

# Mental Health at Work Commitment

Guide for the Higher Education Sector:  
Summary for senior leaders

Mentally  
Healthy  
Universities

## Senior leaders play a key role in creating a mentally healthy university.

Over the last year we've faced a global pandemic, and it goes without saying that this has been a challenging time for both university students and staff. However, we know that strategic leadership and support from the top will create a culture based on openness and staff will be supported to thrive.

## There is a clear need to support university staff with their mental health:

- Education Support (2019) found one in three employees in higher education had experienced a mental health problem (higher than the average working population where one in six British workers are affected by mental health problems each year).
- Research by the University and College Union of over 12,000 members shows there's been a decline in the mental health of university staff in the last year:
  - 85 per cent of respondents reported feeling more stressed as a result of the crisis.
  - 75 per cent of those with long-term mental health issues said they had been exacerbated by the pandemic, but 23 per cent of all respondents said their employer had not signposted to any support for mental health issues.

Alongside wanting staff to be well and healthy, **there is also a clear business case for supporting staff:**

- The cost of poor mental health per employee in the education sector is between £1,203 and £1,585 per year. That is per employee regardless of whether they have a mental health problem. So if you employ 2,000 staff, you are looking at a cost of £2,406,000 a year.
- The return on investment for workplace mental health support is overwhelmingly positive. Every £1 spent on workplace wellbeing returns an investment of £5 on average. Organisation-wide culture change and awareness-raising can provide a return on investment of £5 for every £1 invested.

## So how can you ensure your staff are fully supported?

Sign and champion the Mental Health at Work Commitment in your university. The [Mental Health at Work Commitment](#) is a simple framework based on the strong evidence-based [Thriving at Work](#) standards. The Commitment will support you to address the 'Work' domain (staff wellbeing and development recommendations) of the whole university approach set out in [Student Minds' University Mental Health Charter](#) and [Universities UK's Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities](#).

It includes six standards for how organisations can better support employees' mental health:

### 1 Prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity

As a senior leader you can take high-profile action by driving change and influencing the mental health agenda. Actively aim to develop the mental health awareness of your staff and get behind university-wide mental health campaigns.

#### Take action:

- make sure the Vice Chancellor endorses your mental health plan and regularly shares mental health awareness information and support to all staff
- recruit other senior leaders across your organisation to be involved in mental health and wellbeing initiatives and events, both internally and externally with key people and other universities.

### 2 Ensure work design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes

You're responsible for your employees. So ensure you have effective systems and processes in place to support all staff while they're at your university. Ensure that the campus promotes healthy lifestyle behaviours, and critically assess and mitigate any risks to employee mental health.

#### Take action:

- role model healthy workplace behaviours like working sensible hours, taking breaks and annual leave
- ensure there's a message on mental health from the Vice Chancellor and other senior leaders in staff induction materials. Provide information about your university's approach to mental health and wellbeing and signpost to relevant information, tools and support.

### 3 Promote an open culture around mental health

Staff take cues from how their leaders behave. It can have a huge impact when the Vice Chancellor, and other senior leaders, have open conversations about mental health. So actively encourage these conversations and raise awareness of the support available.

#### Take action:

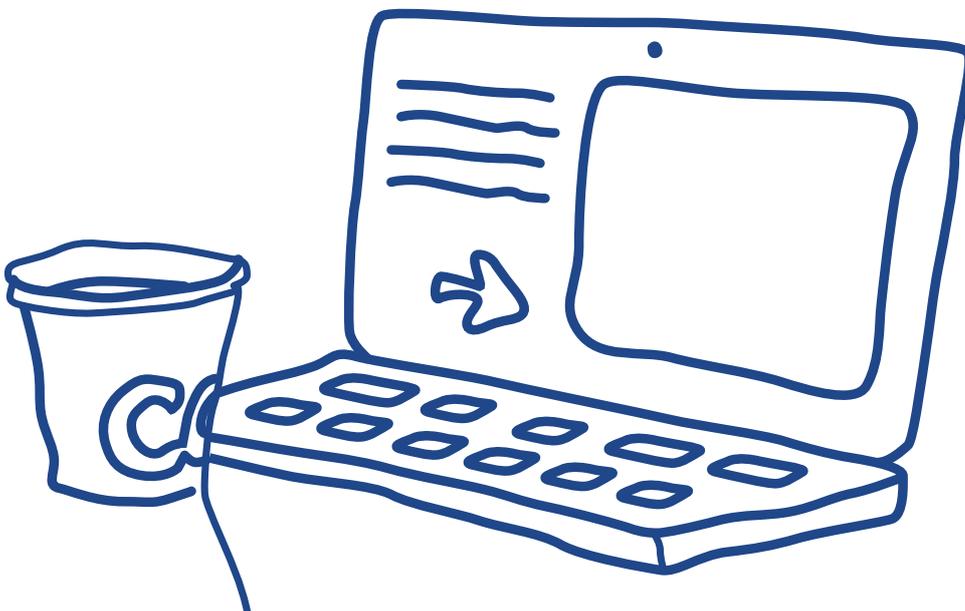
- be open with your staff about mental health, sharing what you do to look after your wellbeing. Encourage wellbeing check-ins at both internal and external meetings
- attend mental health events to show your commitment to the agenda.

### 4 Increase organisational confidence and capability

Your university's mental health plan should detail how you support managers. As a senior leader you should promote effective people management.

#### Take action:

- send regular communications to managers and share specific resources and tools to support managers to develop. For example, you could include a wellbeing section in internal newsletters
- offer a range of mental health training for line managers to raise awareness and develop their skills and confidence to support their teams and staff.



## 5 Provide mental health tools and support

Standing by people when they experience a mental health problem is not only about retaining talented staff. It also sends a message about your university's values. All employees need to see that their university lives its values and treats its people well. We all struggle at some point, so it's important you provide effective mental health support.

### Take action:

- regularly promote the support available including your Employee Assistance Programme. Speak about a time you may have accessed support
- ensure that support is accessible for staff working remotely, or during periods when they don't need to be on campus. Recognise remote staff and teams in communications, acknowledging the specific pressures they may experience.

## 6 Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting

Developing a clear picture of the mental health of your university will help you understand what's affecting your staff and how well you're supporting them. Engage with external stakeholders and take part in benchmarking initiatives.

### Take action:

- include your commitment to mental health and wellbeing in your university prospectus and other publications
- share best practice by participating in Higher Education conferences and events on mental health
- [take part in Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index](#). It will help you find out where you're doing well and where you could improve your approach to mental health in the workplace. It can also help you gain public recognition for what you're doing and find out where you benchmark in comparison to peers and other organisations.

## 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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