

NIMSC 07
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BMA

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Medical Students Committee mental health survey – summary of results



British Medical Association
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Introduction

As part of their work for 2018/19 the Northern Ireland Medical Students Committee (NIMSC) identified student mental health as a priority, as they could see it was a growing concern for medical students.

In February 2019 NIMSC ran a survey targeting all medical students currently studying at Queen's University Belfast (QUB). The survey was intended to flag up any issues with the mental health support services provided by QUB and seek ways in which students feel these services could be improved.

Summary of results

- Results show respondents feel their mental health is worse than their general health – ranking general health 4.3 and mental health 3.4 out of five.
- Over 50% of respondents have experienced a mental health issue whilst studying at QUB.
- Students are more likely to access support for mental health issues outside QUB than from the university.
- Where support is accessed from QUB, results show respondents feel that it helped them to deal with their mental health issue and it was received in a timely manner.
- 97% of respondents were aware of their personal tutor/mentor.
- However just over 50% of respondents were aware they could talk to their tutor/mentor about their personal problems.
- Just under 40% of respondents felt they were comfortable doing this.
- Just under two thirds of respondents felt that they had enough support whilst on placement.

Methodology and demographics

The survey was developed with NIMSC and run online using SurveyMonkey. It ran for five weeks in February and March 2019.

In total the survey received 179 responses.

- The majority of the responses came from females at 60.8%, 38.5% of responses were from males.
- Undergraduate students made up 70.3% of responses with postgraduate students making up 29.6%.
- Students from Northern Ireland accounted for 72.1% of respondents, with students from outside accounting for 27.9% of respondents.

Breakdown of responses

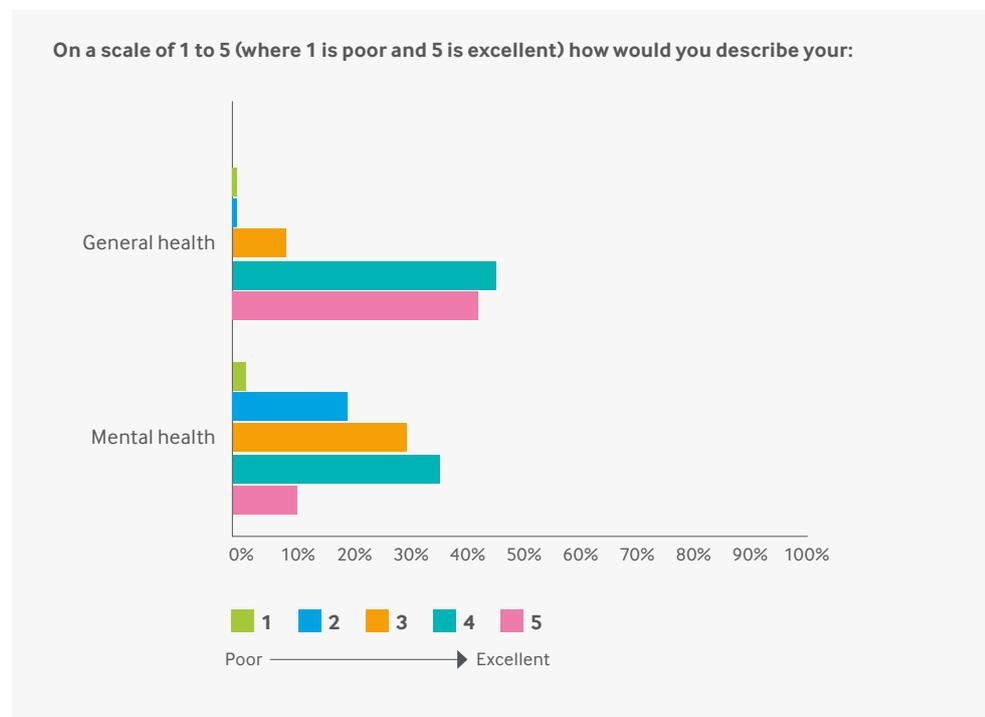
Question: “On a scale of 1 to 5 how would you describe your mental health and your general health”

The first question asked medical students to rank their general and mental health from one to five. One being poor and five being excellent, three was the midpoint.

The average results were:

- General health: 4.3
- Mental health: 3.4

These results show that respondents feel their general health is better than their mental health.



Focusing just on the mental health responses;

There was a large difference between undergraduate and postgraduate respondents:

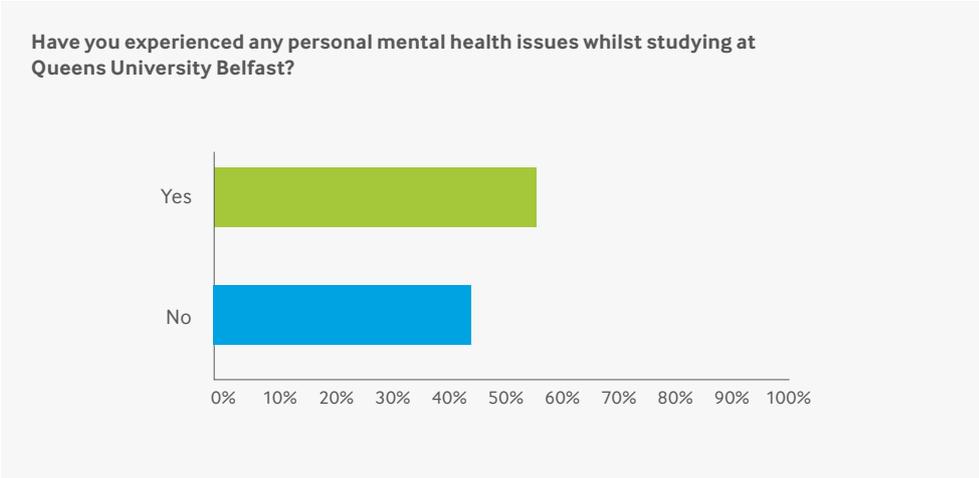
- 22.4% of undergraduate respondents selected 1 or 2
- 13.4% of postgraduate respondents selected 1 or 2

	1	2	3	4	5
Undergraduate	2.4%	20%	30.4%	36%	11.2%
Postgraduate	1.9%	11.5%	32.7%	46.2%	7.7%

Results showed very little difference between male and female respondents.

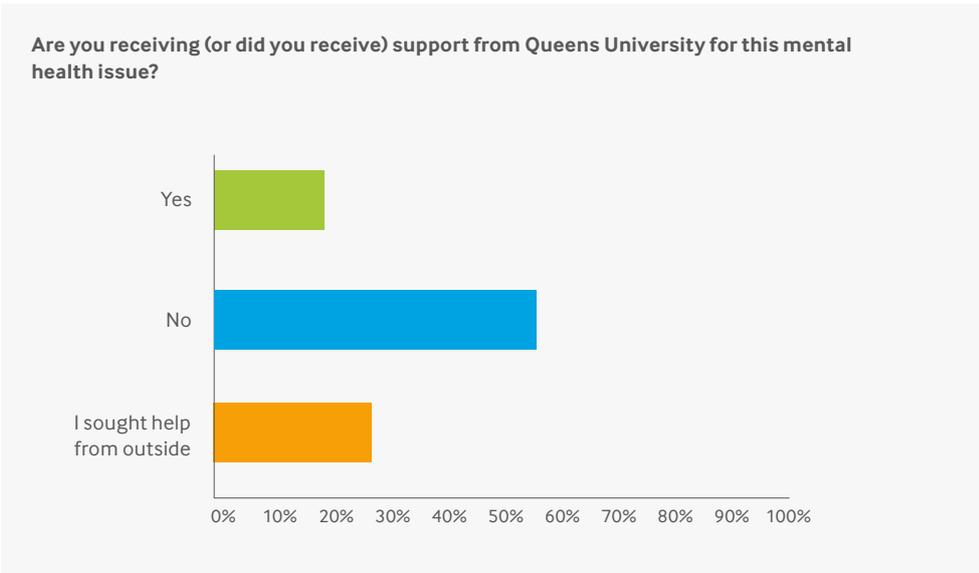
Question: “Have you experienced any personal mental health issues whilst studying at Queens University Belfast?”

57% of respondents told us that they had experienced a personal mental health issue whilst studying at QUB. This compares to 43% who told us they had not.



Question: “Are you receiving (or did you receive) support from Queens University for this mental health issue?”

This question was only asked to those who said they had experienced a personal mental health issue whilst studying at QUB.



Overall responses

Yes	No	I sought help outside QUB
18.6%	54.9%	26.5%

Question: “Did Queens University respond in a timely manner to your request for help?”

This question was only asked of those respondents who stated they had received support from QUB for a mental health issue.

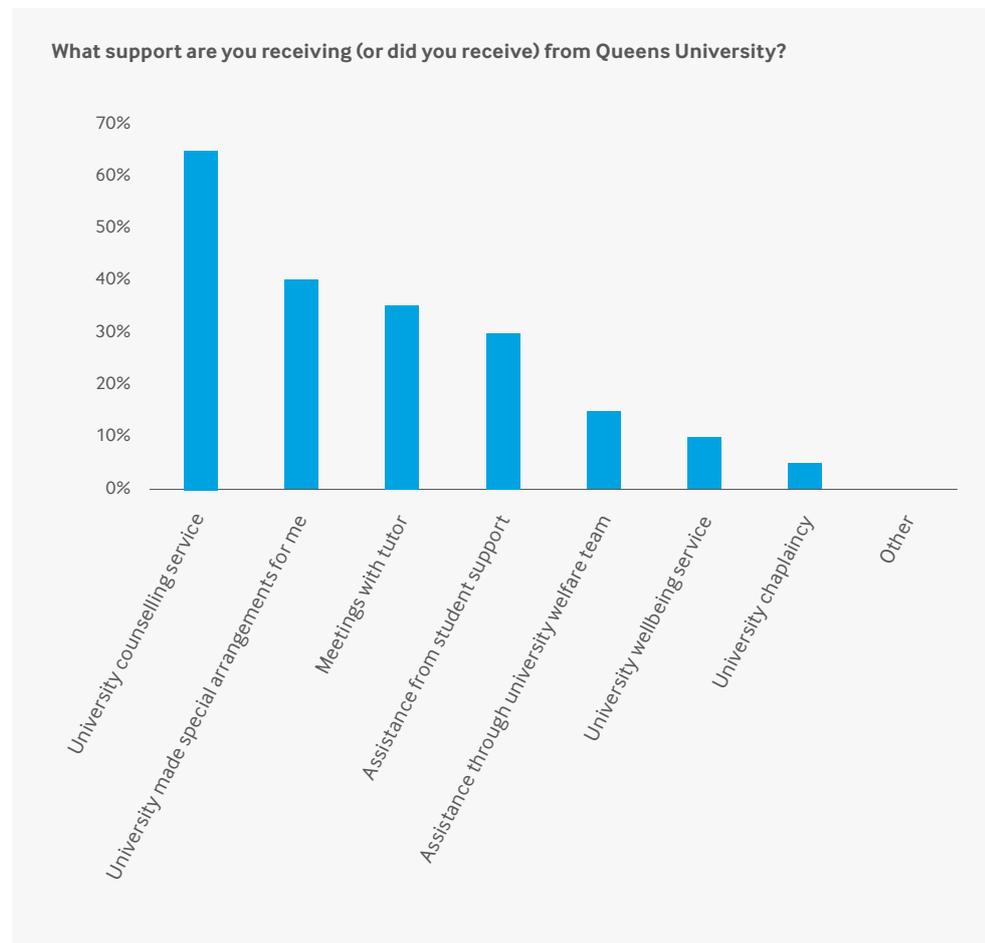
Overall responses	
Yes	No
85%	15%

Question “What support are you receiving (or did you receive) from Queens University?”

Again, this question was only asked of those respondents who stated they had received support from QUB.

Respondents were given a list of options they could choose from, or they could insert their own into a text box.

Results were:



Question: “Do you feel the support provided by Queens University helped you with your mental health issue?”

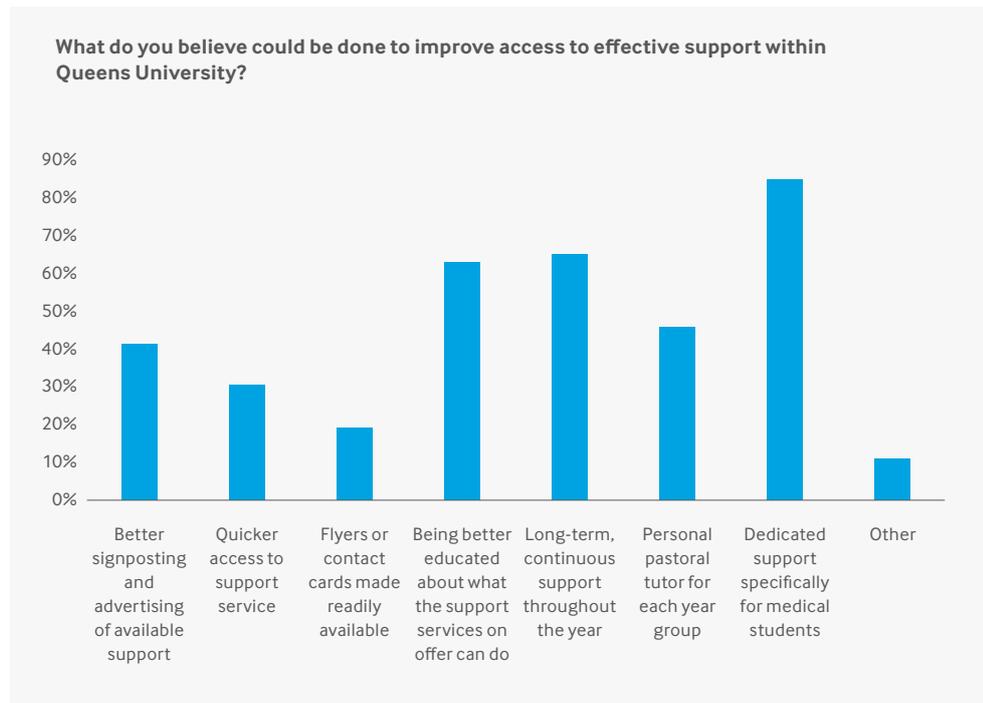
This question was only asked of those respondents who stated they had received support from QUB for their mental health issue.

Of these respondents, 85% stated that they felt the support received by QUB did help with their mental health issue.

Question: “What do you believe could be done to improve access to effective support within Queens University?”

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of options they believed could be provided to improve access to support within Queens University.

Results were:



“Dedicated support specifically for medical students” was the most selected option, selected 84.8% of times, almost 20% more than any other option. This was the most chosen response across all year groups.

The two other most selected options were:

- Long-term, continuous support throughout the year
- Being better educated about what the support services on offer can do.

If respondents selected “other” they were prompted to specify what this may be, suggestions included:

- More consideration being given to the location of support when a student is on a placement outside of Belfast
- Action being taken on bullying by doctors and other medical students
- Workshops each semester to identify where support is available for a range of mental health issues.

Question: “Where did you access support outside of Queens University?”

This question was only asked of those respondents who stated they had accessed support for a mental health issue from outside of Queens University.

The most common source of support outside QUB was through a GP.

Overall results

Through your GP	Private counselling	Friends or family	Local charity or voluntary group	BMA counselling service
64.3%	17.9%	14.3%	3.6%	0%

Question: “Do you believe these mental health issues have affected your physical health/relationship/studies?”

Again, this question was only asked of those respondents who stated they had experienced a mental health issue.

Respondents overwhelmingly show that mental health issues have affected their physical health, relationships and studies.

Do you believe these mental health issues have affected your physical health/relationships/studies?

	Yes	No
Physical health	78.7%	21.3%
Relationships	87.2%	12.8%
Studies	87%	13%

Question: “Have you been assigned a personal tutor/mentor by Queens University? (This would equate to your e-portfolio tutor)”

This question was asked to all respondents.

97.2% of respondents stated they did have a personal/tutor mentor.
2.8% said they did not.

Only respondents in 3rd and 4th year responded that they did not have a personal tutor/mentor.

Question: “On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is easy to contact and 5 is difficult to contact) how contactable is your tutor/mentor?”

This question was asked to all respondents who stated they had been assigned a personal tutor/mentor.

The average response across all responses was 2.8. There was some variation across year groups:

Overall and year group responses	
Overall	2.8
1st year	2.7
2nd year	2.9
3rd year	3
4th year	3.3
5th year	2.3

Question: “Do you find your tutor/mentor easy to approach?”

The overall responses to this question were:

- 61.9% of respondents said they found their tutor/mentor easy to approach
- 38.2% of respondents said they do not find their tutor/mentor easy to approach.

Responses show that those in higher year groups find their tutor/mentor easier to approach than those in lower year groups:

	Yes	No
1st year	50.9%	49.2%
2nd year	57.7%	42.3%
3rd year	54.6%	45.5%
4th year	72.2%	27.8%
5th year	84.6%	15.4%

There was a small difference in the responses between male and female students:

	Yes	No
Male	58%	42%
Female	61.9%	38.2%

Question: “Are you aware that you can discuss personal problems with your tutor/mentor?”

53.2% of respondents were aware they can discuss personal problems with their tutor/mentor.

Similar to the previous question, responses show that respondents in higher year groups were more aware that they can discuss personal problems with their tutor/mentor than those in lower year groups:

	Yes	No
1st year	32.2%	67.8%
2nd year	38.5%	61.5%
3rd year	41%	59%
4th year	80.6%	19.4%
5th year	84.6%	15.4%

Question: “Do you find it easy to discuss personal problems with your personal tutor?”

- 39.1% of respondents stated that they do find it easy to discuss personal problems with their personal tutor.
- 60.9% of respondents stated that they do not find it easy to discuss personal problems with their personal tutor.

	Yes	No
Overall	39.1%	60.9%
1st year	42.1%	57.9%
2nd year	70%	30%
3rd year	33.3%	66.7%
4th year	31%	69%
5th year	27.3%	72.7%
Male	57.1%	42.9%
Female	39.1%	60.9%
Undergraduate	40%	60%
Postgraduate	50.9%	49.1%

Results show that, male respondents appear to find it easier to discuss personal problems with their tutor than female students. As do postgraduate students compared to undergraduate students.

Question: “How often do you meet with your personal tutor?”

Overall results

More than once a year but less than once every three months	58.6%
Once a year	20.7%
At least every three months but less than once a month	16.1%
Never	3.5%
Once a month	0.5%
More than once a month but less than once a week	0.5%
Once a week	0%

Question: “Do you feel that you have/had adequate support whilst on placement?”

This question was not asked of 1st or 2nd year respondents.

- 64.5% of respondents felt that they have/had adequate support whilst on placement.
- 35.5% responded that they felt they did not have/had adequate support whilst on placement.

The lowest response to this question was 5th year, in which 53.9% of respondents stated they did not feel that they had/have adequate support whilst on placement.

	Yes	No
Overall	64.5%	35.5%
3rd year	54.2%	45.8%
4th year	73.7%	26.3%
5th year	53.9%	46.2%
Male	68.4%	31.6%
Female	64.5%	35.5%
Undergraduate	63.2%	36.8%
Postgraduate	68%	32%

Question: “What additional support could Queens University provide whilst you are on placement?”

Again, this question was not asked of 1st or 2nd year respondents.

For this question respondents were able to provide their own responses.

A word cloud of responses is below:



Several themes emerged in the responses:

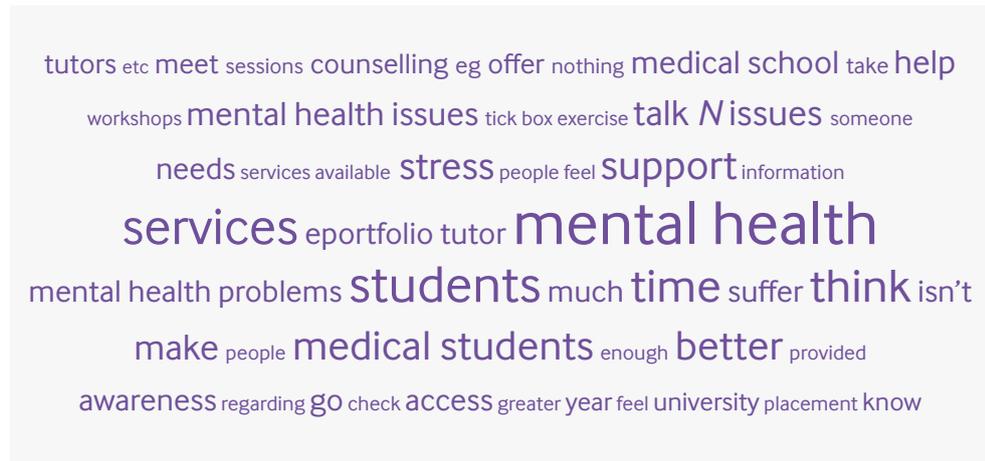
- Better support whilst on placement outside Belfast:
 - This was the most mentioned issue, specific points included:
 - Check ins from your e-portfolio tutor
 - A confidential messaging service to access support
 - Dedicated portfolio days back in Belfast
 - A helpline.
- Someone in charge of mental health support at all placement sites:
 - Ideally a registrar/junior doctor.
- Individual meetings with your placement supervisor:
- Placements in Belfast for people who have existing mental health issues:
 - Will allow people to be close to support and attend appointments.
- Increased financial support:
 - Travel expenses were specifically mentioned as an issue that caused worry or concern for students.
- Better explanation of e-portfolio tutor:
 - Respondents were not aware that they could talk to their tutor about pastoral issues.
- Increasing the number of counselling sessions each person is allowed.
- Debrief sessions post placements.
- Assistance with self-directed learning and self-care.
- A mess/section of the mess for medical students.

Question: “What, if anything, would you like to see change within the medical school regarding mental health services?”

Again, for this question respondents were able to submit their own responses.

A word cloud of responses is below:

Responses were wide ranging, the most mentioned ideas included:



- Greater awareness raising, and advertising of what services are available, and better signposting to services:
 - This was by quite some distance the most mentioned idea.
- Classes on mindfulness, anxiety, self-care and resilience.
- Dedicated support that is only for medical students.
- Support mentioned throughout the five years of medical school, not just at the start.
- More accessible advice, with more avenues of engagement:
 - Ideas for this included:
 - Drop in sessions
 - Online resources
 - Anonymous platforms – such as “tea and engagement”.
- Individual tutor meetings for everyone.
- Removing the focus on 100% attendance.
- Support for those who need financial help.
- Dedicate support in each trust for placement.
- The person you approach for help shouldn’t be involved in medical education.
- Greater explanation of the role of the e-portfolio tutor.

It is important to note that there were several responses that stated the support currently offered is very good, or that there were no changes that should be made.

Conclusion

The mental health of medical students has been identified as a key area of work for NIMSC. These survey results give an overview of the current position of medical students studying at QUB. As noted in the results medical students at QUB state that their mental health is not as good as their physical health.

Results show that more medical students access assistance for their mental health issue outside QUB, than inside QUB. A similar situation is reflected across the UK by BMA surveys of all medical students. Positively, a large majority of those students who state they have received assistance from QUB state that this support was received in a timely manner and did help with their mental health issue.

Respondents have raised several suggestions of where they feel that the support offered by QUB could be improved, especially in the support received whilst on placement and in further improving the student/tutor relationship. NIMSC look forward to working with QUB on these suggestions.

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