

# The Welfare Survey: Final Report

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## Foreword



The London School of Economics and Political Science is a challenging place to be a student. Set in a context of high achievers, high competition, and high ambition, students are set a challenge to be the very best.

The environment that this creates, coupled with an institutional reticence to creating a supportive, positive culture at the LSE, means that students lose out on the world class experience that they expect.

At the Students' Union, we surveyed over one thousand students to find out about their experiences of mental health at the LSE, ranging from the treatment of disability, experiences of the counselling and wellbeing services, and academic advisers. What we were able to learn is that there are some positive stories to tell, but some more shocking areas of improvement.

Astoundingly, over 48 per cent of students disagree that LSE supports good mental health and wellbeing. This is a strategic issue for the LSE and for students. Crucial to the educational success and happiness of our students is good mental health and wellbeing, and institutional support to removing the barriers or causes of this is imperative. Key words that came up in our qualitative data included feeling isolated, a lack of awareness, lack of central support, peer competition, and the high pressure that the School puts on students.

Over 67 per cent of students have experienced poor mental health, and over one third of students disclosing their disability say that they have encountered discrimination. We were saddened, but not surprised by these statistics.

In light of this, we are asking the LSE to say that they will be there for its students. Not just this year, or next year, but in how it thinks strategically in the years to come. A clear message is that we do have good services, but they are overstretched and require more resource. Another

is that academics need to be engaged in issues related to mental health and wellbeing, and professional services and academics need to collaborate and work together.

Most importantly, what is essential is that LSE needs to make a clear commitment to its students to tackling the issues raised in this piece of research. In order for our university to be the best it can be, mental health has to be a priority area which is recognised and tackled. We implore the LSE to do so.

Nona, Aysha, Katie and Jon  
LSESU Sabbatical Team 2015/16

## Executive Summary

The Welfare Survey ran from 11 January 2016 to 8 February 2016 and surveyed a total of 1,100 students as to their experiences surrounding mental health and wellbeing at LSE. The purpose of the Wellbeing Survey was to try to build a picture as to how students feel that the culture surrounding mental health and wellbeing is viewed and treated at LSE. This includes how students view and experiences of the current support services available to them such as the counselling service, disability service and wellbeing activities.

### General Information

This section of the survey sought general information from students regarding mental health and wellbeing; questions included whether the students had experienced a period of poor mental health, if they self-defined as disabled and if they had disclosed a disability to the School.

The survey found that while 45% of students stated they had experienced a period of poor mental health only 9% of students had disclosed a disability to the School. Although experiencing a period of poor mental health does not necessarily always equate to a disability, the disparity in these figures could suggest that there is a culture of under reporting at LSE.

As well as this, there was not a clear correlation between the students who stated that they self-defined as disabled and those that had disclosed a disability to the School. Not all students who had disclosed a disability to the School self-defined as disabled and not all students who self-define as disabled have disclosed a disability. This could add further weight to the hypothesis that students under report disability relating to mental health.

### LSE Culture

This section of the survey sought to find out how students perceive the culture at LSE surrounding mental health and wellbeing. It asked questions such as whether students felt LSE supports good mental health, whether they felt there was a stigma surrounding mental health at LSE, who they would be most likely to disclose a mental health issue to and which aspects of their course they found most stressful. Perhaps unsurprisingly, students stated that exams and essays were the most stressful aspects of their course.

Shockingly, the survey found that the majority of students did not agree that LSE provides an environment that supports good mental health. In contrast to this, students did not feel as strongly that there is a stigma surrounding mental health at LSE. This suggests that while students feel that LSE does not support their mental health, there could be space to have the conversation with staff and students as to how to improve support for mental health at LSE. Students stated very clearly that the culture of high pressure, high expectation and high standards within the institution contributes to them feeling negatively towards mental health support at LSE. This culture is not necessarily something that comes directly from peers or

staff, but it is clear that a collective conversation should be had exploring why the need to uphold LSE's reputation as a world class university appears to come at the expense of its students' wellbeing.

### Student Counselling Service

This section of the survey sought to find out from students their experiences of the Student Counselling Service including first appointment, individual counselling, group counselling, Mental Health Advisers and self-help materials. The survey found that the service most utilised was individual counselling sessions, with the numbers of students using the online self-help materials disappointingly low. The numbers of sessions that students were receiving were quite low, particularly for individual counselling sessions and sessions with Mental Health Advisers; with the majority of students stating that they only had one or two sessions. As well as this, the number of students stating that they had been offered CBT was also quite low.

Of the students who did not use the service, it was disappointing that 29% of these students stated that they would not approach the Student Counselling Service due to feeling uncomfortable or negative about the service or that they felt their issues were not serious enough. In particular, students commented that they felt the service was under-resourced, always busy and therefore not accessible. This perception of the Student Counselling Service seems to be translating into a real barrier for students and suggests that greater investment in resource is required.

### Disability Service

The survey found that the number of students accessing the Disability Service were quite low, although this is representative of the number of students who seek support with disability from the School. While the majority of students who saw an adviser did not have to wait longer than two weeks, the Students' Union believes that no student should have to wait over 10 working days. This is particularly important for learning adjustments as not having these in place in good time could have a serious impact upon their studies.

Overall students seems generally quite positive about their experiences with the Disability Service, however some students did state that they felt advisers may not have been sufficiently well-informed about the nuances of certain mental health issues. This should not be read as a criticism of the adviser, more that where there is a breakdown in relationship with the adviser then students should be able to change where reasonably practicable. As well as this some students reported that their learning adjustments had not been implemented at all or were not sufficient for their learning needs, which is concerning.

### Peer Supporters

The survey found that the vast majority of students who access support from Peer Supporters are undergraduate students and many students also commented that supporters could be

difficult to access outside of halls. Therefore it can be assumed that the largest users of this support are undergraduates living in halls and that for those students they are an important support resource but however their impact is less so for the wider demographic of students.

If the School were to seek to expand Peer Supporters these results suggest that the School should concentrate on improving awareness and accessibility for students outside of halls of residences. As well as this the School should improve targeting postgraduates to become Supporters themselves which would reduce the barriers for postgraduates in accessing them.

#### Academic Advisers

The findings from the survey show that many students simply do not see their Academic Adviser as a source of pastoral support. It is particularly stark to see that only 11% of students who have not approached their adviser for non-academic support would do so in the future and this should raise a number of questions for the School. From the comments left by students it seems that this barrier is due the fact that some students perceive their advisers as unapproachable and disinterested in non-academic issues

For those students who do approach their Academic Adviser about non-academic issues, overall it seems that students generally tend to have a positive experience. This highlights the valuable work undertaken by many Academic Advisers in providing a supportive environment for their students which should rightly be commended. Nevertheless the numbers of students approaching their Academic Adviser are particularly small and work should be undertaken to increase the number of students accessing pastoral support through their Adviser.

#### Wellbeing Activities

The survey found that few students were aware that LSE offered wellbeing activities and events and that even fewer students had attended those on offer. However it is promising that so many students who did take part found the wellbeing activities and events both accessible and helpful. As to additional activities and events that the School could run there is clearly demand by students for 'personal development' type classes to help students cope with their workloads.

From the comments left by students who either were not aware of the wellbeing activities and events or had not attended them, it seems that 'Time' is a major barrier to attendance. This suggests that LSE should ensure that sessions are run at varying times, including evenings. However this could also mean that students do not see the benefit in making the time to attend wellbeing events and activities and that due to the stressful nature of studying at LSE students feel they need to prioritise studying over wellbeing.

## Introduction and Methodology

This academic year one of the main priorities for the elected sabbatical officers of the London School of Economics Students' Union (LSESU) has been to improve mental health and wellbeing for students studying at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). As well as running the year-long 'Wellbeing Project' the sabbatical officers commissioned research to look into how students feel that mental health is treated at LSE and to add to the existing body of research on the various support services that LSE provides.

The ultimate aim of the Welfare Survey and its subsequent reports is to begin a conversation between students, the Students' Union and the School as to how LSE can become a leader in the higher education sector on promoting a positive culture surrounding mental health and wellbeing.

### Background

Nationally, the numbers of students declaring mental health issues and accessing support services has risen drastically over the past few years; data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) found that the number of students declaring a mental health issue has increased 132% from 2008 to 2013. As well as this, Ruth Caleb, Chair of Universities UK's Mental Well-being Working Group has estimated that counselling services are facing an annual rise in demand of approximately 10% (dependent on the institution). Further research published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce) found that institutions felt that the number of students declaring mental health issues and accessing support services has risen. One institution found that demand for mental health advisers had doubled; another had seen an increase in referrals to its counselling service of 54% in 12 months.

A recent Freedom of Information (FOI) requesting in relation to the Student Counselling Service helps to contextualise some of the data in this survey. This found that the service currently employs 7 full time counsellors, 2 mental health advisers and saw around 721 students during 2014/15. The response states that the average number of sessions that students receive is 4.8 sessions and that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is offered.

### Methodology

In order to ensure that students were able to speak as openly as possible about their experiences at LSE the Welfare Survey was completely anonymised. There were a range of qualitative and quantitative questions in order to gain as broad a range of views from students as possible.

The survey ran from 11 January 2016 to 8 February 2016 and received a total of 1,100 responses. The survey was online only and was promoted via LSESU channels, this included:



- Emails to all students;
- Emails to course reps;
- Promotion on the LSESU social media (facebook and twitter);
- Stalls held outside the Saw Swee Hock Student Centre;
- Promotion by Peer Supporters; and
- An advert in the Beaver.

### Findings

The findings from the Welfare Survey are presented in the following pages; they are categorised by each section of the survey, these are:

- General Information
- LSE Culture
- Student Counselling Service
- Disability Service
- Peer Supporters
- Academic Advisers
- Wellbeing Activities

Overall it seems that students who access the various support services available to them at LSE have a positive experience, they generally tend to find them accessible, helpful and supportive; there are many examples of good practice contained within the results of this report.

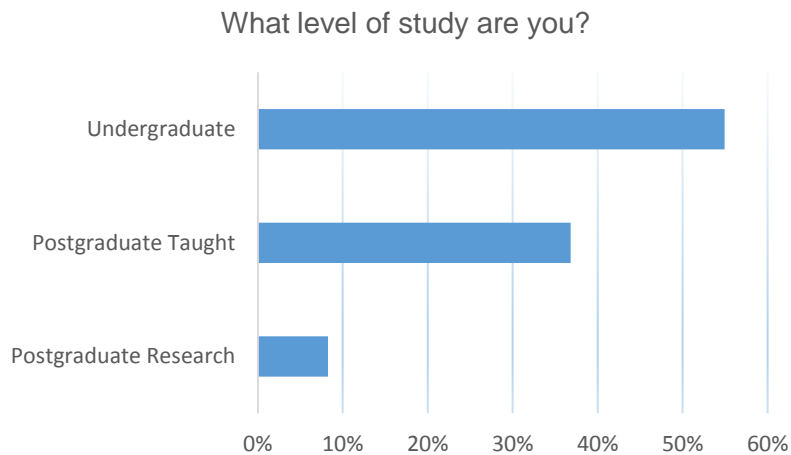
Nevertheless, this report has found that the intensive nature of the academic culture at LSE is having a detrimental impact on students' mental health and wellbeing, and that within the support services there are still too many inconsistencies. Therefore at the end of this report there are recommendations as to how LSESU believes that the mental health and wellbeing of students could be improved. We look forward to working with LSE to better improve the experiences of students studying at LSE.

Please note that percentages used in this report have been rounded to the nearest percentage.

## General Information

This section of the survey sought to gather background information relating to students at LSE and their mental health and wellbeing in order to set the scene for the rest of the survey. The data gathered here included whether students are registered with a GP; whether they had experienced poor mental health; whether they self-define as disabled and whether they have disclosed a disability to the School.

### General Information

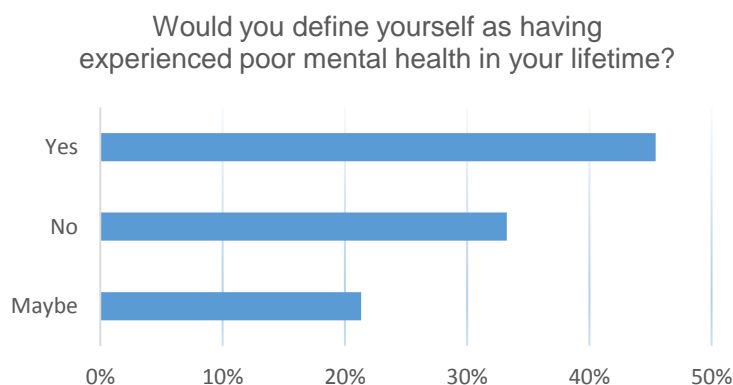


As part of the survey, students were not asked any identifiable questions so as to ensure anonymity so that they felt fully able to share their experiences. However, research has indicated that students at different levels of study experience mental health in different ways, therefore the Students' Union felt that collecting this data was important.

The largest proportion of respondents were undergraduate students with 55% of respondents, however a high proportion of postgraduate taught students did respond with 37% of the total number of respondents.



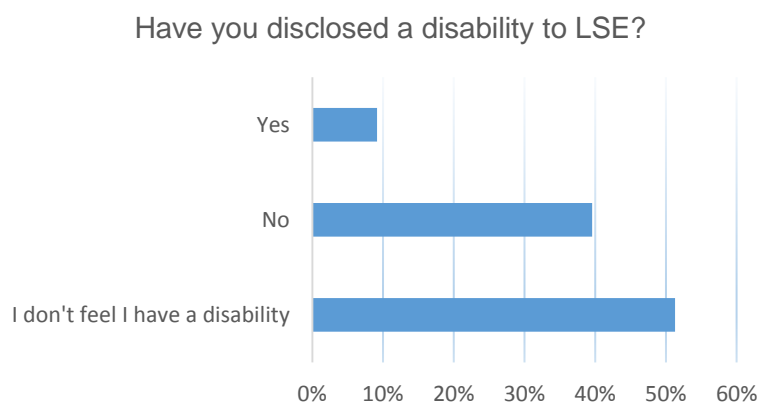
Students were then asked whether they are registered with a GP, this data was important as it helped to build a general picture as to students who by virtue of being registered with their GP have access to NHS mental health support and those who do not. Promisingly, 78% of students were registered; when broken down into the level of study, 85% of undergraduates were registered, 68% of postgraduate taught and 79% of postgraduate research students.



In total 67% of students stated either 'Yes' or 'Maybe' when asked if they had experienced poor mental health, with 45% of students stating 'Yes'. When this is broken down into level of study 47% of undergraduates, 39% of postgraduate taught and 60% of postgraduate research students stated that they had experienced poor mental health. Whilst it is particularly worrying that the number of postgraduate research students experiencing poor mental health was 15% higher than the average across all levels, it should be noted that the sample size for this group is quite small.

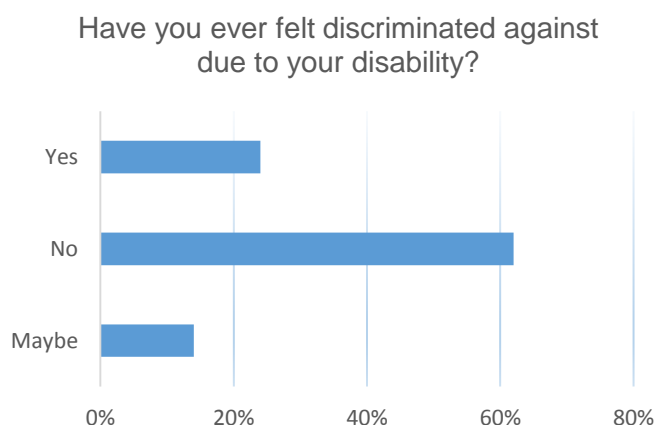
When this is looked at in reference to students who are registered with a GP, it is concerning that of those not registered 38% of these students stated that they had experienced poor mental health. This equates to a cohort of students who may have a need to access NHS mental health services but are not able to do so.

### Disability Disclosure



Interestingly, 9% of students stated that they had declared a disability, although this is slightly higher than the general disclosure rate for LSE which is 6%<sup>1</sup> it is still generally representative of students who access the Disability Service. What is particularly interesting is that of those stating they had disclosed a disability to the School, 78% said they had experienced poor mental health.

What is also particularly interesting about these results are the numbers of students who stated 'No' instead of stating they did not feel they had a disability, which may suggest that some students do define as disabled but do not disclose this to the School. This can be further contextualised as students were then asked if they self-defined as disabled and only 7% of students stated that they did. When disclosure and self-definition of disability are compared, of the students that stated they had not disclosed disability to the School, 4% said that they did define as disabled. Of the students who stated that they did self-define as disabled 23% had not disclosed this to the School and 4% stated that they did not feel they had a disability.



The students who stated that they had disclosed a disability to LSE were then asked whether they had ever felt discriminated against due to their disability. It is troubling that over a third of these students felt that either they had or might have been discriminated against at LSE. From the comments left by students, the majority of respondents stated that the feeling of discrimination at LSE came very much from academics not having a sufficiently detailed understanding of mental health as a disability. Other examples included, students feeling that their Individual Study Support Agreements (ISSA) had not been implemented fully; that academics allegedly used inappropriate language and that students felt that mental health issues could be minimised. As well as this students felt that inflexibility with exams and assignments made them feel that mental health issues were not taken seriously by the School.

### Analysis

The results of the General Information section of the Welfare Survey were highly illuminating as to how students view mental health as a disability at LSE. The most concerning finding was that whilst 45% of students stated they had experienced poor mental health, only 9% of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/staff/equityDiversityInclusion/docs/Equality-data-reporting/2016/2016-Student-numbers.pdf>

students had disclosed a disability to the university. This could suggest that there is a culture among LSE students of not reporting mental health issues as a disability to the School and therefore not receiving vital support in their studies. Although it should be noted that experiencing a period of poor mental health does not necessarily equate to a disability in itself, nevertheless the level of disparity between the two figures is worrying.

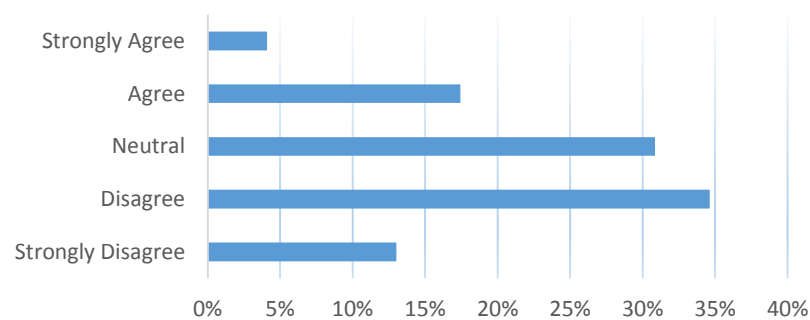
What is interesting is that there did not seem to be a complete correlation between the number of students who self-defined as disabled and those who had disclosed a disability to the School. Not all students who had disclosed a disability to the School self-defined as disabled and not all students who self-define as disabled have disclosed a disability. This could suggest that there is a mismatch between students who seek learning support from LSE but don't define as disabled, and those who do define as disabled but do not seek support from the School. This could add further weight to the assertion that there is culture of under reporting at LSE that is integrally linked to questions of identity and labelling of disability. It could be suggested that students who seek support do not always wish to identify themselves as disabled and that students who do define as disabled do not want the School to label them as disabled and that these two combine to create a reporting barrier.

It was also extremely disappointing that over a third of students who have disclosed a disability have felt discriminated against at LSE. In particular, the majority of comments left by students stated that they felt that academics did not understand mental health problems and were dismissive of ISSAs, although in no way does the Students' Union suggest that this is an issue for the majority of academics. It is the view of LSESU that no student should feel discriminated against due to their disability, therefore Mental Health First Aid Training should be available to all student facing academics, particularly for those who directly engage with disabled students.

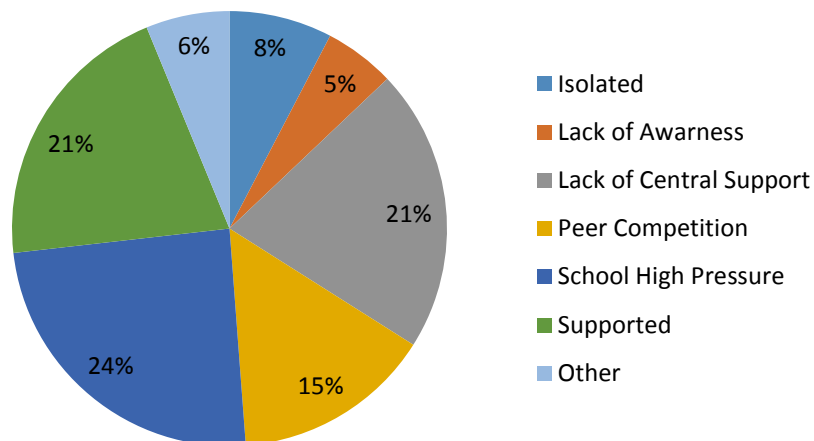
## LSE Culture

At LSE there appears to be a general acceptance that the culture of studying at LSE is an intensive experience and that the exam period is stressful often to the detriment of student's mental health and wellbeing. However, much of this is hearsay and the Students' Union felt that there was a lack of data collected on the views and perceptions of students. Therefore this section of the survey sought to find out from students if they feel that LSE supports good mental health, which aspect of their courses cause them the most stress and who they would be most likely to speak to about mental health issues.

Generally, do you feel that LSE provides an environment that supports good mental health and wellbeing?



Perhaps the most challenging statistic from the Welfare Survey is that 48% of students, when asked if they felt that LSE supports good mental health and wellbeing stated either 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'; this equates to nearly half of all respondents. Further to this, if the results are broken down by level of study then undergraduates are most likely to respond negatively, with 56% in total, and postgraduate taught students are most likely to feel positively with 31% answering positively that LSE supports good mental health. Nevertheless across all study levels students were most likely to answer this question to the negative.



The comments left by students to this question contextualise why it is that students do not feel that LSE supports good mental health, these can be loosely grouped into seven categories which are as follows:

*Isolated* – This category of students felt that LSE does not support their mental health as they feel that the culture within LSE is such that it does not foster a supportive community; for example some students stated that they felt like there are cliques, which can lead to them feeling isolated or lonely.

*Lack of Awareness* – This group of students were those that stated they did not feel supported as they did not feel they have sufficient information as to where to access support for mental health issues from the School.

*Lack of Central Support* – This category of students were those who felt that the central support services on offer were not able to support good mental health; this includes Student Counselling Service, Disability and Wellbeing Service and Academic Advisers. Some students reported overtly negative experiences in accessing central support services in particular that their experiences had been minimised. Other students cited long waiting times, the cap on counselling, and the perception that services were too busy and underfunded. Some students commented that Academic Advisers were not able to signpost them effectively or were simply not empathetic to their situation. .

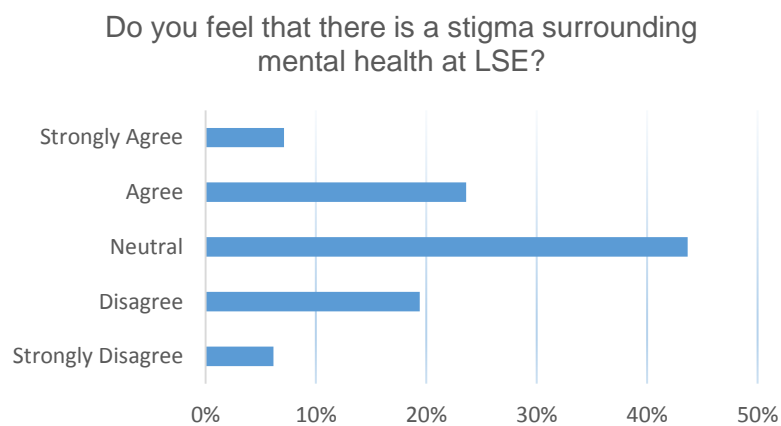
*Peer Competition* – These students were those that stated that whilst they felt that LSE did not necessarily support good mental health, that this culture emanated not directly from the School but from the competitiveness that is instilled between students. In particular students felt that this culture creates a 'stereotype' of the typical LSE student therefore it becomes difficult for students experiencing poor mental health to access support as they are fearful that deviating from the 'norm' would mean that other students may perceive them as 'weak'.

*School High-Pressure* – This group of students were those who overtly stated that the reason that they felt that LSE did not support their mental health was because of the pressure placed on students to succeed by the School. Students feel that there is a high expectation on them to not only succeed academically but also to find a career. Students within this category also felt that the large level of work that is allocated to them adds to this pressure. Cumulatively, students feel that this creates a lot of stress for them and that they are not properly supported in coping with the intensive, high pressured, high expectation environment that they perceive LSE to be.

*Supported* – This category of students were those that stated they felt sufficiently supported by the School; this included students who cited positive experiences with central support services, Academic Advisers and those students who felt that the culture at LSE is competitive and high pressure but stated that they felt this was of benefit to them.

*Other* – These comments included students who felt that LSE does not do much to support their mental health and that LSE does not care about their mental health but did not explicitly state why they felt this way.

It is concerning that less than a quarter of these comments were students stating that they felt sufficiently supported by LSE, although it was the third most common comment. The most common categories were 'School High-Pressure', 'Lack of Central Support' and 'Supported'. Interestingly, some students spoke specifically about their Departments, and it very much seems that the experience of students varies significantly on a Departmental level, with some being much better than others. As well as this many students referred to the fact they would like to see more support for mental health and wellbeing on a Departmental level.



Interestingly, whilst the majority of students felt that LSE does not support good mental health and wellbeing, students seemed to feel less strongly about whether there is a stigma surrounding mental health with 44% of students choosing 'Neutral'. However, more students either stated 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' than stated 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' with 31% and 25% respectively.

From the comments left by students for this question it seems that the students who stated 'Neutral' about whether there is a stigma at LSE generally did so because they feel that this stigma is a societal problem and not just limited to the School. Others stated that there was not an active stigma surrounding mental health at LSE but rather that mental health is 'neglected' as there is a lack of support and that mental health issues are not openly talked about.

For those that felt there was a stigma at LSE, their comments suggested that experiencing poor mental health at LSE is seen as a 'weakness', it was suggested that students feel as though they are expected to struggle through their degree no matter the cost to their mental health. Other comments stated that the culture of LSE being an intensive institution can create a barrier to openly discussing mental health issues as there is a perception that students are just expected to cope. Finally, for those students who stated they did not feel there was a stigma surrounding mental health at LSE this was because they felt that it was discussed relatively openly, though this was a relatively low number of respondents.

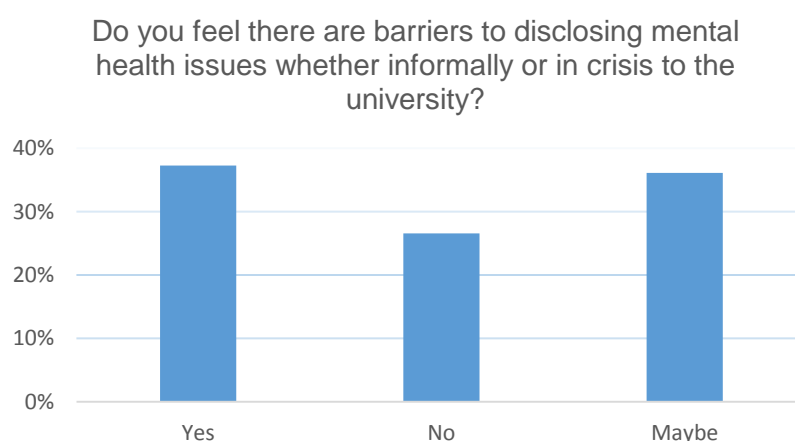


### Mental Health Disclosure

In order to fully understand the culture surrounding mental health at LSE it is important to find out where and to whom a student would be most likely to approach if they were to experience a mental health issue (see table below). Perhaps unsurprisingly students stated that they would be most likely to disclose a mental health issue to family or friends; and least likely to disclose to their Head of Department and a society or sports team.

	Very Likely	Likely	Neither	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Academic Adviser	8%	23%	11%	26%	32%
Class Teacher	3%	12%	12%	28%	45%
Head of Department	2%	6%	8%	24%	60%
Counselling Service	19%	44%	16%	13%	8%
Society or Sports Team	3%	11%	14%	26%	46%
Student Representative	2%	8%	15%	28%	47%
Peer Supporter	5%	26%	19%	20%	30%
Friends	40%	40%	9%	7%	4%
Family	48%	28%	9%	8%	7%

Within the School, students are most likely to approach the Student Counselling Service and second most likely to approach the Academic Adviser, although students are half as much less likely to approach their Academic Adviser. It is disappointing that 58% of students stated they were either 'Unlikely' or 'Very Unlikely' to approach their Academic Adviser and 51% to approach a Peer Supporter. Nevertheless it is still encouraging that 31% of students stated they were either 'Likely' or 'Very Likely' to approach a Peer Supporter. Students were also given the option to choose 'Other'; of these responses students generally referred either to their GP or to their partner.



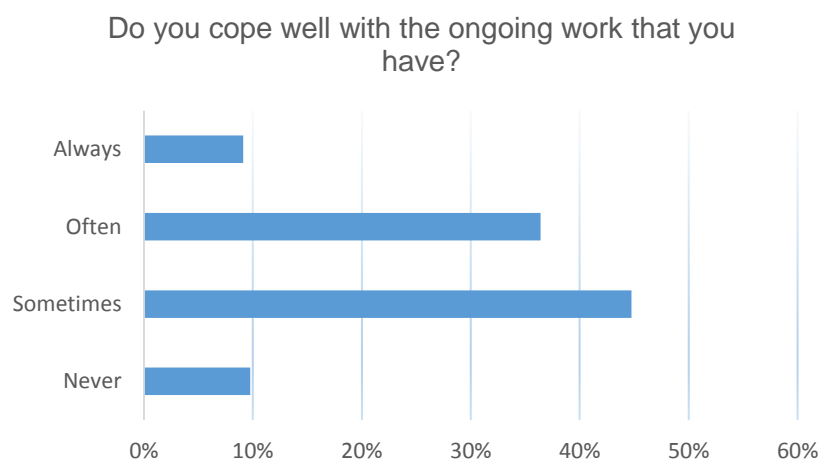
Students were then asked whether they felt that there are barriers in disclosing mental health issues to the School. Only 27% of students felt that there were no barriers to mental health disclosure at LSE, which leaves 73% of students who stated either 'Yes' or 'Maybe' in total,

meaning that just over three quarters of students feel that there are or could be barriers to disclosure.

From the comments left by students to this question it seems that the barriers for students disclosing mental health issues include; not knowing where to go, feeling as though academic staff are not approachable, feeling that the School is impersonal, feeling as though the Student Counselling Service is not accessible such as long waiting times, as well as the requirement of 'medical proof' from the Disability Service. Other students were concerned that disclosing a mental health issue to the School would make them appear 'weak'. However there were some students who did not feel that there were any barriers to the disclosure of mental health issues and these were generally due to positive experiences with either academics or from central support services.

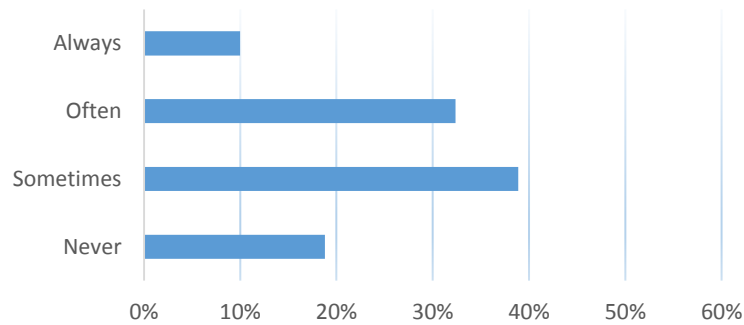
### Course Related Stress

The final part of the Culture Section of the Welfare Survey focused on course related stress, asking students how they felt they coped with their workload, exams and what aspects of their course caused them the most stress.



When asked as to how they coped with their ongoing work, encouragingly only 10% of students stated 'Never', but only 9% of students stated 'Always'. Just under half of students stated that they only 'Sometimes' felt able to cope with their workload with 45%.

### Do you cope well with the stress of exams?



Students were then asked specifically whether they coped well with the stress of exams and the proportion of students stating 'Never' nearly doubled to 19%. A further 39% of students also stated that they only 'Sometimes' coped with exams. Interestingly however, the proportion of students stating that they 'Always' coped well with the stress of exams remained relatively static.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Lectures	3%	7%	32%	58%
Tutorials	5%	14%	38%	43%
Seminars	8%	18%	41%	33%
Presentations	19%	24%	35%	22%
Essays	32%	30%	27%	11%
Group Work	12%	24%	37%	27%
Exams	53%	25%	16%	6%

Finally in the culture part of the Welfare Survey students were asked as to which aspects of their course caused them the most anxiety or stress (see above table). Perhaps unsurprisingly the top three aspects of courses that cause students stress were exams, essays and presentations. Exams were by far the most stressful aspect with over half of students stating that they 'Always' caused them stress. Lectures, tutorials and seminars were seen as the least stressful. Students were also able to choose the 'Other' option and alternative suggestions left by students included dissertation, viva/upgrade, course readings, careers (such as searching for jobs) and finally general workload.

### Analysis

It is extremely worrying that the majority of students do not think that LSE supports good mental health and wellbeing. Although there were a large proportion of students who felt neutrally about this question there remains a large majority of students who did not feel as though LSE has a positive effect on their mental health and wellbeing. These statistics are

quite shocking and should demonstrate to the School that this should be a key area of focus on improving the student experience at LSE.

Interestingly, there is a contrast between students who felt that LSE does not support their mental health and the number of students who felt 'Neutral' as to if there is a stigma surrounding mental health, this could suggest that there could be and should be space made by the School for students to talk more openly about these issues. In particular, more should be done to explore the impact that the intensity of studying at LSE can have on students' mental health and wellbeing.

This is a particularly pertinent point as the results of this section of the survey appears to show that students feel that the high intensity and pressure to succeed culture at LSE can have a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. What is not clear is whether this pressure to succeed (whether perceived or real) comes directly from peers or staff; nevertheless it is clear that the pressure students feel whilst studying creates an environment which does not make students feel supported in their mental health. As well as this the number of students who commented that they felt that staff and academics did not take their mental health issues seriously enough as 'LSE is just a difficult institution' is also extremely concerning. It could be hypothesised that when this view point is espoused by those in authority such as academics, then this is internalised by students and then becomes the 'standard' by which they judge themselves and their peers. This is not to suggest that this is an intentional action on behalf of staff but rather that this perception of the culture at LSE becomes a self-perpetuating cycle, although at this stage this is simply conjecture.

Nevertheless, a collective conversation needs to be had by both staff and students; the purpose of this would be to better understand the perceived or real pressures on students and how the School can uphold its reputation of being a world class institution but also ensure that this is not at the expense of its students' wellbeing. This is not to suggest that the question of better supporting students' mental health and wellbeing can be answered simply through 'making the workload easier' but rather a holistic approach needs to be taken to ensure that standards are maintained but also that students are properly supported. It is clear that students are in need of recognition that not being able to cope with workload and not always knowing what the future holds (particularly in terms of careers) is 'okay'. It is also important that this conversation is led by academics and School senior management.

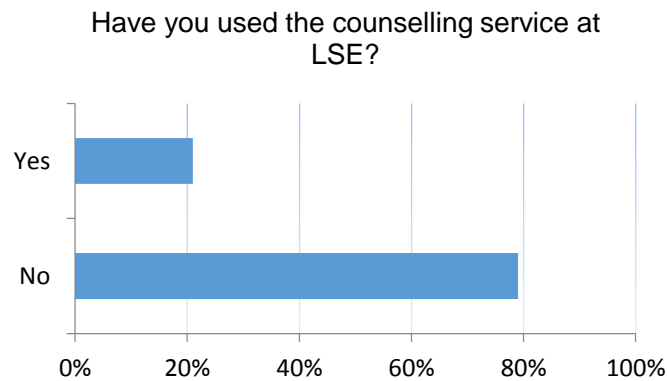
Given that students who are experiencing poor mental health are most likely to approach the Student Counselling Service, this demonstrates a clear starting point for the School to ensure that the service is as well-resourced as possible. Students stated that they felt that the long waiting time, the cap on the number of sessions and the inability to change counsellor very often acted as a barrier for them accessing the Student Counselling Service. As well as this it was disappointing that so few students felt able to speak to their Academic Adviser about

mental health issues as this should also be a useful resource in facilitating students feeling better supported at LSE.

Lastly, it is in no way surprising that students found exams and essays the most stressful aspect of their course, and it is most disappointing that so few students felt they were 'Always' able to cope with their workload and even fewer students with exams. Whilst these findings are unsurprising, it does confirm what students have said informally and could suggest that LSE should continue to investigate how best to diversify the forms of assessment that students undertake rather than focusing so heavily on exams. These findings also present a compelling argument for the introduction of Summer Resits so as to ease the stress of exams on students.

## Student Counselling Service

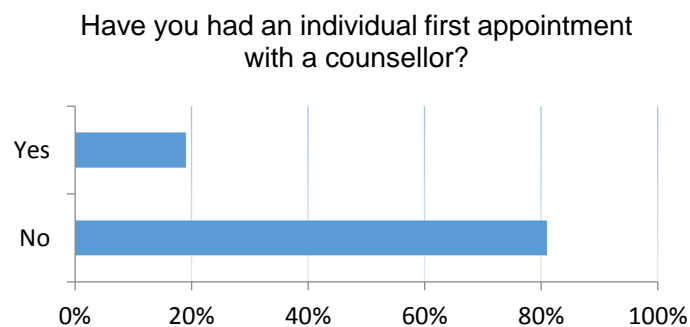
The Student Counselling Service Section of the Welfare Survey sought to find out from students about their experiences in using the service, as well as the reasons why they chose not to access it. This section of the survey covers the first appointment and individual counselling sessions, group counselling sessions, Mental Health Advisers, self-help materials and non-users.



In total, the proportion of students who had used the Student Counselling Service as a whole was 21%. Of these students who had used the service; 56% were undergraduates, 32% were postgraduate taught and 12% were postgraduate research.

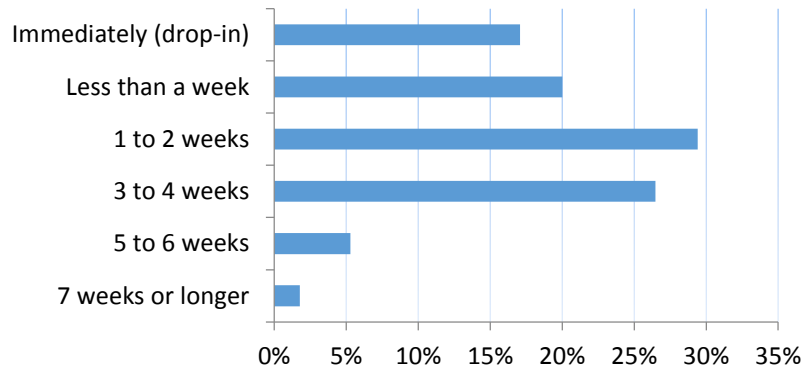
### First Appointment and Individual Counselling Sessions

These questions sought student's views on the first appointment they are given when they accessed the Student Counselling Service and on any subsequent individual counselling sessions.



In total 19% of respondents stated that they had received an individual first appointment with the service. Of these students 54% were undergraduate students, 33% were postgraduate taught students and 13% were postgraduate research students.

### How long did you have to wait for your first appointment?



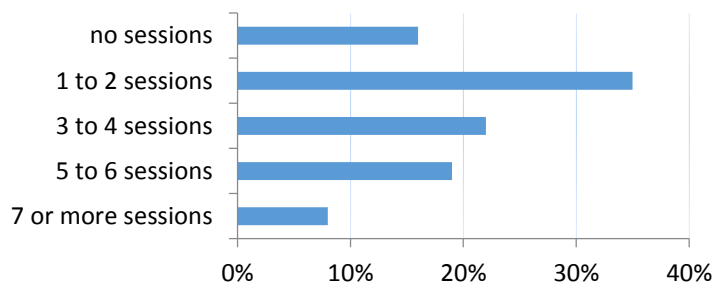
In terms of how long students had to wait for their first appointment; it is encouraging that 66% of students did not have to wait longer than two weeks; that 17% of students were able to see someone immediately, and that 29% of students only had to wait between one to two weeks. However, it is the view of LSESU that no student should have to wait longer than two weeks or ten working days for an appointment for any LSE support service.

Finally, students were then asked how many further sessions they received, of the students that received a first appointment 81% were recommended further counselling sessions. Of the 31 students that were not offered counselling sessions, three students received group counselling, seven saw a Mental Health Adviser and eight used the self-help materials.

#### *Individual Counselling Sessions*

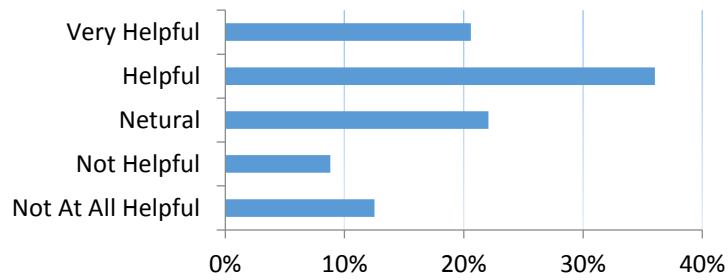
The students that were offered further counselling sessions were then asked how many sessions they actually received.

### How many counselling sessions did you have?



Although it is promising that 49% of students received more than two sessions, this still equates to 35% of students who received two or less. It should be noted that there will be some students who for various reasons chose not to proceed with any sessions or chose to not complete all the sessions allocated to them. Nevertheless, it is concerning that that in a recent FOI response on the support services for students the School stated that on average students receive 4.8 sessions yet these findings seem to be substantially lower.

### How helpful did you find these sessions?

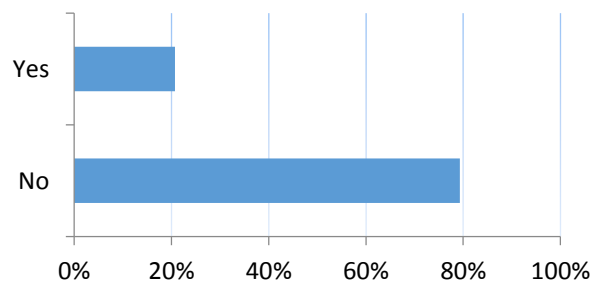


Students were then asked how helpful they found these sessions; with 57% of students stating that they found their counselling sessions either 'Helpful' or 'Very Helpful'. From the comments left by students for this question, generally it seems that whether a student finds their counselling sessions helpful or not depends very much on the individual relationship with the counsellor. Given this, LSESU believes that students should be able to change their counsellor if they reasonably feel that the relationship between them and the counsellor is not effective.

### *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)*

LSESU is aware that the Student Counselling Service can also offer students CBT. This is a useful tool for the service, therefore the Students' Union sought to find out how much this was actually utilised.

### Were you offered Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)?

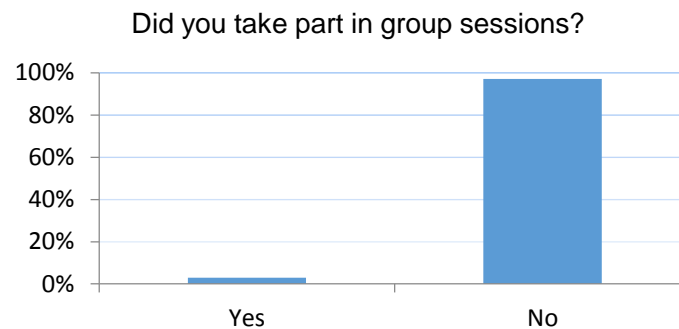


Disappointingly, only 21% of students who received individual counselling sessions were offered CBT. When asked if they would like to have been offered this, 40% of students stated 'Yes', with a further 42% stating 'Maybe'. From the comments left by students, it seems that the reason why most students either did not want CBT or were not sure was due to not understanding what CBT is and how this can benefit their mental health and wellbeing.

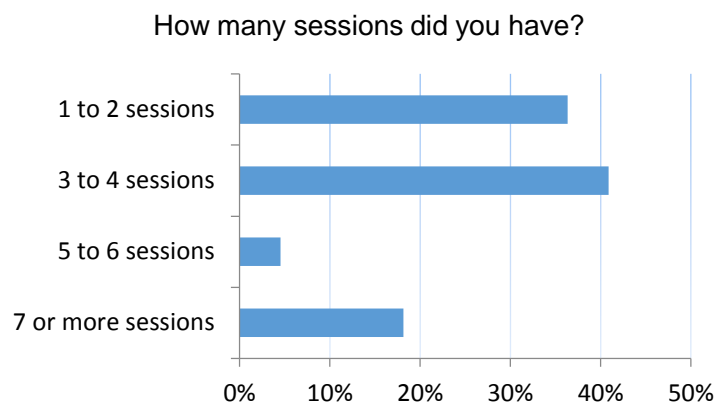


### Group Sessions

Another service that the Student Counselling Service offers students is group counselling sessions.



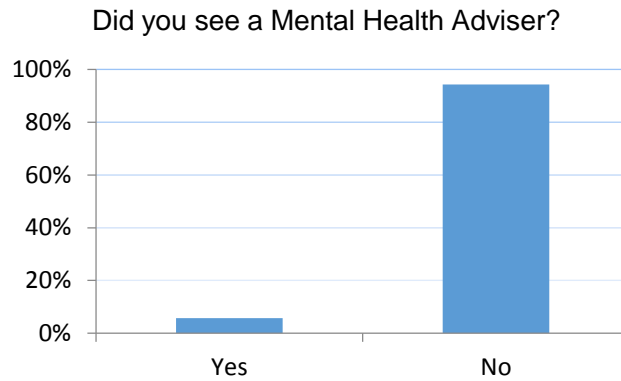
Only 3% of respondents stated that they had taken part in a group counselling session; this is a much lower proportion of students than those accessing individual counselling sessions. Of these students 58% were undergraduate students, 31% were postgraduate taught students and 12% were postgraduate research students. Interestingly, it seems that students do not have to wait as long for group counselling session with only 17% of students stating that they had to wait over two weeks.



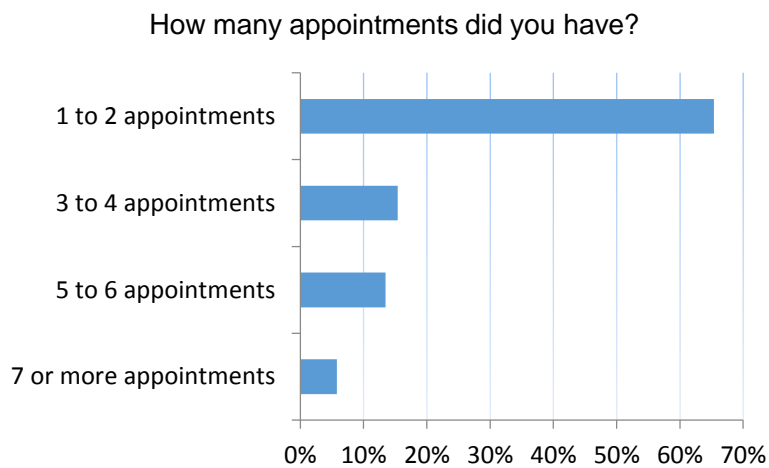
Whilst 41% of students received either three or four sessions and a further 23% of students received five or more sessions this still equates to 36% of students that only had one or two sessions. However, this does not represent a marked difference between those receiving individual counselling. Interestingly, when asked how helpful students found their group sessions over half of students (52%) stated that they found the session either 'Very Helpful' or 'Helpful', with only 13% of students answering this question to the negative.

### Mental Health Advisers

The Mental Health Adviser service differs from counselling as it does not focus on talking therapies but coping strategies. It can also provide support for students with longer term mental health issues.

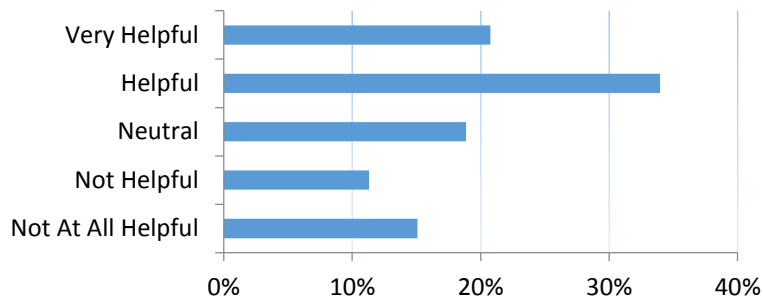


With only 6% of respondents stating that they had seen a Mental Health Adviser this equates to a very small proportion of students, although it should be noted that this is more students than had taken part in group counselling sessions. Of these students, 57% were undergraduate students, 33% were postgraduate taught students and 10% were postgraduate research students. As well as this 67% of students seeing a Mental Health Adviser stated that they had received an appointment in two weeks or under, with 19% of these students stating they had seen an adviser in less than a week.



The vast majority of students received only one or two sessions, with only 19% of students receiving 5 or more. This results in substantially fewer students receiving more than two appointments than either individual appointments or group sessions. This is concerning, as the purpose of Mental Health Advisers is to support students with longer term mental health issues who are logically therefore likely to need more sessions.

### How helpful were these appointments?

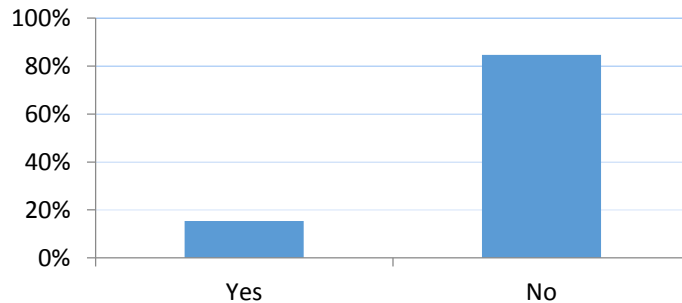


In total 55% of students stated that they thought their Mental Health Adviser was either 'Very Helpful' or 'Helpful', however 26% of students did answer this question to the negative. Interestingly, slightly fewer students stated that they found their Mental Health Adviser either 'Very Helpful' or 'Helpful' than students that had received individual counselling sessions.

### Self-Help Materials

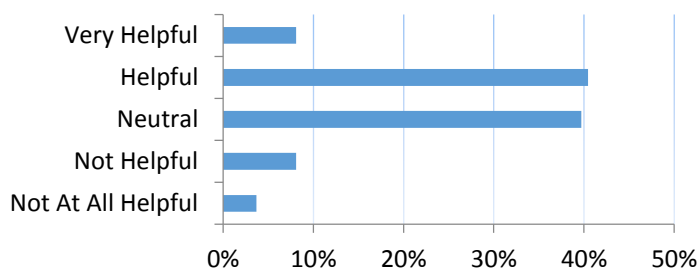
The self-help materials are an important resource for students; in particular for those that may not feel comfortable approaching a counsellor it means they have access to resources to help themselves.

### Have you used the counselling service self-help materials?



In total 15% of students had accessed the online self-help materials making this the second most used support within the Student Counselling Service, nevertheless this is still quite a low proportion of students. Of these students 47% were undergraduate students, 41% were postgraduate taught students and 12% were postgraduate research students.

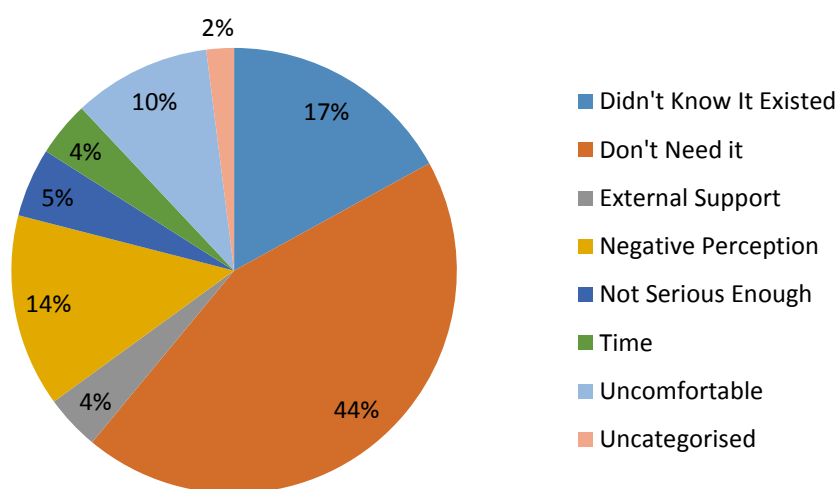
### How helpful did you find the self-help materials



It is promising that 49% of students stated that they thought the self-help materials were either 'Very Helpful' or 'Helpful' nevertheless 40% of students also felt neutrally about this. Interestingly when compared with other services the Student Counselling Service provides, students were less likely to be negative about the self-help materials, were less likely to think they were 'Very Helpful' but more likely to think that they were 'Neutral'.

### Non-Users

The students who stated they had not used the Student Counselling Service were then asked 'Why Not' in the form of an open text comment, from the 448 comments given these have been categorised (as shown in the below chart).



The top three reasons cited by students were that they didn't need the service, that they didn't know it existed, and that they had a negative perception of the counselling service. While it is encouraging that such a low proportion of students (17%) stated that they were not aware of the service, this should be read with caution. As well as this 44% (the largest group) simply stated that they did not feel they required it.

Nevertheless, it is worrying that in total 29% of respondents stated that they had not used the counselling service because they either felt uncomfortable approaching them, due to negative perceptions or that they did not feel their mental health issue was serious enough. The comments left by students highlight that there is a real issue in terms of students seeing the counselling service as being inaccessible.

Each of the categories of comments can be described as follows:

*Didn't Know it Existed* – This group consisted of students who clearly stated that the reason they did not access the Student Counselling Service was because they did not know that it existed.

*Don't Need it* – This category of students were those that overtly stated that they had not accessed the service because they had not felt the need to.

*External Support* – This group of students were those who commented that they had not accessed the Student Counselling Service as they preferred to seek external support from either, a private provider, the NHS or family and friends.

*Negative Perception* – This category comprises of students who stated that they would not approach the Student Counselling Service because they had felt that it would not be able to help them, that the waiting list was too long and that they would have to wait a long time for an appointment. This group also included students who had tried to approach the service but had never received a response.

*Not Serious Enough* – These students were those that commented that they would not access the Student Counselling Service as they felt that their mental health issues were not serious enough. And were either concerned that their issues would not be taken seriously or they would be taking up slots for others who needed them more.

*Time* – This group of students commented that they would not access the service because they felt that their workload was so large that they did not have time to go, or that the opening hours were inconvenient.

*Uncomfortable* – This category of students were those that stated that they would not approach the Student Counselling Service as they felt embarrassed, were concerned about privacy, were concerned about judgement of peers and generally felt uncomfortable disclosing a mental health issue to someone they didn't know.

*Uncategorised* – These were the comments left by students that could not be categorised.

### Analysis

It is interestingly that of the various services that the Student Counselling Service provides that individual counselling is the most utilised and that so few students access the Self-Help materials online. Whether this is due to students not being aware that the online materials exists or that students do not see them as beneficial as individual sessions or whether this is simply because student demand for individual counselling is higher, should be an area of further investigation by the School.

Generally the experiences of students accessing these services seem to be relatively positive, with only small variations between how helpful students feel that they are. However, the number of sessions students are receiving for both individual counselling and Mental Health Advisers are lower than expected. Further investigation is required as to why such low numbers of students are being offered CBT, for example this could be due to the counsellors decisions or it could be that there is not the resource to allocate students CBT as the Student Counselling Service is not able to provide students with a sufficient number of sessions to accommodate this type of therapy.

Ultimately LSE needs to find a balance of provision between individual counselling sessions and its Mental Health Advisers and set out to how the two services can better support each other. For example, if more students are presenting at the Student Counselling Service with increasingly complex mental health issues, there is a question as to how to provide these students with appropriate support, whether this is through short term talking therapies, CBT or through a longer term relationship with a Mental Health Adviser; students need the best possible and most appropriate support for their needs.

It is also the view of the Students' Union that no student should have to wait longer than 10 working days to access any service within the Student Counselling Service, particularly if that student presents themselves as experiencing a crisis.

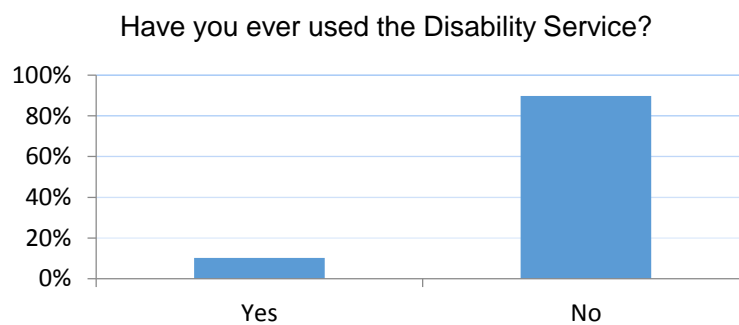
As for non-users of the Student Counselling Service, in retrospect the Welfare Survey should have asked students specifically if they were aware of the counselling service as from the results presented it is not possible to gain a definitive view as to whether student awareness is an issue. However, the survey did find that a significant proportion of students do not feel that the Student Counselling Service is accessible particularly that there is perception that the service is under resourced and always busy. It appears that this perception of the counselling service as not being accessible has come from either students approaching the service and it not meeting their expectations or due to hearing that it has not met the expectations of their peers. It very much seems as though this is translating into a real barrier for students in accessing the service.

It is not the view of the Students' Union that the counselling service is in some way providing a poor service to students but rather that it is not able to meet the high expectations of LSE students with the resources it has. On this basis, it is the view of LSESU that the School should review the provision of resource allocated to the Student Counselling Service with a view to significantly increasing its capacity. As well as this the School should run an awareness raising campaign that aims to address these negative perceptions of the service and remove this barrier by fostering a more positive view of the experiences of the students who use it.

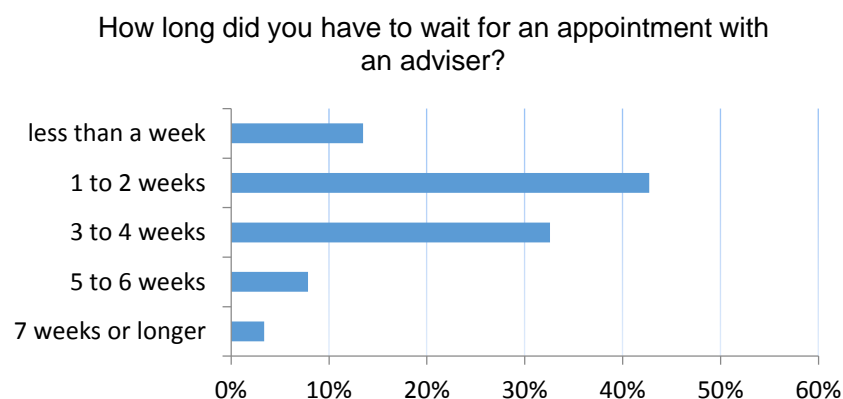
## Disability Service

This section of the Welfare Survey sought to find out the experiences of students who have accessed support from the Disability Service. It asked students, how long they had to wait to see an adviser, how helpful they had found the service and whether they had been recommended adjustments, if these were sufficient for their learning needs and if they had been implemented.

To note that although this section covers the Disability and Wellbeing Service (DWS), the Welfare Survey has separated the Disability Service (including neurodiversity screening and Individual Student Support Agreements (ISSA)) from the wellbeing activities and events that DWS run.



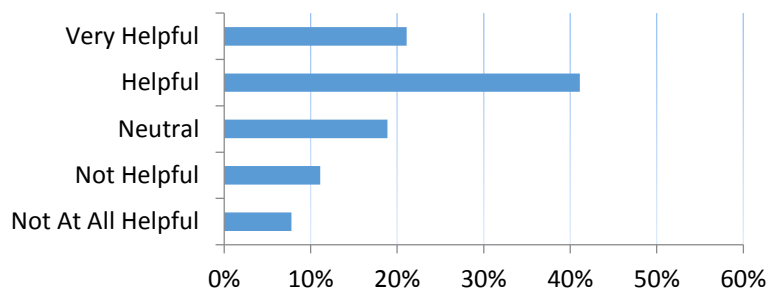
Although only 10% of students stated that they have used the Disability Service at LSE, according to the School's own data 6% of students have declared a disability therefore the Students' Union believes this to be a representative sample of students.<sup>2</sup> Of these students 66% were undergraduate students, 24% were postgraduate taught and 10% were postgraduate research students.



Students were then asked how long they had to wait for an appointment with a Disability Service Adviser; it is positive that 56% of students only had to wait two weeks or less for an appointment. However, considering that many students who approach the Disability Service do so because they require learning adjustments, it is disappointing that just under half of students are waiting for three weeks or longer.

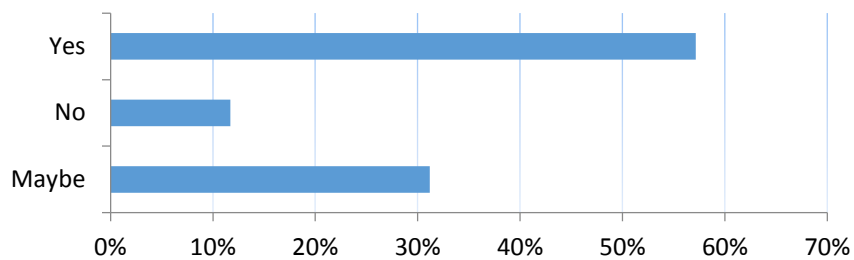
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/staff/equityDiversityInclusion/docs/Equality-data-reporting/2016/2016-Student-numbers.pdf>

### How helpful did you find the disability service?



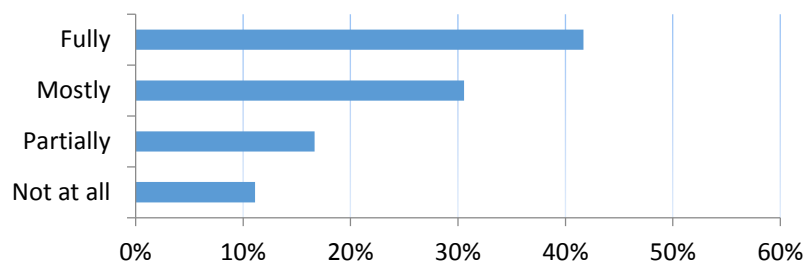
It is however positive that 62% of students that approached the Disability Service felt that they were either 'Very Helpful' or 'Helpful', with only 19% of students answering this question to the negative. Whilst many of the comments left by students in relation to this question were positive about their experience with the Disability Service, others commented that there could be long waiting times. Other students felt that the person they had spoken to lacked expertise in particular on the nuances of the impact that poor mental health can have on students.

### If you were recommended adjustments, were these sufficient to meet your learning needs?



Of the students who stated that they had been recommended learning adjustments, 57% of students stated that they felt that the adjustments were sufficient to meet their learning needs. A further 31% of students answered 'Maybe' to this question.

### If you were recommended adjustments, to what extent were these implemented?



Students were then asked as to what extent their adjustments had been implemented with 42% of students stating that they had been 'Fully' implemented and 30% stating 'Mostly' implemented. However, it is unacceptable that 11% of students who had been recommended



adjustments felt that their adjustments had not been implemented at all, with a further 17% of students feeling that it had only been 'Partially' implemented.

### Analysis

Although it may seem that the number of students who use the Disability Service is quite low, this is actually quite representative of the numbers of students who seek support for their disability from the School. However, there is a question as to whether there is a culture of underreporting of disability at LSE particularly relating to mental health. Considering that 45% of students earlier in the survey stated that they had experienced a period of poor mental health and the disparity between the numbers of students self-defining as disabled and disclosing a disability, this certainly warrants further investigation. Needless to say that not all instances of poor mental health are and should be classed as a disability, however this is of particular concern as there may be students who require additional support who are not receiving this which could be damaging their studies.

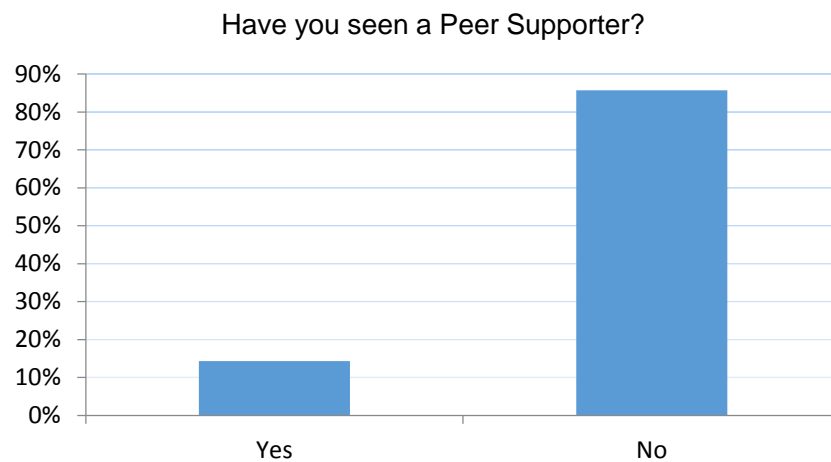
Overall, the students who accessed the Disability Service seemed to have a positive experience; however it is concerning that some students commented that they felt that the disability adviser they spoke to lacked expertise in the nuances of mental health. This is not to suggest that the Students' Union believes that the advisers or Mental Health Advisers, who help students implement their ISSAs are not experienced enough for the role as these comments may very well be the perception of the student. Rather the conclusion to be drawn from this is that the relationship between the adviser and the student is important, and therefore if there is for some reason a breakdown in this then the student should be able to have the option to change adviser where this is reasonably practicable.

Whilst it is welcome that the majority of students who saw an adviser did not have to wait over two weeks, the Students' Union believes that no student should have to wait longer than 10 working days for an appointment. In particular for the Disability Service this is of paramount importance as if the student does require learning adjustments not having these in good time could have a real negative impact upon their studies. Of the students who were recommended learning adjustments, it is extremely disappointing that some students felt that their learning adjustments had not been implemented at all or that they were not sufficient for their learning needs. Whilst these numbers may be small, it is still the view of the Students' Union that all students should feel that their learning adjustments are both sufficient and that they are fully implemented as far as reasonably practicable.

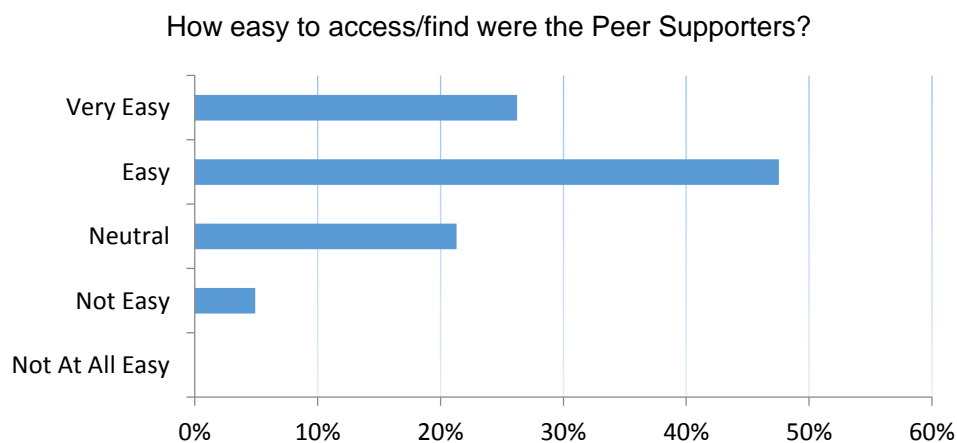
It seems that whilst the view of the Disability Service by students is generally positive, it is important that LSE should not be complacent and therefore the School should continue to work to ensure that the needs of all disabled students are being met, or exceeded. This is of particular importance in the wider context of the decision by the Government to rebalance the obligation for many services funded by Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) from the Government to institutions.

## Peer Supporters

This section of the survey sought to find out from students as to their experiences with Peer Supporters, it looked at student awareness, how easy it was to access the Peer Supporters, how helpful students found them and if students would use them in the future. Although Peer Supporters sit within the Student Counselling Service it was felt that as this was a student-led initiative that it warranted its own section.

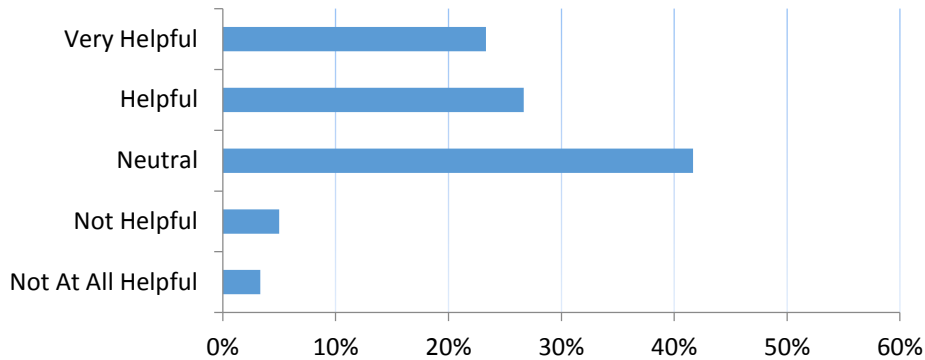


Students were initially asked if they were aware that LSE has Peer Supporters and it is promising that nearly half of respondents (48%) stated that they were aware. However, when asked if they had approached a supporter only 14% of students said that they had. Of those students that had approached a Peer Supporter, 85% were undergraduate students, 10% were postgraduate taught students and 5% were postgraduate research.



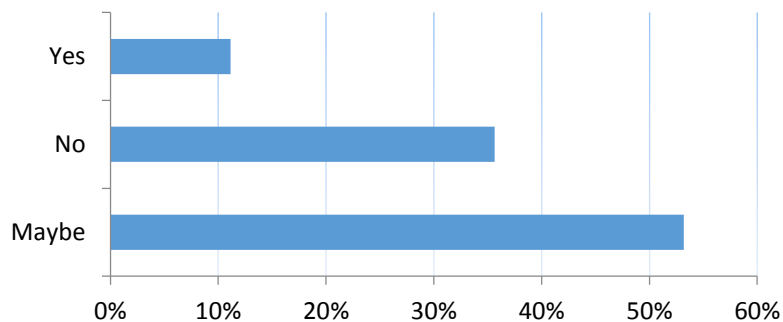
The students who had approached a Peer Supporter were then asked if it was easy to access or find them, 74% of these students stated that it was either 'Very Easy' or 'Easy' to find or access the Peer Supporters. It was encouraging that not a single student stated that they were 'Not At All Easy' to find or access.

### How helpful did you find the Peer Support Service?



The students who had seen a Peer Supporter were then asked if they felt that they had been helpful. It is positive that 50% of these students stated that they found the Peer Supporters either 'Helpful or 'Very Helpful', with only 8% of students answering this question to the negative. The comments left by students for this question are majority positive, with students commenting that they felt that Peer Supporters were friendly and approachable. However, some students did comment that more work could be undertaken to ensure that Peer Supporters were accessible to postgraduates and students outside of halls of residences.

### Would you use the Peer Supporters in the future?



Finally, all students, including those who were previously unaware or had not approached a Peer Supporter were then asked if they would approach them in the future. It is disappointing that only 11% of students stated that they would approach a supporter in the future. The comments left by students to this question were highly informative; students who stated 'No' generally commented that they would prefer to speak to friends or family or they would prefer to speak to the Student Counselling Service. Others were concerned about approaching fellow students either over privacy concerns; fear of judgement or particularly for postgraduate students who felt that undergraduate Peer Supporters may not be able to relate to their experiences of studying at postgraduate level.

For the students stating 'Maybe' there were many comments setting out that they would like to know more about the supporters and how they could benefit their mental health and wellbeing before they could decide if they would approach them or not. Other students stated that when living outside of halls of residences that Peer Supporters could be difficult to access.

Finally, some students did comment that they would approach them if they felt the need to in the future.

### Analysis

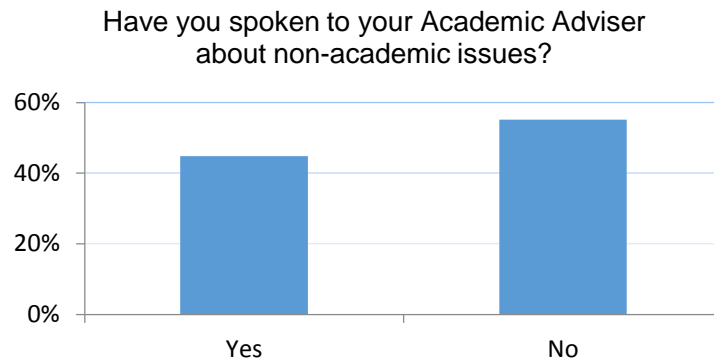
What was particularly interesting about the results of the Peer Supporter section was the demographics of the students approaching them, as the vast majority were undergraduate students. Given the comments from students about the lack of accessibility of Peer Supporters outside of halls it can be assumed that most of the students who accessed the supporters were undergraduates living in halls. From this it very much seems that that Peer Supporters are an important support resource for students living in halls; however their impact is less so for the wider demographic of students.

If the School were to seek to expand Peer Supporters, these results show that they should concentrate on improving awareness and accessibility for students outside of halls of residences. One way in which the Peer Supporters could be more accessible to postgraduate students is through improving targeting these students to become Supporters themselves; this would lessen the barrier for postgraduates in accessing them.

However, it is important to note that any expansion of the Peer Supporters should not take away nor be seen as a substitute for other support services such as the Student Counselling Service. They should very much be seen as an additional support for students who may prefer a less formal route, particularly for students who may not have other support networks outside of the School.

## Academic Advisers

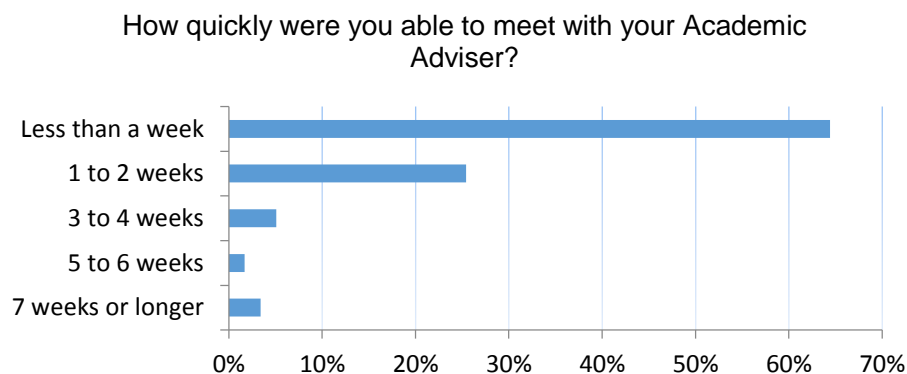
The Academic Advisers section of the Welfare Survey sought to find out from students about their experiences in approaching their Academic Adviser with a non-academic issue, as well as the reasons that they choose not to engage with their adviser on non-academic issues.



Students were first asked whether they were aware that they could approach their Academic Adviser about a non-academic issue, with 60% of respondents stating that they were aware. These students were then asked if they had approached their Academic Adviser about a non-academic issue, with 45% of these students responding that they had. Of the total number of responses to this section of the survey, this equates to 27% of students that had approached their Academic Adviser about a non-academic issue.

### The Academic Adviser Experience

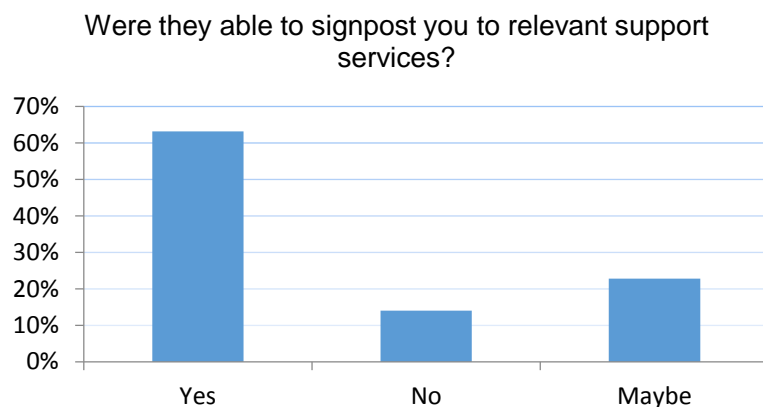
The survey then sought to better understand the experiences of the 27% of respondents that had approached their Academic Adviser about a non-academic issue their experiences with their adviser. It included questions on how quickly were they able to see their adviser, how supportive they were, were they able to signpost them to other services and if they found them helpful.



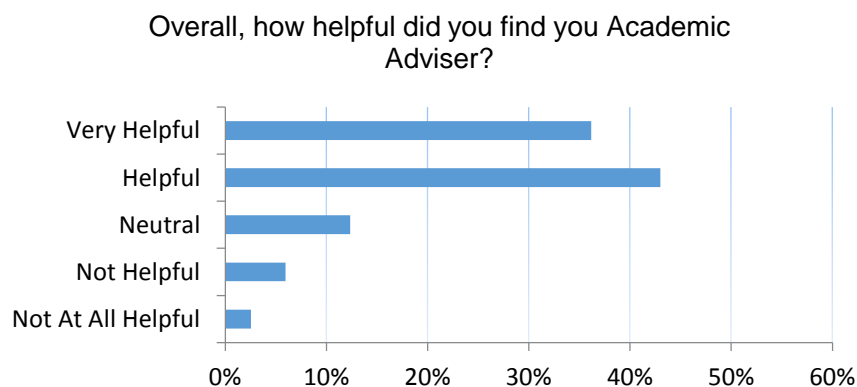
Students were first of all asked how quickly they were able to meet with their adviser and it is encouraging that 64% of students were able to see their Academic Adviser in less than a week and a further 25% in one to two weeks. However this still represents 11% of students who

had to wait for three weeks or longer to see their Academic Adviser and it is the view of LSESU that no student should have to wait longer than two weeks to access any LSE support service.

In terms of whether students felt that their Academic Adviser made sufficient time for them and whether they felt their Academic Adviser was supportive these responses were particularly positive; with 82% and 81% of students respectively stating that they either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' to these statements.



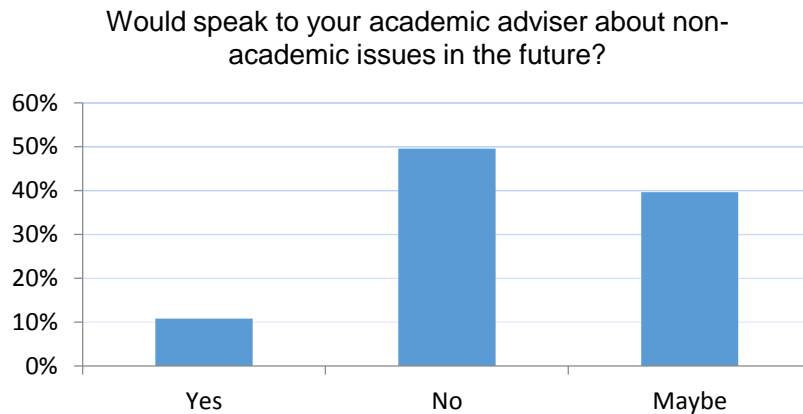
In total 63% of students stated that they felt that their Academic Adviser was able to signpost them to relevant support services, which is an extremely welcome figure. However this still represents 37% of students, who did not feel that their adviser was able to do so.



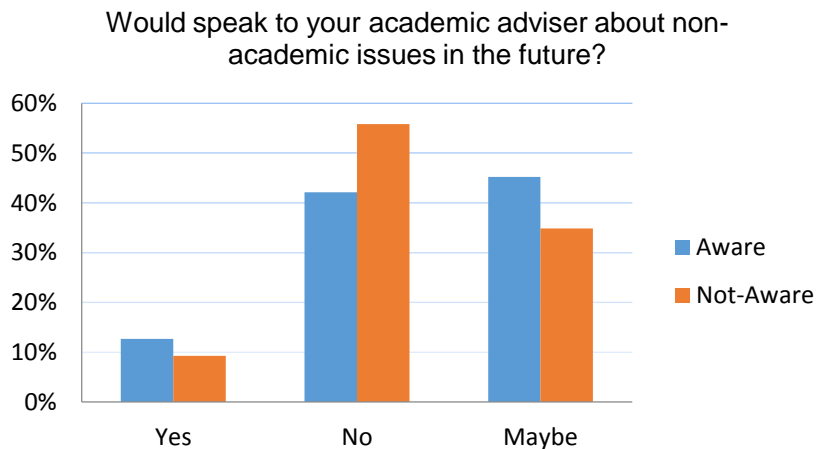
Students were then asked as to how helpful they found their Academic Adviser; it is encouraging that in total 79% of students stated that they thought they were either 'Very Helpful' or 'Helpful'. Nevertheless many of the comments left by students highlight that there does appear to be an inconsistency between the levels of support that different Academic Advisers give to their students. In particular students stated that they felt that their Academic Adviser was not trained enough either in being understanding of mental health issues or being able to signpost them to support services, other students simply stated that their adviser had never replied to their emails. It also appears from the comments that where students have multiple advisers over the course of their studies this also diminishes their experience.

### Student Non-Engagement

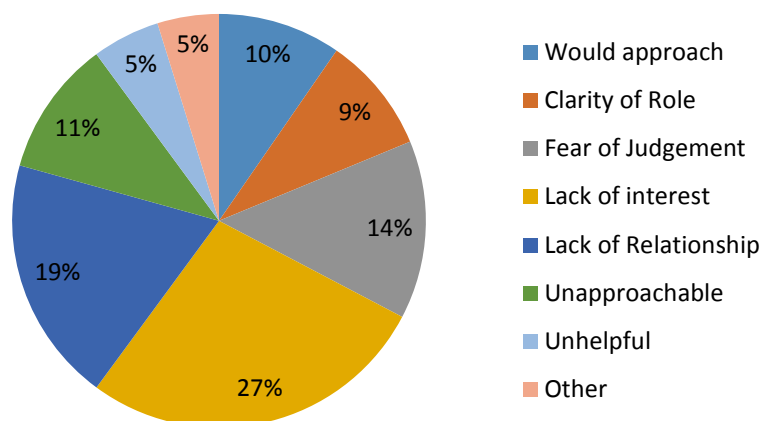
At the beginning of the 'Academic Adviser' section of the Welfare Survey students were asked if they were aware that they could approach their Academic Adviser about non-academic issues. In total, 40% of students stated that they were not aware, the survey then sought to find out – now that they were aware – if they would approach their adviser about a non-academic issue in the future and if not, why not. As well as this, the students who stated they were aware but when asked if they had approached their Academic adviser about a non-academic issue stated they had not (55%) were also asked if they would speak to their Academic Adviser about a non-academic issue in the future and if not, why not.



In total, these two groups represent 73% of the students who took part in the Academic Adviser section of the Welfare Survey. Therefore it is extremely disappointing that in total a derisory 11% of students stated that they would approach their academic adviser in the future with nearly half (49%) of students stating that they would. Although it is important to note that 39% of these students stated 'Maybe' it is still enormously concerning that the number of students answering this question to the positive is so low.



Interestingly, when the two groups of students, those that were aware but would not approach their Academic Adviser with a non-academic issue and those that were not aware and still would not approach, are compared against each other for this same question the results vary. Students who were not aware were 14% more likely to answer 'No' to this question, 10% less likely to state 'Maybe' and 3% less likely to have stated 'Yes'.



The comments left by all students as to why they would not approach their Academic Adviser with a non-academic issue in the future can broadly be categorised into eight themes. The most common three themes were 'Lack of Interest', 'Lack of Relationship' and 'Fear of Judgement'. Each of the categories can be described as follows:

*Would Approach* – These were the students who stated that they would approach their adviser; however many of these comments were qualified to either only if it was an issue affecting their studies or only if it was such a serious issue that it would for example require an interruption of studies.

*Clarity of Role* – These comments made reference to the 'role' of advisers, specifically that students either felt that or had been informed by their adviser that non-academic issues did not fit within their remit. As well as this some students stated that they had not been aware of the non-academic role due to the title 'Academic Adviser'.

*Fear of Judgement* – This category includes students who stated that they would not speak with their adviser about non-academic issues due to a perception that the information would not be kept private or that by disclosing mental health issues that this would influence any future marks or references that they may receive from the adviser.

*Lack of Interest* – This group of students were those that commented that they felt their Academic Adviser had a lack of interest in their welfare. For example this could include where they felt the Adviser did not make time for them or where there was a perception by the student that the adviser did not value non-academic conversations.



*Lack of Relationship* – These comments made specific reference to where the student had little or even no contact with their adviser and therefore due to this they would not disclose non-academic issues to them.

*Unapproachable* – This category included students who stated that they felt their adviser was difficult to approach or unfriendly, or where they expressed that they had a negative relationship with them.

*Unhelpful* – This is where students stated that they had previously approached the adviser about an academic issue and that due to the student feeling they had not been helpful they would not do so for a non-academic issue, or that the student had a perception that the adviser would not be helpful.

*Other* – This group of students were those who stated that they were unwilling to go to see their Academic Adviser as they did not feel that they were properly trained to deal with mental health issues or where the student said explicitly that they would seek assistance from a source external to the School.

#### Analysis

As the individual that students are arguably most likely to interact with at LSE it could be suggested that the Academic Adviser would be the individual within the School who students would be most likely to approach for support if they were experiencing a period of poor mental health. However, the findings from the Welfare Survey show that many students simply do not see their Academic Adviser as a source of non-academic support. For example many students were just simply not aware that they can approach their Academic Adviser about a non-academic issue.

It is particularly stark to see such low numbers of students who would do approach their Academic Adviser about non-academic issues in the future and this should raise a number of questions for the School. Students paint a picture of advisers who have little or no relationship with their student, who present this perception of themselves as being detached, an individual with little or no time to spare for their students and that they do not 'value' a student's wellbeing. Of course this is the severe end of the negative perceptions that students can hold towards their Academic Adviser. However for an individual who may be experiencing a period of poor mental health, or even for a student who is just struggling to cope, such an experience can be debilitating. It is also important to note that this is not to suggest that all advisers are actively discouraging students from approaching them, although some comments were left that explicitly stated that this was the case, but that more should be done by the School to combat this perception and open up Academic Advisers as a means to supporting students' mental health and wellbeing.

For those students who do approach their Academic Adviser about non-academic issues, overall it seems that students tend to have a positive experience. The majority of these students feel that their Academic Advisers made time for them, was supportive, was able to

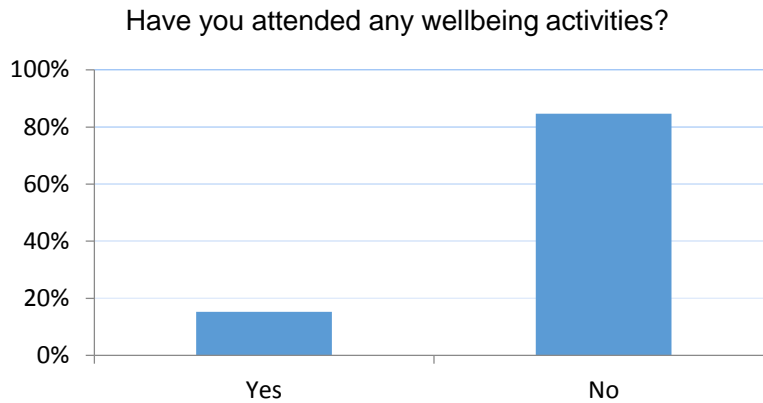
signpost them and was helpful. This highlights the valuable work undertaken by many Academic Advisers in providing a supportive environment for their students which should rightly be commended. Nevertheless the number of students approaching their Academic Adviser is extremely small.

It is also important to remember that whilst the number of students citing a negative experience with their adviser may be small that due to the nature of issues relating to mental health and wellbeing these experiences may have a disproportionately adverse impact on the individual. Therefore it is the view of the Students' Union that the School should do more to share best practice from advisers who excel at delivering a pastoral role and that as a bare minimum all advisers should be able to signpost students to other support services. As well as this, LSESU believes that all Academic Advisers should undertake Mental Health First Aid training, so that they are fully equipped if a student presents with an issue relating to mental health.

It is the view of the Students' Union that the Academic Adviser system is an important tool in supporting students at LSE and in ensuring an excellent student experience. Therefore this data should not be read as showing that Academic Advisers should have no involvement students' non-academic lives, as separating pastoral and academic issues is simply a false dichotomy. What is perhaps the most concerning finding from this survey is that it does appear that in some cases it is the advisers themselves that are creating a barrier for students approaching them for support. This is not to suggest that Academic Advisers as a whole are intentionally unapproachable, but rather that more could be done by the School to ensure a consistent experience for students.

## Wellbeing Activities

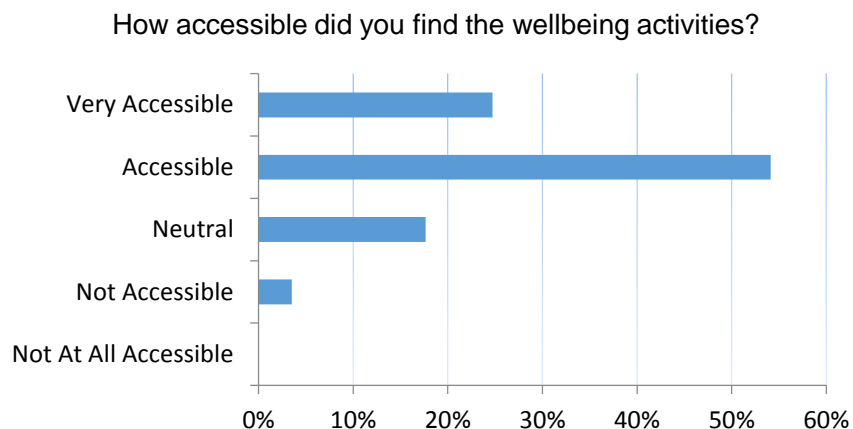
This section of the survey sought to find out from students their experiences of the wellbeing activities that are run by LSE. It asked students how aware they were of wellbeing activities, if they have attended any, if they found the activities helpful, if there were many barriers to accessing the wellbeing activities and what additional activities they would like LSE to run.



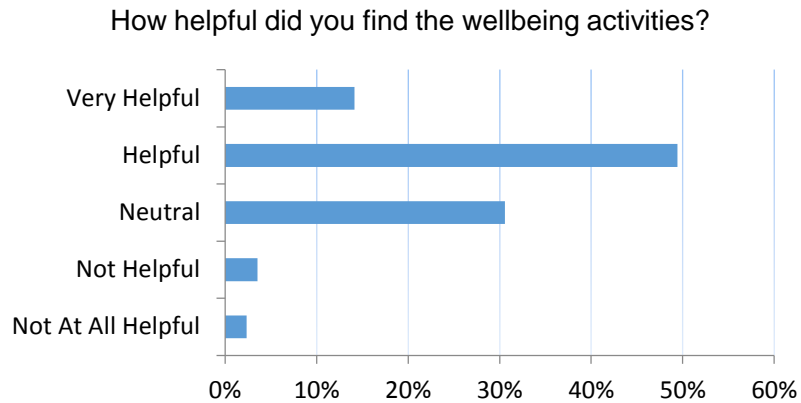
It is disappointing that only 36% of students stated that they were aware that LSE offered wellbeing events and activities. Of these students 55% were undergraduate students, 36% were postgraduate taught students and 9% were postgraduate research students. However, of those students who were aware only 15% had actually attended at least one activity or event; of these students 55% were undergraduate students, 33% were postgraduate taught students and 12% were postgraduate research students.

### Wellbeing Activity Attendees

Of the students who stated they had attended a wellbeing event or activity the survey then sought to find out from them as to their experiences of those activities.



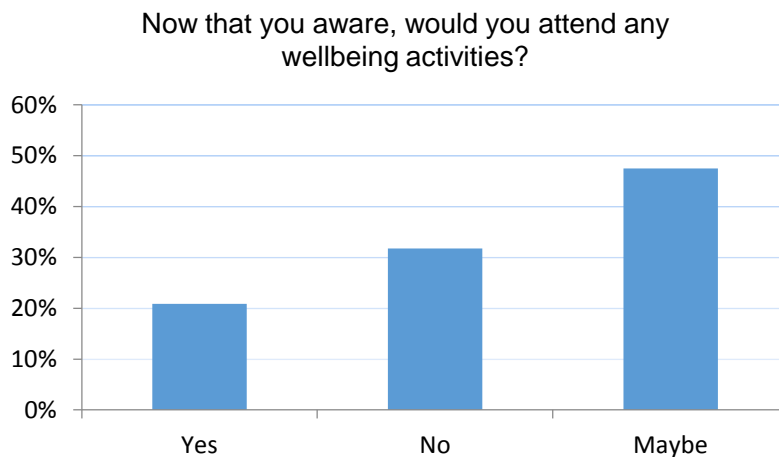
In total 79% of students stated that they found the wellbeing activities run by LSE either 'Very Accessible' or 'Accessible', with only 4% of students answering this question to the negative.



It is encouraging that 64% of students stated that they found wellbeing activities or events either 'Very Helpful' or 'Helpful', with only 6% of students answering this question negatively. Around half of the comments left by students for this question stated that the activities and events were very helpful; other students commented that 'soft' wellbeing activities should not replace other forms of support such as the Student Counselling Service and finally some students felt that the range of activities on offer could be improved.

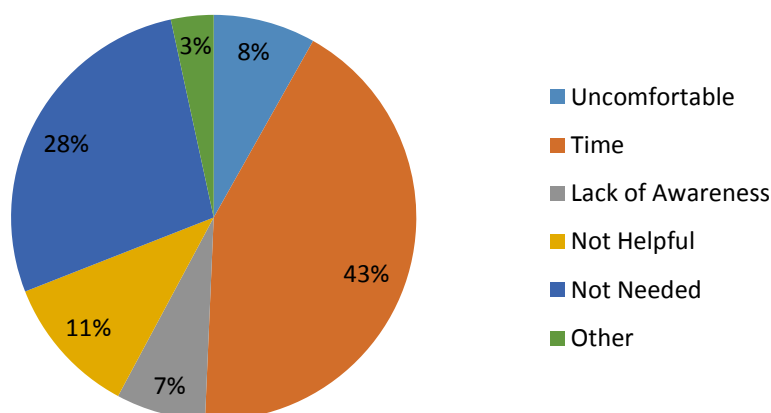
Wellbeing Activity Non-Users

The survey sought to find out firstly from the students who were not previously aware that LSE offered wellbeing activities and events, whether they would now attend. Secondly, the survey sought to explore why students who were aware that LSE offered wellbeing activities and events did not attend them.



Only 21% of students who were not previously aware that LSE offered wellbeing activities and events stated that they would attend them in the future with 32% of students stating that they would not. The majority of students who stated that they would not attend wellbeing activities or events commented that they would not do so because they felt like they did not have the time, with a minority of students stating that they could get support from elsewhere or they did not feel that it would be helpful. The students who stated 'Maybe' commented that the reason

for this was because they felt they did not have enough information about the activities and events on offer and how they would benefit their mental health and wellbeing.



The students who were previously aware that LSE offered wellbeing activities and events but had not attended any were then asked why they had not attended in the form of an open text comment. The most commonly cited reasons as to why students did not attend these activities and events were Time (43%), Uncomfortable (28%) and Not Helpful (11%). Each of the categories can be described as follow:

*Uncomfortable* – This category of students were those who stated that they would not attend LSE run wellbeing activities and events as they were fearful of stigma or judgement from other students, stated that they felt embarrassed or uncomfortable with attending or said that it was hard to attend on their own.

*Time* – These students were those who stated that they would not attend LSE wellbeing activities or events due to feeling as if they have no spare time.

*Lack of Awareness* – This group of students were those who stated that they would not attend wellbeing activities and events due to not having enough information, such as where and when they were taking place, or not knowing enough about the activities and events themselves to be able to ascertain whether they would be helpful or not.

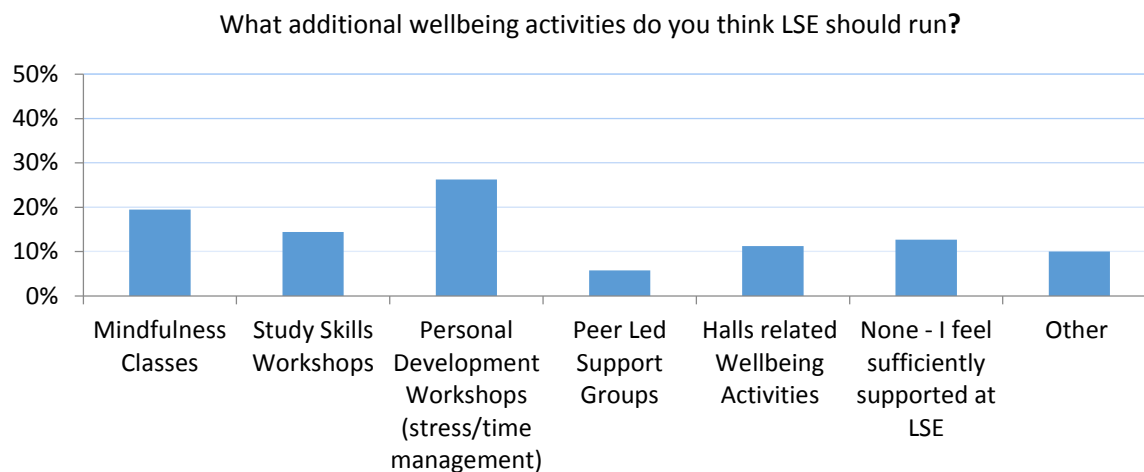
*Not Helpful* – This category of students were those that overtly stated that they did not feel that the wellbeing activities and events on offer would be helpful to them, this includes both students who felt negatively towards the activities and events and those who stated they preferred to get support from other sources.

*Not Needed* – This group of students were those who overtly stated that they had not accessed LSE’s wellbeing activities and events because they have not felt that they needed to.

*Other* – This group included students who said that they would attend a wellbeing activity or event in the future as well, however these numbers were so few that they did not warrant their own category, as well as comments that could not be categorised.

### Additional Wellbeing Activities

Finally all students who answered this section of the survey were then asked to choose what additional wellbeing activities and events they think LSE should run in the future.



Interestingly, only 13% of students said that they did not feel the need for any additional wellbeing activities or events at LSE. The majority of students with 26% stated that they would like to see personal development workshops such as stress or time management; 20% of students would like to see more mindfulness classes, and 14% of students stated that they would like to see more study skills workshops.

Of the 10% of students who chose 'Other' many students stated that they would like to see all the activities that were listed introduced. Other students suggested that additional activities could include personal development and self-esteem courses and sessions on where to go for support. In particular underrepresented groups such as postgraduate research students, part time and live at home students commented that they felt there should be more activities targeted at these specific groups. However, some students felt that the School should instead invest resources in improving and expanding its Student Counselling Service. Finally, some students stated that they would like to see sport being promoted as a wellbeing activity, particularly 'light exercise' activities such as Yoga, Pilates and badminton.

### Analysis

What was disappointing were how few students were aware that LSE offered wellbeing activities and events, even more so with the small numbers of students attending those on offer. However it is promising that so many students who did take part found the wellbeing activities and events both accessible and helpful.

For both groups of students (those who were not previously aware and those that were previously aware that LSE offered wellbeing activities and events) it seems that 'Time' is a major barrier. It appears that there are two facets to this time barrier, the first is to do with the scheduling of these events and activities; LSE should make sure that any sessions run by

them are at varying times, including evenings so that as many students as possible are able to attend. The second aspect to the 'Time' issue is that students perceive themselves to have no time to attend. It could be argued that there are two reasons for this, firstly that students don't understand what the wellbeing activities and events are and how they can benefit them so they are unlikely to make time in their busy schedules to attend; the second is that studying at LSE can be very stressful and that this stress creates a self-perpetuating cycle, in which students feel that they need to be working all the time and therefore do not take the time to look after their wellbeing which in turn makes them more stressed. This is further corroborated by the numbers of students saying 'Maybe' to attending a wellbeing event or activity in the future as they were not sure how it would benefit them. Therefore the School should be much more effective at communicating these events and activities and the benefits of these to students.

As for future activities, there clearly is a demand by students for 'personal development' type classes to help students cope with their workloads. This is particularly important as the LSE Culture Section of this report highlighted that the intensive nature of studying at LSE places additional stress on students. Therefore the School should be open about this and facilitate ways for students to mitigate these expectations by teaching them how to effectively manage their time and stress levels. However, the purpose of this question was not to choose one event or activity to the detriment of all others, rather it was to provide a guide as to where the School should prioritise its resources. As well as this, these results demonstrate that there is a demand by students for 'softer' more informal wellbeing support; however again this should not be to the detriment of more formal support services such as the Student Counselling Service.

Finally it was interesting that there were some students who mentioned that they saw sports activities such as those run by the Students' Union's as wellbeing activities. This presents an interesting hypothesis for the role of sports teams at LSE; in that by students engaging in them that this could promote positive wellbeing and therefore reduce stress for students. As well as this some students when asking for additional wellbeing activities requested 'light exercise activities'; this is something that the Students' Union provides through its Active Lifestyle programme. This demonstrates that sports generally and Active Lifestyle could feed into a promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing across LSE.

## Conclusion

The Welfare Survey sought to find out from students whether they feel that LSE sufficiently supports their mental health and wellbeing, as well as to give a brief overview of how they experience and perceive the various support services available to them at LSE. Given the sensitive nature of the topic of mental health and wellbeing the level of response to this survey was overwhelming with 1,110 students taking part; from this alone it seems as if mental health and wellbeing is an issue which is important to the students at LSE.

This report provides LSE with an opportunity to understand the experiences of students relating to mental health and wellbeing at the School. This research was never intended to be a comprehensive review of the support services that LSE provides, nor was it supposed to provide the final answer on mental health and wellbeing. Rather its purpose was to build a picture and start a conversation regarding where the School should concentrate its efforts in better supporting its students. LSESU's ultimate aim in this report is to begin a conversation between students, the Students' Union and the School as to how LSE can become a leader in the higher education sector in promoting a positive culture surrounding mental health and wellbeing.

The results of the survey were highly illuminating; it is generally accepted that the academic culture at LSE is intensive and that expectations on students are extremely high. That is not to say that academic rigour is wrong and that the reputation that is afforded to students who graduate from this institution is meaningless, but what this survey showed is that this is having a detrimental impact on students' mental health and wellbeing. Simply put, LSE students are really really stressed. They often don't feel they can cope with their work load and exams seem to be an exceptionally stressful period; they do not feel that the institution supports their mental health and wellbeing sufficiently and nearly half of them have experienced a period of poor mental health. And yet, many students do not feel able to openly discuss this, students are fearful that if they speak out about not coping then their experiences will be minimised.

Whilst it is clear that there are individuals and services within the School that go out of their way to support students, it is also clear that the School needs to do more to fully meet the needs of its students. Together, the Students' Union and the School need to work to build a culture where mental health and wellbeing is something that is discussed more openly, where students feel able to seek support and where experiencing stress and poor mental health is not minimised nor considered as an indication that you are not able to succeed in the rigorous academic environment at LSE.

As to the support services that LSE provides, students generally seem to be positive about their experiences; there are some cases of overtly negative experiences but these do seem to be in the minority. Nevertheless, there clearly are improvements that the School could make. Firstly it seems that there is a negative perception of the Student Counselling Service being



over-worked and under-resourced which seems to be translating in a real barrier for students in accessing the service. Secondly, there seems to be a lack of awareness particularly of how 'softer' support services such as the Self Help Materials, Peer Supporters and wellbeing activities and events can benefit student's mental health and wellbeing. Thirdly, there seems to be a real inconsistency around the level of support that Academic Advisers offer students; some seem to be absolutely outstanding, yet there are far too many students who do not feel able to approach their adviser about a non-academic issue. Finally, there does seem to be an appetite from students for further wellbeing activities and events at a variety of different times.

The results of this survey have resulted in a number recommendations which the Students' Union believes if they were to be implemented would go a long way to improving students mental wellbeing at LSE. We look forward to working in partnership with LSE to implement these recommendations.

## Recommendations

From this survey LSESU believes that whilst LSE does provide some support for students' mental health and wellbeing, there are clear ways in which it needs to improve. The overarching priority of these recommendations is for LSE to become a leader in the HE sector in embedding a culture of positive mental health and wellbeing. The following recommendations seek to provide opportunities for LSE to further improve the mental wellbeing of its students.

### High Priority Recommendations

These recommendations are those that the Students' Union believes would have the largest and most positive impact on student's mental health and wellbeing at LSE.

LSE should:

1. Set up a Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group to replace the 'Wellbeing Working Group' which met once in 2015-2016, this will include representation from the Students' Union to facilitate the sharing of best practice and an open dialogue on these issues for both staff and students.
2. Invest financially in the Student Counselling Service, including increasing the number of full time counsellors in order to combat the limited number of sessions students are currently receiving.
3. Ensure Students' Union representation in the 2016/17 review of the Student Counselling Services, the remit of this review should investigate the number of sessions students are receiving and why CBT is not being offered, as well as identifying the pressure points and peak periods of demand during the year and where extra sessional staff could be employed.
4. Introduce mandatory Mental Health First Aid training for all Academic Advisers.
5. Provide additional wellbeing activities at a range of times for students with a particular priority on how to cope with the demands of studying at LSE.
6. Introduce summer exam resits, with no additional cost to students.

## General Recommendations

LSE should:

### *Culture*

- Commission further research into the culture surrounding mental health and wellbeing at LSE, including whether there is a culture of under-reporting poor mental health as a disability and investigating how to create a positive culture surrounding mental health and wellbeing at the School.
- Review the policy, procedures and regulations relating to the 'Fit to Sit' policy, the extenuating circumstances procedure and Interruptions of Study to ensure that these procedures are being used appropriately and that students are properly supported through the application process.
- Increase the number of staff receiving Mental Health Awareness and Mental Health First Aid training, with a particular focus on student-facing staff.
- Be an active participant in mental health awareness raising initiatives, for example running activities with the students' union on University Mental Health Day on 3 March 2017, and providing full funding for an annual Wellbeing Week.
- Investigate the introduction of alternative assessment methods with a view to reducing the number of exams that students are required to take.

### *General Support Services*

- Integrate all Disability and Wellbeing Services and its administration into one physical space, which is easy to access and provides a suitable level of privacy creating a 'Student Services Hub'.
- Ensure no student has to wait longer than 10 working days for an appointment with any LSE support service.
- Investigate how better to engage with postgraduate students, particularly research students, in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing and in making the central support services more accessible to them.

### *Student Counselling Service*

- Investigate current usage and division of funding between the different internal Student Counselling Services to determine how provisions between these best serves students
- Investigate why students who see counsellors and Mental Health Advisers are receiving

such low numbers of sessions.

- Enable counsellors to provide primary evidence in extenuating circumstances forms for students applying under mental health grounds
- Ensure students are aware that Mental Health Advisers exist and how they can support students.
- Undertake an awareness raising campaign including a focus on positive messages about the Student Counselling Service.
- Ensure students are able to change counsellor or Mental Health Adviser if the relationship is reasonably not working and inform students of this when they access the service.
- Investigate why CBT is not routinely being offered to students.
- Increase the number of full time counsellors.
- Increase the number of Mental Health Advisers.
- Increase the number of sessions students are receiving.

#### *Disability Service*

- Ensure that learning adjustments are fully implemented, through applying action plans where there is non-implementation, setting timescales to rectify this and investigate any common issues.
- Ensure that students are able to change disability adviser if they feel the relationship is reasonably not working and inform students of this when they access the service.
- Ensure that Disability Advisers (and Mental Health Advisers) are fully supported in being able to deliver learning adjustments to students with a diverse range of mental health issues.

#### *Peer Supporters*

- Recruit a diverse range of Peer Supporters with a particular focus on postgraduate students.
- Improve the awareness of students of Peer Supporters outside of halls of residences, including making it explicit as to how the supporters can provide a positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of students.

### Academic Advisers

- Ensure that all Academic Advisers undertake Mental Health First Aid Training in conjunction with the Disability and Wellbeing Service so that they are able to identify and feel equipped, particularly to deal with students presenting themselves as being in crisis.
- Ensure that all Academic Advisers are given the appropriate training, support, literature and resources in order to understand the School's Support Services and regulations so that they are able to effectively signpost students.
- Review the guidance on Academic Advisers for both students and advisers to make the language used less legalistic and more accessible and welfare focussed. As well as ensuring that there is a single clearly written and accessible student facing document for the entire School.
- Further develop and clarify the Departmental Tutor role of *"To monitor the academic and pastoral care provided by members of his or her department, including the provision of reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities and compliance with the School's Single Equality Scheme."* so that it includes:
  - Recommending professional help services to students.
  - Co-ordination of the student support system within the Department.
  - Acting as a consultant to Academic Advisers and students about non-academic issues.
  - Acting as a liaison point for the Disability and Wellbeing Service and Student Counselling Service.
  - Support students experiencing academic and personal issues.
- Improve the process of students meeting with an Academic Adviser including:
  - Introduce longer time-slots where students state that they wish to discuss a non-academic issue.
  - Introduce half past starting times for appointments so that students do not have to miss class.
  - Ensure all Academic Advisers offer specific office hours for their advisees.
  - Multiple group sessions particularly at the start of each term and in the build up to the exam period to facilitate a greater support network among students.
- Provide students with clear information on the process of changing Academic Advisers where there is a relationship breakdown and ensure that this is properly communicated.

- Explore ways in which the school can introduce a 'Reward and Review' system for Academic Advisers, so that students are able to provide effective feedback to advisers on their experiences and that best practice can be recognised, shared and linked to promotion.
- Ensure that no student has to wait longer than 10 working days for an appointment with their Academic Adviser.
- Undertake further research into the impact and interplay of Academic Advisers on the student experience, student mental health and the disclosure of a disability.

#### *Wellbeing Activities*

- Create a plan to improve the promotion of wellbeing activities run by LSE with a particular focus on communicating to students the benefits of attending.
- Work with the Students' Union to investigate how in the longer term the Active Lifestyle programme can help facilitate the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing for students.

Published: June 2016

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