**A request to candidates: A Statutory Duty of Care for students in Higher Education**

Since 2017, almost 400 students at our Higher Education Providers (HEPs) have taken their own lives. Many of those lives could be saved. Last year we delivered a 128,000 signature-strong petition to 10 Downing Street asking for a Statutory Duty of Care for students from their Higher Education institutions. This led to a Westminster Hall Debate and a government taskforce. We have taken positive steps – but as the prospective MP for this constituency, we ask you to take them further.

Our message is simple: we need to ensure universities and other HEPs protect their students from reasonably foreseeable harm through their actions or omissions. It is wider than simply covering mental health issues but is neither in loco parentis nor a retributive measure to punish institutions that get it wrong.

Through a framework of best practice policies, support and action it's designed to bring parity of student experience, clarity of university roles and responsibilities and accountability around the implementation of their student-related processes.

The Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce (HEMHIT) operated through The Department for Education and commissioned by the Higher Education Minister is close to completion of its first year and was about to recommend a range of measures to the Minister to take the sector towards this position of good practice-led clarity. Yet implementation of these initiatives remains voluntary. History suggests many institutions will simply choose to ignore them. A Statutory Duty of Care will ensure widespread adoption and implementation of good practices across the sector.

In a climate where Higher Education finance is stretched to its limits, new initiatives around student support fall into discretionary spend, and therefore are likely to fall into many HEPs’ ‘too difficult’ or ‘too costly’ box, even though the reality is that much of the work is already in place, and the real cost per student is minimal.

We all know that what gets measured gets done, and that what gets measured against standards set by law and regulation gets done well.

So we are asking you to support our call for a Statutory Duty of Care in Higher Education, setting a measurable bar for how institutions looks after their students. This is no more than employees already receive from employers, or FE students of all ages receive from their colleges. We would expect the Office for Students to play an active role in setting and maintaining the standard and would see it implemented through a Support Framework on a par with HE’s existing Research and Teaching Excellence Frameworks.

We ask you to support our campaign for a Statutory Duty of Care so that if, elected, we can count on you to lobby Government both to continue HEMHIT with its committed drive towards standards of excellence in student support, and to introduce appropriate legislation to ensure the Higher Education sector abides by these standards.

**Can we count on you to save student lives?**