

Exploration of the knowledge and skills of WELS associate lecturers in relation to supporting students with a mental health difficulty



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Our aim was to investigate with WELS associate lecturers (ALs) their skills and experience of dealing with students who have mental health difficulty and to explore what support they need to be confident in their ability to support or signpost students with a mental health difficulty.

Findings: Most of the 39 ALs who were interviewed had tutored at the OU for many years and had noticed a steady rise in the number of students with a mental health difficulty. Anxiety followed by depression were the most frequently experienced mental health difficulty.

The following are skills suggested by ALs as necessary to support students with a mental health difficulty: Counselling skills, coaching skills, communication skills, listening skills, interpersonal skills, to be attuned/intuitive/able to recognise early warning skills and to the ways students are communicating with us, to know when to have difficult conversations, to have the ability to be realistic and honest to know one's limitations.

In relation to training in mental health ALs reported having informal updates on mental health issues, but no formal training at the OU. There was a range of responses in relation to how well equipped they felt in relation to supporting students with a mental health issue, and a large majority of ALs reported that they would welcome more training, with suggestions as to what that should be.

Many ALs felt it necessary to maintain boundaries with students who had a mental health difficulty.

Conclusion: ALs are experienced in supporting the growing number of students with a mental health difficulty but feel the need of training on the issue so that they can feel more confident in the support they provide for students.

