

STUDENT HEALTH & WELLBEING IN READING



First year students completing Healthwatch Reading's survey at a Freshers Fair in September 2018

Phase 1 report of an engagement project with people studying at Reading College and the University of Reading

February 2019

Introduction

This report presents the first set of findings of an engagement project launched by Healthwatch Reading in September 2018. Our aim was to understand the health and wellbeing concerns of people aged 16 and over, who are studying in Reading, and their awareness of local health and wellbeing services

With 19,000 people undertaking academic courses with the University of Reading (although not all at the Reading campuses), and 8,500 people working towards technical, vocational or academic qualifications at Reading College, this represents a sizeable proportion of Reading’s current population of around 163,000 people.

The first step of our project was to seize the opportunity offered by the annual September ‘Freshers’ Fairs’ at the university and college to capture views of first-year students in a simple, short survey. In return for completing our service we offered students a specially designed Student Guide to Local Services - a double-sided A5 card directory of GPs, pharmacies, sexual health, mental health and other services that can be found in Reading. The guide is reproduced on page 13.

After compiling the survey results based on 172 completed surveys, as outlined on pages 3-7, we then held a special workshop with key stakeholders, including the university’s own Wellbeing and Welfare service, the University Health Centre, which provides GP services to students, and a counsellor from the college’s welfare service. This workshop - summarised on pages 8-11 - helped us to check if the survey confirmed what was already known about student health or wellbeing, whether there were any surprises and what more we could do to understand students’ experiences and needs. We also learned more about specific help and support that is available for students in Reading.

We now plan to undertake a second phase of our project, which aims to survey second or third year students, to see if needs and awareness of services change over time, and to hold focus groups with students to understand their needs in more detail. We aim to publish findings of this phase by mid-2019.

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Summary of survey findings

Who?

172 students answered (130 from the university and 42 at the college);
71% were women, 29% men, none said they identified as another gender;
Most were aged 17-18 years
Nearly one-quarter were international (non-EU) students

When?

Surveys were completed on 24 and 27 September 2018

How?

On paper questionnaires handed out by Healthwatch Reading at Fresher's Fairs

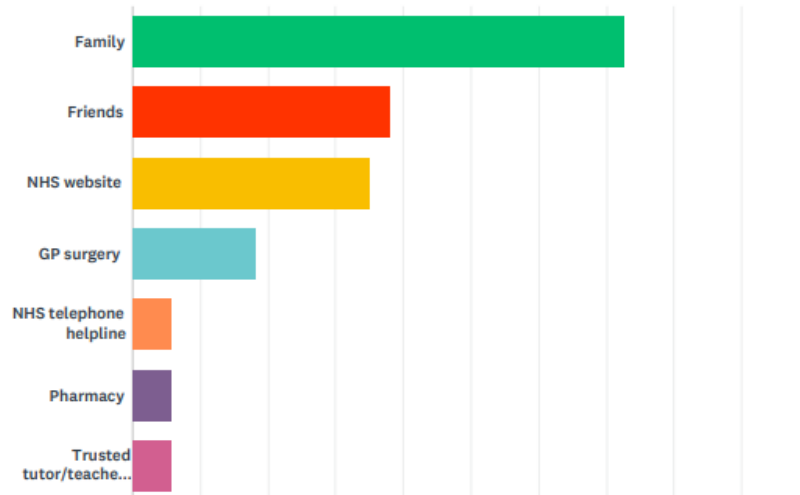
Key statistics

- 73% of students who responded to the survey said they were most likely to turn to family when first seeking information about a health or wellbeing issue
- The top three services that students were most confident of finding in Reading were: a GP (66%), pharmacy (60%) or their college or student welfare service (60%)
- The three services they knew *least* how to find in Reading were: the NHS sexual health clinic (22%), an NHS dentist (29%) and the NHS walk-in centre (38%)
- More than two-thirds (68%) said the most important health and wellbeing issue to them right now, was 'coping with stress and worries', followed by weight/diet (32%), and then 'coping with depression or a diagnosed mental health condition' (21%)
- Only 24% of respondents said they would know how to access help for serious mental health issues
- Only 31% said they would know how to access free and/or emergency contraception
- Only 31% said they would know how to access medical help when their GP surgery was shut
- When asked to describe a health or wellbeing topic they wanted more information on, most of the people who answered this question said mental health (17%), or stress (9%)

Survey findings in details

Q1 Where are you most likely to turn to when you are first seeking information about a health or wellbeing issue affecting you? Please tick your top two

Answered: 171 Skipped: 1



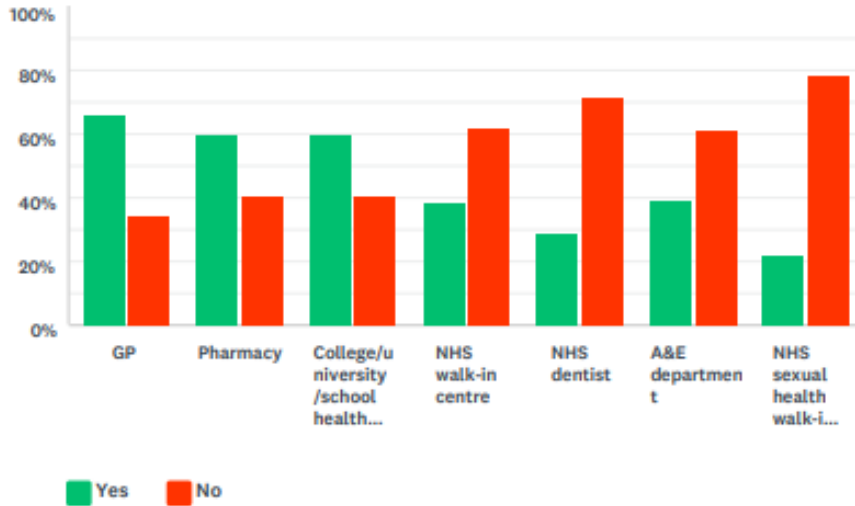
▼ Family		72.51%	124
▼ Friends		38.01%	65
▼ NHS website		35.09%	60
▼ GP surgery		18.13%	31
▼ NHS telephone helpline		5.85%	10
▼ Pharmacy		5.85%	10
▼ Trusted tutor/teacher/nurse/welfare officer at your place of study		5.85%	10
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses	5.85%	10
▼ Online forum for young people/students		3.51%	6
▼ Health charity website		2.34%	4
▼ NHS leaflets		1.75%	3
▼ Facebook		1.17%	2
▼ Instagram		1.17%	2

Further breakdown of top three answers by various groups:

UK student respondents only	International students only	University students only	College students only
1. Family	1. Family	1. Family	1. Family
2. NHS website	2. Friends	2. Friends	2. NHS website
3. Friends	3. NHS website	3. NHS website	3. Friends

Q2 Tell us about your knowledge of local services. Do you know where to find the following services in Reading?

Answered: 171 Skipped: 1



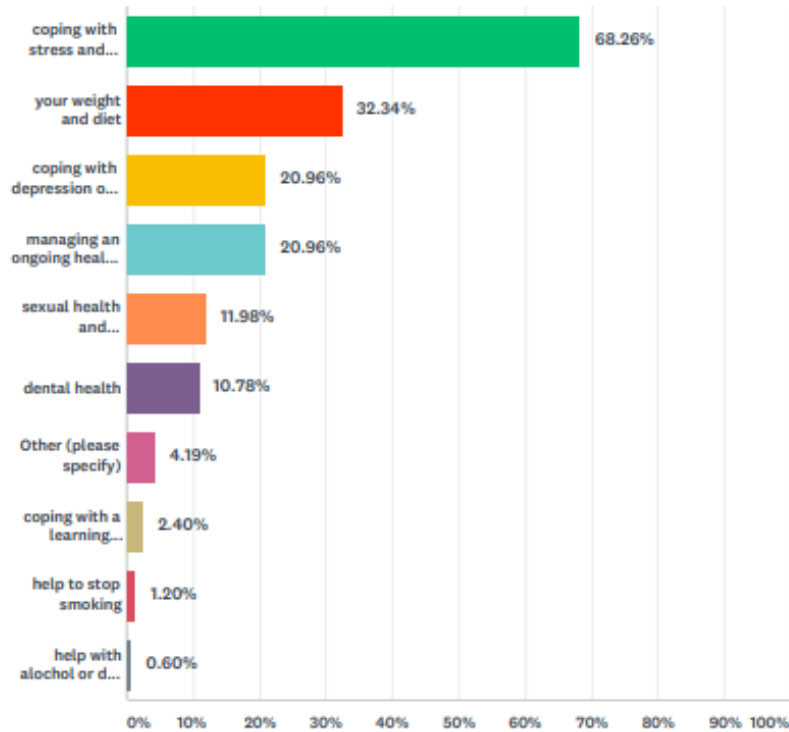
	YES	NO	TOTAL
GP	66.07% 111	33.93% 57	168
Pharmacy	59.63% 96	40.37% 65	161
College/university/school health/welfare/counselling office	59.75% 95	40.25% 64	159
NHS walk-in centre	38.22% 60	61.78% 97	157
NHS dentist	29.03% 45	70.97% 110	155
A&E department	39.22% 60	60.78% 93	153
NHS sexual health walk-in clinic	21.57% 33	78.43% 120	153

Analysis and breakdown of top three *least* known services

All students	UK student respondents only	International students only	University students only	College students only
1. Sexual health clinic	1. Sexual health clinic	1. Sexual health clinic	1. NHS dentist	1. Sexual health clinic
2. NHS dentist	2. NHS dentist	2. NHS dentist	2. Sexual health clinic	2. Walk-in centre
3. Walk-in centre	3. Walk-in centre	3. A&E	3. A&E	3. A&E

Q3 Which health and wellbeing issues are most important to you right now? Please tick your top two

Answered: 167 Skipped: 5



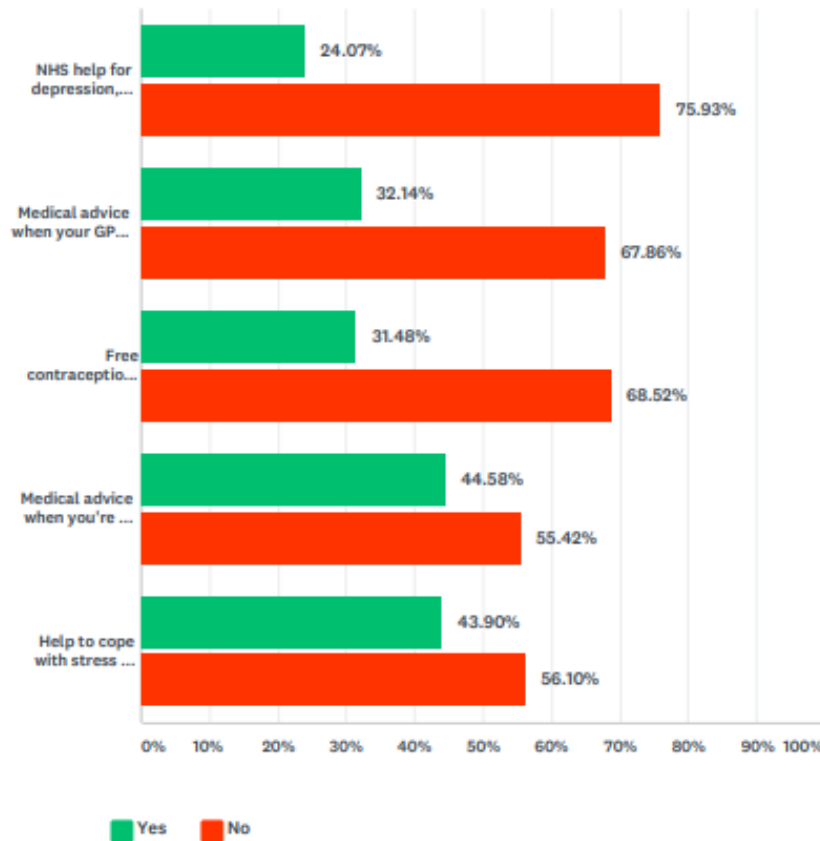
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
coping with stress and worries	68.26%	114
your weight and diet	32.34%	54
coping with depression or diagnosed mental health conditions	20.96%	35
managing an ongoing health condition e.g. diabetes, asthma	20.96%	35
sexual health and contraception	11.98%	20
dental health	10.78%	18
Other (please specify)	4.19%	7
coping with a learning disability	2.40%	4
help to stop smoking	1.20%	2
help with alcohol or drug use	0.60%	1

Further breakdown:

UK student respondents only	International students only	University students only	College students only
1. Stress and worries	1. Stress and worries	1. Stress and worries	1. Stress and worries
2. Weight and diet	2. Weight and diet	2. Weight and diet	2. Depression/mental health
3. Depression/mental health	3. Ongoing conditions	3. Ongoing conditions	3. Weight and diet

Q4 Do you know how to access the following?

Answered: 169 Skipped: 3



	YES	NO	TOTAL
NHS help for depression, thoughts about harming yourself or others, or other mental health issues	24.07% 39	75.93% 123	162
Medical advice when your GP surgery is shut	32.14% 54	67.86% 114	168
Free contraception and/or emergency contraception	31.48% 51	68.52% 111	162
Medical advice when you're not sure if your problem is an emergency	44.58% 74	55.42% 92	166
Help to cope with stress or anxieties	43.90% 72	56.10% 92	164

Further breakdown: Main help/support students *least* know how to access

UK student respondents only	International students only	University students only	College students only
1. Help for serious mental health issues	1. GP advice out-of-hours	1. Help for serious mental health issues	1. Free contraception
2. Free contraception	2. Free contraception	2. Free contraception	2. GP advice out-of-hours
3. GP advice out-of-hours	3. Help for serious mental health issues	3. GP advice out-of-hours	3. Help for stress/anxieties

Q5: Which health or wellbeing topic or local service would you most like more information on, so you can find help or understand your issue?

79 people answered in a free text answer. Analysis shows most common words mentioned:

1. Mental health: 17%
2. Stress: 9%
3. GP: 8%
4. Anxiety: 6%
5. Depression: 5%

Selection of students’ answers:

‘Mental health conditions e.g. panic attacks’

‘Help for anxiety’

‘Coping with stress during exams’

‘Trauma therapy’

‘Emergency contraception’

‘How to stop cough, cold etc and issues related to climate difference between countries’

Coughs and colds’

‘Closest GP’

‘Repeat prescription’

‘Managing stress’

‘Dealing with anxiety’

‘Help with depression’

‘Vitamins to improve balanced diet/cheap and healthy meals’

Workshop discussion

Healthwatch Reading convened a workshop on 6 November 2018 with representatives from University Health Centre, University of Reading's welfare service, and Reading College's counselling service.

The group shared a range of views about the survey findings and student health and welfare in general:

Stress, anxiety and mental health

The survey finding about stress and worries being students' number one health and wellbeing concern, resonated with workshop participants, but led to a wider discussion about the spectrum of need.

The group thought that students needed help to build resilience before coming to university and to understand that some stress and anxiety was normal during what was one of their first major transitions - from childhood to adulthood and perhaps being away from home for the first time without day to day parental support. The approach there was to try to help the student help themselves.

At the other extreme, both the college and university described some overseas students who were self-harming or experiencing major anxiety because of fears they were not living up to high academic expectations of parents, especially when parents had made a major financial investment in paying for courses.

The university said it had begun developing a suicide prevention protocol with staff and tutors, which would aim to ensure all knew how to refer students for help and who to contact in emergency situations.

The college said it was surprised to find that some of its 16-year-old students, had said they had been prescribed antidepressants for mental health issues but did not seem to have been referred at the same time for some kind of talking therapy.

Both the college and university offer short-term counselling for students and will then refer to local NHS mental health services if students need more specialised, or longer-term support. Some students are reluctant to refer themselves to the local NHS mental health service, Talking Therapies, because they have not ever made their own health appointments or dealt with referral paperwork, without parental support. The college welfare service will support students, particularly the younger age group, by sitting down with them at the end of term to help them physically complete the self-referral to Talking Therapies to ensure students don't miss out if they need more help.

Some anecdotal feedback shared by students about Talking Therapies to welfare services, is that the students can feel uneasy taking part in group therapy sessions because other people in the group may be much older than them, rather than being student-only groups. The university said it had heard from some students that there is a push towards online programmes before they can access face-to-face support.

All the group thought it would be useful for mental health resilience to be part of secondary school education to better equip students for new adult life.

Weight and diet

Students identified their weight and diet as the second thing that concerned them most, a finding which needed more exploration, according to the workshop discussion.

On the one hand, young people might feel under pressure to have a perfect body image due to unrealistic portrayals on social media. But some of the comments given by students in the survey also suggested they might just want simple advice about eating cheaply due to the financial impact of being students.

The university wellbeing team had been made aware during Fresher’s Week that a poster advertising a weight-loss organisation had been put up by an external organisation, without university authorisation, near the student eatery. The poster included the statement: ‘82% of students put on weight during university’. One student had disclosed to the welfare service that seeing that poster had triggered thoughts related to a past eating disorder that prevented them going into the eatery that day. The welfare service took the poster down and contacted the organisation to ask who had put it up and where the data was from. The statistic was five years old and came from the organisation’s own small survey of students who had used the weight-loss service, rather than from an independent survey about weight among the general student population.

Awareness of Reading health and wellbeing services

The survey’s finding showing a lack of awareness of Reading health and care services, could partly be explained by the fact that some of the respondents had come to Reading to study from elsewhere, were new to the area, and had not thought about what services might be available locally. The first year of study was also a busy time with lots of new information to process.

It was perhaps more surprising for students who said they had always lived in Reading, but that might be due to the fact their parents had previously managed, on their behalf, their contact with health and wellbeing services. This might mean there needs to be more ‘literacy’ on using and accessing the NHS, developed with parental support and secondary school Personal, Social and Health Education (PHSE) lessons.

Even using the right kind of terminology is important to help students access services. Healthwatch Reading staff who handed out the survey said that in many cases they had to explain what the term ‘contraception’ meant in one of the questions, by using more simple terms like ‘condoms’ or ‘the Pill’.

The group reflected that although the survey suggests the biggest gap in awareness related to sexual health services, the topic that students said they wanted most information on, in another question, was mental health.

Healthwatch Reading staff also noticed that international students lacked full awareness about how the NHS worked - one student said if they had a problem they would just go to the hospital, because they did not realise most hospital access had to be arranged by a referral from their GP.

Another issue raised about access to services, was the fact that one university accommodation building spanned both Reading and Wokingham boroughs. This had led to one student with complex needs being ‘bounced’ between the two local authorities who did not agree on which was responsible for assessing and/or funding their social care needs.

All the workshop participants were positive about the Student Guide to Services (see Appendix 2, pg 13) developed by Healthwatch Reading to pool together information in one place, and which was handed out to students at the Fresher’s Fairs.

Since the discussion, the University Health Centre has put a link to the Healthwatch Reading online version of the guide on its website and handed out card copies of the guide to students on reception.

Healthwatch Reading has also shared a PDF of the guide with organisations so they can print more copies to hand out to students in the future.

The group concluded that it would be helpful for Healthwatch Reading to survey students further along in their studies to see if their awareness of local services changes as they get to know Reading, and to check their experience of using those services.

The range of health and welfare services provided at the University and College

The workshop allowed us to discover more information about support available from welfare services.

University of Reading:

Welfare team

Drop-in or appointment service on campus for help with settling in, crisis support, relationship issues, harassment, bullying or violence, drug and alcohol issues, caring responsibilities and more.

Counselling and Wellbeing Team

Students can self-refer, and tutors can also make referrals, for a set number of free counselling sessions, offered in person, over the phone, one-to-one, or in groups. Students can contact the onsite team Monday-Friday 9-5pm.

Life Tools

Free talks offered through the academic year on topics such as minimising stress, sleep, exercise, nutrition and mindfulness and general resilience building.

Big White Wall

A free, 24/7 online mental health resource which all students can use anonymously to

- Meet and chat with others who may be experiencing similar feelings or situations
- Access a range of self-help articles, videos and online courses
- Evaluate wellbeing and mental health, set goals and track progress
- Express feelings through drawing or uploading images.

The Big White Wall has safety features to create alerts if people express things like suicidal intentions. These alerts are picked up by Big White Wall guides, trained practitioners, who will then respond to the messages directly.

Reading College:

Counselling: Free, confidential counselling sessions available for all students who need it.

Student Support team: Drop-in or appointment service for current students for advice with any safeguarding concerns, financial support, housing advice, relationship advice, drug and alcohol issues, young carer support and more.

C-Card provider: Free Contraception provided for anyone under the age of 21 with information provided about the local sexual health clinic, safe sex and how to use contraception safely and effectively.

Conclusion and next steps

To date our project has:

- shown which issues are most important to students who answered our survey
- highlighted the lack of awareness of local services
- developed new resources to help increase awareness of local services, through the Healthwatch Reading Student Guide, available as a card or online directory
- brought together various professionals to discuss students' needs
- helped us understand existing services at the university and college

Healthwatch Reading now plans to:

- send this report to Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group to help inform its role as the body that funds local mental health and primary care services
- send this report to Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to help inform its role as provider of mental health services
- send the report to student representatives at the university and college and invite them to get involved with further project work
- set up focus groups of students to discuss issues in more depth
- arrange a survey of second and/or third year students to see if there is evidence that their health and wellbeing needs, and their awareness of services, changes over time during their studies
- publish a further report outlining our next set of findings.

Acknowledgements

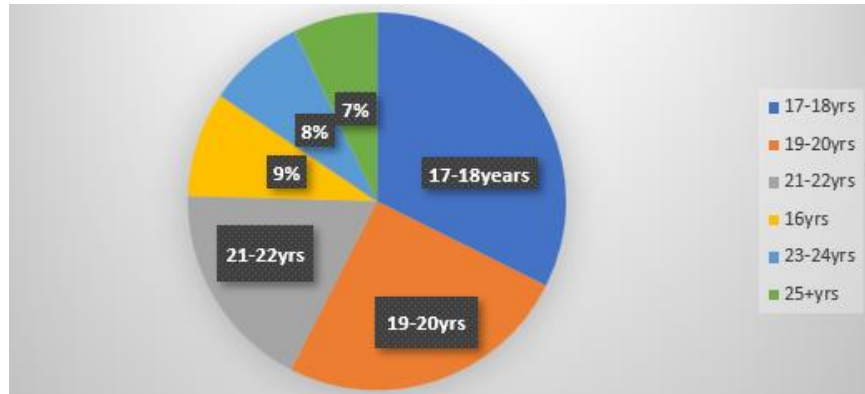
Healthwatch Reading would like to thank:

- all students who took time to answer the survey*
- representatives from the university, college and the University Health Centre for attending the workshop and sharing their views*
- University Health Centre for providing space to hold the workshop in.*

Appendix 1: About the students who answered the survey

Gender: Woman made up 71% (118) of respondents, men, 29% (48 respondents) None described their gender in any other way. Six people did not answer.

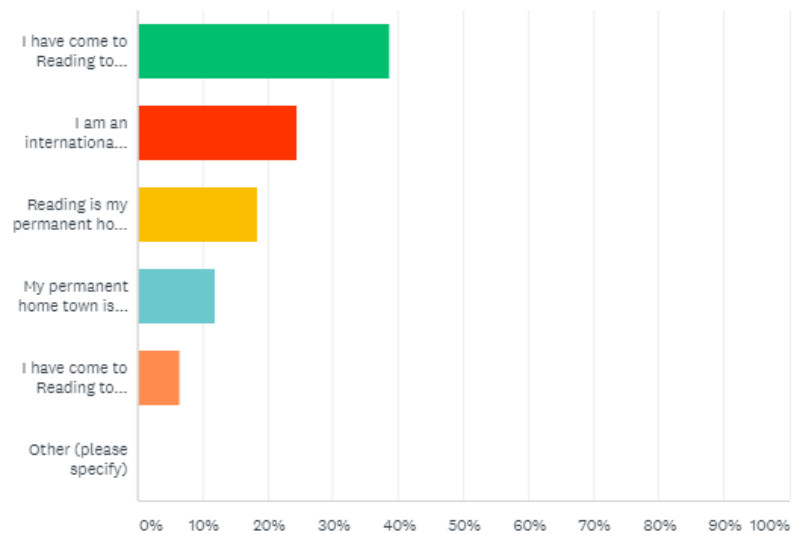
Age The biggest age group responding was 17-18-year-olds:



Residence:

Which best describes where you normally live? Please tick one

Answered: 168 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
I have come to Reading to attend college or university from another part of the UK	38.69% 65
I am an international student who has come to Reading to attend college or university, from a non-EU country	24.40% 41
Reading is my permanent home town and I also go to college or university here	18.45% 31
My permanent home town is outside of Reading, in another part of Berkshire or Oxfordshire, but I go to university or college here in Reading	11.90% 20
I have come to Reading to attend college or university from an EU country	6.55% 11
Other (please specify)	Responses 0.00% 0
TOTAL	168

Appendix 2: Student Quick Guide, developed by Healthwatch Reading, double-sided A5 card

HEALTH & WELLBEING SERVICES

A quick guide for students by Healthwatch Reading

GP & Primary Care Services



University Health Centre,
9 Northcourt Avenue, Reading, RG2 7HE
Call 0118 987455 or visit
www.readinguniversitymedicalpractice.nhs.uk

Other local surgeries
Use the ‘Find a GP’ search tool at www.nhs.uk

NHS Reading Walk-In Centre,
1st floor, Broad Street Mall, RG1 7QA
Drop in between 8am-8pm every day including Bank Holidays or call 0118 902 8300, if you can't wait to see your own GP or for minor injuries.

NHS 111 Telephone Helpline
Call 111 for any health query or to find help outside working hours.

Local Pharmacies
Offer advice and help for minor ailments and illnesses.
Use the ‘Find a Pharmacy’ search tool at www.nhs.uk

Mental Health Support



Reading College Counselling Services
Email gillian.brooks@activatelearning.ac.uk, call 07779089686 or contact via confidential postbox outside the main ground floor counselling office in student services.

University of Reading Counselling & Wellbeing Team
Call 0118 378 4216, email counselling@reading.ac.uk or visit in the Carrington Building, Whiteknights Campus.

Talking Therapies
A Berkshire-wide NHS service for anxiety, depression, stress or phobias.
Self-refer by calling 0300 365 2000 or visit talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk

No 5
A free counselling service for 10-25-year-olds in Reading. Visit no5.org.uk

Still unsure where to go?
Want to know your NHS rights?
Then call us on 0118 937 2295
or visit our special student webpage at
<http://healthwatchreading.org.uk/student-health-guide/>

HEALTH & WELLBEING SERVICES

A quick guide for students by Healthwatch Reading

NHS Dentists



Use the ‘Find a dentist’ search tool at www.nhs.uk

Sexual Health & Contraception



The Florey Clinic, 21A Craven Road, Reading RG1 5LE
Free NHS walk-in service for testing and treatment of STIs, plus contraception.
Open until 7pm most days Mon-Fri, & Sat 9.30-11.30am.
www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/florey-sexualhealth.htm

Local pharmacies offering emergency contraception:
Boots stores: The Oracle, Broad Street, Reading train station; **Lloyds Pharmacy** at Milman Road Health Centre; **Newdays Pharmacy**, Coley Park; **Oxford Road Pharmacy**; **Saood Pharmacy**, Oxford Road; **Superdrug** in Broad Street; **Tesco Instore Pharmacy**, Napier Road; **Western Elms Pharmacy**; Oxford Road.

Life-Threatening Emergencies



Call 999 or visit the Emergency Department, Royal Berkshire Hospital, Craven Road, Reading RG1 5AN.
If in doubt, call 111.

Charities & Support Groups



Organisations offering advice or support on debt and benefits, disabilities, domestic violence, FGM, LGBT+ issues & more, can be found via the online directory: servicesguide.reading.gov.uk

Drug & Alcohol Services



IRIS, the Reading drug & alcohol service
For people aged 18 and over.
Call 0118 955 7333 or visit www.cranstoun.org/service/iris-reading

Still unsure where to go?
Want to know your NHS rights?
Then call us on 0118 937 2295
or visit our special student webpage at
<http://healthwatchreading.org.uk/student-health-guide/>