

University of the West of Scotland Student Mental Health Agreement 2018 /2019:

The new Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA) aims to raise awareness and promote positive wellbeing for students at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS). The agreement sets out the University, Students' Association, and Team UWS's commitment to working in partnership to promote the mental wellbeing of all students. The aim of this agreement is to have a positive impact on student wellbeing, through training and a cultural shift to full acceptance of mental health and support for students. The Agreement encapsulates work underway in 2018/19 which sets out to change perceptions of mental health among the student community, challenge negative attitudes, and promote positive outcomes and supportive strategies to maximise student resilience. It also offers plans and priority areas for the coming year, which both students and staff can use to shape their efforts to develop an environment which supports positive mental health and wellbeing.

We recognise that students are disproportionately impacted by mental ill health (1), and in 2015, the National Union of Students (NUS) reported that 78% of students experienced mental health concerns within the previous year (2). This research builds upon previous findings by NUS in 2013 (1) which reported that 80% of students experienced stress, 55% reported feeling anxiety, and 49% reported feeling depressed. Continuing this trend, reports have shown that students on average experience mental ill health at least once a week (3). NUS has found that 21% of students approach their university or students' union to seek support for mental health (4).

Developing a Student Mental Health Agreement has been highlighted as a key objective in the university's new Mental Health Strategy, which is currently in development. The Agreement will be reviewed annually, with new working areas set based on emerging needs and priorities. The Agreement will support the implementation of the Mental Health Strategy's vision through providing a forum for identifying and working towards joint actions. Key outcomes of the Agreement are for the University, Students' Association and Team UWS to work together to create an environment which is both free from mental health stigma and supports the wellbeing of students. Seven key working areas have been identified to achieve these outcomes:

- 1. To provide activities and supports which focus on promoting overall wellbeing**
- 2. To hold events and activities throughout the year to challenge stigma and discrimination**
- 3. To reach out to students who may face additional barriers when accessing support and explore ways to combat these barriers**
- 4. To enhance the capacity of students and staff to signpost students to appropriate support**
- 5. To raise awareness of suicide and how to respond to students in distress**
- 6. To promote physical activity and the link between exercise and wellbeing**
- 7. To regularly promote, review and develop our mental health work**

1. To provide activities and supports which focus on promoting overall wellbeing:

We aim to provide support and information on improving overall wellbeing that is relevant to all students. This will be achieved through activities, supports and resources which focus on preventative and informal aspects of general mental health and wellbeing.

2018/19 Highlights:

- Two Paws against stress events took place on three campuses in partnership with Canine Concern Scotland, reaching over 400 students. The events gave students the opportunity to de-stress by playing with therapy dogs in the run-up to deadlines and exams.
- Useful apps and online resources for mindfulness and relaxation promoted through social media, leaflets given out at events, and signposting during student services appointments.
- The Students' Association worked to reduce barriers to setting up societies (e.g. costs, numbers) to allow more opportunities for students to meet, socialize, and take part in activities of interest.
- Pilot group workshops on wellbeing topics (e.g. sleep, stress, perfectionism) began in March 2019, and will be reviewed and developed further in the coming year.
- SilverCloud offers secure, immediate access to online CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) programmes and is available to all students and staff. New sign – ups for SilverCloud have doubled since its introduction (from 152 in 2016/17, to 304 in 2018/19).

Priorities for 2019/20:

- A new Sabbatical Officer position of Welfare and Wellbeing will commence in June 2019. This role will work to promote the mental health and wellbeing of students. The Students' Association will provide ongoing support for the development of this role.
- We will continue to work together to promote SilverCloud in new ways to improve awareness of the resource.

2. To hold events and activities throughout the year to challenge stigma and discrimination:

We will take part in University Mental Health Day and other national days as a focus for mental health promotion activities and events. Activities will aim to promote conversations about mental health, and will be advertised through social media, emails, Eventbrite, posters, and digital screens.

2018/19 Highlights:

- Walk a Mile event: Across all Scottish campuses, students and staff paired up with someone to 'walk a mile' in their shoes, speaking about mental health, with 185 students and staff taking part. Feedback from this event was extremely positive, leading to the organisation of two more walks in April and May 2019.
- 'FeelsFM' emoji powered jukebox activity and 'Who do you talk to' interactive art activity took place alongside Walk a Mile events to engage students in conversations about mental health.
- UWS Library created a travelling promotion of 'mood boosting reading' on all campuses.
- 'Feel Good Quiz' hosted at the Students' Association in Paisley, with all questions linked to mental health.
- Time to Talk Day – Nursing society event held at Lanarkshire campus to promote conversations about mental health over a cup of tea.
- 'The Big Read' 2018: The book 'Eleanor Oliphant is completely fine', was chosen to stimulate discussion about mental health and provide a common ground for those new to UWS. Copies of the book were provided to 500 new and direct entry students.

Priorities for 2019/20:

- We will continue to work together to plan events and activities which tackle stigma and discrimination, using feedback and reflections from 2018/19 activities to inform this.

3. To support students who may face additional barriers when accessing support and explore ways to combat these barriers:

Some students may be more reluctant to seek support at an early stage where they experience mental health difficulties. Consulting with them and finding out the reasons for this, and what would be helpful and supportive to them may enhance their wellbeing and overall student experience.

2018/19 Highlights:

- Doctoral college programme in development to support the mental health of post graduate students and combat isolation.
- Team UWS took part in the 'Rainbow Laces Campaign', to act as active allies and welcome and support the LGBT+ community in sport.
- Representatives from UWS joined the TransEDU Community of Practice, which aims to share and encourage good practice across educational institutions for supporting transgender and gender diverse students.
- The LGBT+ and Care Experienced Liberation Groups have worked to raise awareness of issues facing students and provide safe spaces and support networks.
- International student support held events to provide students with opportunities to socialize and connect with Scottish culture (e.g. Taste of Scotland, Trips Away), and new 'Reverse Culture Shock' workshops to prepare for the return home after their studies.

Priorities for 2019/20:

- To identify student groups who may have additional barriers to accessing support.
- To engage with these students find out the nature of these barriers and ways to combat them. Feedback gained from this consultation can be used to shape the services and supports available.
- To create promotional materials for wellbeing initiatives in different languages.
- The Students' Association will continue to support the setup, running and expansion of Liberation Groups.

4. To enhance the capacity of students and staff to signpost students to appropriate support:

It is paramount that all students and staff are aware of support available to students. This is relevant both to those who wish to access this support themselves, and to students and staff who can play a key role in signposting others. Through training and promotion of support available, we hope to increase staff and students' confidence with signposting students to appropriate support.

2018/19 Highlights:

- 20 Mental Health Awareness workshops were rolled out from March 2019 onwards across all campuses, covering 20% of all staff.
- The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust online mental health training has been promoted to staff at UWS, and was required 'pre-reading' for face-to-face training workshops.
- Mental Health First Aid training: Two day course was delivered to two staff within Team UWS.
- Information on support available to students and how to signpost included in Student Rep training and Team UWS Committee training.
- Schools used a range of approaches to support their Personal Tutors with signposting students. Guidance will continue to be developed and made available to more staff.
- Support services were promoted through induction, social media, and the website in addition to ongoing promotion events and activities throughout the year.
- The residencies put forward a proposal for a new role within the team specifically for signposting students to support services.

Priorities for 2019/20:

- To continue to raise student and staff awareness of support available both within and outside the university and how to signpost appropriately.
- To raise awareness of self-harm and where to signpost students for appropriate support, linking with relevant organizations to inform this process (e.g. Self-Harm UK, Harmless)

5. To raise awareness of suicide and how to respond to students in distress:

Suicide is a serious concern amongst university students, and it is imperative that the university community are aware of how to respond and signpost students to appropriate support. We aim to raise awareness amongst students and staff about suicide, and provide training, information and resources to increase people's confidence with responding to students in emotional distress.

2018/19 Highlights:

- Choose Life poster campaign: Suicide awareness posters were distributed across all campuses and displayed in all public areas in October 2018.
- SafeTALK suicide alertness training provided to 50 staff in 2019. Feedback from the training has been positive, and there is a proposal to deliver this training to more staff in the coming year using qualified UWS staff.
- 'Students in Distress' Policy has been available to all staff since 2016. This includes information on how to respond to a student in emotional distress in the form of a flowchart.

Priorities for 2019/20:

- To increase awareness of suicide further, linking with relevant organizations to inform this process (e.g. SAMH, Samaritans). The Universities UK Guidance for universities on preventing student suicides will be consulted throughout this process.
- To provide opportunities for staff to increase their awareness and confidence with following the procedures for students in distress.

6. To promote physical activity and the link between exercise and wellbeing:

We are committed to creating opportunities for all students to engage in physical activity. We recognize the importance of physical activity in supporting wellbeing. Physical activity and sport have been highlighted by UWS students as key factors in supporting their mental health.

2018/19 Highlights:

- Took part in the 'Healthy Body Healthy Mind' award, a partnership initiative between NUS Scotland and Scottish Student Sport which focuses on the link between physical activity, smoking prevention and mental health. Team UWS worked with the Students' Association, Student Services, and representatives from the student body to bring forward actions from the award.
- Team UWS held events throughout the year to promote student engagement in team sports.
- Competitive and recreational sports teams made available to engage more students in sport.
- Free gym facilities made available to all students through on-campus gyms and partnership arrangements with other institutions.
- Expansion of 'Brodie's Bikes' project to include three campuses. The project provides bikes on loan to students in the residences to enable them to have a break from studies and improve their wellbeing through exercise and leisure time.

Priorities for 2019/20:

- We will continue to work together to promote the benefits of physical activity on mental health through campaigns and initiatives, tying these in with mental health promotion events at the university.
- The Sports and Student Engagement team are committed to continuing to identify and remove barriers to participation in physical activity. The team will work to provide varied opportunities to engage in physical activity.

7. To regularly promote, review and develop our mental health work:

We are committed to continuing to review and develop our mental health work. Priorities and needs will change over time, and ongoing involvement in the student mental health agreement project will assist with identifying and working towards these priorities. We will actively promote the mental health and wellbeing work underway and encourage student involvement in this.

2018/19 Highlights:

- Annual student survey to gain feedback on all student services. Feedback from students who have accessed these supports contributed to the ongoing development of services.
- Creation of the 'Health and Wellbeing Group', a working group with representatives from across the university and Students' Association. This overarching group has resulted in the development of smaller working groups to bring forward identified actions, including the development of a new mental health strategy.

Priorities for 2019/20:

- To launch the agreement on the university and Student Associations' website, at the beginning of the academic year 2019/20.
- The launch will aim to improve students' awareness of the Agreement, invite student comments and feedback, and promote involvement in the 2019/20 Student Mental Health Agreement Working Group.

References:

- (1) Institute for Public Policy Research; Not By Degrees- Improving Student Mental Health in the UK's Universities
- (2) NUS-USI; Student Wellbeing Research Report
- (3) NUS Disabled Students; Mental Health and Suicide Prevention: an in-depth guide for Students' Unions and student activists
- (4) NUS; Mental Distress Survey Overview