 The college report can be found here:

https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/202211/MHF_Thriving_Learners_Report.pdf

3.3 Findings and Recommendations

3.4 The study found that:

- 64% of college students in Scotland had low mental well-being.
- Among the college students who said they had low well-being, three-quarters said they experienced food insecurity or had a **long-term health condition**, and half had a disability
- 37% experienced food insecurity in the previous 12 months while 31% of students worried about running out of food; 30% ate less due to a lack of resources or money; and 17% lived in households that had run out of food.
- 54% reported having moderate, moderately severe, or severe symptoms of **depression**. Among students who have experienced food insecurity, 25% had severe symptoms of depression.
- 55% of students said they had concealed a mental health problem due to fear of **stigma**

3.5 The study recommended:

- The Scottish Government should provide increased investment and sustained funding for mental health and well-being support in colleges. This should include well-being interventions that benefit general health.
- Colleges and key funding agencies, including the Scottish Government, need to work together to implement a post-pandemic recovery plan that recognises and addresses the effects of the pandemic on student learning and social confidence.
- College student support services should strengthen their communication and engagement with students to help increase awareness among students of mental health and well-being support. This should focus specifically on communication and engagement with students with vulnerabilities and that those who work with them to make sure there is more consistent and clear information for these students before they start college and across their journey.

4. Risk and Compliance Analysis

4.1 Mental health and wellbeing are seen to be significant determining factors in student retention and completion. This therefore remains a significant priority area for GCRB and the Glasgow colleges.

5. Financial and Resource Analysis

5.1 GCRB has proposed the provision of additional funding for the Glasgow colleges to support counsellor provision in 2023-23. There remains a wider significant threat to this service as additional national allocation remains unconfirmed.

6. Equalities Implications

6.1 Mental health has a significant impact across learners of all backgrounds and identities. In many cases mental illness is defined as a protected characteristic and effective support offering is an important offer in providing equality of access to education and opportunity.

7. Learner Implications

7.1 Mental health and wellbeing is a significant determining factor for many learners. At recent SFC engagement meetings to consider learner outcomes, mental health was identified as the leading cause of withdrawal.