

CARE + CONNECT

Delivering Mental Health Supports in Higher Education Institutions across Europe



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Project No: 2025-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000357751

The CONNECT Peer Programme: From Student-to-Student and from Professional-to-Professional

The CONNECT Programme aims to establish student-to-student peer support networks, create professional-to-professional peer learning communities for HEI staff and facilitate ‘Conversation Cafés’ and peer-led discussion spaces. The idea is to provide training in active listening, mentoring and mental health first response.

Goal of the Peer Programme

The CONNECT approach strengthens mental well-being in higher education by creating structured peer support networks and safe spaces for conversation within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). By empowering students and staff to support one another and fostering open, stigma-free dialogue around mental health, CONNECT builds a sense of belonging, encourages early help-seeking, and embeds a culture of shared responsibility for well-being across the campus community.

With regard to students, this general value proposition can be specified as follows:

The CONNECT programme creates safe spaces where students can talk openly, feel heard, and support one another. Through peer support networks and guided conversations, CONNECT helps reduce student isolation, normalises discussions around mental health, and strengthens students’ sense of belonging within the university community.

For Higher Education Institutions, CONNECT builds a culture of care by embedding peer support and open dialogue into campus life. By enabling HEI students and staff to support one another, the CONNECT approach promotes early intervention, reduces stigma, enhances community cohesion, and complements formal mental health services.

The focus of funders can also be taken into account. From this perspective, the CONNECT programme delivers sustainable, community-based mental health impact within higher education.



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The Implementation of the CONNECT Training Programme

To ensure its successful implementation, the Connect Peer Programme is based two component:

- the Professional-to-Professional Peer Programme
- the Student-to-Student Peer Programme

The Professional-to-Professional Peer Programme

The CONNECT Professional-to-Professional Peer Programme will facilitate knowledge exchange and sharing of best practices in student mental health support, strengthen cross-disciplinary communication to enhance institutional well-being strategies, build resilience and emotional intelligence among university staff through peer-led workshops and training and establish clear referral and escalation pathways to enable early intervention for students requiring professional support.

The Student-to-Student Peer Programme

The CONNECT Student-to-Student Peer Training Programme will include peer mentoring initiatives in which trained students offer guidance and emotional support to fellow students, confidential and accessible support networks that allow students to seek help without fear of stigma and skills development in active listening and empathy, enabling peer supporters to recognise early signs of distress.

This student-led and staff-supported CONNECT approach fosters a strong sense of belonging and mutual care, promotes early intervention, and helps reduce isolation among students experiencing mental health challenges.

The ‘Conversation Cafés’ create safe, inclusive spaces for open discussions on mental health, strengthening peer-led support and promoting a sense of belonging. An accompanying implementation guide supports sustainability by equipping trained peer mentors with practical tools to facilitate and maintain ongoing conversations.



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