



INSTITUTE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The University of Birmingham has a very strong history of mental health research and innovation. The Institute for Mental Health has been established to maximise the collaborative efforts of academics at the University, and builds on the strong existing partnerships with practice in the NHS, established through the Birmingham Health Partners. Its objective is to ensure a sustained impact on public policy and practice, and to improve the care and outcomes of those suffering from problems in their mental health. We will undertake high quality research in mental health, with a focus on youth and life course mental health.

Our approach to mental health recognises its multi-dimensional nature and that a broad approach is required to understand the biological, psychological, anthropological, socio-cultural and socio-economic factors that shape individual and population mental health. Such an understanding may, in turn, guide interventions. This approach requires an ambitious research agenda and multi-sector engagement, and recognises the importance of mental health.

There is an urgent need for research focused on improving our understanding of the causes and treatments of mental illnesses and mental distress, and developing better connections between researchers, policy makers, service providers and the wider public. Maximising the impact of research requires a clear understanding of the political and institutional context in which policy is made. This is an essential aspect of the Institute.

As a University, we recognise the increasing importance of mental health and wellbeing to society. In consultation with the Higher Education Academy (HEA), we are reviewing teaching delivery to potentially provide undergraduate programmes developing informed and skilled graduates, crucially needed for a workforce able to deliver high quality evidence-based care.

Key themes

- ❑ Research excellence in discovery science and latest technologies informing best practice
- ❑ Inter-disciplinary research and multi-sector engagement across the region and internationally
- ❑ Focus on innovative service delivery and practice in the 0-25 age group
- ❑ Strength in social policy and implementing research into practice, parity of physical and mental health care

Background

Approximately 75% of lifetime mental disorders begin before the age of 24 years. Prevalence of mental disorder in adolescents and young adults has increased in recent decades and is likely to continue to do so, and students may be a particularly adversely affected group. Developing early intervention strategies in youth services has become even more important: helping people when they are young may prevent serious life-long conditions developing, as well as improving prognosis. Further, mental health problems worsen the outcome and costs of co-occurring physical illnesses.

- ❑ Mental ill health represents a very significant burden, both on those directly affected by illness, on society and on the public purse
- ❑ Mental health problems have high rates of prevalence; they are often of long duration,

causing substantial disability, long-term morbidity, welfare dependence, and premature mortality

- ❑ They have adverse effects on many different aspects of people's lives, including their education, employment, social participation, personal relationships, and physical health
- ❑ Early intervention is important for youth mental health. Helping people when they are young, and when disorders may just be developing, may prevent serious life-long conditions developing as well as improving prognosis.
- ❑ Late adolescence and early adulthood is a crucial time for development - young people may be starting work, higher education, moving away from their parents or developing new relationships. Maximising the support that can be offered in relation to mental health problems which begin at these times, will allow young people to take full advantage of their opportunities and lead to benefit for the rest of their lives
- ❑ It is also the case that mental illness is a significant accelerant of health care utilisation and cost where there is a co-occurrence with physical health problems

Key projects

In line with NHS strategy and the Taskforce report 'Five Year Forward View for Mental Health', the Institute for Mental Health will largely focus on transforming NHS services from an evidence base of the highest quality research.

Our response at the University of Birmingham lies in the strength of our discovery science through the Centre for Human Brain Health. The Centre houses state-of-the-art brain imaging equipment allowing for investigating the physiological substrate of mental health problems. These investigations are aimed at improving diagnosis and guide interventions.

We have research-led partnerships with Forward Thinking Birmingham (FTB), a unique mental health partnership for 0-25 year olds, and with Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust (BSMHFT). This partnership will allow the Institute for Mental Health to work with FTB and BSMHFT to deliver mental health services to young people to meet the aspirations of the 'Five Year Forward View'.

Partnerships

Our partnerships, although rooted in the West Midlands, are global in their outlook and have already established formal links with the Melbourne-based 'ORYGEN', The Australian National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health. This partnership has been framed around joint academic appointments, joint PhD programmes and strong collaborative research.

Birmingham was the first university to implement a successful Masters in the Philosophy of Health and Happiness, and is now unique in offering graduate provision in Health and Happiness and the Philosophy of Mental Disorders. The Institute for Mental Health will build on the University's existing portfolio of Masters with the development of a research and interdisciplinary Masters in Mental Health.

In addition, we are actively engaged in various Department of Health/NIHR mental health related policy research projects including:

- The role of the Third Sector in providing alternative crisis care
- Preventative or capacity building approaches delivered via local authority social care
- National trial of the Open Dialogue approach

The Institute for Mental Health is poised to use this wealth of resource locally together with its existing and recognised expertise within cognitive neuroscience, psychology, social policy, philosophy, ethics, education, health economics and medicine, to inform policy and practice which will make a step change in the mental health of our young people and society.

