

Peer Support Programme

Annual Report - Academic Year 2024-2025

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1. Executive Summary

The 2024-25 academic year represented a period of consistent delivery for the Peer Support Programme, which provides training, supervision and consultancy for student welfare roles

across the collegiate University, including Peer Supporters, Junior Deans and Student Welfare Referrers (Welfare Reps). The Programme continues to play a key role within Oxford's wider welfare ecosystem by equipping students to provide safe, informed and compassionate peer-to-peer support and by strengthening pathways into formal welfare and clinical services.

During the reporting period the programme delivered 13 rounds of Peer Support training- in total 312 hours- with 124 students successfully completing the core 24-hour course.

Supervision remained central to service delivery, with 38 hours of Peer Support supervision provided and strong engagement across the year. Since more accurate records began in 2017-2018, 1429 students have been trained as Peer Supporters across the collegiate University, although this figure should be treated with caution due to known limitations in recording and notification processes.

Alongside Peer Support provision, the Programme continued to deliver specialist welfare training and supervision for Junior Deans, reflecting the distinct responsibilities of this role within colleges. 41 Junior Deans were trained during the academic year, with 23 hours of regular supervision sessions supporting 93 students managing complex and high-risk welfare situations. The Programme also continued to deliver Student Welfare Referrer training, bespoke welfare provision for student societies and summer programmes, and engagement with national research and sector-wide practice development initiatives.

2. Highlights

During the 2024-25 academic year, the Peer Support Programme delivered services within a context of sustained demand for student welfare support and increasing complexity of issues encountered by student volunteers. Key developments and service metrics include:

- 124 students successfully completed Peer Support training across 13 training rounds, with 312 hours of training delivered.
- 38 hours of Peer Support supervision were delivered, with 338 student attendances across in-person and virtual sessions.

- 5.3% of counselling service referrals (119 unique students) referenced a Peer Supporter on pre-intake forms.
- 41 Junior Deans trained during the academic year, with 269 trained since 2017-18.
- 23 hours of Junior Dean supervision delivered, with 93 attendances across the year.

3. Introduction

The Peer Support Programme provides training, supervision and consultancy for student welfare roles across the University of Oxford, including Peer Supporters, Junior Deans and Student Welfare Referrers (Welfare Reps). The Programme recognises the vital role students play in supporting one another and seeks to equip them with the skills, confidence and knowledge required to listen effectively, validate experiences, explore concerns and refer appropriately to professional services where needed. Evidence shows that students value support and listening from peers, cultural variations in support needs encourage students to go to peers in the first instance as opposed to those in a perceived hierarchy and that peer-to-peer support offers many mutual benefits of community, adjustment and belonging. According to U-Flourish: Student Wellbeing Research from the department of Psychiatry, peer support consistently features highly in average ratings across the university support services as overall easier and faster to access, and as more helpful with a problem.

Peer Support occupies an important position within Oxford's welfare landscape, sitting between informal support from friends and more formal professional services. It provides students with additional, accessible routes into welfare support and contributes to a whole-institution approach to mental health, aligned with Universities UK and Student Minds guidance. Training and supervision are delivered primarily in person, with a limited virtual provision to enhance accessibility and student choice.

4. Strategic goals - progress and achievements

4.1. A High-Quality Student Experience

‘We will deliver professional and skilled specialist services that recognize the needs of our diverse student populations, appreciating that every student is an individual. Our service offer will be clear, accessible and of high quality.’ – excerpt from Student Welfare and Support Services (SWSS) strategy

- Peer Support training remained a core element of the Programme’s offer, delivered as a 24-hour course over eight weeks during term-time. Training content focused on developing students’ confidence and competence in listening without judgement, validating experience, exploring concerns collaboratively, and referring appropriately to professional services.
- During 2024-25, training content was actively reviewed and developed to reflect the increasing complexity of welfare conversations encountered by students. This included piloting new content on managing tricky and sensitive conversations and supporting students to maintain pluralistic, respectful and humanised communal spaces, responding to the need for peer supporters to navigate difference, uncertainty and emotionally charged discussions while upholding psychological safety.
- Promotion of student-facing welfare training continued throughout the year, with a particular emphasis on peer support and community-building activity. This included promotion of peer support training at a senior institutional level, including engagement involving the Vice-Chancellor, supporting visibility and recognition of peer-led welfare provision across the collegiate University.
- Students wear highly visible lanyards, to promote their roles. In colleges they run events that include welfare teas, drop ins, welfare week events and talks, cookie fairies and many other creative ways to engage with students.

4.2. Effective partnership working and engagement

‘SWSS comprises specialist services delivered by highly qualified and experienced practitioners. It forms part of an extensive student welfare and support eco-system with many stakeholders. We will work in partnership with colleagues across the collegiate University and external partners to ensure that our services align with, complement, inform, and are informed by those provided elsewhere, promoting consistency of approaches for the benefit of students.’ – excerpt from SWSS strategy.

The Programme continued to work closely with colleges, departments, divisions and student organisations to ensure that peer support provision aligned with local welfare structures and complemented professional services.

- Attends twice termly Welfare Forum meetings, contributing to discussions around student welfare.
- Provides welfare supervision to welfare colleagues across the collegiate university.
- Engages with Senior Management Team meetings to integrate with other SWSS services.
- Partnership working included reviewing and participating in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) student training rounds led by departments, supporting content review, consistency of language and alignment of welfare messaging across services. This work contributed to a coherent and inclusive student-facing welfare offer.
- Engagement with research and sector networks formed an important area of activity. The Programme participated in a University College London (UCL) research project focused on the development of universal fidelity measures for peer support training and the identification of core competencies for effective peer support delivery. The Programme contributed practitioner insight, experiential evidence and sector-specific knowledge to support the development of shared evaluative frameworks within higher education.
- Programme staff attended a Peer Support research roundtable hosted by Nottingham Trent University, which brought together researchers and practitioners from across UK Higher Education. Discussions explored the impact of peer support

on community and belonging, alongside challenges associated with evidencing outcomes and developing a robust research base for peer-led interventions.

- The Programme attended meetings of an EDI Community of Practice focused on themes and issues impacting trans students in higher education, including ongoing policy, legal and cultural developments. Learning from this engagement informed training, supervision and consultancy activity across the year.

4.3. Investing in Our People and Culture

‘Our services and their continuous development depend on the expertise and commitment of all SWSS colleagues. We will build a supportive, engaging and inclusive culture in which our colleagues feel a sense of belonging, take pride, feel valued and give us their best. In turn this will contribute to a positive student experience.’ – excerpt from SWSS strategy.

The sustainability and effectiveness of the Peer Support Programme depend on the wellbeing, confidence and professional development of both student volunteers and staff delivering training and supervision.

- Supervision continued to function as a key protective and developmental mechanism, supporting psychological safety for Peer Supporters, Junior Deans and the communities they serve. Group supervision sessions and one-to-one support focused on reflective practice, ethical awareness, boundaries, referral pathways and self-care, supporting the sustainability of peer support roles and enhancing confidence in practice.
- Staff development remained a priority during 2024-25. Programme staff undertook specialist training on LGBTQ+ sexual violence and domestic abuse, strengthening the service’s capacity to support students encountering sensitive disclosures and complex safeguarding scenarios. Staff engagement in EDI-focused training review activity, communities of practice and sector research further supported reflective, inclusive and evidence-informed practice.

4.4. Building Financial Sustainability

‘We recognise the impact of the wider social, political and economic context of higher education funding, the reduction in the availability of welfare provision available via external agencies, and the consequent increase in demand for our services. We will develop a service offer whilst maintaining quality of service and will explore new and alternative resourcing models and income streams to invest in the financial sustainability of our services.’ – excerpt from SWSS strategy

The Programme continued to deliver core services within existing funding arrangements while responding to growing demand for training, supervision and bespoke welfare provision.

- Bespoke training for summer programmes, student societies and student-led initiatives remained an important component of service delivery, supporting both reach and financial sustainability.
- The Programme also contributed to the SWSS Student Welfare Analysis of Processes and Systems (SWAPS) review, identifying opportunities to streamline processes, improve data quality and support more efficient use of resources.

4.5. Technology Integration

‘We will seek to apply digital technological improvements to the way that our services are accessed and delivered. This has the potential to reduce administrative burden, enhance the student and service experience, and to bring efficiencies to our services. We recognise that becoming a more digitally enhanced service requires significant planning and commensurate resourcing.’ – excerpt from SWSS strategy

- While training and supervision continued to be delivered in person as the default, selected virtual supervision sessions continued to be delivered, to improve accessibility and flexibility for students.
- The Programme engaged with SWSS process and systems reviews to improve data capture, monitoring of active volunteers, and the lifespan of training and supervision

records. This work aims to strengthen future reporting, evaluation and service planning.

4.6. Regulatory and Legal Compliance

‘We will meet, if not exceed, the ethical, legal and regulatory requirements that underpin our services. We will seek to contribute our expertise to the evolution and application of the regulatory frameworks within which we operate.’ – excerpt from SWSS strategy.

- Training and supervision continued to reflect relevant legal, ethical and regulatory requirements. Junior Dean training included dedicated content on GDPR, note-keeping, risk management and escalation processes, ensuring that students in these roles are equipped to operate safely and in line with University policy.
- Supervision spaces for Junior Deans also provided opportunities to discuss policy and procedural matters, including Fitness to Study processes and referral pathways, supporting consistent and compliant practice across the collegiate University, while recognising that colleges retain discretion in how policies are applied within their local governance frameworks.

5. Service data overview and analysis

Training and participation

During 2024-25, 124 students successfully completed Peer Support training: 34 in Michaelmas Term, 55 in Hilary Term and 35 in Trinity Term. Training comprised 13 rounds and 104 individual sessions, totalling 312 hours. Completion rates were 91.9% in Michaelmas Term, 98.21% in Hilary Term and 98.21% in Trinity Term (Appendix 1: Table 1)

The demographic profile of trainees was as follows:

- **Gender:** 78 female; 38 male; 3 genderqueer; 3 non-binary; 1 agender; 1 preferred not to say/ not known. (Appendix 1: Table 1)
- **Nationality:** 29 nationalities represented. Largest groupings were British (50), German (13), English (12), American (7), Chinese (6), Indian (6) and French (4). (Appendix 1: Table 1)

- **Academic division:** 53 Humanities; 35 Medical Sciences; 23 Social Sciences; 14 MPLS; 1 Continuing Education. (Appendix 1: Table 1)
- **Level of study:** 75 undergraduate; 35 DPhil; 14 Postgraduate Taught, 35 Postgraduate Research (Appendix 1: Table 2)
- **Age:** Most commonly 19 (41), 20 (18), 21 (9), 18 (8), 24 (8) and 22 (7); youngest 18, oldest 68. (Appendix 1: Table 2)
- **Year of study:** 43 first year; 66 second year; 13 third year; 2 fifth year. (Appendix 1: Table 2)

Supervision

Peer Support supervision

A total of 38 hours of Peer Support supervision were delivered (36 in person; 2 virtual), with 338 student attendances. Topics included imposter syndrome; transitions and year review; ethical dilemmas and boundaries; responding to low mood; referral pathways including to the Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service; sensitive conversations; creating pluralistic and inclusive communal spaces; and self-care and resilience. (Appendix 1: Table 2)

Junior Dean supervision

Junior Dean supervision totalled 23 hours (17 in person; 6 virtual), with 93 attendances. Themes included sexual harassment and violence; self-harm and suicide attempts; death by suicide; severe mental health presentations; substance misuse; crisis management; de-escalation; managing violence; team communication; and Fitness to Study processes. (Appendix 1: Table 3)

Active roles

Since 2017-2018, 1429 students have been trained as Peer Supporters and 269 Junior Deans have received training. These figures are subject to known limitations, as colleges and students do not always notify the Programme when roles end. Annual verification against eVision and collegiate records is undertaken to improve accuracy. (Appendix 1: Table 1 and Table 3)

Referrals

Peer Supporters continue to play a meaningful role in supporting access to professional services. During the reporting period, 5.3% of counselling service referrals referenced a Peer Supporter, equating to 119 unique students. (Appendix 1: Table 2)

6. Key challenges and areas for development

Key challenges included:

- sustaining high-quality supervision alongside increasing demand
- improving data accuracy on active roles
- managing uneven recruitment cycles
- supporting volunteers encountering increasingly complex presentations
- ensuring consistent understanding of peer support roles
- continuing to embed inclusive and EDI-informed practice.

7. Priorities for 2025-26

The Programme will:

- maintain core training and supervision provision
- strengthen recruitment and onboarding processes
- deepen partnership working
- sustain investment in staff and student development
- improve data systems and reporting
- continue to align training and supervision with ethical, regulatory and safeguarding requirements.

Appendix 1: Data charts and tables

Table 1: Peer Support

Metric	Number
Programme membership	Colleges and PPHs – 37 Departments – 6 Divisional – 1
Referrals into Counselling Service	5.3% 119 unique mentions
Total students trained since 2017 – 2018	1429
Total number of students completing Peer Support training	124 students MT24 – 34 HT25 – 55 TT25 – 35
Total hours of training delivery	312 hours 13 rounds 104 training sessions
Completion rates of training	MT24 – 91.89% (3) HT25 – 98.21% (1) TT25 – 98.21% (1)
Gender distribution	Female – 78 Male – 38 Genderqueer – 3 Non-binary – 3 Agender – 1 Preferred not to say/ not known – 1
Primary nationalities distribution	29 nationalities in total British – 50 German – 13 English – 12 American – 7 Chinese – 6 Indian – 6 French – 4
Division distribution	Humanities – 53 Medical Sciences – 35 Social Sciences – 23 MPLS – 14 Cont. Ed. – 1

Table 2: Peer Support

Metric	Number
Level of study distribution	Undergraduate – 75 DPhil – 35 Master's – 14
Age distribution	Youngest – 18 Oldest – 68 19 years – 41 20 years – 18 21 years – 9 18 years – 8 24 years – 8 22 years – 7
Year of study distribution	First year – 43 Second year – 66 Third year – 13 Fifth year – 2
Total hours of supervision delivered	38 hours In-person – 36 Virtually – 2
Total number of students attending supervision	338 students In-person – 324 Virtually – 14
Supervision topics	* Imposter syndrome, transitions to the summer vac. and year review. * Dilemmas, friends and giving advice. * Low mood. * Self-care and resilience. * Referring onwards and the Support Service (SHVSS). * Speaking and listening with sensitive topics, creating pluralistic communal spaces.

Table 3: Junior Deans

Total number of students completing Junior Dean training	41 students MT24 – 33 HT25 – 8
Total students trained since 2017 – 2018	269 students
Total number of students attending supervision	93 students In-person – 60 Virtually – 33
Total hours of supervision delivered	23 hours In-person – 17 Virtually – 6