

Final Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

Mentally
Healthy
Universities

Executive Summary

Background

In 2019, Mind introduced the Mentally Healthy Universities Programme, supported by Goldman Sachs Gives, in response to an increasing need to improve the mental health and wellbeing support provided to both students and staff at university. The pilot programme was delivered in partnership with nine universities in England. It aimed to provide support and specialist training to equip these communities with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support their own mental health and that of others.

The programme aimed to achieve five goals:

- **Goal 1:** Ensure students are equipped to manage their mental health and thrive at university.
- **Goal 2:** Ensure students have the knowledge and tools to manage their mental health and wellbeing.
- **Goal 3:** Ensure students are prepared to manage their mental health in future employment.
- **Goal 4:** Reduce stigma and improve peer support for university staff.
- **Goal 5:** Make positive changes to the way universities think and act about mental health.

To achieve these five goals, a range of workshops for student and staff were delivered:

- Wellbeing Essentials sessions for students.
- Tools and Techniques for Mental Health: a four-week resilience-building intervention for students.
- Looking After Your Mental Health at Work sessions for students.

- A training course and ongoing support for new Staff Mental Health Champions: volunteers whose role is to reduce stigma and raise awareness of mental health.
- A training course and ongoing support for new Staff Mental Health Peer Supporters, whose volunteer role is to provide peer support to their colleagues in their workplace.

We also worked with the pilot universities to support them to embed the Mental Health at Work Commitment. The Commitment is a simple framework with a set of actions for employers to improve and support the mental health of their staff. Practical guidance (5) about implementing the Commitment was developed for the wider sector based on the learnings from the pilot universities.

To develop the programme we built on learning from previous targeted mental health and workplace wellbeing programmes, as well as our extensive catalogue of existing mental health training. University students and staff were consulted to help shape the programme and ensure it has the best chance of meeting their needs.

Over 2,500
students attended our training
courses over the two years.

Over 450
Staff Mental Health Champions and
Peer Supporters were recruited
and trained.

Impact of coronavirus

Soon after the launch of the programme in September 2019, the coronavirus pandemic and social distancing restrictions meant adapting from a predominantly in-person delivery model to going entirely remote. This presented challenges, but also opportunities to learn and be responsive to the mental health challenges faced by students and staff due to the pandemic.

Programme evaluation

Both years of the programme pilot were evaluated using mixed methods. These included

short evaluation forms after each session or course, process interviews with local Mind staff and university leads and a small number of interviews with staff and students in year one who took part in the sessions. The evaluation aimed to demonstrate the impact that engagement with the programme had on student and staff's mental health and wellbeing. Findings from the evaluation will be used to inform future work with 16-25 year olds, as well as contributing to sector-wide knowledge of what effective mental health and wellbeing support looks like in higher education institutions.

Key findings

The majority of students who engaged with the programme evaluation were UK/EU students (86 per cent) who were female (73 per cent), white (88 per cent), aged 16-24 (77 per cent) with personal experience of mental health problems (42 per cent). For staff, the majority were administrative (35 per cent) or academic (27 per cent) staff who were female (78 per cent), white (88 per cent), with a broad age range, and with personal experience of mental health problems (45 per cent).

Evaluation across both years of the pilot showed that students and staff had a positive experience of the Mentally Healthy Universities Programme, reporting increases in confidence, understanding and awareness across all five of the workshops offered.

Key findings included:

Nearly 90 per cent

(89 per cent, n=710) of students had a better understanding of mental health problems and wellbeing after attending our Wellbeing Essentials course. The majority of attendees (93 per cent, n=658) said they would recommend the course to a friend.

Over 90 per cent

(93 per cent, n=258) of students who took part in our 'Tools and Techniques to Manage your Mental Health' course said they were more confident looking after their mental health. The majority of attendees (95 per cent, n=261) said they would recommend the course to a friend.

Over 90 per cent

(91 per cent, n=217) of students were more aware of where to seek help for mental health in the workplace after taking part in our Looking After Your Mental Health at Work course. The majority of attendees (91 per cent, n=215) said they would recommend the course to a friend.

Nearly 90 per cent

(87 per cent, n=92) of staff felt confident tackling mental health stigma in the workplace after attending the Mental Health Champions course, and 97 per cent (n=47) of staff reported they knew more about peer support after attending the Staff Mental Health Peer Supporters course. The majority of attendees of both courses (93 per cent) said they would recommend the training to colleagues.

In course feedback, students and Staff Mental Health Champions told us how helpful they found the non-judgemental and inclusive environment created in the training. This provided opportunities to connect with others and share lived experience of mental health problems. The practical and interactive activities within the courses were well received, and the knowledgeable and supportive course trainers were praised. Attendees also provided useful feedback on how improvements can be made to future versions of the programme. Key suggestions included reducing the length of sessions to better align with student timetables, tailoring the content to be more specific to the context of individual universities, and including more practical activities within the courses.

“As someone who has not really openly admitted to struggling in the past, the course provided a relaxed, honest space to talk about my problems with a group of likeminded individuals.”

Student attendee, Looking After Your Mental Health at Work course

Process interviews with local Mind Coordinator and University Leads focused on the legacy and sustainability of the programme, and identified learning to improve delivery of future versions.

Key suggestions included:

- increasing the flexibility to tailor programme content to the needs of different institutions’ staff and students
- increasing resource and capacity for programme stakeholders
- ensuring co-production with staff and students at all stages of programme design and development
- improving integration of programme delivery with universities’ existing wellbeing offer and services.

Summary of recommendations

The following recommendations are presented to inform Mind’s future work with 16-25 year olds, as well as the sector and government’s decision making on mental health and wellbeing support within higher education institutions.

Recommendations for Mind:

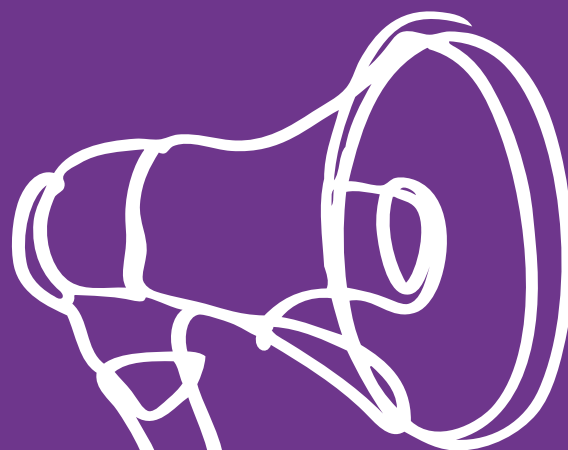
- 1 Offer a blended model of delivery in future programmes** – Use a blended model of remote and in-person support to retain the accessibility and flexibility benefits of remote delivery while gaining the benefits of in-person learning.
- 2 Prioritise engagement from marginalised communities** – Prioritise increasing engagement from participants from lower socioeconomic groups and racialised communities. Key enablers for this will be effective partnership working with specialist community organisations and ensuring programmes of activity are co-produced with these communities.
- 3 Ensure future programmes of activity are adequately funded and resourced** – This will ensure sufficient capacity across all delivery partners, especially for stakeholders within higher education institutions where high workloads mean external work is often deprioritised when capacity is low.
- 4 Prioritise and improve co-production processes with intended beneficiaries for future programmes** – Co-production with students and staff should be implemented in all stages of service design and development to ensure that programmes are rooted in lived experience and reflect the needs and preferences of those accessing them.
- 5 Programme delivery to be two years as a minimum** – When agreeing programme length with funders, request a minimum of two years to enable greater culture change within institutions.
- 6 Continuous programme improvement** – Feedback from students, staff, local Mind Coordinators and University Leads outlined in this report should also be used to inform future work.

Recommendations for the higher education sector:

- 1 Prioritise supporting staff with their mental health** – Universities should [sign the Mental Health at Work Commitment](#) and [embed the six standards within their institution](#).
- 2 Invest in providing training and tools for students** – Mental health training, information and support should be provided throughout students' university experience, not just at the start.
- 3 Key stakeholders from universities should be identified and informed about their role from the beginning of programmes** – All key stakeholders within higher education settings should be involved when applying to be involved in programmes and from the outset of programme set up. This should include ensuring programmes align with existing mental health and wellbeing services, and that clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are set.
- 4 Implement Peer Supporter and Mental Health Champion roles** – Support should be provided by higher education institutions to staff to carry out these roles.
- 5 Senior leadership prioritise mental health and support future initiatives** – Higher education settings should encourage senior management to prioritise the mental health of their staff and students. Take a look at our [guide for senior leaders](#).
- 6 Take a whole university approach** – Apply for [Student Minds' University Mental Health Charter](#) and take forward [Universities UK's Stepchange: mentally healthy universities](#).
- 7 Review and address the systematic causes of mental health problems for students and staff** – Higher education institutions should review and address the causes of mental health problems within their specific demographic of students and staff.

Recommendations for government and research institutions:

- 1** Ensure mental health and wellbeing in the education system is prioritised and sufficient funding is allocated for support services, training and resources. This includes staff as well as students.
- 2** Invest in research on best practise approaches to support the mental health needs of students from a range of backgrounds. This should include international students, students from racialised communities, LGBTQ+ students, disabled students and those with caring responsibilities.
- 3** Invest in research on the causes of poor mental health for university staff, including those from diverse backgrounds to inform future work.



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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