

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Our Staff Strategy

December 2018

Introduction from the Vice-Chancellor and President

**Professor Hugh Brady,
14 December 2018**



Nationally, and indeed globally, there is increasing concern about mental health, and the growing pressures people face living, working and studying in today's world. Our absolute priority at Bristol is to work with our staff and students to promote good mental health and wellbeing, and to support staff and students who need help. I have established a university taskforce to co-ordinate these efforts and have put in place an expert advisory panel of national and international experts to guide us on best practice.

Just as physical fitness helps our bodies to stay strong, mental fitness helps us to achieve and sustain a state of good mental health. When we are mentally healthy, we enjoy our life and environment and the people in it, and can be creative or learn new things. We are better able to cope with difficult times in our personal and professional lives. We feel the sadness and anger that can come with personal problems or difficult work events, but in time we are able to get on with, and enjoy, our lives once again. Nurturing our mental health can also help us combat or prevent the mental health problems that are sometimes associated with a physical illness. In some cases, it can prevent the onset or relapse of a physical illness. Managing stress well, for instance, can have a positive impact on heart disease.

Support for staff experiencing mental health difficulties is particularly important given the rise in the number of people affected by a mental health condition. Doing all we can to prevent circumstances which may lead to increased stressors and mental health problems, as well as

managing the work environment more widely to support a reduction in the risk of exacerbating any existing conditions, is an essential part of every leader's role. The University will also support staff to take a proactive approach towards enhancing their own health and wellbeing.

Simply put: at our University, mental health is everybody's responsibility.

The challenges of mental health are not ones we can address alone. We already work closely with the City of Bristol, the University of the West of England (UWE), Public Health England and the local NHS, the Samaritans and other third-sector groups. We have signed the national Time to Change pledge on mental health and will also draw on the expertise of our researchers to support our new mental health and wellbeing strategies.

The steps we are taking are part of a journey that will evolve over time. New activities and initiatives will emerge as we learn from our work here at Bristol, and as all parts of our society understand more about these complex challenges. Working together with staff and students, I believe we can build an environment on our campuses where everyone can thrive, and where all aspects of wellbeing are reflected in every facet of the University of Bristol experience.

University of Bristol Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Vision

The World Health Organisation states that mental health is a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to his or her community.

At Bristol we are placing wellbeing at the heart of our University, as it impacts on how we all feel and our ability to function. We aim to equip our staff and students with the understanding, skills and experiences to lead satisfying, worthwhile and happy lives. We are taking an institution-wide approach to mental health and wellbeing to provide the best possible experience for all our staff and students. We are committed to mental health permeating every aspect of the University culture and experience and it being part of the language of education.

Our approach will reflect and foster the diversity of the staff and student community at the University of Bristol. We acknowledge that mental health interconnects with all aspects of working life and that every staff member will experience mental health differently. Working together, we can build an environment where our staff and students can thrive, and where all aspects of mental health and wellbeing are supported in every facet of the University of Bristol experience.

Aims

We will:

- expect everyone in the whole University community to support staff and student mental health and wellbeing;
- expect staff and student mental health and wellbeing to be a strategic priority for leaders across the University;
- expect mental health and wellbeing to be everybody's responsibility in our University;
- continue to review the University environment and culture to ensure that it impacts more positively on staff mental health and wellbeing;
- work proactively in partnership with academic schools and professional services divisions to promote improved mental health and wellbeing;
- deliver effective support for staff and managers that is easy to access and supports a wide range of staff needs;
- create an environment that aims to further reduce the stigma associated with mental health and promote positive mental health and wellbeing within the University;
- use data and research effectively to provide support for mental health and wellbeing, helping us to monitor trends and plan improvements.

Background context

One in four people will experience a mental health problem in their lifetime. At any one point, one in six of the working age population will be suffering from a mental health condition. Last year, stress accounted for 43% of all working days lost in the UK due to ill health and for 34% of all work-related ill health cases, yet 95% of employees cited a reason other than workplace stress for their absence owing to stigma.

Young people's mental health is one of the most challenging public health issues of our time: around three-quarters of adults with a mental illness first experience symptoms before the age of 25. Here at Bristol, young people make up 13% of our workforce.

We know that staff in our University are representative of this national picture. Our Staff Counselling Service has seen a significant rise in demand for appointments in recent years with an increase in the demand for the service of nearly 20% in the 2017-18 academic year on top of the previous year's increase of nearly 40%.

Our 2018 staff survey feedback shows that 42% of staff who responded to the survey feel that the University takes an active role in supporting staff mental health and wellbeing, and this is something that the University wants to improve on.

We also know that 37% of staff who responded to the staff survey feel stressed at work 'frequently' or 'always', and the University is committed to addressing this issue.

Our Strategy

This Strategy has been developed in partnership between the University and our Trade Unions to provide a framework enabling the whole institution to support mental health and wellbeing. We already have several effective policies and procedures in place to support employee health and wellbeing at Bristol and we will regularly review these to ensure that they support this Strategy.

As an institution, we recognise that broader university and sector-wide issues such as the gender pay gap, casualisation in the workforce and workload can impact on overall wellbeing in the workplace. These issues are also very real at our University and our staff feel very strongly about support and action to address these

issues. This Strategy is designed to complement the actions already taking place on these issues, as well as being complementary to the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

We recognise that our staff come from a range of backgrounds with different cultures, beliefs, abilities and sexual orientations. We will ensure that any initiatives suggested or implemented consider these differences so that we do not knowingly preclude any group from participating.

This Strategy references five of the eight strategic themes proposed by Universities UK's #StepChange framework for mental health in higher education.



Cornerstones of our Strategy



Leadership /

Making mental health everybody's responsibility

Everyone in the University community is expected to support staff mental health and wellbeing. Mental health and wellbeing is a strategic priority supported by the

Vice-Chancellor's Taskforce for Mental Health and Wellbeing and the designation of a Pro Vice-Chancellor to lead Staff Engagement.

Prevention /

Integrating a positive culture and healthy behaviours to promote positive mental health and wellbeing within the workplace

We will expect and support our staff to adopt the University Professional Behaviours. We will better understand how the University culture acts as a contributory factor in achieving positive staff mental health and wellbeing. We will implement a set of agreed principles across the University

for the allocation of workload to help ensure workloads are more transparent, equitable and manageable. We will commit to review the structure of the Academic Year to support wellbeing for staff and students alike, reducing key points of stress and anxiety for staff.

Early intervention /

Taking early intervention and reducing stigma

We will encourage early disclosure of issues via open discussion, and further promote Wellness Action Plans as a proactive tool for

staff to use to support their own wellbeing. We will review relevant policies to ensure they support our wellbeing ambitions.

Support /

Connecting and communicating our support for staff and managers and between staff and student communities for mutual benefit

We will provide enhanced staff counselling facilities, training and other online resources to support staff wellbeing and better equip staff to

support each other and students. We will expand the available training relating to student mental health for staff.

Data and metrics /

Using data and metrics to support mental health and wellbeing initiatives

We will take an evidence-based approach to our plans and measure the impact of interventions.

Leadership and communication

What we are doing:

- **The Vice-Chancellor's Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce is leading the University-wide approach to mental health and wellbeing, reporting to the University Management Team.**
- **The Taskforce is advised by an Expert Advisory Group of regional, national and international experts.**
- **The Taskforce is leading on the development of University-wide Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategies, co-produced with our students and staff.**
- **A Pro Vice-Chancellor with a remit for Staff Engagement has been introduced and will work closely with the Chief People Officer.**

What we will do next:

- The University Management Team will provide formal governance oversight of the Strategy with assurance oversight from the Board of Trustees, supported by a new annual strategic mental health report and annual review for the University.
- Review the impact that University Governance and Committee structure has on workload.
- Provide additional leadership capacity in the Staff Counselling Service with a full-time Head of Staff Counselling focusing on staff wellbeing working in conjunction with HR to ensure trends and priorities are clearly identified.
- The role of the manager in supporting staff wellbeing will be included in University leadership and management programmes.
- Managers will be encouraged to include wellbeing discussions as part of regular conversations with their staff.
- Our institution-wide approach to wellbeing will be highlighted in all Further Particulars documents for recruitment purposes.
- Selection processes for leadership roles will include assessing commitment and approach to supporting wellbeing.



Prevention

What we are doing:

- **We have been raising awareness of mental health and the support available to staff through our internal communication channels and our training courses related to wellbeing and diversity.**
- **We have introduced Wellness Action Plans – a personal, practical tool that all staff can use to help identify what keeps them well at work, what causes an individual to become unwell at work, and how to address a mental health problem at work.**
- **We have introduced Sleep Clinics for staff, as we know that lack of sleep can affect health and wellbeing. We can all take steps to improve the quality and quantity of our sleep and these clinics can help staff with this.**
- **We are working in partnership with our Trade Unions to identify actions that can be taken to reduce the gender pay gap.**
- **We provide a wide range of wellbeing resources which are available in the online ‘Know How’ tool to support wellbeing in the workplace for staff and managers.**

What we will do next:

- We will continue to consider the physical environment for staff to encourage the development of spaces and workplaces that support wellbeing.
- We will implement a set of agreed principles across the University for the allocation of workload to help ensure workloads are more transparent, equitable and manageable.
- We will commit to review the structure of the Academic Year to support wellbeing for staff and students alike, reducing key points of stress and anxiety for staff. This will include considering the length of the teaching term coupled with a commitment to drive through assessment and feed back changes.
- We will further enhance accessibility to, and the range of, online health and wellbeing resources.
- We will promote the benefits of a physically active life and facilitate health improvement activities as part of national and local health campaigns.
- We will provide opportunities for staff to be better informed about their financial wellbeing.



Early intervention

What we are doing:

- We have signed the 'Time to Change' pledge and are monitoring progress against our action plan, regularly reviewing our mental health disclosure rates.
- We have developed Wellness Action Plans that can be shared with managers to help recognise early symptoms of poor mental health.
- We have implemented essential online mental health training for supporting students which all staff are required to take, with more in-depth training already being provided for those with key student support roles.
- We have launched a new, confidential tool, Report and Support, for reporting instances of bullying or harassment in any form. We believe that bullying, harassment, assault and discrimination are never acceptable, and we are committed to ensuring both students and staff receive appropriate support.

What we will do next:

- We will review relevant policies that can contribute to positive wellbeing such as our Acceptable Behaviour Policy and Flexible Working Policy.
- We will update the email etiquette guidance emphasising the impact that an over-reliance on, and inappropriate usage of, email messaging can have on wellbeing.
- We will explore options for additional resource to establish counselling sessions for staff outside of normal working hours and at Langford Campus.
- Our Occupational Health Service will refocus on supporting both mental and physical wellbeing in the workplace.
- We will explore options for arranging in-house sessions for staff for 'Getting the balance back'.

proud to support

time to change

let's end mental health discrimination

Support

What we are doing:

- **Enhancing staff support arrangements including extending the Staff Counselling Service and introducing an employee assistance programme which is available 24/7.**
- **Providing online staff training relating to student mental health as part of the suite of essential training within staff review for all.**
- **Encouraging managers to seek early advice and guidance from HR teams on resources and the support available for staff.**
- **Providing training for managers to give them a better understanding of how to support mental health in the workplace.**
- **Supporting the retention and rehabilitation of all employees as appropriate through reasonable adjustments which could include: phased return to work, flexible working, supporting treatment time or adjustments to jobs or premises.**
- **Working alongside Trade Union partners to support staff in the workplace.**
- **Providing support for staff through the University Occupational Health Service who will help provide effective support for occupational health risks.**

What we will do next:

- Further training and resources will be made available to staff through a range of workshops and online material, including training for managers to ensure they are well equipped to support staff.
- We will take a strategic approach to the planning and delivery of staff training relating to mental health and wellbeing, identifying priorities across our whole staff community, including developing the provision of training for senior tutors and other leaders.
- We will regularly seek feedback from staff (eg surveys on wellbeing issues) to measure the impact of our interventions and inform our future approach.
- We will revise our online resources to support staff wellbeing and develop an integrated set of accessible materials.
- We will champion the value of one-to-one discussions between line managers and staff as an opportunity to support wellbeing at work.



Data and metrics

What we are doing now:

- **All staff were invited to participate in a staff survey designed to provide baseline data and opportunities to identify trends and priority areas where interventions are specifically required. The University staff survey gathers feedback on questions relating to health and wellbeing.**
- **Staff Counselling and Occupational Health employ a range of monitoring and evaluation methods including service usage and satisfaction ratings.**

What we will do next:

- We will develop a monitoring 'dashboard' to track progress in implementing this Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- In 2019, we will present a strategic mental health report, drawing information from a range of metrics, including those mentioned above, and incorporating benchmarking information from higher education and other sectors.



Related policies and resources

- Managing Health and Absence Policy
- Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace
- Wellness Action Plans
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Acceptable Behaviour Policy
- Report and Support Tool
- Time to Change pledge
- Staff Counselling Service
- Guidance for Carers at Work
- Prevention of Sexual Misconduct
- Stress Management and Risk Assessments
- Flexible Working Policy
- Mental Health Training and Awareness Programmes (via Staff Development)

