

Mentally Healthy Universities

A mental health and workplace wellbeing programme for students and staff

Staff Mental Health Champions information pack

Nine universities are taking part in Mind's Mentally Healthy Universities Programme until August 2021. The pilot is testing a number of new interventions to help universities take a 'whole community' approach to mental health – in particular focusing on prevention and early intervention.

One of the programme's goals is to reduce stigma and improve peer support for university staff. As part of this universities are working with local Minds to recruit Staff Mental Health Champions. Now more than ever it is vital that universities have open cultures and staff feel able to talk about their mental health and seek support. Mental Health Champions play a crucial role in this.

What is a Mental Health Champion?

A Mental Health Champion is an employee who takes action to raise awareness of mental health problems amongst staff and challenges mental health stigma in their department, division, and wider university context.

Mental Health Champions are not expected to act as counsellors to their colleagues or share their own experiences if they are not comfortable doing so. This role is not about replacing counselling/therapeutic interventions, but is one of the many things the university is doing to keep workplace mental health on the agenda, and to create an open culture where staff feel confident talking about mental health.

Champions are focused on changing attitudes. They create opportunities to start up conversations about mental health, dispel myths, and make it easier for people to seek support.

I think every workplace needs somebody that is holding a torch for mental health. It doesn't need just one person, it needs multiple.

Georgia, King's College London

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What is the difference between this role and other mental health roles at the university?

Although it is of course important to support students with their mental health, this role is specifically focused on staff raising awareness amongst their colleagues.

- A **Mental Health Champion** is any employee who takes action to raise awareness of mental health problems amongst staff and challenges mental health stigma. Champions may or may not have their own experiences of mental health problems.
- A **Mental Health Peer Supporter** is an employee with personal experience of poor mental health or a mental health problem, who provides peer support to their colleagues. The role is founded on shared experiences of poor mental health and mental health problems. This role is also part of Mind's Mentally Healthy Universities Programme. Staff can apply for this role as well as the Mental Health Champion role.
- A **Mental Health First Aider** steps in, reassures and supports a person in distress, reacting in a crisis. They may or may not have their own experiences of mental health problems.

Why do we need Mental Health Champions?

We all have mental health just as we have physical health.

We know that 1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health problem in any given year. University staff actually experience a higher rate of poor mental health than the general population: the Education Support Partnership found that 32 per cent of higher education staff have experienced a mental health problem in the past academic year. Additionally, 55 per cent of staff described themselves as stressed.

The attitudes of others can stop people with poor mental health getting the help and support they need. Too many people with mental health problems are made to feel isolated, ashamed and worthless.

Stigma is still an issue across the higher education sector. The Equality Challenge Unit found that 38 per cent of university staff surveyed said they had not told colleagues about

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their mental health problems due to a fear they would be treated differently or thought less of.

We hope that taking part in this programme will be just the beginning for staff who want to make a difference around mental health at work. We are looking for those who have the passion to create an environment where colleagues feel able to talk openly and receive support.

The more people who can openly promote mental health and wellbeing, the more we can reduce the stigma attached to it and enable conversations about mental health as a normal part of everyday life...
Clare, Research Assistant, Staff Mental Health Champion, University of Greenwich

Who can become a Champion?

We are looking for university staff at any level and any role from our pilot universities to join our network of Champions.

I wish I had known how rewarding it can be (I might have signed up sooner).
Senior Lecturer and Staff Mental Health Champion, University of Greenwich

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What do Champions do?

As a Champion you will raise awareness of mental health and help to make it part of normal conversation at work. How you do this is completely up to you but you will be provided with training and ideas to help you undertake the role. This will include face-to-face activities as well as online ones in light of COVID-19 and remote working.

Activities could include:

- raising awareness and encouraging colleagues to talk about mental health
- signposting colleagues to support
- organising or attending events, meetings and training to talk about valuing mental health at work
- if you have lived experience, sharing this if you feel comfortable to do so
- continuing to raise awareness amongst managers and supporting wider mental health initiatives at the university.

Every activity, no matter how big or small, contributes to our collective goal of tackling stigma.

Some examples of what the Staff Mental Health Champions have done last year include:

- introducing a regular wellbeing check-in to staff meetings
- ensuring a wellbeing section in the staff away day
- set up a journal club to discuss research papers on mental health
- running a mental health quiz
- introducing a 'look after yourself' page on the university website with resources and links to free apps and services
- writing blogs on their personal experiences of mental health
- introducing a communal bookshelf of books on mental health and wellbeing
- setting up a notice board in a tea room to dedicate to mental health events and information
- running a drop-in session on Time to Talk Day in the café where staff could take leaflets or speak to someone from the counselling service.

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Support for the role

As part of the programme you will receive training from Mind which covers:

- mental health and stigma
- the Champion role, including activities and signposting
- managing conversations
- boundaries
- confidentiality and safeguarding
- looking after your wellbeing.

Staff Champion and Peer Supporter roles are currently part of the Mentally Healthy Universities pilot programme. In the first year of the pilot, the training by Mind was rated **9/10** by those who took part, and **98.5 per cent** of participants said they would recommend the training to a colleague.

A local Mind representative will be available throughout the academic year as Champions become more familiar with the role.

Champions will also be provided with an information pack for their line manager to help them speak to them about the role.

The training was really good but actually knowing the Coordinator (from Mind) has been here for handholding and guidance has felt like an important safety-net.

Staff Mental Health Champion, pilot university

Organisational Development/HR are involved in the programme and provide safeguarding policies and support. They will also provide on-going support once Mind's involvement comes to an end in August 2021.

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What is the time commitment?

This is an important role at the universities. We appreciate there may be staff who could struggle to make time. We want the Champion opportunity to work for you, so there is no set time commitment. We just ask that you undertake meaningful anti-stigma activities, being mindful that you only undertake activities that you feel comfortable with. You will be provided with a range of suggested activities which you can tailor to suit your working pattern.

If you need to stop or pause your activities for any reason, you can until you're able to resume them.

You do as much or as little as you can offer,
which is good for fitting it around work and
means that every little helps.

Stephanie, Acting Soft Services Supervisor and Staff
Mental Health Champion, pilot university

What could you gain from being a Champion?

- The satisfaction of helping improve the way colleagues think and act about mental health in the workplace and supporting them with their mental health.
- The opportunity to develop new skills such as organising events and public speaking.
- The chance to attend Mind training and receive support from them this year to help you take forward this role.
- The opportunity to be a part of a community of Champions, sharing knowledge and experience.

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Being a Mental Health Champion is voluntary but extremely rewarding...
Meeting up with other Mental Health Champion is great as we all have a common goal and thinking of ways to spread awareness can be creative and fun.
Muhammed, MSc Programme Manager and Staff Mental Health Champion, LSE

Start your journey: become a Staff Mental Health Champion

Never underestimate the power of a single voice calling for positive change.

If you are motivated to positively and constructively challenge mental health stigma and work at one of our pilot universities we'd love you to join the network of Champions.