Mental Health at Work Commitment

Guide for the Higher Education Sector

Standard four:

Increase organisational confidence and capability

Mentally Healthy Universities

mind
for better mental health

Goldman Sachs *Gives*

Standard four:
Increase organisational confidence and capability

This standard has four action points:

1. Increase mental health literacy of all staff and provide opportunities for staff to learn about how to manage their own mental health.

2. Ensure all staff are suitably prepared and educated to have effective conversations about mental health, and where to signpost for support, including in inductions for all new staff.

3. Train line managers in spotting and supporting all aspects of mental health in the workplace and include regular refresher training.

4. Support managers to think about staff mental health in all aspects of their role including during staff inductions, one-to-one meetings, team meetings and return-to-work meetings.

We run a virtual induction session which includes speakers from across the university who introduce the services available. There is a five-minute slot specifically about the importance of wellbeing and our university's approach. We highlight key resources and support services available and invite new colleagues to join the Wellbeing and Mental Health network, which has over 450 staff members, so they can keep up with new initiatives.

Catherine Querin, Learning and Organisational Development Adviser, Leeds Beckett University

The role of line managers

Having conversations about mental health

Supporting staff's mental health isn't just a one-off action. Open conversations about mental health and offers of support should happen at every stage of a person's journey with your university. Below we explore some key points when effective conversations between manager and staff should happen:

- **first day** – mental health should be part of conversations from day one. Staff should feel able to have a conversation about mental health and know they will be supported

- **team meetings** – mental health can also be integrated into team meetings. For example, start with a temperature check where you ask everyone to talk about how they are doing, perhaps asking them to rate their mental health from a scale of 1-10. Making them a regular part of meetings gives staff permission to share how they are and feel heard. You could also do a team mental health audit (see standard one).

- **regular one-to-ones** – having a regular time in the diary to check in individually with staff is fundamental to effective people management. Ideally these should take place every four to six weeks. Staff should also be able to request a meeting outside the normal schedule if they need to discuss anything important.

There are several benefits of regular one-to-one meetings:

- boosting staff engagement and building mutual trust

- identifying issues early, so staff can get the support they need

- ensuring staff wellbeing is monitored throughout the organisation

- providing an opportunity for line manager and staff to have two-way conversations and share feedback.

Wellness Action Plans

A Wellness Action Plan is a great tool to promote two-way conversations. It's an easy, practical way of helping you to support your own mental health at work, and for managers, helping you to support the mental health of your team members.

When undertaking Wellness Action Plans, but also meetings such as one-to-ones, ask your team how they can be tailored to suit their needs. For example the University of Bath also runs one-to-ones in 15-minute coaching sessions following feedback on time constraints.

We have also produced a checklist for line managers which you can find on page 34 of this guide.

The Workplace Wellbeing Wheel and individual Wellbeing Action Plans are regularly used as management tools for team and individual meetings. This has helped managers feel more confident in having conversations about mental health and gives permission to staff to share how they are feeling.

Health and Wellbeing Manager, University of Bath

Ensuring staff can get support

As a manager, one of the easiest ways to support staff is to make sure your staff are aware of the help, tools and services available to them. But it's not just about signposting. Actively promoting wellbeing tools, mental health support and local and national services is a way of creating a culture in which these things are OK to talk about.

Remember to consider staff employed by third party contractors who work in your university. We recommend you encourage and support contractors you work with to prioritise the mental wellbeing of staff. For example, you could share resources, knowledge and training courses.

Case study: University of Greenwich

We signposted Wellness Action Plans in appraisals in 2020, and encouraged managers to support staff to consider wellbeing objectives. The appraisal training was led by our Deputy Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer. This helped support the importance of the expectation and messaging around wellbeing.

We recommend staff receive meaningful feedback on their performance as part of their one-to-ones and appraisal meeting. This is so they can consider what they do well and are recognised for their efforts. This also supports personal development for their future.

We suggest managers should attend training on giving and receiving feedback, coaching skills and motivating teams as part of their role and that they ask for feedback from staff at appraisal. Training is offered on our open programme and leadership and management training programmes. These courses cover management communication, style and personal effectiveness.

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

Support and training for managers

Our 2018-19 Workplace Wellbeing Index found that of those who disclosed poor mental health at work, 76 per cent disclosed to their line manager. However, lack of manager understanding can be a barrier to disclosure – less than half (45 per cent) feel their manager understands their problems. That's why it's absolutely vital that line managers get training on mental health.

Training for managers should cover:

• spotting the signs of poor mental health

• awareness of relevant personal issues affecting staff such as illness, bereavement, financial worries or stress-related factors which might be contributing to them struggling to cope in the workplace

• policies in place for dealing with these issues

• how to have conversations about mental health

• signposting to support and offering reasonable adjustments

• having effective return to work conversations

• promoting wellbeing in their team.

> What I have found more problematic is individual line managers' confidence/knowledge of mental health issues and how to put effective support in place. Local line managers need to appreciate that mental health issues are ongoing and that it is important to check in with staff regularly to ensure support is in place to avoid problems rather than only getting involved at the point of crisis.
>
> **University staff member**

Case study: Leeds Beckett University

The People and Organisational Development team have created Wellbeing Conversations – A Manager's Guide. This includes advice on how to spot signs of mental health difficulties and possible triggers. Because we've found that staff appreciate resources which give them tangible structures to follow, this document acts as a step-by-step guide to having a wellbeing conversation. We have also encouraged all managers to focus on wellbeing during appraisals and have produced a question bank of coaching style questions which has been well received. We used a mixture of NHS wellbeing resources and the team's experience as coaches to devise the questions.

We have also signposted Mind's Wellness Action Plan as a resource for discussion during appraisals on our website, in communications to managers and in webinars.

Catherine Querin, Learning and Organisational Development Adviser, Leeds Beckett University

Consider how you will train line managers who are reluctant to talk about mental health. Non-compulsory training only reaches those who are open to talk about it.

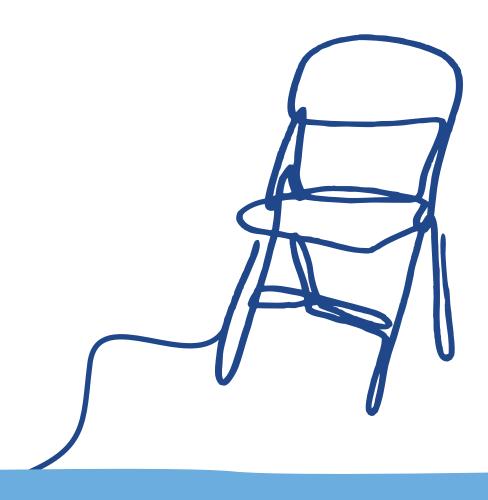Some important things to consider when thinking about training are:

- training shouldn't be a one-off but refreshed regularly so managers are up to date and in line with the latest university policies so they feel confident in supporting people's mental health

- have clear guidelines and policies for managers on managing mental health issues which they can refer to after the training. Encourage managers to role model positive, healthy behaviours

- the University of Bath encourages people to attend by asking key staff to influence people to do the training.

Case study: University of Greenwich

We have a line manager's induction which covers how to support staff wellbeing and managers roles in terms of using our resources, policies and how they can signpost staff that may need additional support by using information on the university wellbeing hub. We have training to support all tiers of line management (five programmes which support those in supervisory roles, up to those in senior management posts) covering greater knowledge for how to support wellbeing through communication, coaching, managing conflict, developing individuals and managing boundaries and resources. Line managers must also complete online mandatory training for managing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Our annual staff survey asks if individuals feel their managers know how to support their wellbeing and we have a comments section for gathering how we can improve this. We feel our training packages are working well as they're being cited as a positive intervention from the annual survey results, with staff reporting that their line managers are flexible and caring.

Laleh Williams, Head of Organisation and People Development, University of Greenwich

Useful links

- Explore a range of toolkits that are useful when planning and delivering mental health support plans for your workforce, these include details on other services you can use.

- Mind's Mental health at work module can be used to support conversations about mental health in your workplace, to inspire your own colleague-led workshops or activities focused on mental health, or to form part of your induction programme for all new staff. It can also act as a refresher for people who have already done mental health training.

- Mind provides a range of training for workplaces including mental health awareness and how to support others.

- This PDF guide from Acas has tips for managers when approaching a conversation about mental health.

- Talking Toolkit – preventing work-related stress: The Health and Safety Executive has produced an easy-to-use Talking Toolkit. It walks you through six specific conversations to have with staff, each on a different theme relating to workplace stress.

- Mental Health at Work Webinar on Standard 4.

- Mental Health at Work have produced an article on supporting staff returning to work after long-term leave.

- The Mind Infoline provides support on managing mental health problems.

- Local Minds across the country can help source advice and support. Use our online tool to find your local Mind for more information.

Agenda for one-to-one meetings

One-to-ones aren't just about checking progress. They should create a space to understand the person's wellbeing and how this may relate to their work. Putting these points into an agenda ensures they consistently happen.

- Encourage managers to ask about their line report's wellbeing and workload.

- Regularly review what's gone well and why, what's not gone so well, and any actions needed. Ensure managers are providing positive and constructive feedback.

- Get feedback on your management and communication style.

- Support the employee to look ahead to what's coming up before the next one-to-one. This will enable you to plan for this together and put in place any support that you both anticipate may be needed.

- Offer personal development opportunities, which can boost people's wellbeing. This could include opportunities to shadow other staff or do formal training.

- Encourage staff to take regular breaks and rest to maintain mental health and avoid burnout. Working longer or shorter hours than usual may be a sign that someone needs support.

- Refer to their Wellness Action Plan.

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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