University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

The Wellbeing Team

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

2023

This is the place where nurture is our nature

Mental Health is defined by the World Health organisation as: *'a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in.' World Health Organisation*

Wellbeing is defined in the Oxford dictionary as: *'the state of being comfortable, happy or healthy'.*

Introduction from Andrew Fisher, University Dep. Asst. Pro Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Curriculum Leadership

In my role as the University Senior Tutor, I find inspiration and encouragement when reading our new Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It is incredibly important as it directly tackles the urgent requirement to prioritise and support the mental health of our students, especially considering the concerning decline in mental wellbeing in the UK and beyond. As an institution, we have a responsibility to take this matter seriously. It is vital in our community for everyone to consider how decisions, policy, or initiatives fit with this strategy.

Our strategy recognises the unique challenges that students face in today's world and importantly acknowledges that mental health is not solely an individual concern but a communal issue. It highlights the importance of leadership, transition, prevention, data, and partnerships in creating a supportive and inclusive environment for our students. By incorporating these themes, we will better foster a positive and nurturing atmosphere that promotes our student wellbeing.

"Our strategy recognises the unique challenges that students face in today's world"

An integral element of our strategy is the incorporation of the Suicide Safer review. Whilst recognising the sensitivity of this topic, it is important to address it head-on; by including this review we are actively working towards meaningful progress in this crucial area. Furthermore, the UUK Stepchange Framework and Mental Health Charter

serve as invaluable guides, setting high standards for our initiatives and ensuring that we utilise evidence-based practices. By aligning ourselves with these frameworks, the University of Nottingham demonstrates our commitment to continuously improving our support systems and providing the best possible care for our students.

I am particularly encouraged that our strategy prioritises prevention and early intervention, focusing on equipping students with necessary support before mental health issues worsen. Through proactive measures and cultivating a wellbeing culture, the aim is to continue to create a positive environment that supports all students. Collaboration lies at the core of our strategy with valuable input and involvement from students, as well as partnerships with the Students' Union and other student groups. This inclusive and diverse approach ensures that our strategy reflects the needs and perspectives of our student community.

As University Senior Tutor, I am excited by the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It demonstrates our commitment to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our students. I am confident that with the right resourcing and continued support from the university community, it will make a tangible difference in their lives and contribute to a healthier and more nurturing university environment.

Introduction from Ellena Leech, Student Union Officer for Welfare and Wellbeing

Every student at the University of Nottingham has mental health and every student deserves a university community that is supports their health and wellbeing. Life can be difficult for students – academic pressures, the skyrocketing cost of living, loneliness and feeling excluded and every day life worries are increasing pressure on our students. This pressure is expressing itself locally and nationally in a student mental health crisis.

"the Strategy lays a pathway to a proactive, whole-university approach to mental health and wellbeing"

We know that we need urgent action to address this crisis, both nationally and here at Nottingham, and so I am pleased to see the Student Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy come to life after a year of collaboration and co-creation.

Every student deserves the ability to access appropriate support when they need it, and the Strategy lays a pathway to a proactive, whole-university approach to mental health and wellbeing. It's so important that we recognise the inequalities of access to services and the impact of discrimination and marginalisation on the wellbeing of students at Nottingham, and we welcome the steps outlined to create respective and inclusive communities that support the wellbeing of everyone on campus.

We need a system of support which is easy to navigate, compassionate and cohesive, so that every student can thrive. The Strategy outlines some of the steps that the University – working with the Students' Union and other partners – will take to meet this goal. We encourage you to hold us and the University accountable to the progress we make together.

We look forward to working together to ensure that every student is empowered to reach their full potential in a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment.

Current landscape of young people's mental health in the UK: Trends, concerns and university implications

Recent statistics on the mental health of university students is concerning, so it is of high importance to the university and Students' Union that we take action on this to support our student body in all forms of their university life. The statistics below highlight why we are concerned, and include some statistics which relate to suicide rates which may be difficult for some to read. We want to work together to change these trends and bring about an improvement in the wellbeing of our community, work which will be underpinned by this strategy.

Nationally the UK has seen a significant deterioration in the mental health of young people. In 2021 rates of probable mental disorders in young people aged 17 to 19 year olds increased to one in six (17.4%) from one in ten (10.1%) in 2017. The proportion of 17 to 19 year olds reporting eating problems rose from 44.6% in 2017 to 58.2% in 2021. The number of 17-23 year olds reporting problems with sleep was over half (57.1%) (NHS, 2021)

Whilst the majority of students studying at the university are under 25, there also needs to be careful consideration of the needs of mature students, who can present with different, but equally important needs, which their poorer attainment and retention gap indicates are not being effectively met.

The increasing level of reports of poor mental health is reflected in university populations with the number of home students in the UK disclosing a mental health condition increasing from 1% in 2010 to over 5% in 20/21 (UK Parliament, 2023). In a survey (Student Minds, 2022) 57% of respondents self-reported a mental health issue and 27% said they had a diagnosed mental health condition, 1 in 3 reported poor mental wellbeing and 1 in 4 said they would not know where to go to get mental health support at university.

Rates of suicide in universities fell in 2018/19 after showing a rise in the decade before but rates of suicide are lower for students than for other young people in the general population. Every death of a student by suicide is a tragic loss and we are committed to developing a suicide safer community.

This year, at the University of Nottingham, 9% of all UoN students declared to the disability team that they have a mental health condition. In 2022/23 the wellbeing services provided a wide range of support to students:

Wellbeing Service	Activity
Support and Wellbeing service	4,861 students supported
Specialist support: Counselling and Mental Health	3,048 students supported
ResX wellbeing support based in Residential Life Service	1,525 incidents supported involving 6,748 interactions
Report and Support	798 reports responded to
Health Improvement team	Seven campaigns ran involving 76 activities, 500 registered for condom scheme, 20 HealthyU student champions recruited and trained.

The National Institute for Heath and Care Excellence (NICE) identified a number of factors contributing to poor student mental health including: increased risk of mental illness in the typical age of students, moving away from home, developing a new identity, workload pressures, financial pressures. They also recognised the inequality reflected in higher levels or mental health issues in students with chronic physical health (NICE, 2020).

Our Strategy

This strategy has been co-created with staff and students from across the university community, through focus groups and consultations conducted throughout 2022/3. It also incorporates aims and objectives identified by a Suicide Safer review conducted in the same year and these objectives will be highlighted in the strategy below, the first of which was to develop a new student mental health and wellbeing strategy.

"A whole-university approach must include both adequately resourced, effective and accessible mental health services and proactive interventions. It must provide an environment and culture that reduces poor mental health, as well as supporting good mental health, and facilitating staff and students to develop insight, understanding and skills to manage and maintain their own wellbeing" **University Mental Health Charter, 2023**

The development of the strategy has been underpinned by the UUK Stepchange framework and the university's commitment to sign up to the University Mental Health Charter which promotes a whole university approach which is defined in the charter:
This strategy recognises, and seeks to build on, the existing good practice found throughout the university, which currently supports students mental health and wellbeing.

We have taken a holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing which considers physical, social and mental health when exploring mental health and wellbeing.

Our Vision

To be a University that empowers all students to take care of their own wellbeing and reach their full potential and create a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment that enables them to thrive both at the university and in the wider community
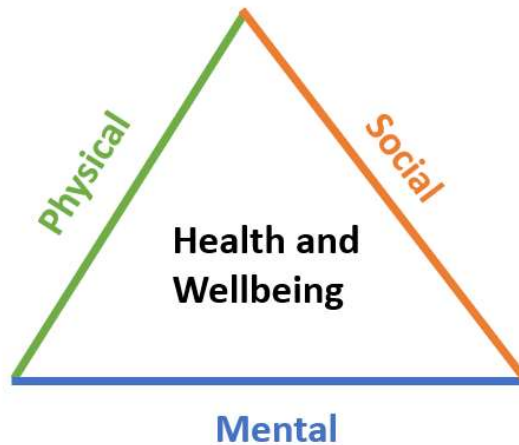
Our Mission

To help the student community by creating a positive culture where wellbeing is embedded throughout every area of student life, by having a cohesive and holistic approach and by providing timely and proactive support which is evidence-based and reflective.

Key aims and objectives:

To ensure the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy adopts a holistic 'whole university approach' to all aspects of student life, with leadership invested in people.

A comprehensive list of aims and objectives can be found in Appendix 1., the main themes of which are summarised below:

1. To align the student strategy with the staff mental health and wellbeing strategy, once the staff strategy is complete, by creating an overarching statement which demonstrates a clear, consistent promotion of student and staff wellbeing within the university community.

2. To ensure senior leadership within the university model, promote and support good mental health and wellbeing, enabling the ongoing development of effective, inclusive accessible, wellbeing services and initiatives.

3. To develop robust procedures to ensure wellbeing development is informed by service data, evaluation and research, enabling the identification and sharing of good practice across the university and wider university sector, with particular attention to assessing the equality of access to wellbeing services and information.

4. To support a whole university approach by developing a wellbeing assessment toolkit to ensure wellbeing is thoroughly considered and addressed in all university projects and developments.

5. To promote the university values of respect and inclusivity by ensuring all members of the community are aware of the university code of conduct and expectations of behaviour, analysing statistics from Report and Support to help highlight problematic issues arising within the university, and identifying pro-active ways to address these issues.

6. To create a community where students can thrive and develop a sense of belonging, through opportunities created by the university and student union, which enable students to engage in a diverse, and inclusive wide range of activities.

7. To encourage and empower students to positively take care of their mental health and wellbeing by engaging students in creative, inclusive health promotion activities and resources, co-produced with students and the student union.

8. To ensure information on wellbeing services is promoted, and easily accessible, to students and staff at the university, with access carefully monitored and scrutinised to ensure equality of access. To establish smooth pathways between internal university services and establish effective and co-ordinated relationships with external services underpinned by clear information sharing agreements.

References:
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Student Minds, 2022. PowerPoint Presentation. [Online] Available at: https://www.studentminds.org.uk/research.html [Accessed: 19th July 2023].

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University Mental Health Charter, 2023. The Framework [Online] Available at: https://universitymentalhealthcharter.org.uk/themes/ [Accessed 9th August 2023).

Appendix 1: Aims and Objectives in more detail

NB: All the aims and objectives below support the university to become more suicide safer, but the specific aims recommended by the suicide safer review are marked by an asterix*.

Leadership

- Ensure senior leaders recognise the importance of wellbeing services being supported and resourced to develop in response to student need, evidenced through service data and evaluation.

- Ensure all staff and students in leadership positions recognise the importance of mental health and wellbeing and are informed about support available to students and staff.

- Work closely with the student union and students to access the voice and experience of marginalised students, to ensure accessibility and effectiveness of support services for these students is constantly reviewed and developed.

- Support appropriate information sharing across the institution which helps ensure effective, joined up support for students, whilst also protecting their confidentiality and maximising students' control over information shared.*

- Ensure policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they are effective in supporting student wellbeing i.e. emergency contact policy, critical incident policies*

- Devise an overarching training framework for the University around mental health, wellbeing and suicide safety for staff at all levels, including the senior team and governing body *

- Outline a part for leadership in developing culture which promotes positive mental health and wellbeing for staff and students.

- Collaborate across the university to provide a Senior Tutor/Personal Tutor system which is effective and consistent, prioritising training.

- Ensure the MHWBS is compassionate, people-centric not mechanistic, and invested in people.

- Develop a wellbeing assessment impact tool to ensure wellbeing is considered in all new developments and projects.

- Carry out audits on any identified cases and student deaths to determine any areas of learning and/or good practice*

Transitions

- Collaborate and create a whole university approach to transitions ensuring student opportunity to gain a 'sense of belonging', addressing loneliness and isolation –for all student groups completing all levels of study.

- Communicate pre – arrival expectations of what the student journey looks like including easy to find, accessible information about services available, how to access them, why and when.*

- Encourage and enable students to build social relationships and networks to promote a sense of belonging.

- Inform students about the code of conduct and expectations of behaviour, to underpin the importance of respect within the university community and promote values of respect and inclusivity through 'stronger together'.

Prevention

- Develop access to engaging, inclusive health promotion advice and resources, in close collaboration with the Student Union, to empower and enable students to pro-actively take care of their mental health and wellbeing.

- Collaborate with University of Nottingham SU to provide an inclusive variety of extra-curricular activities, volunteering opportunities, community activities within societies, sports clubs and university accommodation activities for all; collaborate with the SU and the Liberation Networks to ensure all activities encourage inclusive activities for underrepresented groups.

- Ensure students develop skills to succeed by embedding wellbeing (e.g. resilience) into the curriculum and ensure it is part of modular review.

- Collaborate with Learning and Teaching Curriculum Design to promote inclusive teaching and assessment options for all Schools and departments, considering the needs of student such as neurodiverse students, international students, mature students, students with significant mental health difficulties.

- Promote healthy living, health and security working in partnership with the Health Improvement team/ Sports/ GP surgeries/SU/Security/Community liaisons/ResX etc

- Facilitate opportunities for students to create/deliver community activities, events and initiatives.

- Promote and encourage access to financial support including hardship funding, and budgeting advice.

- Work in partnership with ResX, SU, Community organisations to create a healthy culture of consent and healthy relationships on campus through education and clear reporting procedures.

- Promote respect and inclusivity throughout the university community, underpinned by the university code of conduct

Early Intervention

- Provide information and advice to enable students to understand and manage their mental health and wellbeing, and access self-help information (e.g. from Togetherall, Student Wellbeing resources, external services etc), to empower them to take control of their own wellbeing.

- Provide advice and guidance for students who have experienced sexual and domestic violence and other forms of abuse and harassment, raising awareness of the Report and Support platform.

- Raise awareness with staff, and students in mentoring or welfare roles, of mental health and wellbeing issues including how to recognise potential early signs of poor mental health and how to help students to access timely support via training such as mental health first aid and 'look after your mate' training and resources such as the staff 'identifying and responding to students in distress' and the student equivalent 'are you concerned about another student at the university'.

Support

- Collaborate across the university to produce effective student communications which are visible, clear, accessible, explain need and services to address need, and identify how to access support, especially in crisis*

- Ensure the structure of the wellbeing service provides easy, inclusive, access to wellbeing services and effective, supported referral between university services, promoting a stepped care approach to student support based on the least intensive/restrictive principle.*

- Identify how to ensure risk is appropriately managed and by who, when students present to Senior Tutors/Personal Tutors in difficulty but are unwilling to engage with services or are awaiting appointments, e.g. via the NHS.*

- Ensure that risk is managed through the development of a University executive out of hours rota as an escalation point for complex situations and through enhanced information sharing via a 'students of concern' process*

- Examine and facilitate colleague collaboration with appropriate two-way info sharing enhancing student experience e.g. disability declarations, wellbeing plans, disciplinary outcomes*

Evaluation, data and research

- Outline procedures for using data to assess current service delivery including what data collection is required across the service delivery, how data will illustrate service value e.g. retention, progression, student experience; how best practice will be shared across the university , and how data will inform future service

delivery.

- Collate data and research, share good practice, via evaluation, retention and progression for all student groups, and APP.

- Understand current data and research on staff mental health and wellbeing.

- Measure the impact of, and evaluate, support services to inform the development of effective student support.

- Gather, review and respond to robust EDI data to monitor equality of access to wellbeing services, ensuring marginalised groups statistically at higher risk of poorer mental health and wellbeing, have access to culturally sensitive services.

Partnership

- Work closely with our most important partners, the students, to listen to and respond to the student voice, with support from the Student Union.

- Ensure partnership working with NHS, LA, PH. to create clear service pathways, develop joint student strategies and develop information sharing agreements.*

- Hold regular pathway meetings to promote student access into external, as well as, internal services.

- Participate in strategic planning meetings with NHS, LA, PH partners to ensure student needs are considered in service developments*.

Staff

- Devise an overarching training framework for the University around mental health awareness and suicide safer awareness and wider wellbeing issues for staff at all levels, including the senior team and governing body, to cover issues such as mental health awareness, safeguarding, personal boundaries and role borders, pastoral support – what it means and who provides it, signposting and referral to support (how, when, who to)*.

- Continue to provide up to date advice to staff through the 'identifying and responding to students in distress' guide.

- Align the staff and student mental health and wellbeing strategies, beneath an overarching strategy.

- Commit to supporting the supporters, ensuring access to support services, and communication of this commitment to staff.