MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The Open University

STUDENT AND STAFF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2020-2023:

promoting an institutional approach

> "Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

World Health Organization

Strategic vision

At The Open University we recognise that mental health and wellbeing impacts all aspects of our lives in terms of how we feel, function and interact with others.

In recent years there has been an increase in students and staff disclosing mental health issues and we know that one in four adults will experience mental ill-health at some point in their life.

In response we are committed to ensuring that across the University everyone recognises that mental health is not solely related to a disability or illness. Instead, it represents a continuum in which we all live and experience fluctuating levels throughout our lives.

We believe that everyone has a responsibility for actively supporting mental health and wellbeing, whether their own or that of others.

By taking a whole institution approach to mental health and wellbeing, we will work collectively to promote an informed, tolerant and inclusive culture. A culture that enables our students and staff to flourish and ensures an appreciation of mental health and wellbeing is central to all we do.

Our strategic vision
To promote an inclusive and supportive culture, underpinned by effective and timely support systems and training about mental health and wellbeing that allows our students and staff to maximise their potential and achieve success.

Supporting statement

Professor Tim Blackman, Vice-Chancellor

At The Open University we are mindful of the relationship between a student's mental health and wellbeing and their ability to engage positively with academic study.

The mental health and wellbeing of our staff is equally important and we are committed to supporting colleagues, both to manage their everyday lives and to support our students.

Mental wellbeing matters to us all. This strategy takes a whole university approach across the four nations. It outlines our ambitions for the future that build on and enhance our support provision for the benefit of all.
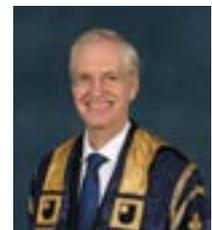
Supporting statement

Sarah Jones, Open University Students Association (OUSA)

OUSA recognises that effective mental health support involves attending to the needs of those experiencing mental health issues and distress as well as promoting good mental health and wellbeing.

For some people, mental ill-health is a one-off episode triggered by events or periods of harmful stress. For others, mental health issues can be longer term. We are committed to creating a student community and work environment that positively promotes mental health and wellbeing for all, making it easier to talk about without fear of stigma, and access to help when needed.

We are proud to be part of this strategy and look forward to working with staff to continually improve the student experience at The Open University.

Background context

The Open University (OU) is a world leader in open and distance learning and our institutional mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. We have pioneered innovative learning and teaching methods that enable people to study at times and in places that suit them, to achieve career and life goals.

Since our foundation in 1969, we have provided education for more than two million people across 150 countries and our students presently equate to 41% of the UK part-time student body. People of all ages and backgrounds study with us for a wide variety of reasons – to update their skills, gain a qualification, boost their career or keep mentally active. As such, there is no typical OU student. Furthermore, the majority of our ~174,000 undergraduate and taught postgraduate students do not attend a physical campus but study from their own homes. This contrasts with the majority of our ~900 postgraduate research students who are typically campus based at the OU, another university or an affiliated research centre.

Our ~8000 staff also have a diverse range of backgrounds, educational and professional experiences. Many currently study with the University or are graduates of it and they either work from home or one of our seven sites in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

While the context in which the OU functions differs from other higher education organisations, supporting our students and staff with their mental health and wellbeing is still an important part of all we do. We are aware of an increase in the number of students disclosing mental health issues in recent years and in the 2017/18 academic year, 38% of students who declared a disability made specific reference to mental health difficulties. Given that one in four adults will experience mental ill-health at some point in their life, we are also acutely aware that this is more than likely an under-representation of the actual number of students studying with mental ill-health. For this reason, we have invested in additional mental health specialist staff, introduced mental health champions and are in the process of rolling out a programme of mental health first aiders across the University.

Insight from staff records on sickness absence, occupational health referrals, uptake levels of our Employee Assistance Programme along with staff survey feedback reveals that mental health is a recurring and important theme for our staff. For example, in the 2017/18 academic year, 60% of calls to the Employee Assistance Programme were mental health related. In the same period, 21% of total sickness absence was due to stress, anxiety or depression, while 35% of the 347 occupational health referrals made were related to mental health. For these reasons, supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our students and staff is a priority area for the University and something we seek to improve.

As the OU operates across the four nations of the UK as well as internationally, we have a responsibility to respond equally to the requirements of all four nations' governing bodies.

- In England, the Office for Students has identified mental health as a priority and challenges higher education providers to consider how they support students' mental health and wellbeing through their Access and Participation Plans. Additionally, the Office for Students is developing ways to incentivise universities to enhance their work in mental health and wellbeing.

- In Northern Ireland, improving mental health is identified as a key indicator in the draft Programme for Government for the Northern Ireland Executive. The expectation is that those in the higher education sector will need to demonstrate how they are actively contributing to achieve this.

- The Scottish Programme for Government proposes a radical reform of the way mental ill-health is responded to and treated. As part of this work, the government has asked the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to oversee the development of institutional strategies for mental health. These strategies will include a commitment to work with the Students' Association to develop a 'Student Mental Health Agreement', by signing up to Think Positive (a Scottish Government funded student mental health project at the National Union of Students Scotland).

- The Welsh Government has made clear its commitment to a 'whole system' approach to mental health and wellbeing through the Healthy Universities framework. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) has developed a 'Wellbeing and Health in Higher Education Policy Statement' that comprises high-level actions to support wellbeing and health, including mental health. Individual, co-created action plans will be published separately, contributing to the policy statement's delivery across Wales.

Supporting statements

Directors of The Open University in Ireland,
Scotland and Wales

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Mental health and wellbeing are enormously important to The Open University in Scotland. I welcome the University's strategy, which chimes with key areas of focus for the Scottish Government, Scottish Funding Council and Universities Scotland. We are already working hard and look forward to using the new strategy to further inform our priorities.

Susan Stewart
Director, The Open University in Scotland

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The Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is very timely and important for The Open University in Ireland. Working with students and staff across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, we recognise how essential it is for us to support students and staff alike in engaging ways.

John D'Arcy,
Director, The Open University in Ireland

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The publication of the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy demonstrates the University's long-term commitment to sustaining the wellbeing and health of our staff and students. The synergies between the strategy and those of the Welsh Government and HEFCW are clear and we welcome the opportunity to contribute further to the wellbeing goals of the Future Generations Act in delivering this strategy.

Louise Casella
Director, The Open University in Wales

Strategy design and implementation

This Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been developed in line with the Universities UK (2017) **#stepchange** framework for mental health in higher education. It is directly aligned with all eight of its strategic themes: leadership, data, staff, prevention, early intervention, support, transitions and partnerships (as set out below). The strategy applies to all OU staff and students, whether full or part-time research students or on taught undergraduate or postgraduate courses. Therefore, individual staff and student groups are called out by exception only when an action relates to a specific subgroup. In all other instances, the strategy should be read as an inclusive rather than exclusive document.

The strategy focuses on future actions and improvements to our current service to be implemented over the next 3 years. It has been designed with collective ownership across all units within the University and as such, we are all responsible for ensuring its successful delivery.

We will measure the impact of our strategic approach by using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data obtained from various university data sources, including student and staff surveys and student and staff feedback, using data from 2017/18 (the most recent and fully comprehensive student and staff dataset) as our baseline reference. This will feed directly into our annual equality, diversity and inclusion review as well as our unit business planning process. An annual report on mental health and wellbeing trends, actions and outcomes will be delivered at the institutional level.

"This strategy was developed shortly prior to the release of the #stepchange 2020 framework. Moving forward, we will ensure all units are fully aware of the two frameworks, how they intersect, and how to best to use them to inform local action plans."

University mental health and wellbeing strategic objectives

Strategic objectives		#stepchange theme
1	**Taking a whole institution approach to mental health and wellbeing.** *Promote an integrated and whole institution approach to supporting student and staff mental health and wellbeing.*	**LEADERSHIP**
2	**Encouraging ownership of positive mental health behaviours** *Equip students and staff with the skills, tools and sense of belonging that promotes positive mental health behaviours and an inclusive culture.*	**PREVENTION**
3	**Reducing stigma through early intervention** *Take a proactive approach to supporting students and staff at risk of poor mental health, and reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues.*	**EARLY INTERVENTIONS**
4	**Delivering effective mental health and wellbeing support services** *Deliver an effective range of support services that meet the diverse needs of our students throughout their studies.*	**SUPPORT**
5	**Supporting students through key transitions** *Support students to transition successfully between key points in their studies, to promote success and maximise potential, while maintaining good mental health and wellbeing.*	**TRANSITIONS**
6	**Supporting the mental health and wellbeing needs of staff** *Ensure the mental health and wellbeing needs of all categories of staff are proactively recognised and addressed.*	**STAFF**
7	**Using an evidence-based approach to evaluating mental health and wellbeing support** *Use data, learning analytics and research to systematically evaluate the effectiveness and impact of mental health and wellbeing interventions and support.*	**DATA**
8	**Working collaboratively and in partnership with others to provide effective mental health and wellbeing support** *Establish strong collaborations within the University and influential partnerships externally to inform and provide effective mental health and wellbeing support for our students and staff.*	**PARTNERSHIPS**

1 Promote an integrated and whole institution approach to supporting student and staff mental health and wellbeing (#STEPCHANGE: LEADERSHIP)

We will promote an integrated and whole institution approach that actively encourages consideration of student and staff mental health and wellbeing across all areas of the University, with clear lines of ownership and responsibility for embedding and reporting on actions and their impact.

Actions

1.1. Task senior leadership and management with integrating good mental health and wellbeing practices within their areas of strategic responsibility and actively championing and promoting shared awareness and understanding of mental health and wellbeing.

1.2. Task senior leadership and management with ensuring appropriate actions that support students and/or staff with their mental health and wellbeing are included in their strategic and unit plans and that the outcomes of these actions are systematically measured and reported on annually.

1.3. Recruit a network of local mental health champions to work collaboratively across the University to influence decision-making at the unit level and enhance the levels and consistency of skills, knowledge and practices associated with mental health issues and wellbeing within an academic context.

1.4. Use a range of transparent engagement methods to gain insight and feedback from students and staff on the implementation and effectiveness of this strategy, ensuring the processes are supportive and inclusive of all communities.

1.5. Review resource allocation and investment in mental health and wellbeing support, initiatives and activities at the unit and institutional levels to ascertain which actions make a difference, remove unintended duplication and address gaps in service.

Success measures/key performance indicators

i. Provision and levels of engagement with communications, events and resources associated with the concept of wellbeing, as measured by attendance, website traffic and stress-related sick leave.

i. Engagement with mental health and wellbeing actions in unit plans increases, with systematic methods of measurement allowing collation and comparison of data at the institutional level.

iii. Mental health champions network created and operating effectively across the University; improved levels of consistency of practice and escalation on a needs basis across units for students and staff.

iv. Responses to relevant National Student Survey (NSS) and staff engagement survey questions indicate increased satisfaction with the support from the University and managers and is consistent with feedback gathered from students and staff during the strategy's implementation.

v. Improved awareness of the extent and range of investments made on mental health and wellbeing resources, support, initiatives and activities at the institutional level.

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As a leadership team, we will work across the four-nation university community to help promote positive mental health for our students and staff, to increase knowledge and understanding of mental health issues, and to ensure that referrals to appropriate help are readily available. "

Professor Fary Cachelin
Executive Dean, Wellbeing,
Education and Language Studies
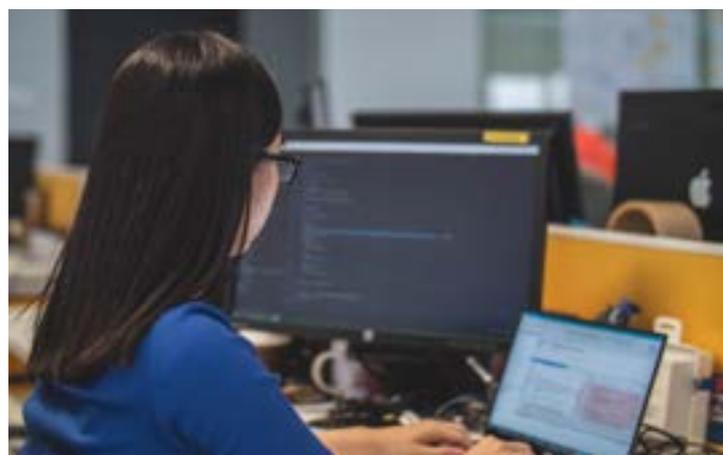
2 **Equip students and staff with the skills, tools and sense of belonging that promotes positive mental health behaviours and an inclusive culture** (#STEPCHANGE: PREVENTION)

We will ensure our learning and working environments promote an inclusive culture that engenders a sense of belonging and connectedness, and fosters self-care and positive mental health behaviours.

Actions

2.1. Using feedback from students and staff who have declared mental health issues, evaluate common types of online group learning environments (e.g. forums, online rooms) and identify potential enhancements that could better support diverse personal needs.

2.2. Conduct an audit of physical working environments used by staff and research students at each OU site and support all homeworkers to systematically review their own working environments to identify potential enhancements that are conducive to wellbeing (e.g. provision of quiet working and relaxation spaces; and provision of technologies that enable connected working).

2.3. Provide, promote and measure awareness of initiatives, training and resources to support students and staff to develop positive mental health behaviours, and seek to improve awareness and uptake by under-represented groups.

2.4. Ensure students and staff can access relevant information and gain the necessary skills to make informed choices about the mental health and wellbeing resources provided by the University, and can make best use of self-directed tools and training programmes to manage and maintain their own mental health, wellbeing and resilience, knowing when and how to seek help.

2.5. Provide training and guidance to staff and their line managers to ensure a common understanding of the stress assessment and sickness support plans, and how they can be used effectively to help an individual manage their mental health and wellbeing.

2.6. Work collaboratively across the University to facilitate peer-to-peer support and mentoring programmes for students and staff that support good mental health and wellbeing.

Success measures/key performance indicators

i. Level of availability and use of supportive online and physical learning and working environments; evidence from scholarship projects informing decision-making.

ii. Satisfaction levels with learning/working environments and technologies, as measured in student and staff surveys.

iii. Demographics of students and staff engaging regularly with initiatives and resources that promote positive mental health and behaviours.

iv. Access and usage levels of mental health and wellbeing resources; uptake of initiatives and training; and satisfaction levels as measured by feedback from student consultation events, NSS and staff survey responses.

v. Use of stress risk assessment, sickness support plan and staff working days lost to stress.

vi. Engagement levels with peer support and mentoring programmes supporting mental health and wellbeing.

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With the time we devote to learning and working, it is vital we look after our own and each other's mental as well as physical wellbeing. Fostering inclusive and supportive environments, and a shared sense of purpose and belonging, will help all students and staff.

Jake Yeo
Deputy University Secretary

3 **Take a proactive approach to supporting students and staff at risk of poor mental health, and reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues (#STEPCHANGE: EARLY INTERVENTION)**

We will use a range of early intervention methodologies to support students and staff at risk of not succeeding due to poor mental health. We will also work across the University to promote a common and shared appreciation of mental health issues in order to reduce cultural stigmas and encourage timely disclosure.

Actions

3.1. Evaluate the effectiveness of current mental health and wellbeing awareness campaigns at reducing stigma and promoting timely disclosure by students and staff across the university and use this insight to modify campaigns to improve reach and engagement at the unit level.

3.2. Units actively monitor levels and category of staff engagement with mandatory and optional equality, diversity and inclusion training associated with mental health and wellbeing and implement a local action plan to ensure compliance and improve local community engagement.

3.3. Extend the provision of professional mental health training programmes to enable staff to proactively recognise the signs of poor mental health and wellbeing in students, other staff and themselves, and support individuals to develop better resilience and personal coping strategies.

3.4. Evaluate proactive interventions designed to support students deemed at risk within their studies and implement enhancements that actively address key attainment gaps between students who have declared mental health issues and those who have not.

3.5. Investigate the potential for new support services for students and staff experiencing mental health issues that could operate effectively at scale and in a sustainable manner, including the provision of Personal Learning Advisors to provide timely and personalised pastoral support to students who have declared mental health issues and are deemed at risk within their studies.

3.6. Review and improve the effectiveness of procedures for proactively supporting specific cohorts of students and staff within the University identified as susceptible to work-related mental health and wellbeing pressures (e.g. postgraduate research students or homeworkers).

Success measures/key performance indicators

i. Number, timing and demographics of students and staff disclosing mental health needs and other disabilities; and the range of reasonable adjustments implemented for students and staff.

ii. Demographics of unit staff engaging with mandatory and optional equality, diversity and inclusion training associated with mental health and wellbeing.

iii. Number, categories and distribution of staff who have completed mental health first aid training (across all locations and including homeworkers).

iv. Measures of key attainment gaps and retention of students who have declared mental health issues, compared with benchmark data.

v. Personal Learning Advisors supporting students with protected characteristics integrated into current support system and fully deployed; and additional/alternative support programmes scoped.

vi. Retention of students/absence of staff due to stress or mental health issues, measured in specified cohorts and compared with benchmark data; and satisfaction with support mechanisms and processes, measured from student and staff surveys.

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> Equity and inclusion are at the heart of what we do as a University and mental health is a critical element of this. As somebody with long-term experience of a mental illness, I am very well aware of the restrictions and challenges that it can impose. I am delighted that we will now have a mental health strategy for the University.
>
> **Dr Liz Marr**
> **Pro-Vice-Chancellor Students**

4 **Deliver an effective range of support services that meet the diverse needs of our students throughout their studies (#STEPCHANGE: SUPPORT)**

We will take an integrated approach to student support, ensuring our services are delivered in a timely, personalised and effective manner that meets the diverse needs of our students and provides the necessary support network to our staff.

Actions

4.1. Maintain levels of investment and review the range of mental health, wellbeing and disability resources currently available to students and staff to ascertain effectiveness of service from different stakeholder perspectives and proactively seek sustainable solutions to any gaps or deficiencies identified.

4.2. Review how, where and when mental health and wellbeing resources, policies and procedures are signposted to students and staff to ensure the information is relevant, accessible and enables individuals to self-serve and support others.

4.3. Devise and implement a whole University awareness-raising campaign designed to ensure students and staff are aware of key supportive policies (including advocacy, deferral from study, dignity and respect, fitness to study, gender identity and safeguarding) and understand their personal responsibilities associated with these policies.

4.4. Work collaboratively to promote and share inclusive learning and teaching practices, monitoring the influence on student success and attainment gaps for students with mental health issues.

4.5. Devise and implement an integrative and comprehensive skills-based framework that helps students and staff actively identify and engage with sensitive and emotive topics, while developing personal resilience to maintain their mental wellbeing.

4.6. Implement procedures that ensure mental health and wellbeing resources are developed for students in parallel with the development of complementary resources for staff (where appropriate) and that these are actively shared across all relevant units.

4.7. Review current procedures associated with the support of vulnerable students (including postgraduate research students) to ensure they are aware of the support available to them and know how to access it at a time that matches their needs.

4.8. Improve guidance, training and the provision of individual and group support for all student-facing staff, including those working with postgraduate research students, on dealing with: students in crisis, specifically around distress, suicidal thoughts and ideation; when to contact appropriate agencies or emergency services; and how to maintain their own resilience and mental wellbeing.

Success measures/key performance indicators

i. Extent of perceived gaps and deficiencies in mental health and wellbeing resources at the institutional level, number and type of pilots and sustainable solutions enacted.

ii. Informal and formal survey feedback on signposting of policies and procedures.

iii. Awareness-raising campaign initiated and informal and formal feedback on awareness of policies.

iv. Measurement of key attainment gaps and retention of students who have declared mental health issues, compared with benchmark data; and good practice from relevant scholarship projects shared.

v. Successful integration of emotional resilience skills, strategies and guidance into the learning design process and other student-facing learning material development processes.

vi. Number of associated student and staff mental health and wellbeing resource pack releases.

vii. Improved handling of vulnerable students self-reporting and time taken to complete requests.

viii. Staff feedback on confidence levels and perceived competence in dealing with distressed and vulnerable students.

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We understand how important it is for students to access support when they need it. By taking a proactive and timely approach to delivering support, we can maximise the impact this has on student success.

Claire Baines
Director, Academic Services

5 **Supporting students to transition successfully between key points in their studies, to promote success and maximise potential, while maintaining good mental health and wellbeing (#STEPCHANGE: TRANSITIONS)**

We will proactively support students at key transition points into, throughout and beyond their studies, helping them to become an integral part of the learning community and maximise their future potential.

Actions

5.1. Review online induction and progression resources from the perspective of supporting students with mental health issues to successfully manage key transitions into, during and beyond their studies.

5.2. Measure the levels of engagement of students with declared mental health issues with induction, progression and careers-related resources to determine and promote the impact these have on student retention and success as a means of building an inclusive learning community.

5.3. Critically evaluate current programmes of targeted proactive interventions designed to support students deemed at risk, to assess their effectiveness in supporting students with mental health issues to manage key transitions, based on their stage of study (e.g. the transition from Access to Stage 1, or progressing from undergraduate to postgraduate study).

5.4. Evaluate the effectiveness of online and face-to-face induction resources for students transitioning into postgraduate research, in terms of encouraging declaration of pre-existing mental health issues and building resilience, and the efficiency with which support measures are implemented.

5.5. Expand targeted support programmes for students with mental health issues designed to encourage career aspirations and skills development, manage expectations and apprehensions and provide guidance on achieving their goals.

5.6. Champion mental health and wellbeing with employers and showcase this work to our students via relevant forums and careers fairs, to address perceived stigmas of mental health issues in the working environment; and develop resources, aimed at employers, on providing effective support for students and staff with mental health conditions.

Success measures/key performance indicators

i. Review of resources completed and any gaps/deficiencies identified and addressed.

ii. Engagement levels by students who have declared mental health issues with induction, progression and careers-related resources, and influence on their transition, retention and success, compared with benchmark data.

iii. Proactive interventions contribute to reduction in attainment gaps for students who have declared mental health issues.

iv. Declaration rates of pre-existing mental health issues by students commencing postgraduate research, and timing of delivery of interventions.

v. Levels of engagement with career development programmes and resources by students with mental health issues; and satisfaction levels, as measured in student surveys.

vi. Number of graduate placements for students who have declared mental health issues; uptake levels of resources by employers.

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We strongly believe that everyone is responsible for respecting the feelings and sensibilities of others. The Open University's mission includes being open to people and central to our ethos is making learning accessible to everyone, regardless of their circumstances.

Professor Josie Fraser
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
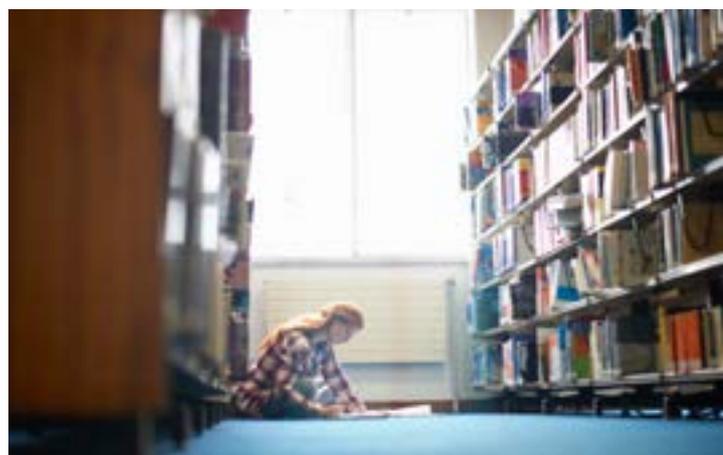
6 Ensure the mental health and wellbeing needs of all categories of staff are proactively recognised and addressed, for the mutual benefit of our staff and students (#STEPCHANGE: STAFF)

We will promote good mental health and wellbeing to all our staff and provide training and support at their time of need, irrespective of location. By integrating mental health and wellbeing in all staff activities and practices, a positive working environment can be created that enables active staff engagement, enhances performance and in turn, helps maximise the student experience.

Actions

6.1. Work collaboratively with our trade unions and external providers to support staff with their mental health and wellbeing, including occupational health services, peer support, counselling and support for carers.

6.2. Promote, monitor and review levels of engagement with online and face-to-face training and self-development opportunities that enable staff to develop and retain a currency with mental health and wellbeing matters, designed to support themselves, students and other staff.

6.3. Develop a long-term mental health and wellbeing communications campaign, underpinned by self-help strategies, that supports, empowers and motivates staff to engage with wellbeing activities and behaviours in their life, health and working environment.

6.4. Inform the institutional review of how workload is allocated, monitored and managed from the context of staff mental health and wellbeing, to create a process that is transparent, equitable and sustainable.

6.5. Ensure managers are appropriately trained, seek advice and guidance from People Services regarding mental health support for staff and can ensure the provision of reasonable adjustments for staff who disclose mental health issues.

6.6. Complete a review of the content, application and level of uptake of University policies that contribute to positive wellbeing and enable the retention of staff through reasonable adjustments.

6.7. Develop and implement an equality impact analysis that systematically considers mental health and wellbeing issues in new projects and policies that may have a substantial impact on staff and student behaviours, workload and/or ways of working.

6.8. Work collaboratively with the OU Club to promote physical and social wellbeing opportunities and facilitate supportive staff-run networks for a diverse and inclusive community.

Success measures/key performance indicators

i. Uptake by staff of additional support services provided by the unions and external providers.

ii. Staff demographics and engagement rates with training courses on mental health and wellbeing matters; and satisfaction levels expressed in staff surveys.

iii. Mental health and wellbeing communication campaign in place and staff engagement levels.

iv. Workload allocation review completed and satisfaction levels with process, from staff survey feedback.

v. Staff satisfaction levels with support from People Services in handling mental health issues.

vi. Review of policy content and use completed, recommendations for enhancements identified and staff days lost through stress or other mental health issues, as measured by sickness returns.

vii. Equality impact analysis developed and implemented.

viii. Number and diversity of staff participating in wellbeing activities.

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By putting wellbeing at the heart of all our activities and practices, we can strive to embed an open environment where we continue to recognise and support all colleagues throughout their employee journey at the University.

Caragh Molloy
Group People Director

7 **Use data, learning analytics and research to systematically evaluate the effectiveness and impact of mental health and wellbeing interventions and support (#STEPCHANGE: DATA)**

We will use a combination of management information, learning analytics and quantitative and qualitative data to systematically analyse and determine demand for, engagement with and effectiveness of our student and staff mental health and wellbeing support interventions.

We will use an evidence-based approach to monitor impact and progress in a transparent and robust manner. From this, we will identify, adopt and share best practices across the University, informing future initiatives on where additional support or research is needed.

Actions

7.1. Introduce a mental health and wellbeing needs assessment to inform students and staff about appropriate support and resources; from this, establish baseline data on trends and identify areas that require additional interventions.

7.2. Establish an annual review process to monitor trends within and between cohorts (students and staff) and using an evidence-based approach, ascertain which actions and interventions are working effectively, which can be improved further and which are not working.

7.3. Monitor and track progress against an agreed set of data relating to the health and wellbeing of our staff (e.g. Higher Education Statistics Agency data; and management information on sickness absence, occupational health referrals and Employee Assistance Programme uptake) to identify trends at the unit to institutional levels and make direct comparisons with sector norms.

7.4. Improve staff awareness of, and engagement with, institutional dashboards that provide insight into the mental health and wellbeing status and success of our students; and promote collaboration with scholarship centres to embed an evidence-based approach to the development and delivery of mental health support and interventions.

7.5. Use learning analytics to target students who have declared mental health issues and are deemed at risk of non-completion with proactive and timely interventions, providing personalised support that promotes a positive outcome for the individual.

Success measures/key performance indicators

i. Baseline data established and systematically used to inform future interventions.

ii. Improved levels of service and reduction in gaps of mental health provision to students and staff.

iii. An established, annual mental health and wellbeing review process and schedule with results informing interventions and actions.

iv. Evaluation of the level of staff knowledge, their skills, attitudes and training needs, compared with baseline data.

v. Positive feedback from students who have declared mental health issues and improved levels of success.

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> We will use data and technologies to provide personalised support and interventions to address student and staff needs and drive continuous improvement in mental health and wellbeing. We will support the strategy to succeed by using business intelligence for decision-making, robust evaluations to challenge our roadmap and data science solutions to realise our staff and students' potential. "
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> **Begona Nunez-Herran**
> **Director, Data & Student Analytics**

8 **Establish strong collaborations within the University and influential partnerships externally to inform and provide effective mental health and wellbeing support for our students and staff (#STEPCHANGE: PARTNERSHIPS)**

We will promote effective internal collaborations and external partnerships to strengthen the reach and impact of our mental health and wellbeing support services to students and staff.

Actions

8.1. Work collaboratively with the Open University Students Association to review the effectiveness of our mental health and wellbeing support services and involve the student voice in ongoing developments to promote an inclusive and supportive community that celebrates diversity.

8.2. Work collaboratively with our trade unions and external health providers to review the methods by which we support staff with their mental health and wellbeing, and their effectiveness, to improve retention in the workplace and promote an inclusive and supportive community.

8.3. Align internal scholarship and research projects on inclusive learning and teaching practices and supporting students with mental health conditions, to enhance and inform our current support services; and appraise changes to strategy, operations, policies and procedures.

8.4. Work in partnership with Student Minds to develop a Mental Health Charter for the University and more widely, for online and distance learning, that demonstrates good practice.

8.5. Maintain and strengthen our partnerships with mental health and safeguarding charities to ensure external rigour is applied to the review and assessment of our policies and procedures associated with supporting students and staff who may be susceptible to risk.

8.6. Monitor developments within the online digital mental health services market and other external agencies (focusing on services administered by qualified clinicians and registered with the Care Quality Commission) to identify potential opportunities to provide enhanced specialist mental health services and ensure we are signposting our students and staff to appropriate support in accordance with their location.

8.7. Where feasible and appropriate, explore options for working with National Health Service providers and local authorities across the UK to improve access and pathways into local services for our students and staff.

Success measures/key performance indicators

i. Joint campaigns and initiatives developed between different units within the University and the Students' Association.

ii. Staff sickness levels attributed to mental health issues, stress, anxiety and/or depression; and feedback to student and staff surveys on matters associated with wellbeing, community and inclusion.

iii. Tangible and transparent links between support service improvements and the focus of internal scholarship and research projects on inclusive practices and mental health.

iv. University Mental Health Charter Award secured.

v. Quality review feedback from external organisations on effectiveness of policies and procedures.

vi. Sustainable integration of specialist services for students and staff across all four nations.

vii. Ease of access and a range of specialist services for students and staff provided online and within the local community.

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We will bring the power of our organisational size and reach to bear upon mental health and wellbeing challenges that our staff and students may face. We will partner to multiply our efforts and collaborate to deepen positive impact on mental health and wellbeing.

Professor Devendra Kodwani
Executive Dean,
Faculty of Business and Law