

# Mental Health at Work Commitment

## Guide for the Higher Education Sector

Standard five:

Provide mental health tools and support

Mentally  
Healthy  
Universities

# Standard five:

## Provide mental health tools and support

This standard has three action points:

- 1 Raise awareness of the resources and tools available, including [Mental Health at Work](#).
- 2 Ensure provision of tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help, including but not limited to digital support, occupational health, employee assistance programmes, the NHS.
- 3 Provide targeted support around key contributors of poor mental health, for example financial wellbeing.

### Identifying triggers and tailored support

Some staff may need support from outside mental health services or other practical support. Find out more on page 51 of our [guide](#).

Identifying potential triggers and putting in place tailored support for staff is essential to creating a safe and secure working environment.

Some triggers might include:

- financial insecurity
- trauma
- relationship breakdown
- bereavement
- organisational change
- having children
- physical safety risks
- bullying.

### Case study: University of Sheffield

We have run financial wellbeing seminars which have proven popular with staff. Feedback has been generally positive with staff reporting an overall increase in knowledge post-delivery. To supplement these specific sessions we have also improved our signposting to available financial wellbeing resources during the pandemic including those available via the EAP.

**HR Manager, Wellbeing, University of Sheffield**

## Providing support for mental health

It is important to review and assess mental health and wellbeing support tools. Ineffective support can make a staff situation worse and, in some cases, having no support at all is less detrimental than having ineffective support. Our 2018-19 [Workplace Wellbeing Index](#) found that 17 per cent of those with ineffective support said their situation got worse, compared to 5 per cent of those who had no support at all.

Organisations should collect data and report on how often support tools are accessed by staff, as well as requesting this information from suppliers e.g. your Employee Assistance Provider. You should also seek feedback from staff as to how easily accessible, effective and well publicised your support tools are through regular staff surveys.

It's also important to support any contractors you work with to prioritise the mental health of their staff by sharing resources, knowledge, and training courses.

**Targeted support:** It's important to consider and include services which cater specifically for different groups of people, for example staff from Black and ethnic minorities or staff who identify as LGBTQI+. Standard support services might not cater to all specific needs in different communities.

**Online support:** Have a look at our guide for [supporting staff through Coronavirus](#).

**Employee Assistance Programmes:** It's important to highlight to staff that EAP services are confidential. You could also promote case studies from those who have used the support (asking people's permission, or making sure they remain anonymous).

**Information in one place:** Have a section on the intranet with all the support tools listed so they're all in one place including external support signposting. The information should be easy to find and accessible.

**Promotion:** Managers and staff should know where they can get support, and where to signpost colleagues and students. This should be included in induction training and frequently communicated to all staff.

### Case study: University of Bristol

We know that promoting the support available just through our university website is not enough. We ran two mental health road shows in 2019 where we showcased the support we provide to staff and brought in external support providers running talks to highlight what services they provide and build awareness of support available. This year due to Covid we ran a virtual festival instead. This worked really well as it allowed us to do a programme of events across a whole week which we found was easier for people to attend rather than having an all-day event in one place.

**Alison Wall, Head of HR Operations, University of Bristol**

## Case study: University of Greenwich

It's really important to have regular signposting of the support services available with consistent messaging around mental health and wellbeing so people recognise the support available and see it as a normal service offer.

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

## Case study: University of Sheffield

To date the awareness and utilisation of our EAP with Health Assured has not been quite what we would have liked. It came to our awareness that a significant proportion of staff were not aware that the EAP was the university-endorsed route to professional counselling for staff or how to go about accessing it when it was needed. Since this time, we have made messages about Health Assured more prominent on our staff wellbeing pages. We have promoted the Health Assured App 'My Healthy Advantage' to help increase accessibility for those staff who do not have access to PCs in their roles.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) has a strong presence in Sheffield and we worked with them to improve our overall signposting to their services. We piloted a Sheffield IAPT 'Improving Wellbeing in the Covid-19 pandemic' webinar with HR colleagues. As an outcome of the pilot we are currently working with IAPT to develop an informative introduction to IAPT Services that we can share with all staff. We are also promoting Sheffield IAPT's new BBC Sounds Podcasts on various mental health-related themes.

**HR Manager, Wellbeing, University of Sheffield**

## Case study: University of Greenwich

During the pandemic the university completed comprehensive equality impact assessments. We found that BAME employees were more affected and felt isolated during the pandemic, which fed into our ongoing work around equality, diversity and inclusion and wellbeing. We shared information with the Chair of the BAME staff network and sought relevant information to share within the university's wellbeing hub.

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

## Mental Health Peer Support

Peer support is about the mutually beneficial relationships that build as people share their own experiences to help and support each other.

Mental Health Peer Supporters are university staff with personal experience of poor mental health or a mental health problem, who provide support to their colleagues on a voluntary basis alongside their day-to-day roles.

They're not expected to be counsellors, or replace therapeutic interventions. Their role is about understanding another person's situation through shared experiences. Peer support can take the form of peer support groups, one-to-one support or be online.

As part of the Mentally Healthy University programme the nine pilot universities, in partnership with local Minds, have recruited, trained and supported over 120 Peer Supporters. Below are practical steps to support you in setting up your own Peer Supporter network and practical examples from universities.

### Case study: University of Greenwich

What's so great about this scheme is it allows people to get in contact with Mental Health Peer Supporters to get that support in work, whether it be just a friendly ear to offload or someone who can advise a little on where that person can get additional help and support. Sometimes just having someone tell you it's OK to feel as you do and listen is enough. A little can make a big difference.

Clare, Research Assistant, University of Greenwich

### Benefits of peer support

[Mind's Side by Side programme](#) is the largest ever UK study of peer support in the community. It found that as people engaged with more peer support, their wellbeing, hope for the future, connections to others and self-efficacy (feeling like they can make positive changes to their own situation) improved.

**I think it's important because it eases loneliness so if you're in work and you're struggling with something and you don't feel you can go to your line manager... it's a really useful thing to be able to talk to other colleagues. [There's] relief that you're not the only one that feels like that.**

Suzanne, University of Worcester

## Recruiting Peer Supporters

The main criteria to consider when recruiting Mental Health Peer Supporters are:

- do they have lived experience of a mental health problem or experienced poor mental health?
- do they demonstrate passion for providing peer support to their colleagues?
- have they demonstrated how they will fit the role within their current workload?
- have they carefully considered how they will look after their mental health while doing the role?
- are they clear that this role is focused on supporting their colleagues, not students?
- have you recruited a range of peer supporters at different levels of the organisation? It is important that all members of staff, including those in senior leader positions, feel they can access this service.

Please see [page 9](#) for a template application form for recruiting Mental Health Peer Supporters.

### Supporting Mental Health Peer Supporters

Peer support should be led by staff for staff, but senior leadership and the university have roles too. To achieve change, Peer Supporters need to be valued, supported and encouraged. This could include support from the communications team and senior leadership in promoting their role as well as support from facilities and HR with providing meeting rooms and training. HR should also ensure the Peer Supporters are kept up to date with university signposting information and are trained in the university's safeguarding policy as well as any policies around General Data Protection Regulation.

Managers are not expected to provide expertise or supervision around the role. But they should support Mental Health Peer Supporters by:

- checking in about how they're balancing the role with their workload
- speaking to them about the role and listening to any suggestions they make
- working with them to support good mental wellbeing for them and the team. For example by encouraging them and others to complete a Wellness Action Plan
- celebrating the fantastic contribution they're making to supporting colleagues at your university

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

## Case study:

### University of the West of England Bristol

At the University of the West of England Bristol a peer support staff network was introduced for staff by staff as a result of their Time to Change Employer Pledge action plan. Originally peer support group meetings were set up and run by two staff members. The group meets once a month with the date and time varying to ensure it is as accessible for as many colleagues as possible. The meetings provide a safe and confidential space where colleagues can share their experiences and support one another. They did start with an agenda but have found that staff preferred a more informal approach.

Since those first meetings, network colleagues have grown in confidence and many have developed their own individual peer support contacts, often within their own departments. The network now has over 100 members. Staff at the university are allocated 15 hours a year to attend staff network groups so colleagues can make time for the peer support group. They also offer one-to-one peer support called 'coffee connections' which has worked well. Each month, those who are interested put their names forward and are paired off with another colleague to go for coffee. Successful 'connections' have been carried forward into the workplace expanding future peer support options.

Peer support for me has been the key ingredient for my mental wellbeing. [It's the] capacity to go in and say to one of my colleagues that I'm having a difficult time at the moment – can we have a chat over lunch or coffee? That was enough to keep me on the straight and narrow. Whereas in the past I would have just kept going against it, not talking about it, not sharing it, often ending up with quite long-term sickness absence.

**Sue, Peer Supporter, University of the West of England Bristol**

## Useful links

- This [Mental Health at Work](#) website can help you find the right resources for your university.
- [Mental Health at Work Webinar on Standard 5](#) – featuring Mind and Mental Health at Work.
- [Education Support](#) – Education Support is a UK charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of education staff in schools, colleges and universities. They offer a free support and counselling helpline for staff and also provide an Employee Assistance Programme for education institutes across the UK.
- [Developing peer support in the community: a toolkit](#) – This toolkit was developed in 2017 to gather learning from our Side by Side project.
- [Remote and online peer support: A Resource for Peer Support Groups and Organisations](#) – This guide brings together experiences of people working online following Covid-19.
- Mind has more information on [peer support](#).





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 Peer Supporter?

.....

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

.....

**We want the Peer Supporter opportunity to work for you, so there is no set time commitment. But we ask that you reflect on the time you could give to this role before applying.**

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 Peer Supporter?

.....

Do you have any other roles within the university? How do you see the Peer Supporter 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 Peer Supporters at the university as part of the Peer Support network.

Thank you for expressing interest in being a Staff Mental Health Peer Supporter. 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](http://mind.org.uk/universities)

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

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