

Mental Health at Work Commitment

Guide for the Higher Education Sector

Standard three:

Promote an open culture around mental health

Mentally
Healthy
Universities

Standard three:

Promote an open culture around mental health

This standard has three action points:

- 1 Proactively change the way people think and act about mental health by raising awareness and challenging mental health stigma.
- 2 Empower staff to champion mental health and positively role model in the workplace.
- 3 Encourage open two-way conversations about mental health and highlight the support available at all stages of employment.

Being open and supportive

It's important to be open and supportive in the way we talk about mental health at work. Negative language and unhelpful stereotypes add to the stigma faced by staff and students. By raising awareness of mental health, and encouraging discussion, you can challenge this harmful culture.

Ensuring staff and managers have a good understanding of mental health, and the factors that affect workplace wellbeing, is essential for building a healthy, happy and productive workforce.

You can do this by:

- providing opportunities for staff to learn about how to manage their own mental health through mental health awareness training, workshops on resilience-building and stress reduction techniques
- ensuring staff get information about what support is available from their induction and are reminded of this throughout employment
- sharing tips with staff to help them support their own wellbeing such as [the Five Ways to Wellbeing](#).

Case Study: University of Bath

We run a range of workshops for all staff to help and support with the management of wellbeing. These have now been redesigned, moving from face to face to online Wellbeing Workshops that offer a variety of interactive activities for attendees to promote, reflect on and build wellbeing and resilience. The key aims are:

- developing knowledge of mental health, stress, resilience and wellbeing
- enhancing skills, behaviours and confidence in managing these topics effectively and positively.

Health and Wellbeing Manager, University of Bath

Speaking up not only destigmatises and demystifies mental illness, but it also highlights that those of us with mental illness within universities are just as capable of contributing to higher education as our counterparts who don't have any mental health struggles.

Furaha, University of Leicester

Raising awareness and tackling stigma

There are a number of ways in which your university can look to raise awareness of mental health and tackle mental health stigma and discrimination:

- **help people understand mental health** – find workplace resources on the [Mind, Time to Change](#) and [Mental Health at Work](#) websites
- **embed mental health in your induction and training** – give people information on how best to manage their own mental health and how to support colleagues. Set out what support is available
- **invite an outside speaker on mental health to your workplace** – this could be part of broader diversity, disability or mental health awareness activities and happen on significant dates like World Mental Health Day
- **make the most of internal communications** – raise awareness through blogs, factsheets, tips for line managers, useful web links and FAQs. You can use posters, noticeboards, staff newsletters, magazines and intranet and internet pages to get the message out. Update content regularly and make sure you represent diverse perspectives and experiences
- **recruit Mental Health Champions** – Champions are staff who volunteer to help challenge stigma and change the way staff think and act about mental health. See [page 30](#) for more information
- **share your experience** – if you have a story to share on mental health you can help improve people's understanding and change their attitudes. People follow their leaders' behaviour, so lead by example. Create opportunities for others to do the same
- **support co-workers and colleagues** – put in place, and shape, mental health programmes and policies at work. Play your part and others will follow.

Case Study: University of Sheffield

For University Mental Health Day 2021 we arranged for senior leaders to promote taking time out for 'self-care' and the Five Ways to Wellbeing with suggested activities in the week running up to it. They included free yoga sessions, a mindful drawing class, mindfulness meditation, ideas for connecting with colleagues and the Staff Book Club. We use a Staff Wellbeing Twitter account for daily wellbeing updates and promote awareness days in the wellbeing calendar. We also use the weekly university All Staff Newsletter to highlight activities and signpost to sources of support. We have a set of web pages dedicated to [Mental Wellbeing](#), including [mental health wellbeing resources](#), links to our Employee Assistance Programme, external charities and suggestions for how managers can support the wellbeing of others in the workplace.

HR Manager, Wellbeing, University of Sheffield

Case Study: University of Greenwich

We developed [a video](#) with our senior leadership team talking about how they look after their wellbeing and support their own and other people's mental health. This is included in our staff resilience toolkit on our website.

**Laleh Williams, Head of Organisational and People Development,
University of Greenwich**

Case Study: University of Bath

A dedicated wellbeing area has been developed online to reflect our Health & Wellbeing plan. This enables easy access to a range of information, resources and support that includes: stories and news, workshops and events, online and printable factsheets and resources, coaching, counselling and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) services. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor communicates updates and development activities around mental health via emails and blogs particularly around awareness days such as Time to Talk Day.

Health and Wellbeing Manager, University of Bath

Empower staff to be Mental Health Champions

Passionate staff, at any level of the organisation, often drive cultural change. Empowering staff to take an active role in championing mental health can help create a culture which fosters wellbeing and enables people to come forward if they need support.

The experience of my mental breakdown was challenging. But I have always believed that with any challenge in life comes the opportunity of a learning experience. As I worked through my recovery, to help me make sense of what had happened to me I chose to reflect on it and design a session around it to share with colleagues on World Mental Health Day.

I'm fascinated by the stigma that surrounds mental health and also the gender inequalities in how men respond to discussing it (or even thinking about it). I recorded a one-minute trailer for the session for Twitter, in which I talked about some of the feelings I had experienced. I was amazed at the response it got.

So many male colleagues contacted me to say they recognised what I was talking about and commended me for talking so openly about feelings like crying and feeling guilty and dealing with anxiety and depression. This motivated me massively and gave me confidence in building up to delivering the session.

Chris McLay, Learning and Development Adviser and Staff Mental Health Champion, Leeds Beckett University

Being a Mental Health Champion is voluntary but extremely rewarding... Meeting up with other Mental Health Champions 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

What is a Mental Health Champion?

Mental Health Champions take action in the workplace to raise awareness of mental health problems and challenge mental health stigma. The role is voluntary and undertaken alongside their day-to-day role. Champions make a difference to their workplace culture and to the lives of their colleagues by:

- starting conversations about mental health
- holding activities to make mental health a normal topic of conversation
- helping to dispel myths and stereotypes
- signposting colleagues appropriately to support
- supporting the mental health at work action plan by feeding back on new policies or processes.

As part of the Mentally Healthy Universities Programme our nine pilot universities, in partnership with local Minds, have recruited, trained and supported 291 Staff Mental Health Champions.

You can find some practical steps to set up your own Champion network below.

Recruiting Mental Health Champions

The role should be open to everyone in your university and aim to bring together people with different perspectives and experiences. Mental Health Champions may or may not have personal experience with mental health.

The main criteria to consider when recruiting Mental Health Champions is:

- do they demonstrate passion for tackling the stereotypes, stigma and discrimination associated with people who experience mental health problems in the workplace?
- are they willing to be proactive about normalising mental health at work and signposting to information and support?
- can they fit the role into their current workload?
- have they carefully considered how they will look after their mental health while doing the role?

Please see pages 10 and 11 for a role description and template application form.

Case Study: University of Bristol

Our Champions at the University of Bristol ran a “It’s Okay to” campaign from January 2021 until the Easter break. They focused on building awareness on the theme of overcoming social isolation during the pandemic. Champions ran informal workshops, sharing experiences on juggling family and work life during lockdown and tips for dealing with isolation. Champions also wrote blogs about topics such as home schooling and the Pro Vice Chancellor wrote a blog about it being OK to disconnect from work and reconnect with colleagues through informal social interaction such as ending a meeting early to make time for a cup of tea with a colleague. The campaign had good engagement from staff. I think it started to generate a shift in how people approach online meetings. Across the board we could see people putting this into practice by making default meeting times 50 minutes to take 10 minutes back for yourself, to connect with a colleague, go outside or make a drink.

Head of HR Operations, University of Bristol

Supporting Mental Health Champions

To achieve change, Champions need to be valued, supported and encouraged. This could include support from the communications team and senior leadership in promoting their activities, plus support from facilities and HR with providing meeting rooms and training.

Case Study: University of Sheffield

Our community of Wellbeing Champions continues to grow, we currently have over 60 across all areas of the University. To support them in the role we have designed an internal induction and continuous development programme. We write to them through a monthly newsletter which contains information on key wellbeing initiatives, and share relevant resources and information with them – for example, our EAP (Health Assured) monthly newsletter, webinars and any new university wellbeing resources. We are currently engaging a working group of Champions to establish a Champions Forum/Network where they can share experiences, best practice and continue their development.

HR Manager, Wellbeing, University of Sheffield

Line managers should support Mental Health Champions by:

- checking in about how they're finding balancing the role with their workload
- listening to any suggestions and taking on board any recommendations to improve the wellbeing of your team
- celebrating the fantastic contribution they're making to improve the culture at your university.

We recommend adding associated objectives to a Champion's personal development plan.

Case study: University of Greenwich

We have an active network with over 50 Champions. Champions have shared some of their own lived experience of mental health problems through blogs and in workshop sessions they've run for staff in libraries, local directorates and faculties. The university supports this activity by raising awareness about mental health and the support available for students and staff through Digital Screens, our online portal, email banners and social media.

During lockdown Champions set up a wide range of activities such as virtual coffee mornings so staff could discuss their wellbeing and concerns, as well as learning information about university support. They shared tips for looking after wellbeing while working remotely.

University Mental Health Day also fell during lockdown and was widely supported by the network of Champions through organising and delivering a range of events for staff and students.

**Laleh Williams, Head of Organisational and People Development,
University of Greenwich**

Useful links

- [A guide to supporting your Champions.](#)
- [Take 10 together](#) – MHFA England have put together [this](#) poster full of tips on how to have a conversation about mental health.
- [Mental Health at Work Webinar on Standard Three](#) – featuring Mind and This is Me.
- [This is Me](#) is a mental health initiative that aims to change attitudes towards mental health in the workplace and support organisations to create healthier and more inclusive workplace cultures.
- For universities in Wales the [Time to Change Wales Organisational Pledge](#) is a public declaration that an organisation wants to step up to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination.
- Time to Change offers a wide [range of materials](#) including social media assets, postcards, email signatures and short videos that can support your organisation to raise awareness of the importance of mental health.
- You can also find a [range of activities](#) designed to address mental health stigma in workplaces on the Time to Change website.
- We offer expert training and consultancy to help you put wellbeing into practice. Visit [our website](#) to find out more.
- Our [Guide for Employees](#) offers advice on how staff can manage their own mental health.
- Find more information on [mental health problems](#).
- Find more resources on [workplace mental health](#).



Mental Health Champion role description

What is a Mental Health Champion?

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

Mental Health Champions are not expected to act as counsellors to their colleagues or share their own experiences. This role is not about replacing counselling or therapeutic interventions. It's 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.

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

This role is specifically focused on staff raising awareness among their colleagues.

- A Mental Health Champion is an employee who takes action to raise awareness of mental health problems among 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.
- 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.

What do Champions do?

A Champion raises mental health awareness and helps 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. This will include face-to-face and online activities.

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 among managers and supporting wider mental health initiatives at the university. Every activity, no matter how big or small, contributes to our goal of tackling stigma.

This is an example template designed to be accommodated within our guide. We recommend using an editable version that leaves applicants more space than this form provides.

Name:

Contact number:

Job title:

Email:

Department:

Why are you interested in becoming a Staff Mental Health Champion?

.....

What skills and experiences can you bring to the role of Staff Mental Health Champion?

.....

Are you willing to be proactive about normalising mental health at work and signposting to information on support?

.....

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.

Do you anticipate being able to fit the role into your workload?

.....

Have you considered how you would look after your mental health while doing this role?

.....

What support do you think you'll need as a Staff Mental Health Champion?

.....

Do you have any other roles within the university? How do you see the Champion role interacting with these?

.....

Please add a cross in this box to confirm that you understand that if you are successful we will share your email address with other Staff Mental Health Champions at the university as part of the Champion network.

Thank you for expressing interest in being a Staff Mental Health Champion. We anticipate a number of applications so will be reviewing the responses and ensuring we have a diverse range of staff involved.

We're Mind, the mental health charity.

We're here to make sure anyone with a mental health problem has somewhere to turn for advice and support.

mind.org.uk/universities

We're a registered charity in England (no. 219830)

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