Our Response to the University of Aberdeen Counselling Service Client Feedback Survey Results 2016

At the end of January 2016 we sent our annual Client Feedback Survey to all student and staff clients who had attended the University Counselling Service in the first semester of this academic year, September to December 2015.

In brief
We received 198 responses (which amounts to a 40% response rate, an increase of 10% compared to our 2015 survey response rate). Everyone who responded had attended a minimum of one initial Exploratory or Emergency session. Of the respondents, 55% had also received ongoing counselling sessions and 20% were still on the waiting list for ongoing counselling. As in last year’s survey, we included those on the waiting list in our survey as well as those who had received ongoing counselling and directed respondents to different sections of the survey according to what they had been offered. Overall:

- 93% of respondents found counselling was very helpful or helpful in addressing their situation
- 12% of respondents wanted a reduced waiting time for counselling and 4% wanted more information about the waiting time whilst on the waiting list

In detail
We analysed all the survey results, including all the individual free-text comments that you have made. We are grateful to you for taking the time to give us feedback and this has influenced any modifications that we are planning for our service in order to improve the experience of our clients. We have grouped the information that we received from you under the following headings and have described the changes that we have made or intend to make below in response to your comments:

- Experience of the Counselling Service reception and procedures
- Ways in which counselling has helped those who have received ongoing sessions
- Experience of those who had to wait for ongoing counselling sessions after their initial Exploratory appointment
- Responses regarding what would have improved your experience of the Counselling Service
Experience of Counselling Service reception and procedures

What you said:

- 100% of you were **very satisfied** or **satisfied** with the reception you received in the office
- 96% were **very satisfied** or **satisfied** with the appointment booking system
- 93% were **very satisfied** or **satisfied** with our explanation of the waiting process
- 61% were **very satisfied** or **satisfied** with the location of our books which are available for clients to borrow, 39% **neither satisfied or dissatisfied**.

Ways in which counselling has helped those who have received ongoing sessions

What you said:

- The following graph indicates what respondents received at the Counselling Service:
- 43% felt that counselling was **the most significant** or was **an important factor** in helping you stay at University and 19% felt this was **one of many factors**

- 36% felt that counselling was **the most significant** or was **an important factor** in helping you do better in your academic work and 25% felt this was one of many factors

- 55% felt that counselling was **the most significant** or was **an important factor** in improving your overall experience of University and 19% felt this was **one of many factors**

- 52% felt that counselling was **the most significant** or was **an important factor** in helping you develop skills that might be useful in obtaining future employment and 20% felt this was **one of many factors**

- 93% felt that counselling has been **very helpful** or **helpful** in addressing your situation

- Analysis of individual comments indicated that about 54% of you found the experience of being listened to and given space to explore your issues and express your feelings in a non-judgmental and empathic environment with specialist understanding of student issues useful. 8% stated that counselling enabled you to continue with your studies or your job at University. 4% of you felt that counselling helped you to stay alive during a period in your life when you were feeling suicidal.

- In your comments 14% of you referred to the location of the service, ease of access, availability of resources and the friendliness at reception as beneficial. 6% of you acknowledged the usefulness of receiving a quick appointment after first contact.

- Finally, 3% felt that your supportive relationship with your individual Counsellor was an important factor and you also referred to the value of the strict confidentiality of the service

- 18% valued the outcome of counselling in terms of increased insight, self-awareness, self-compassion, wellbeing and improved mental health and self-care as well as the development of coping strategies, combatting recurring issues and reducing feelings of hopelessness and loneliness.

- 80% of respondents said they would ‘**definitely**’ recommend the Counselling Service to a friend or colleague, and 14% responded to this question with ‘**maybe**’ or ‘**perhaps**’
Experience of those who had to wait for ongoing counselling sessions after their initial Exploratory appointment

What you said:

- Of those of you who had to wait for an ongoing appointment, 35% waited for **under a month**; 24% waited for **1-2 months**; 29% waited for **2-3 months**; 8% waited for **3-4 months**; 5% waited for **over 4 months**
- For those of you who had to wait for ongoing counselling the consequences were: 9% of respondents reported that their situation resolved itself; for 70% of respondents there was **no change**; 21% felt that their situation deteriorated
- 36% of those waiting reported that they had taken up the option of one or more ‘holding’ appointments offered during the Exploratory session during the waiting period
- 86% of respondents found the Exploratory session itself ‘**definitely**’ or ‘**a bit**’ useful
- 55% of those waiting said they used alternative sources of help during the waiting period, including resources they found on the Counselling Service website
- 67% of those who used alternative resources during their wait found these ‘**helpful**’
- In response the question about what other resources those awaiting counselling had tried, written comments listed the following: Counselling Service website, leaflets and library books; Big White Wall; yoga; breathing exercises; self-help books and DVDs; online resources; private therapy; GP referral to specialised service in hospital &/or medication; meditation; daylight lamp; sport; mindfulness; relaxation CD; Nightline.
- 32% of respondents reported that they had used the **Big White Wall** online support network which the University of Aberdeen has paid for students to use. 42% found it ‘**a little**’ or ‘**a lot**’ helpful, 42% responded ‘**not really**’ or ‘**no**’ to the question of whether they found it ‘helpful’ and 16% were unsure.
- In terms of being kept up to date about the waiting list during the waiting period, 59% felt that they were kept adequately informed with updates, 41% of respondents felt that they were not kept adequately informed.
- The following graph shows the overall impact on respondents of having to wait for counselling on a scale of 1-5:
What we are doing:

- From September 2015, those on the waiting list for ongoing counselling have been contacted at two points during the year, around mid-November and mid-March to update them on the current situation and to provide additional information about alternative sources of support

Responses regarding what would have improved your experience of the Counselling Service

What you said:

20% of respondents said that there was nothing that could improve the service for them and felt that it is very good as it is

12% felt that a reduction in the waiting time for counselling, more staff resources, and faster, more immediate service would improve their experience

4% specified that they would like more updates about the waiting time
6% would appreciate more suggestions from the Counsellor, such as: coping mechanisms; therapeutic exercises; group discussions and activities; referrals to NHS mental health specialists

3% did not like the fact that their counselling contract was terminated prematurely

3% did not feel helped at all at the service

What we are doing:

- In order to offer a more equitable service, from September 2015 we have put an upper limit on the duration of counselling for all clients which will be established in discussion with a Counsellor
- From September 2015 if a client cancels 2 consecutive appointments or does not show up for an appointment and does not contact the service within 24 hours we have re-add them to the waiting list if they request this in order to increase the chances of those on the waiting list receiving ongoing counselling sooner
- Immediate short-term counselling (up to 3 sessions) and ‘on hold’ status (where clients can contact us for ad hoc ‘one-off’ sessions during an academic year, as needed) are being offered more frequently during the initial Exploratory session for those who prefer not to join the Waiting List for ongoing counselling appointments
- From September 2015, those on the waiting list for ongoing counselling have been contacted at two points during the year, around mid-November and mid-March to update them on the current situation and to provide additional information about alternative sources of support
- We have taken on more Diploma in Counselling interns and newly qualified Associate Counsellors in 2015-16, in an effort to reduce waiting times
- The University Counselling Service within Student Support Services will be reviewed as part of the Professional Services Review in 2016 when a response to the substantial increase in demand for counselling from both students and staff will be considered.