


FORBES-MCKAY, K.E. and HENDERSON, S. 2023. *When and how to involve trusted contacts if serious concerns are raised about a student's wellbeing*. Presented at the 2023 International higher education teaching and learning annual conference (HETL 2023): re-imagining education: collaboration and compassion, 12-14 June 2023, Aberdeen, UK.

When and how to involve trusted contacts if serious concerns are raised about a student's wellbeing.

FORBES-MCKAY, K.E. and HENDERSON, S.

2023

The CC BY licence applied to this file covers only the text and images that have been created by the authors. Any third-party materials remain under their original licences and permission to reuse those should be sought from the relevant copyright owners.



When and how to involve trusted contacts if serious concerns are raised about a student's wellbeing

Dr Katrina E Forbes-McKay & Dr Sarah Henderson

Background:

- HESA (2022) reported 122,530 students with a recorded **mental health condition** in the UK in 2016/17.
- Office for National Statistics reported 319 **suicide deaths** amongst HE students between 2017 and 2020.
- Those with mental health issues recover better with **social support**
- Most students support **Emergency Contact Schemes (ECS)** BUT widespread unease about implementation
- POPYRUS 2022, urging Universities to develop **clear policies** on when and how to involve trusted contacts when serious concerns are raised about a student's health or safety.

Aims:

- This study aims to investigate the relationship between student **well-being** and **social support**, and to explore student perspectives on the introduction of an **ECS**



METHOD



Design: An online Survey design was employed and distributed via JISC.



Sample: 113 University students completed questionnaire

- 14 (12.4%) males, 95 (84.1%) females, 2 (1.8%) Selected “Prefer not to say” and 1 (0.9%) identified as other.
- 77 (68.1%) undergraduates and 36 (31.9%) postgraduate students
- Aged between 17 to 60 (Mean 28.18, SD 11.14).



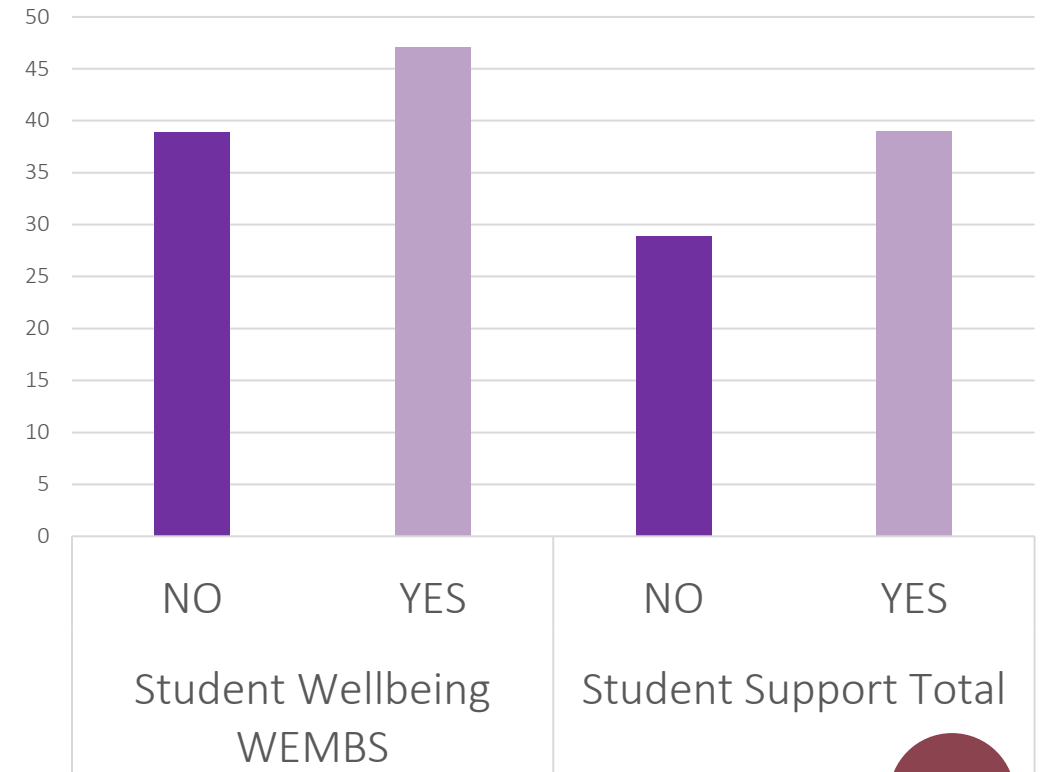
Materials:

- *Questions on current support and opinions on an emergency contact scheme*
- The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List shortened version - 12 items (Cohen et al. 1985)
- Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Tennant et al. 2007)

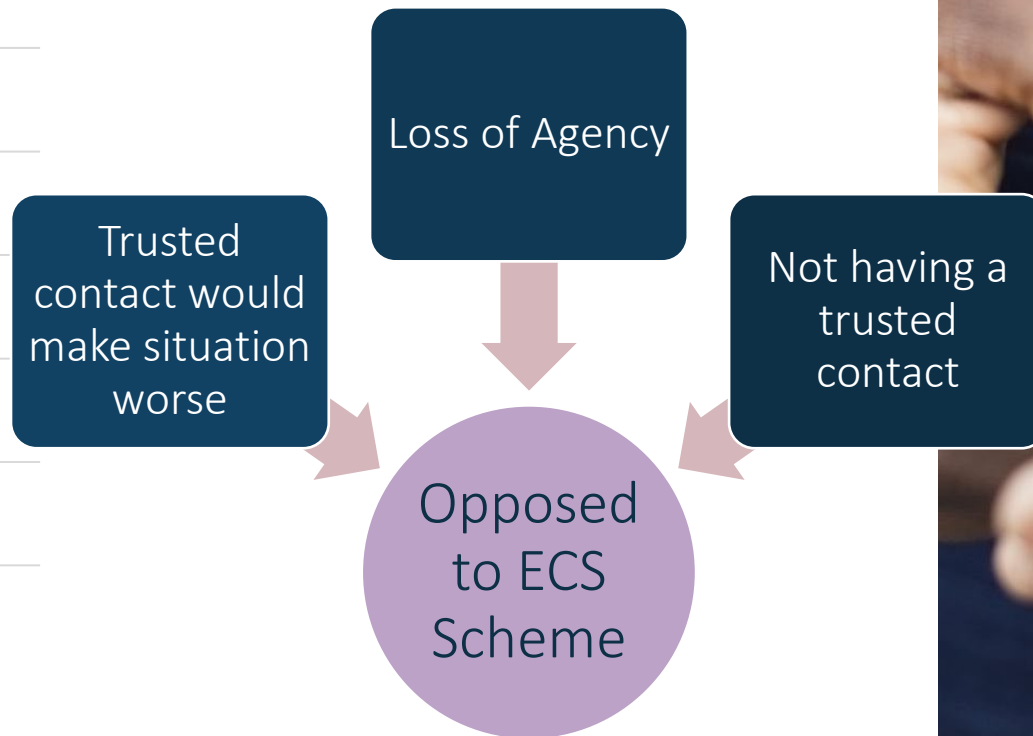
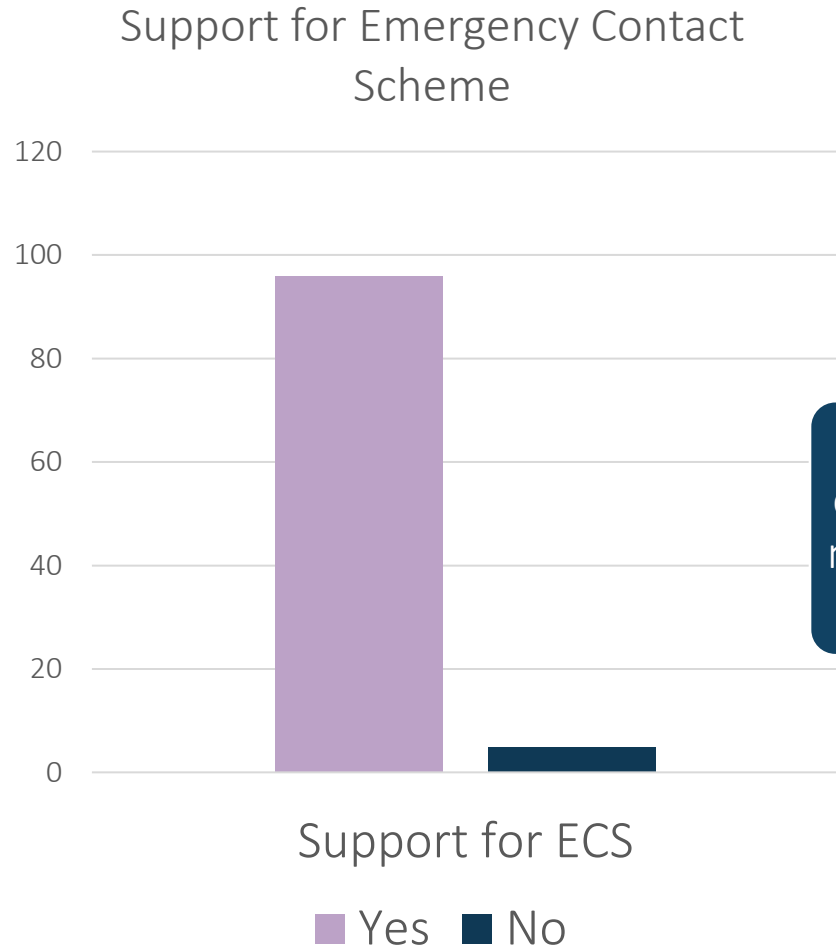
FINDINGS: Wellbeing & Social Support

- **WEMBS scores** ranged from 26 to 63 (Mean 45.50, SD 8.87)
- **Social support** ranged from 12 to 48 (Mean 37.00, SD 7.28).
- **Significant positive relationship between Wellbeing and Social Support** ($r = 0.52$, $N = 111$, $p < 0.001$).
- When asked if they **had someone to share their worries with?**
 - **21 Disagreed (19%)** and 90 Agreed (78%)
 - Significant differences between those who Agreed/Disagreed on Mental Wellbeing ($t(109) = 4.04$, $p < 0.01$) and Social Support ($t(109) = 6.97$, $p < 0.01$)

Mean Scores for those who Agree/Disagree that they have someone to share their worries with

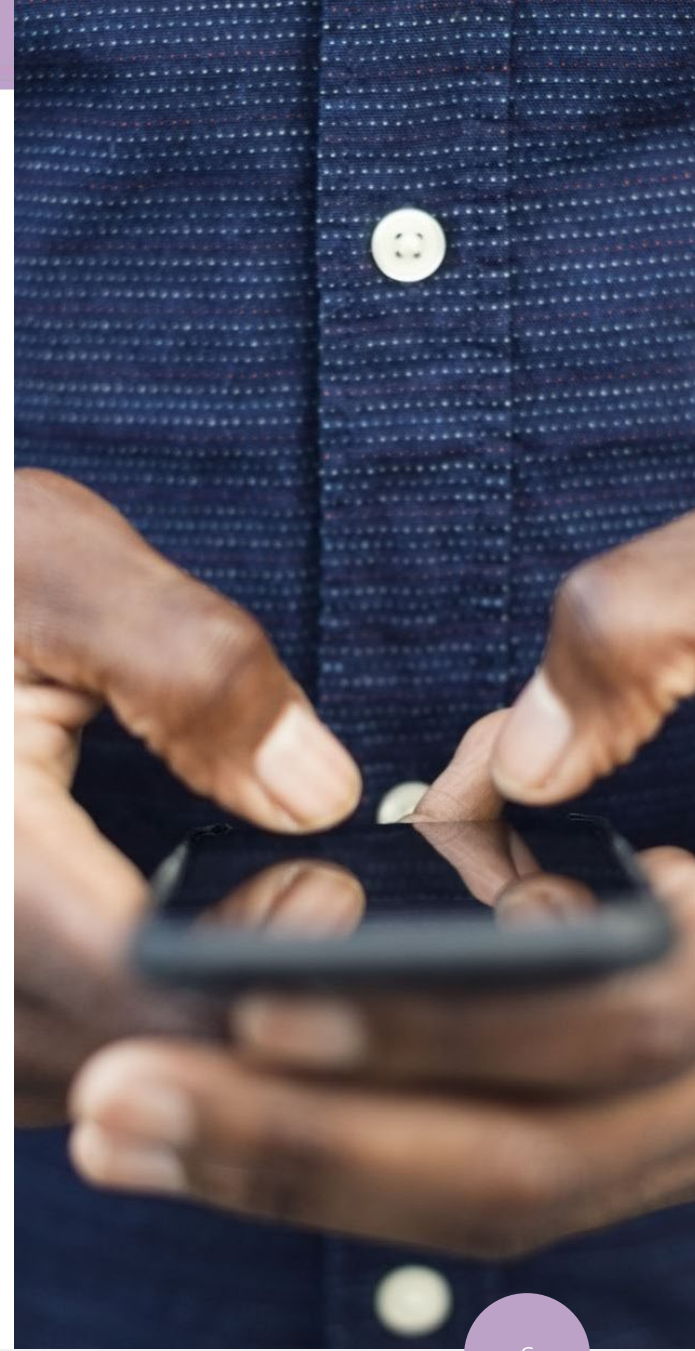


FINDINGS: Support for ECS Scheme



FINDINGS: Format of ECS Scheme

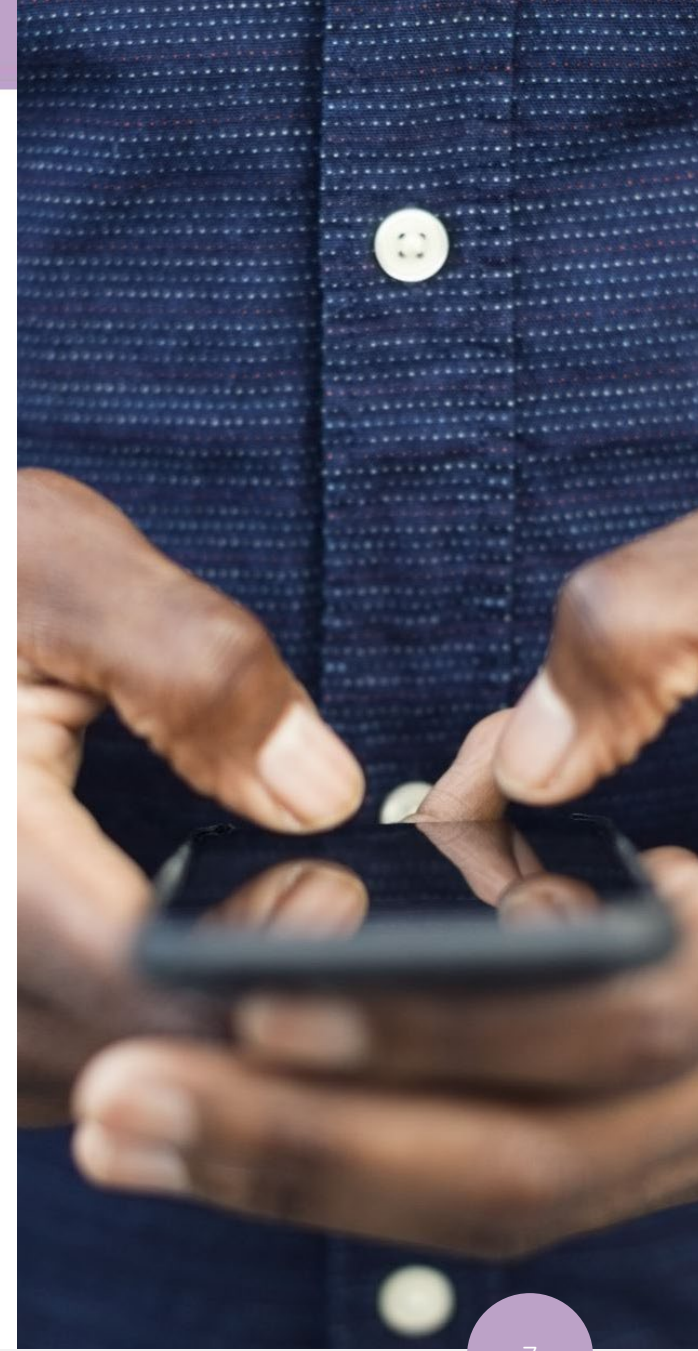
- **Preferred Name:** 'named trusted person' (59%), 'emergency contact scheme' (30%)
- **Preferred NTP:** parent/guardian (49%), partner (35%).
- **Preferred Contact:** personal tutor (67%), dedicated person for student support (15%), course administrator (2%) or course leader (10%).
- **Preferred mode of communication:** via telephone call (42%) or text message (32%) to mobile as opposed to University email (8%).
- **Period of disengagement considered alarming:** 14 days



FINDINGS: Format of the Scheme

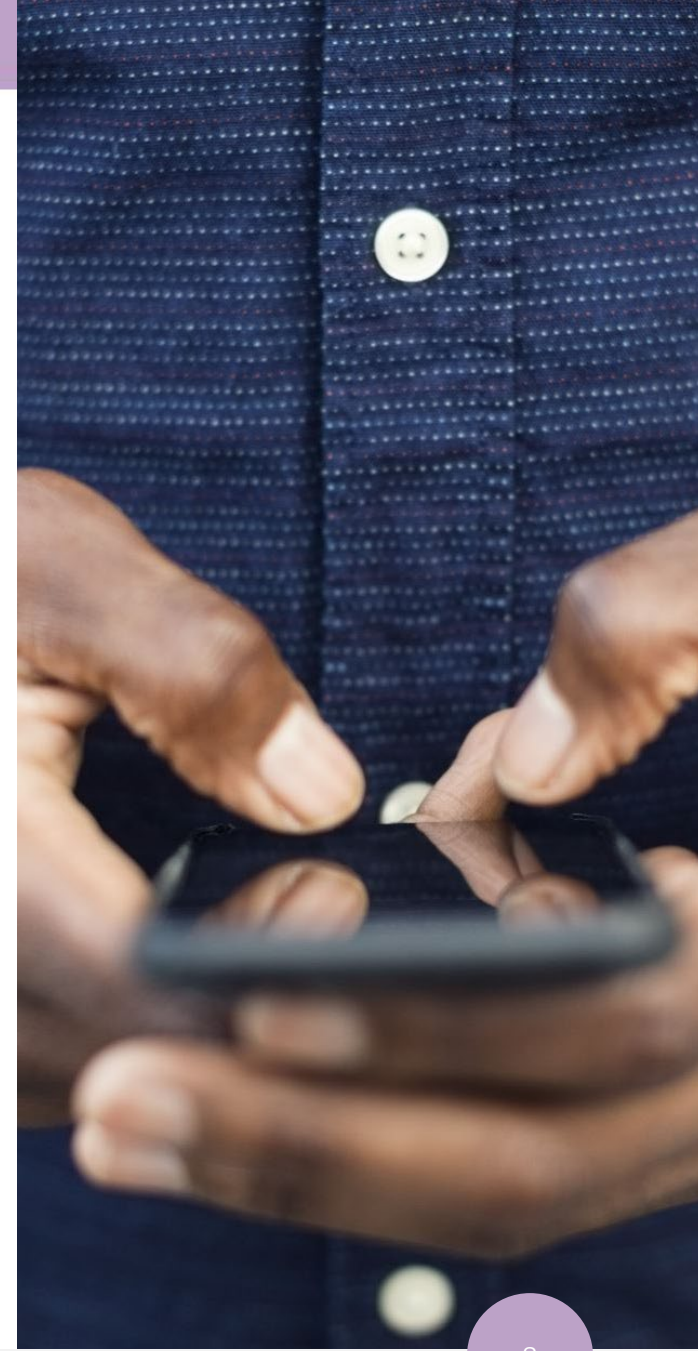
Table 1 – When to contact NTP

Circumstances	Yes
Student ceases to engage with their studies and we have been unable to contact them	69%
Student fails to submit course work/attend an exam	73%
Student has not recently been seen in their hall of residence	76%



FINDINGS: Format of the Scheme

Table 2 - When to contact NTP without contacting the student first	
Circumstances	Yes
Serious concerns about behaviour, personal safety or wellbeing	88%
Student is experiencing a mental health crisis	83%
Student has suffered a serious physical injury, including self-harm	81%
Student has attended or been admitted to hospital in an emergency	77%
Student has been detained by the police or hospital etc. and can no longer engage with their course	72%
Student has an ongoing illness and are deteriorating	62%
Student has been suddenly taken ill	60%



• **WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

- Students with **mental health difficulties** more likely to **drop out of university** (Richardson, 2015), and less likely to attain **higher grades** (Eisenberg et al., 2009).
- **Enhancing wellbeing** support provision, could, therefore, have a wider impact on **student attainment and progression**.



THANK YOU



Dr Katrina Forbes-McKay



k.e.forbes-mckay@rgu.ac.uk



REFERENCES

Cyz, E. K., Horwitz, A. G., Eisenberg, D., Kramer, A., & King, C. A. (2013). Self-reported barriers to professional help seeking among college students at elevated risk for suicide. *Journal of American College Health*, 61(7), 398-406.

Eisenberg, D., Golberstein, E., & Hunt, J. B. (2009). Mental health and academic success in college. *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 9(1), 522–541. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1935-1682.2191>

Goodwin, J. et al., (2016). Help-seeking behaviors and mental well-being of first year undergraduate university students. *Psychiatry Research*, 246, pp.129-135.

Harris, P. J., Campbell Casey, S. A. Westbury, T. & Florida-James, G. (2016). Assessing The link between stress and retention and the existence of barriers to support service use within HE. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 40(6). 824-845.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2015.1014316>

HESA (2022) Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2020/21. <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/25-01-2022/sb262-higher-education-student-statistics/numbers>

Mowbray, C. T., Mandiberg, J. M., Stein, C. H., Kopels, S., Curlin, C., Megivern, D., ... & Lett, R. (2006). Campus mental health services: Recommendations for change. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76(2), 226-237.

Richardson, J. T. E. (2015). Academic attainment in students with mental health difficulties in distance education. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 44(3), 231–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2015.1035084>

Rosenthal, B., & Wilson, W. C. (2008). Mental health services: Use and disparity among diverse college students. *Journal of American College Health*, 57(1), 61-68.