



**University of  
Nottingham**

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

# **Annual Report 2020-21**

## **University Counselling Service**



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## Headline information

### Client related

2643 clients (students and staff) were seen, an increase of 23% on 2019/20.

- 7593 individual and group appointments were attended remotely (phone or Teams)
- 7% of the total student population accessed counselling, up 2% on 2019/20.
- 9% of university staff accessed the service, down from 12.4% in 2019/20.
- Attendance increased to 81.4% from 75% in the previous year
- Waiting times for an appointment were on average 15 working days

Of the 2643 individual clients:

- 42.1% attended for 1 appointment only
- 88.5% attended between 1-5 appointments
- 8.7% attended 6-10 appointments
- 2.7% attended 11 or more appointments

### Waitlist for counselling consultations

- 2941 requests received
- Average 58 requests received per week
- Average wait 15 days (excl weekend) or 20 days (incl weekend)
- Approximately 10% of people requesting an appointment decided not to take it up when offered

### Baseline

We did some modelling of our services to work out how many appointments we may be able to provide per year based on current staffing levels. The baseline was arrived at by looking at counsellor FTE and then adjusted for annual leave, average annual sick leave, CPD, team activity etc. Below are our findings:

- Theoretically 9429 individual appointments available
- We provided 8747 appointments
- Achieving 92.76% of theoretically available appointments

### Workshops programme

- 42 workshops were offered online.
- 694 students and staff attended

### Therapeutic groups

- Three fixed term (8 weeks) therapeutic counselling groups were provided online
- The International Students Support Group, which is ongoing, continued online, meeting monthly

### Pilot workshops offered

- A series of workshops for staff across the university throughout the year
- A joint workshop with Careers and Employability Service
- A joint workshop with the International Student Mental Health project

### Staff support groups

- The University Counselling Service provided consultation, support, and guidance to individual schools and departments following critical incidents and events affecting staff groups and individuals in staff teams.

## Head of Service report

This has been a challenging year but also one of discoveries for the counselling service. We continued to provide support to students and staff across the university as well as to some living outside of the UK due to lockdown restrictions - all of it remotely by telephone or on Teams. We have all had reason to feel grateful to the staff in IT at some stage or another and to our own administrative team who have maintained steady delivery through deft handling of process and procedure throughout.

We have discovered that working therapeutically online has been possible and effective as a means of continuing to support our clients through several lockdowns. It does not suit everyone, but it has enabled some people to access counselling when they might otherwise have found this difficult. We have also been reminded of the value of our in-person contact with clients and colleagues.

Newspaper headlines and reports across social media have told us repeatedly over the past year that we are in the grip of 'a mental health crisis,' that young adults have suffered particularly, and that we are all stressed and burnt out due to working longer hours and harder than ever before. In the counselling service, we have witnessed first-hand the truth of some of these headlines and the complex reality that they do not necessarily describe. We know that loneliness has been particularly difficult for many young adults and for other people living on their own. We learned that for many of our clients, existing difficulties were made worse by the circumstances of Covid. Loss has been a predominant theme – both in terms of bereavement and losses that were related to necessary life changes or disrupted relationships. Uncertainty has been a challenge as political shifts and last-minute changes in reaction to the transmission of Covid defined our lives and our work. Universities have had to adapt rapidly and reactively throughout the year, and this has placed significant demands on staff throughout the organization.

We also discovered that we could work in ways that we had not imagined before – delivering workshops online to large numbers of attendees who told us that they had found them useful. We found that we could still reach our clients despite the remote contact – and for some clients, because of it. We saw many of them grappling with the challenges of remote study and working, and we often faced similar challenges ourselves. We were reminded that those online resources cannot replace interpersonal contact and that simple activities of self-care could enable us all to cope better. We increased our communication and collaboration with partner services and strengthened our links to the university pastoral network.

### Performance outcomes 2020-2021

- To investigate ways of managing high demand in an organisational context, whilst maintaining quality and team wellbeing.

Active waiting list management, the appointment of sessional counsellors, and improved liaison with internal and external services enabled us to respond effectively to the high demand for appointments

- To make efficient use of our resources and minimise non-attendance and late cancellations. To continue to be a consistent and reliable service whilst adapting to a reduction in staffing levels during a period of change and increasing demand.

2643 clients (students and staff) were seen, an increase of 23% on 2019/20. Attendance increased to 81.4% from 75% in the previous year

- To continue to develop effective internal and external support partnerships.

UCS has increased its provision of support, supervision and reflective practice to staff supporting students in the university. We meet regularly with IAPT service leads and the Mental Health specialists at Cripps Health Centre to maintain effective liaison.

- To continue to develop our use of digital technologies to ensure that the service can provide a blend of online and face to face counselling support.

UCS is now able to provide a mixture of online and F2F working, optimizing the use of our resource, and providing flexibility for clients.

- To review and return to the pursuit of a suitable outcomes measurement tool for full use in the service when possible.

The counselling service is in discussion with managers in Campus Life to look at an effective means of outcome measurement and how to effectively measure student satisfaction with services available to them (net promoter scores, student feedback)

- To investigate how we might improve access to counselling within the realistic parameters of our provision.

Remote working, increased communication with internal and external partner services, regular service updates, changes to the registration for an appointment process, and to our website have improved the information available to all our stakeholders and have facilitated access to the service for clients.

- To continue to align service activity with university EDI policies and university strategy.

The service has created a BAME counselling service directory and a leaflet providing strategies for neurodivergent students and staff. Our CPD training this year was on cultural competence. The service met with the SU Liberation Officer to discuss their manifesto commitments regarding counselling provision. The counselling team ensure that EDI issues are a core consideration in our discussions about and reflection on service practice.

- To continue to make effective use of qualitative and quantitative data to improve service delivery.

We are now able to provide baseline data about core resource use and efficiency and have provided fortnightly service usage/delivery figures to the Deputy Registrar to contribute towards the development of a divisional data set.

- To give attention to the professional development and welfare of team members.

Support to enable staff to access clinical supervision is essential in this respect. Service staff have been encouraged to engage constructively and critically with university policy and strategy using team meetings, discussion with the Head of Service, and reflection spaces to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Sustainability of high intensity provision throughout the year remains a challenge for university counselling services. The Head of Service was in regular contact with team members throughout the year of home working, with regular sessions available for support on clinical issues and just to stay connected with staff.

- To provide a safe counselling work environment in the context of Covid-19 restrictions in The Orchards building.

UCS Operational Manager Davina Malcom has overseen all Health and Safety risk assessment and adaptations at all counselling sites

## **Review**

The counselling service has met its targets from last year and is able to account for its activity comprehensively in terms of quality of provision, consistency of delivery, and effective and efficient use of its resource.

It is important to identify that a key element of an embedded counselling service is to ensure that it provides as much access as possible to the community it serves and uses the organizational knowledge that it holds to benefit the people who study and work at the university. We are able to offer insight and understanding to people who use our service because we know the university. Our work with staff through support and consultation and their own use of the service, informs our work with students, and vice versa.

## **Looking ahead**

An emerging theme for counselling, mental health, and wellbeing services across HE is that of defining what is and what is not possible to provide.

From time to time, we are asked if we can provide specialist support with a particular issue. Our expertise in the counselling service is informed by our specialist knowledge of the higher education context and not in particular areas of intervention, for example, trauma, bereavement, Autistic Spectrum disorder, ADHD. That is not to say that this service cannot work with all the above presentations and many more. Our counsellors are experienced and accredited with the BACP and are used to working on a short-term basis with a wide range of difficulties and problems.

We work on a 'one at a time' basis. This does not mean everyone only gets one session, but it does mean that we will generally book appointments one at a time. We might also ask our clients to decide if/when they want a follow up appointment after they have had time to reflect on their previous counselling session.

The task that faces us is one of sensitively addressing the needs of our client population in the context of increased articulation of stress and distress, which very often becomes defined by medical terminology. Counselling is a reflective process not an emergency intervention. We can help with a wide range of problems – some of them diagnosed mental health conditions and many which arise from the tragedies, losses, adversities, challenges, and trauma of life. Counselling support can help people to bear their problems and to find ways of thinking about them, expressing how they feel and managing the difficulties that arise. In a culture where the difficulties resulting from life problems are increasingly seen as mental health issues, the issues that we support our clients with – serious, profound, complex, and sustained difficulties – will need to be worked through and lived with, rather than resolved.

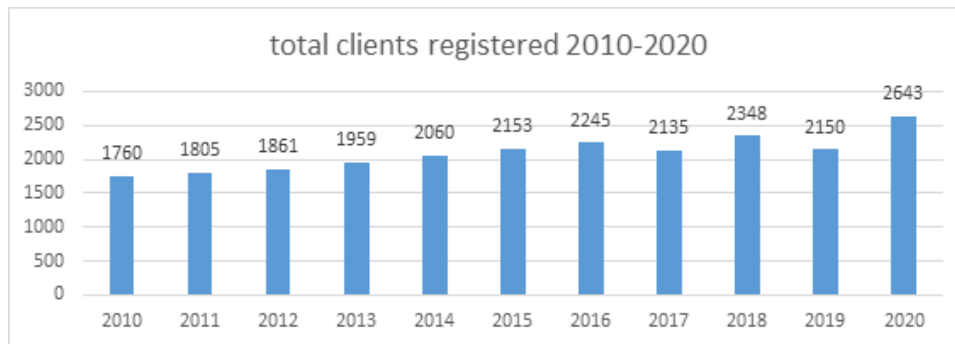
## **Our goals for 2021/22**

- Provide clear information about what we can offer and what it is not possible to offer – to manage expectations of counselling provision
- Continue to develop access to counselling support that is inclusive and of consistent quality and availability to both students and staff.
- Develop our provision in terms of hybrid working to achieve optimum flexibility and accessibility of appointments and workshops. We will resume offering appointments at Sutton Bonington and Jubilee campuses
- Contribute to the data collection across Campus Life to ensure that service net promoter scores can be attained, and user feedback collected.

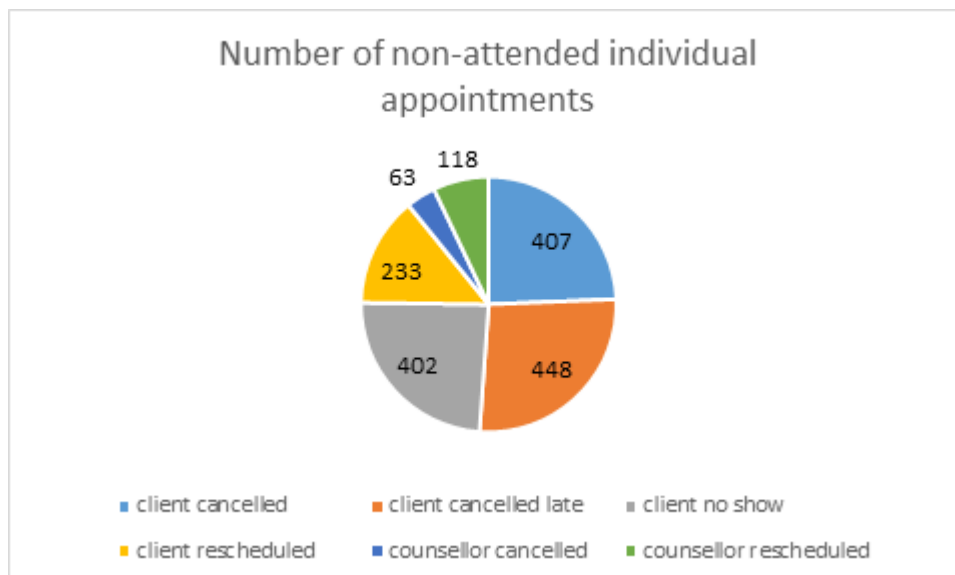
- Develop systems to support counsellors in maintaining self-care while responding to intensive and sustained demand.
- Collaborate with partner services to provide a robust and effective pastoral support network at the university
- Focus on neurodiversity as a theme for our service CPD for the forthcoming year
- When we recruit staff, a key principle will be to increase diversity where it is possible to do so
- We will liaise effectively with internal and external services to ensure that students and staff can make informed choices about the help they need and are effectively signposted when necessary.

## Statistics

In the academic year 2020-2021 2643 individuals attended appointments with UCS; 34% of these individuals had been seen by the service prior to the start of August 2020.

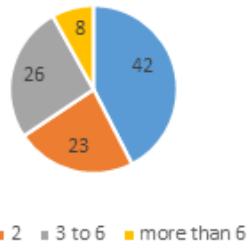


UCS offered a total of 9399 appointments, individual and group, and overall, 81% of these were attended. The numbers of unattended appointments are shown below.



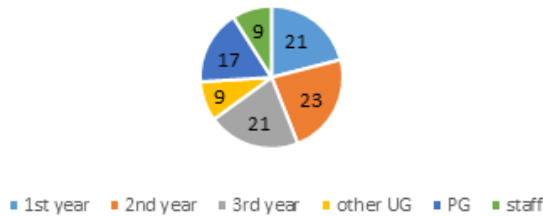
The average number of appointments attended per client was 2.8, with 65% of clients attending 1 or 2 appointments.

Appointments attended as % of total clients



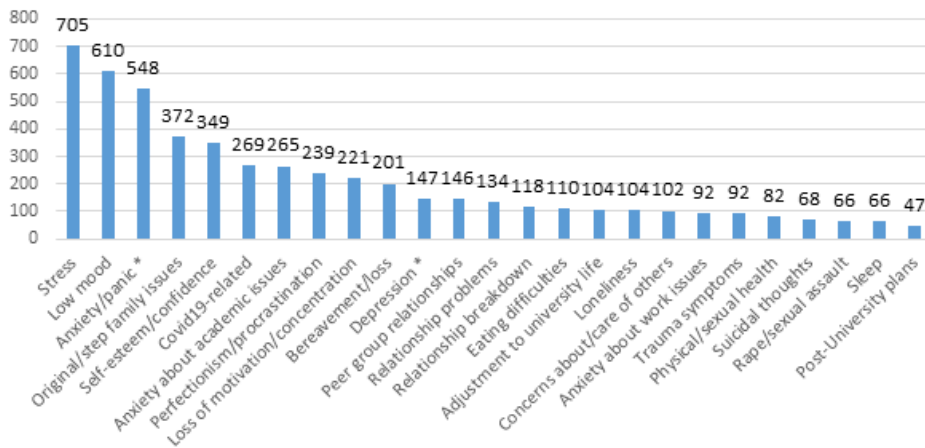
The proportions of undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and staff were similar to those recorded previous years in previous years.

% total client population



The most frequently cited presenting problems were also comparable with previous years. Difficulties relating to Covid-19 was the sixth most cited problem.

25 most frequently cited Presenting Problems





## Client feedback

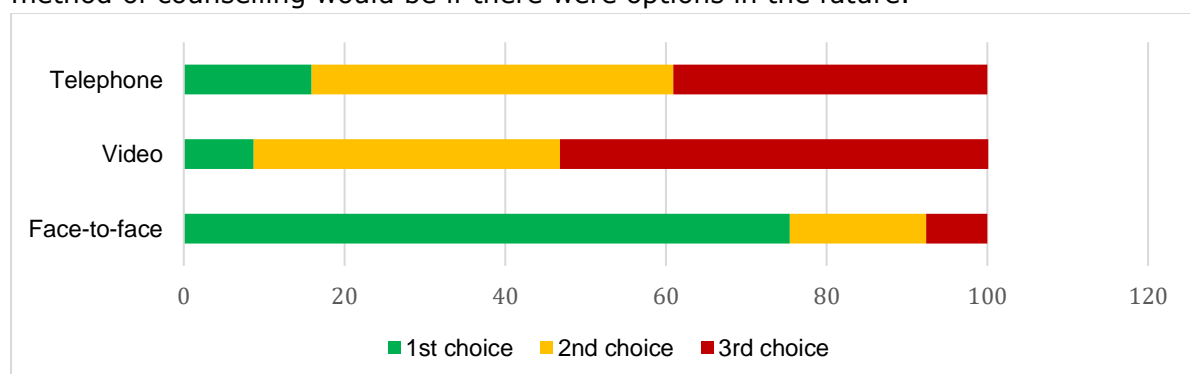
All clients who attended at least one appointment were sent a feedback questionnaire at the end of the counselling contract.

We sent 2239 questionnaires, 289 were completed giving a feedback rate of 13%, and this is an increase on the 11.5% return rate last year.

77% of the feedback was from student clients, 23% from staff clients.

- To what extent has counselling improved your sense of well-being?  
29% responded significantly or very significantly
- How satisfied are you overall with the counselling you received?  
75% responded satisfied or very satisfied
- To what extent has counselling has improved your overall experience of the University?  
45% responded that it was an important factor or the most significant factor
- To what extent has counselling helped you do better in academia, at work or on placement?  
34% responded that it was an important factor or the most significant factor
- To what extent has counselling helped you develop skills that might be useful in (future) employment?  
27% responded that it was an important factor or the most significant factor
- How satisfied are you with your experience of the administration of the counselling service?  
87% responded satisfied or very satisfied
- How likely is it that you would recommend the counselling service to others?  
1 = not at all likely; 10 = extremely likely  
Student: Average score was 7.92. (67% scored between 8 – 10)  
Staff: Average score was 9.06. (88% scored between 8 – 10)

As this would be, the first full year of working remotely, we asked what the preferred method of counselling would be if there were options in the future.



## Counselling provision at other campuses

Remote working meant that students from different campuses could be offered appointments with any of the counsellors.

We have now resumed face to face work at Sutton Bonington and Jubilee campuses and can offer appointments at those sites or remotely. We are still unable to offer in-person sessions at Royal Derby Hospital so for students and staff there we will continue to offer appointments remotely or in-person at The Orchards on University Park.

UCS Head of Service Lucy Halberstam and the Head of Counselling at Ningbo Patti Wallace, University of Nottingham, China, have continued the established practice of regular liaison between the services and maintain contact through monthly peer supervision sessions. This summer Patti Wallace announced her intention to retire at the end of the calendar year after over 5 years in that post and more than 45 years working in therapeutic roles which have also included management and leadership positions in a variety of organisational settings

## Clinical Placement Counsellor

It has been a year of change and reflection resulting in a shift in working practice.

With the outbreak of Covid and the ensuing lockdowns, clinical placements were initially curtailed but by October 2020 all the students had been supported back into placement. From September 2020, requests for support continued to rise. The Medical School agreed to support an additional day of this post from the end of October 2020.

Together with the Head of Service, I reflected on the following questions:

1. **What was stopping the role being as effective as it could be?**
  - Divided commitments straddling two teams
  - Insufficient flexibility to meet the needs of the students within the existing appointment structure
  - Insufficient contact with the School of Nursing
  - Insufficient opportunity to go on site and meet students and staff
2. **Changes made to the role need**
  - Identification of the best means of delivery for placement support
  - A flexible timetable
  - Opportunities to meet with students in their placement settings
  - Increased knowledge of Medical School training and sites
  - Collaborative working across sites and services (including MHAS, Health Sciences, sub-deans)

The outcome of the discussion was a decision to position the role of Clinical Placement counsellor alongside and not within UCS. This will enable more flexibility when working to the students' schedules as well as a clearer positioning of the role between the Medical School and the counselling service. I have been able to create more access points through social media and timetable my hours and appointments to ensure greater accessibility to counselling appointments.

## **Outcomes achieved this year**

- Trauma workshops with nurses: 80 plus students attended over three workshops. Feedback was positive and the workshops will now be embedded in the curriculum for 2021/22.
- Transition Group – supporting students from BSc to placement. This was well attended with feedback that it was important in helping the students through their first few weeks on site
- Open Group – drop-in space for CP2 students, sharing experiences and coping mechanisms
- Instagram Live – sessions offering advice and support through exam season
- Early Riser group – 20-minute mindfulness sessions every day at 8 am through 3 weeks of exam season and every Monday throughout the year
- Reflect & Connect group – reflective practice space for CP3 students
- Mental health awareness workshops - for teaching fellows on all sites. Feedback suggested these were useful sessions for the staff.
- Over 100 clients have been seen one to one and over 50 students have attended the various groups.

## **Plans for 2021-22**

- Drop-in initial consultation 'surgeries' have begun at Lincoln hospital with a plan to offer these at different sites once they open up.
- More mental health awareness sessions for staff across all sites with supervision groups every three months to discuss any mental health concerns.
- Collaboration with other services (MHAS/UCS/SU) in the delivery or psychoeducation & mindfulness for staff and students in the Medical School

**Beth Hill**  
**Clinical Placement Counsellor**

## **Workshops 2020-21**

### **Programme developments**

The shift to an entirely online workshop programme this academic year has been positive, with our new webinar format enabling us to reach a far higher number of participants than might normally be feasible for in-person sessions. While the lack of face-to-face contact necessitated a temporary pause in our creative workshops, we incorporated new sessions on managing the impact of the pandemic alongside our core psychoeducational themes. Two of our counsellors also piloted a series of webinars open to all university staff in response to continuing global uncertainty and the challenges of remote working. Titles included 'Refresh and Replenish' and 'Evolve and Reshape' with sessions focusing on self-care, personal development, and reflection. These webinars proved extremely popular and are now set to become a regular feature.

### **Workshop promotion, statistics, and feedback**

Responding to feedback, we introduced various changes this year to increase the reach and accessibility of our programme by timetabling sessions where possible to coincide with staff and student lunch breaks and continuing to adapt to meet changes in demand. We also improved the reach of our publicity for the workshops with support from a colleague.

This year's statistics clearly reflect the success of these measures, with an increase in the number of participants of close to 50% compared to 2019-20 (despite a slight reduction in the number of sessions offered). The percentage of students and staff who booked a place on a workshop and then attended the session increased by 13% compared to the year before'.

The comments received this year were positive (a satisfaction rate of 75%) with participants frequently reporting that they enjoyed the mix of didactic and interactive content and found the sessions dynamic and engaging. Here is a sample:

*It was really brilliant and far exceeded my expectations (**Refresh and Replenish**).  
Superb, best hour of my week, thank you! (**Mindfulness**).  
Really excellent. Best workshop on this topic I have ever seen. Other universities would be lucky to experience this (**Perfectionism & Procrastination**).*

### **Looking ahead**

This year has shown that online workshops enable us to connect with a much broader section of the university community. Going forward, we will aim to offer both online and in-person workshops. This will enable us to continue to improve accessibility whilst retaining some of the additional containment and interactivity provided by face-to-face contact. We are looking forward to reinstating our creative workshops as soon as circumstances permit and continuing to improve and innovate through our new blended approach.

### **Sarah Olds**

#### **Workshops Coordinator**

## Therapeutic groups

This year has seen some streamlining of the groups programme after the loss of some key staff who were involved with group facilitation. We have also adapted to meet the shifting demands of life in a pandemic. The main changes this year have been:

- A bereavement group in summer of 2020 in response to the needs of the university community during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Introduction of a group called Coping and Connecting – an eight-week group for students run in the autumn term and then again in spring. These groups recruited well and replaced the Managing Relationships groups.
- The continuation of the International Students Support Group. This was particularly needed and well received as many international students have been facing acute loneliness during Covid. The format of this group will change to become a 'drop-in' style of attendance.
- The continuation of the Men's Group in the summer term. The group continues to flourish and recruit/retain members well. It is going to be re-named for 2021/21 to make it more welcoming for anyone identifying as male.
- All groups have been run online and this will continue at the start of the next academic year. There is a keenness to return to running groups in person as soon as

it feels safe to do so. We may consider still running some groups online as feedback suggests that for some people the convenience, accessibility, and perceived safety of online contact can help.

Between 4 and 8 people attended each group session.

We have reviewed the Open Group that was offered previously, and this provision has been put on hold for now so we can assess the needs of the student population and the staff resources in the service.

**Dan Pitt**  
**Groups Coordinator**

## Outreach programme

### **UoN sports and men's mental health**

The counselling service has been working with the sports centre to offer consultation and advice on how to shape the support offered to male identifying students who want to access physical activity as a way of managing their mental health.

This initiative is called 'Men's Health Active' (MHA), and Hannah Webber (Disability Sports Officer) has been leading it.

In 2019/20, the counselling service agreed to facilitate regular, monthly 'talk shops' for users of the Men's Health Active service in response to student feedback that the activity sessions were helpful, but it was hard to find space in them that felt safe enough to talk openly.

The pilot went well and after an interruption when the UK went into the first lock down, these sessions have continued to be offered monthly during term time. They were moved online and continue that way currently, to be reviewed later in the 2021/22 academic year.

**Dan Pitt**  
**Groups Coordinator**

### **Careers**

It has been a pleasure to collaborate with the Careers and Employability Service this year. We have written two blogs for the Career Wellbeing series, which have included: *Under Pressure: how to cope with others' opinions when career planning* and *"Your Career Awaits: how to manage change."*

In addition, we have worked together to facilitate a workshop for final year students, *"Approaching graduation? How to stay calm and carry on when job searching in uncertain times."* This felt particularly relevant and helpful in the context of such a difficult year for the students who were preparing for their next steps following graduating.

Sarah Hinds contributed to the Career Wellbeing Nottingham Open Online Courses and optional Nottingham Advantage Award module. The collaboration has been a rewarding experience for us and hopefully has benefited the students' experience.

**Susie Ward**  
**Groups Coordinator**

## Continuing Professional Development

In addition to individual professional development undertaken by all our counsellors, we hold several in-house training events. We aim to cover current themes encountered in our clinical work, as well as subjects that are relevant to our core client group, and which connect with university strategy and EDI requirements.

This year the team undertook online training delivered by the organisation NASFIYAT (<https://www.nafsiyat.org.uk/>). This cross-cultural awareness training enabled further exploration of the issues involved in working across cultures and of those related to race, power, and oppression.

Further areas of CPD are being planned for the new academic year and will include working with neurodiversity.

**Adrian Langham**  
**CPD Lead**

## Appendix 1 – Our staff

### Current staff – Counsellors

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Adrian Langham     | BACP Accredited                                      |
| Alison Hammond     | BACP Accredited, UKCP Registered, BACP-UC            |
| Beth Hill          | BACP Accredited                                      |
| Daniel Pitt        | UKCP Registered Psychotherapist                      |
| Fiona Mercer       | BACP Accredited, UKCP Registered                     |
| Ira Karakatsani,   | BACP Accredited                                      |
| Jackie Philippides | BACP Accredited                                      |
| Jane Titterton     | HCPD Counselling Psychologist,                       |
| Liz Cowley         | BACP Senior Accredited                               |
| Lucy Halberstam    | BACP Senior Accredited, BACP-UC.                     |
| Maya Gagni         | BACP Accredited                                      |
| Myra Woolfson      | UKCP Registered Psychotherapist                      |
| Sarah Hinds        | BACP Accredited                                      |
| Sarah Olds         | BACP-UC, UKCP Registered                             |
| Susie Ward         | BACP Accredited and BABCP Accredited Psychotherapist |

### Current Staff – Reception

Davina Malcolm  
Jane Hoddinott  
Nicolette Poyzer

### Trainee / Placement Counsellors

As a result of the global pandemic, we did not have any trainee / placement counsellors during the 2020/21 academic year.

### Leavers

- Lee Wilkes, Sessional Counsellor
- Natalie Copeland, Sessional Counsellor
- Kathryn Morris-Roberts UKCP Registered Psychotherapist

We wish them all the best with their futures.

## Appendix 2 – Abbreviations & Acronyms

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| APPT(s) | Appointment(s)  |
| BACP    | British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy             |
| BABCP   | British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies |
| BME     | Black and Minority Ethnic   |
| BPS     | British Psychological Society                                     |
| C&YP    | Children and Young People (BACP Division)                         |
| CPD     | Continuing Professional Development                               |
| CP1/2/3 | Clinical Placement years 1, 2 and 3                               |
| EDI     | Equality Diversity Inclusion                                      |
| FTE     | Full Time equivalent (36.25 hours)                                |
| GDPR    | General Data Protection Regulations                               |
| GEN     | Graduate Entry Nursing  |
| GP      | General Practitioner  |
| HCPC    | Health and Care Professions Council                               |
| HEA     | Higher Education Academy  |
| HEI     | Higher Education Institute  |
| HUCS    | Heads of University Counselling Services                          |
| IAPT    | Improving Access to Psychological Therapies                       |
| MHAS    | Mental Health Advisory Service                                    |
| NAA     | Nottingham Advantage Award  |
| NOOC    | Nottingham Open Online Courses                                    |
| SB      | Sutton Bonington campus   |
| SEDC    | Staff Equality and Diversity Committee                            |
| SU      | Students' Union   |
| SWBO    | Support & Wellbeing Officers / Managers                           |
| UCS     | University Counselling Service                                    |
| UEB     | University Executive Board  |
| UKCP    | United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy                          |
| UKRC    | United Kingdom Register of Counsellors                            |
| UNMC    | University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus                          |
| UNNC    | University of Nottingham Ningbo Campus (China)                    |
|         |   |