

Consultation Response: Transforming children and young people's mental health provision

To: Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care

By: The Intergenerational Foundation

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The Intergenerational Foundation (www.if.org.uk) is an independent think tank researching fairness between generations. IF believes policy should be fair to all – the old, the young and those to come.

Introduction

The Intergenerational Foundation (IF) is pleased to comment on the *Transforming children and young people's mental health provision* consultation. This response focuses on how the green paper may affect young adults, aged up to 25 years old, and what can be done to further improve services for this demographic. In particular, we would like to offer comments on the following elements of the green paper:

- *Wider support for the mental health of 16-25 year olds*
- *Promoting positive mental health for all*

Wider support for the mental health of 16-25 year olds

Young adults, who are 12% more likely than the general population to report a mental health problem, and 31% more likely than over 65s,¹ should be a key target of mental health reforms. In the current system of mental health support, 18-25 year olds often slip between the cracks; there are few services which respond specifically to the needs of *young* adults, as they simply enter adult services once turning 18. The green paper sets out several ways of increasing mental health support for 16-25 year olds, including working with higher education institutions to improve provision of services. IF welcomes this, and believes it to be an important step in supporting young people, for whom adult mental health services may not be entirely appropriate.

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/one-in-three-young-adults-experienced-mental-health-issues-this-year-here-are-their-stories_uk_59cbc21ae4b053a9c2f59eea

Promoting positive mental health for all

The green paper sets out the need to “*identify key prevention evidence and... highlight gaps and make recommendations for these to be addressed through further research*”. IF believes that young adults should be a target of research into prevention, and there is a particular need to focus on the unique stresses placed on many young adults who are at university.

NHS England has recognised students as an “atypical population”² that are more likely to be negatively affected by the recent cuts in mental health funding. In the last decade, there has been a fivefold increase in the number of mental health problems reported among university students.³ A number of sources have suggested that soaring tuition fees and living costs may have contributed to mental health problems. Whilst it is very difficult to explicitly link mental health and student debt, the National Student Money Survey found that 50% of its respondents stated that financial concerns had caused their mental health to suffer.⁴ Furthermore, the Vice Chancellor for the University of Bristol suggested that high tuition fees contribute to the uncertainty faced by students,⁵ and the same idea was also put forward by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) in a report about the specific stresses which students are subjected to, which placed particular emphasis upon financial pressures.⁶ In this report, it stated that over the past five years, 94% of universities have reported an increase in demand for counselling services.⁷ Research into key prevention evidence for young adults at university may be an important step in improving the mental health of the younger generation.

Conclusion

IF supports this green paper as a whole, but we particularly hope that services for young adults will be improved as a result of it. 16-25 year olds are at a pivotal point in their lives, and, as the paper lays out, often need additional support in the transition to adulthood. Such support is increasingly needed, especially due to the unique pressures students face. IF emphatically supports the widening of support for young adults, and calls for future research into prevention to include the financial stresses students are under.

If you would like to learn more about the work of the Intergenerational Foundation please contact:

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² <https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-09/not-by-degrees-summary-sept-2017-1-.pdf>

³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/student-life/health/suicides-rates-double-uk-university-students-134-2015-depression-anxiety-services-overwhelmed-a7925631.html>

⁴ <https://www.savesthestudent.org/money/student-money-survey-2017.html>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/feb/21/suicide-is-a-sector-wide-issue-says-bristol-university-vice-chancellor>

⁶ <https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-09/not-by-degrees-summary-sept-2017-1-.pdf>

⁷ *ibid*