



Mental health in the workplace



The University of Bristol is committed to creating and sustaining a positive and supportive working and learning environment in which all staff are equally valued and respected, all students are able to thrive academically and everyone can reach their full potential.

It is estimated that one in four of us will experience mental health difficulties at some point during our lives. Mental health problems can affect people of any age, gender, ethnicity or social group. Examples of the most prevalent mental health difficulties facing people of working age include:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Bi-polar affective disorder (manic depression)
- Eating disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Obsessive compulsive disorders (OCD)

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) protects disabled people – including those with ‘unseen’ disabilities such as mental illness – from unlawful discrimination. Consideration should therefore be given to reasonable adjustments that might be made to support staff with mental health difficulties in the workplace. Any adjustments should be made in collaboration with the disabled person, as they are best placed to

know what might work for them, although ultimately the decision as to what can realistically be provided rests with managers. People with mental health difficulties are not all the same, and so any adjustments required will vary from person to person.

Many people are able to control their condition with medication or other therapeutic interventions. However, the stigma that is attached to mental illness can add greatly to the distress and isolation felt by those affected, and it can also stop them from asking for help.

My Story*

I have suffered from depression/ anxiety for most of my adult life. I have spent several years on and off anti-depressant medication and have been on my current anti-depressants for eight years. The nature of depression means that you may fear you will encounter prejudice if you choose to declare that you suffer from it, not least in a work situation. This pressure understandably makes people reluctant to disclose. I have chosen to be open about it – which is why I wanted to write this article – as I feel that those of us

with depression shouldn't be forced to lie or conceal the reason for their illness by pretending it's something else. My view is that if other people don't like it, that's their problem – not mine. That said, I acknowledge that in being open I may suffer from negative judgements.

At times when I have been off work for long periods, it was really good to have the support of the Occupational Health Service. They were a useful sounding board and support to me in dealing with the situation, and were in effect the link between myself and the University in dealing with my illness and absence from, and return to, work. I have previously also benefited from counselling at the Staff Counselling Service here at the University.

My managers understand that I suffer from depression and I have been fortunate in always being able to talk to my line manager if I need to. That said, the fact that I suffer from low self-confidence over my work means that I have not always performed to the best of my ability, and it has been hard to hear criticism about that. My low self-confidence also means that I feel fear regularly at work – not because of other people, but because I am afraid that I will not be able to perform. But I believe I have now become

stronger and more able to ask for help, not just in a personal sense but also in taking advantage of the services that the University provides. I have already mentioned Staff Counselling and

Occupational Health. There are also the Dignity at Work Advisers, to whom you can offload if you are feeling intimidated at work. Staff Development offer a myriad of courses on a whole range of subjects - such as Assertiveness, Confidence Building and Interpersonal Skills – some of which may be valuable to those of us suffering from depression or similar conditions.

The experience of depression is different for everyone. It has even been different for me over the course of my life. A lot of my own depression is, I feel, a reaction to circumstances, such as stress at work. For example, if I have had an interaction with someone which could have gone better, I would ruminate about it and regret it, perhaps playing it over and over again in my mind. It is also true that I am probably more susceptible to depression because I am naturally over-sensitive. I would love to be strong. I have a picture in my mind of myself being like a young plant which is easily damaged by the wind – alongside lots of other older, sturdier plants which withstand the weather! But I do believe that I am becoming stronger and feel that, with my current counsellor, I am definitely on an upward trajectory and moving towards emotional wholeness and 'light at the end of the tunnel'.

So what I am saying to anyone reading this is that there is help and support available – you just need to ask for it.

*** This story was kindly provided by a member of staff.**

SUPPORT SERVICES AT THE UNIVERSITY

For individual members of staff who may be/are experiencing mental ill health:

Staff Counselling Service

The Staff Counselling Service offers confidential counselling and referral to other sources of support in the workplace.

8 Osborne Villas, Bristol, BS2 8BP
T: Internal 45704 or External 0117 954 5704 (confidential 24 hours answer machine) or Office number 0117 930 0261 (external)
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffcounselling/>

Personnel Managers

Your Personnel Manager can provide you with information and support on issues connected to mental health in the workplace.

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/personnel/facteam_contacts.html

Staff Development

Staff Development offers many high quality training courses and events that may be helpful, such as Good Mental Health at Work.

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/>

Occupational Health Service

Occupational Health provides advice and support to the individual in work or during sickness absence and can also act as a link between the individual,

their manager and their GP. Referrals will normally be arranged through your Personnel Manager, who will be able to provide you with more information regarding the process for this.

Hampton House Health Centre
St Michael's Hill, Bristol, BS6 6AU
T: 0117 330 2572 F: 0117 330 2699
<http://www.bris.ac.uk/safety/health>

Sport, Exercise and Health

The Disabled Staff Forum meets periodically to discuss common issues, share experiences and comment on University policy and practice.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sport/>

Disabled Staff Forum

Being physically active, eating well and having a healthy lifestyle has a positive effect on your mental as well as physical health. You will feel fitter, energised and more confident as you enjoy life and face the challenges it can bring. Physical activity is recognised as a treatment for mild to moderate depression, a great way to reduce stress and a simple way to improve your quality of life and mental wellbeing.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/disability/disabledstaffforum/>

Trades Union Representative

Your union representative will be able to offer confidential advice and support (on issues such as DDA rights, university practices and procedures) and if necessary active representation in your dealings with the University.

Guidelines on the avoidance and management of work-related stress

The University has developed guidelines to support members of staff who are experiencing work-related stress through recognition and appropriate management.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/mhealth/staffmhealth/staffmhealthpolicy/smhindividguid.doc>

The Positive Working Environment

website describes a number of different services that are available to help address issues that you may face at some time during your career at Bristol. These may be issues of career direction, personal problems, workplace conflict or perhaps stress.

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/pwe/supporting.html>

FOR MANAGERS SUPPORTING STAFF WHO MAY BE/ARE EXPERIENCING MENTAL ILL HEALTH:

Personnel Managers

Your Personnel Manager can advise you in supporting staff with mental health difficulties in the workplace.

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/personnel/facteam_contacts.html

Staff Development: Management Briefings

The Diversity Trainer delivers a series of breakfast and lunchtime management briefings on many issues connected to equality and diversity, such as the

practicalities of managing mental health in the workplace.

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/handbook/leaders-managers/blm-briefings.html>

Equality and Diversity Team

The Equality and Diversity Team can advise you on how best to support your staff and also on what might constitute a reasonable adjustment under the DDA.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/contact.html>

Staff Counselling Service

The Staff Counselling Team can be consulted about interpersonal problems and team dynamics.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffcounselling/>

Occupational Health Service

Occupational Health can advise on the reasonable adjustments that managers may need to consider to support individual members of staff. The Service can also advise on return-to-work programmes, fitness to work and medical retirement.

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/safety/health>

Guidelines on the avoidance and management of work-related stress

The University has developed guidelines for managers who find themselves supporting colleagues suffering from work-related stress.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/mhealth/staffmhealth/staffmhealthpolicy/smhguidmgrs.doc>