Ruth.Tudor

Last sort of topic for discussion then, and this is the one that obviously I'm really interested in because of a day job. So what would the higher education institution that puts duty of care front and centre look like to you? Discuss.

Arabella

Well it would be that initial tutorial at the beginning of at least that year, year one, to show the students that we take mental health seriously. And prepare them for whatever, life in general, as well as their studies.

Alison.Kingan

And it's also having things like The Open University has introduced in more recent years like the safeguarding team that students can be referred to, but also buying in to external services if the OU cannot provide them themselves or the institution cannot provide them themselves. For example, Nightline. And I mean there are many apps and many companies that are prepared to provide support. It might be that some counselling sessions are needed, for example, so we're talking about duty of care for hopefully it quite a small number of students going to that extent. But, but they need to be accommodated and helped just as much as the range of students, so that those I would hope at the extreme. But all the other things that we've talked about, I think during this these sessions, you know making sure that students know what's available, know what the modules are going to be like, have more information, maybe about exams, you know and alternative modules that you can take if you don't want to do an exam. So, but you know it's taking things seriously because the last thing you want to have happen is that if you've contact the OU for them to dismiss it and say "ohh it's only a couple of pages you have to read" or "It's only a TMA, you have to do. It will be over in a week. That'll be fine." Or "you're the only person who has who has mentioned this is a problem". All those sorts of things, you know, take it seriously, have resources, make sure resources are there for students to find if they want to, and also make sure that students know that they are there for them to find because it's fine having the resources there because Arabella has mentioned a couple of times, she doesn't know they're there, you know, and.

Arabella

Yeah, I've heard of the safeguarding.

Alison.Kingan

You don't go searching things if you don't know they're there and all you need sometimes is a sentence saying there's an awful lot on the help centre about mental health and emotional resilience. This is the link. If you look there, it opens up another world for you.

Cinnomen.McGuigan

That would be key if we had, like, an emotional resilience hub. If we took it seriously enough that we put resourcing into making sure that we embed this as practice going forward, that we know that this is something that is gonna be necessary for some of our students and we set that up. We don't wait until we know we have students on this module at this time that need it. We put it there so that it's there ready for them when they get it. And we have to signpost the heck out of all of this stuff because we could have the absolute best stuff in the

world to support us. If you don't know it's there, it's neither use nor ornament. It literally may as well not exist if we're not sharing with our students that this is here to help you, what's the point of having it? And we're not good at that. We're not good at getting that out there. You have to dig through six layers of the help centre to find anything and it's not good enough. Whereas if we had a central resource hub where everything to do with that was located and you could literally have different modules, different disciplines have their own little sections because the stuff that could be triggering in one discipline may be very different to the stuff that's in another. So that you may have different techniques you may have.

Arabella
Yeah.

Cinnomen.McGuigan
You may literally just have a little forum space or a Teams drop in, an Adobe Connect room where students can go to discuss content that's been a problem and tools to be able to assimilate whatever you need to to be able to work through it. So, a lot of the stuff that we've talked about today, if you could embed some of that as practice and just make sure that we all know it's there before we start our module so that we can get those safety nets in place for as and when we need them throughout the course of it. That's exactly what a a higher institution that's taking this seriously that wants to safeguard their students would be doing.

Arabella
I think that's a great idea. And then you're informing. Excuse me. You're inform students that come along in their first year, so they knew exactly because I think The Open University's excuses is that it's on the student homepage. Everything's on the student homepage, but in actual fact, it's not, because I've looked up stuff online and it hasn't been there. Or when I have looked something, they've taken me all around the bloody houses to find something. And I end up giving up. So. Yeah. And I think investment that's key, isn't it?

Cinnomen.McGuigan
Yeah.

Arabella
We're kind of scraping the barrel in terms of resources in terms of people that can go to those tutorials and answer questions. So all the onus is all on the tutor and they they've got a completely and entirely separate job.

Alison.Kingan
Then that, that's that's part of my fear. It's, you know it, it could be overwhelming tutors if the expectation is always that tutors know everything and can deal with everything and it's just not fair on tutors unless the OU is going to say you know we'll resource much more and have 40,000 more tutors. So, you can spend 3 hours each week with every student you have. So, unless the OU is going to do that, but just looking at Ruth, I suspect that's not going to happen.

Cinnomen.McGuigan
No.

Alison.Kingan
You know, but there are other ways to do it. And don't just say "just just talk to you tutor", because that's that's not the only answer. There are other people that can help as well or should be able to help. It's training as well.

Arabella
Like Cin said the more modules with different areas that might trigger people. To be fair, what triggers a person is irrelevant. It's what you do to come back from that. That will make our life a lot much easier if we focus on that as opposed to picking out all the areas you know. I don't know, a story about the monkeys could trigger somebody. "Ohh. Well, we must have that in. Blah, blah, blah." No. What do people do when they're in that state where they've lost that control and all of a sudden, they're transported back 15 years to when they were getting the what's it kicked out of them by their partners or? Or they had the kids taking off from all. You know, or something terrible happened, you know.
It's that coming back. So it what gets that person in that state is almost irrelevant. It's how do we get them out of it and back to. Because you don't know, you've dealt with suicides this year, Ruth, and none of us know.

Ruth.Tudor
Mm-hmm.

Arabella
That that bit that just tips someone over like you were saying about that tutor and what he wrote on Alison's essay. She could have been in that state and that comment might have been enough to say "I'm going. That's it. I'm, I'm off. I've had enough." So. Tutors as well have to be mindful of the comments they make. Hopefully none would make any like that. 15 years later, but you never know.

Alison.Kingan
No 'cause. My tutors that that would be the only one I would have any complaints with at all. You know, all my other tutors have been really good, really positive and I wouldn't think anyone would do what he did. So, you know, he was like one, one bad apple out of many, many good ones.

Cinnomen.McGuigan
Yeah.

Alison.Kingan
But you know, I think maybe if he'd been trained. That that might have helped. So, it's resources, it's taking things seriously, as I've said and advertising what's there.

Cinnomen.McGuigan
Yeah.

Arabella

Also, I think I don't know it might b e a bit macabre, but I I do think there's a there's a very Victorian mindset that's that people still hold.

Ruth.Tudor

OK.

Arabella

And I kind of think well when that generation pops its clogs we'll be in a much better,

Ruth.Tudor

The the there is still that little, but there's there's no where near as much tabooness around mental health as are used to be when I was younger, my parents are sort of 70s, mid 70s to late 70s and it's very sort of "well, there's nothing wrong with everythings. Fine. Let's get on with it". Whereas that's definitely on its way out. And it's much more a sort of, "let's talk about it, let's" you know. So that's on its way out and long may that continue, but equally.

You know, there are some subjects which are still, you know, whether it's drug use, whether it's alcohol use, whether it's domestic violence, whether it's abuse of any description, you know, it's still eggshells or still there and people are still not comfortable unless you know it's, you know, I have to take suicide by the scruff of the neck and talk about it because it's my job and I'm dealing with students who are attempting suicide or having suicidal thoughts. So, I have no option but to sort of say to them, well, what is it you're planning type of thing, but not everybody, you know, wants to do that, wants to even think about it, wants to even have those discussions. So it's working out how we get around all of that and, you know, provide support that students require and provide the you know.
The learning and everything in the course content and all everything that scaffolds, you know.

Arabella

It's a safety net is what we need isn't it really. From a learning, it's just a safety net, so we don't reach those depths.

Ruth.Tudor

Yeah, absolutely.