

Mental Wealth First

| Our strategy to put mental health and wellbeing first for students and staff



Foreword – by Professor Steve West

University is a time of great transition in a young person's life and is not without its challenges. Changing attitudes towards mental health, tuition fees, living costs, a tough jobs market and the impact of social media are all factors that previous generations did not have to contend with.

Most students have happy, fulfilling and rewarding experiences at university. They are transformational experiences that they will carry throughout their lives and fondly remember. But as student numbers have grown, and society and attitudes change, so universities must adapt to meet the needs of those who study with us. We recognise that for some students their journey is not as smooth and additional support is required.

UWE Bristol is not alone in facing the challenge to support students and staff who experience a wide range of issues with their mental health. The reasons why people experience these challenges are complex, multifactoral and personal. The way we support them must reflect that. This is why last year we made the mental health and wellbeing of our university community a strategic priority for UWE Bristol and committed to developing this Mental Wealth First strategy, which sets out how we will support them in new and important ways.

Looking at these issues in a holistic way, this strategy is a step towards delivering the joined-up and collaborative support our students need to succeed and flourish after they graduate.

Any strategy to address such a complex challenge must do so in a personalised and meaningful way. Our strategy considers how students and staff connect with all areas of university life and looks at ways to make sure the experience is positive for them, providing an environment in which they are able to thrive. We also want people to know that it's okay not to feel okay and make it easy for them to get the help they need, when they need it, in a way that suits them.

Our students will make a huge contribution to the UK once they graduate. Working with our partners, staff, families and their peers, we want to make sure they have every chance of doing so.

By providing the support outlined in this strategy, I am determined that together we will achieve just that.

Professor Steve West CBE

Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West of England and Chair of Universities UK's Working Group on Mental Health in Higher Education

1. Introduction

At UWE Bristol, we know that the mental health and wellbeing of our university community is fundamentally important in enabling people to engage, perform and flourish. It is key to how our University feels as a place to learn and underpins the success of those who study and work here.

In December 2017, we pledged a commitment to make mental health - the health and wellbeing of our community - a strategic priority. This means that it will inform all of our strategies and operations. It will play a core part in shaping the University's future as we look to define our path to 2030 for our students, staff and partners.

Meeting the challenge

Mental health and wellbeing plays a huge part in how we think, feel and act.

About one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year¹. This could mean that more than 500,000 students across the higher education sector will experience challenges at some point. It is right, therefore, that we look for new and meaningful ways to support them.

With more people going to university than ever before, the national trend in mental ill-health among young people is increasingly present in our student populations. UK universities have reported a three-fold increase in the demand for counselling services since 2007. At UWE Bristol, we have seen a corresponding increase in demand for our counselling and mentoring services.

This strategy sets out how we intend to address this, through a wide range of measures. In doing so, we aim to become sector-leading for our commitment to mental health, by taking a university-wide approach that is **positive, proactive and preventative**. It is an approach that we will evaluate to ensure we learn as we deliver and share our experiences with others.

We will work in partnership with staff, students, internal and external groups and organisations, to put mental health and wellbeing first for everyone in our university community.

2. Explaining mental health

Mental health is about building positive wellbeing in individuals and communities. It achieves this by creating a culture of care and support and raising awareness of issues surrounding mental health.

At UWE Bristol, we want to promote and support healthier learning, working and social environments, based on an organisational culture that enables people to flourish.

A key part of this is about **empowering our university community** with the knowledge, confidence and personal resources to:

- Understand mental health and wellbeing.
- Recognise the associated signs of mental ill-health.
- Know what support is available, in times of critical need and to help prevent mental health problems before they arise.

¹ McManus, S., Meltzer, H., Brugha, T. S., Bebbington, P. E., & Jenkins, R. (2009). **Adult psychiatric morbidity in England, 2007: results of a household survey**. The NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

3. What we need to do

Our approach is based on Universities UK's Step Change Framework², existing policy guidance and an audit of our existing provision to support mental health and wellbeing.

As the next section of this strategy explains, we already deliver many services to students and staff. Providing this in a more joined-up way and understanding their impact on student and staff mental health is an important part of this new approach.

To ensure that this happens, we have developed some clear objectives that will drive our Mental Health First strategy and form the basis of our approach.

- **Leadership and communication:** to foster a positive and supportive organisational culture that ensures mental health is embedded as a strategic priority and removes the stigma associated with it.
- **Prevention:** to ensure mental health and wellbeing is everybody's responsibility, by providing evidence-based individual, organisational and community-level interventions to promote good health, raise awareness and increase resilience.
- **Support:** to have appropriate and timely support, training and toolkits in place to improve mental health and wellbeing for our students, staff and the wider community.
- **Partnerships:** to further develop external partnerships with schools, colleges and universities, health bodies, local authorities and the voluntary sector to deliver a joined-up approach that supports students and staff.
- **Data:** to use relevant data to measure the impact of mental health and wellbeing interventions, to inform decisions and future strategy development.

Our strategic approach to mental health



Our approach will be driven by the actions set out in this document, the University's strategic change programmes and our faculty and professional service plans.

² www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/stepchange

4. What we are already doing

Our commitment to mental wealth is already well established and we are proud of the progress we have made.

Our recent audit found that there are more than 200 different services provided by the University related to mental health and wellbeing. These services range from workshops, to counselling support and drop-in sessions. Some of it is truly innovative and ground-breaking and has benefitted thousands of users.

Our services include

Introducing 24/7 support for students

We have made support available for students in ways that are right for them, when they want it.

UWE Bristol was the first university in the UK to introduce Kooth Student in September 2017. This is a free, anonymous online platform for students to access advice and forums during evenings and weekends. This service has been extremely successful and has had hundreds of registrations since it launched.

Nightline, a phone-based student-to-student support service, run by the Students' Union at UWE, was launched in January 2018.

In September 2017, we introduced a new out of hours senior on-call team providing support for any students experiencing difficulties.

We have strong and well-established relationships with healthcare providers across the city to ensure appropriate referrals and a joined-up approach for students needing support services.

Regular vulnerability workshops for academic staff are held to ensure they are able to spot students struggling with their mental health at an early stage.

Peer-led resilience workshops have been organised to enable students to work together to build confidence and the ability to work collaboratively and confidently during times of stress.

Schools partnerships

We work with local schools to ensure that students are well prepared for university. Through these partnerships, we have designed emotional resilience workshops, which aim to support students making the transition to university. So far, 200 students have participated in the workshops and 40 staff have been trained to facilitate them.

Student Life Programme

Building strong, supportive communities for students is an important part of their mental health and wellbeing. We want to ensure students are provided with the right environment and culture to make friends, feel part of the local community and find activities to get involved in. That is why we have introduced a number of initiatives as part of our Student Life Programme, including:

- Our Halls Life programme, which supports communities on and off campus.
- The development of more than 110 student societies, 40 of which are focused on academic subject areas.
- Working with local communities and employers to support students on work placement.
- Taking this community-building approach to our academic programmes, so that students have every opportunity to build strong and lasting relationships with their peers as they progress through university life.
- Working with the University of Bristol, Developing Health and Independence, Public Health England and the Bristol Drugs Project to take an educational approach to tackling issues surrounding drugs and alcohol use. These form part of wider awareness-raising campaigns at key times, like the start of the academic year, after Christmas and before exams.
- UWE Bristol and the Students' Union were awarded the NUS Alcohol Impact accreditation for our commitment to responsible consumption of alcohol and building healthier, safer and more productive student communities across our campuses.

For parents and carers

As part of our supportive approach to families/parents/carers, we have introduced a dedicated telephone number exclusively for use by those who have student welfare concerns. A senior university staff member follows up these calls.

At registration, we have also introduced a new student support zone to highlight the support available to students.

For staff

For our staff community, we have been raising awareness of mental health and the support available through our communications and our training courses related to wellbeing and equality and diversity. All staff at UWE Bristol have access to 24/7 free and confidential information, advice and emotional support.

5. Delivering the strategy: what will change?

A number of initiatives are being introduced through our Mental Wealth strategy. Further actions will follow as we take our strategy forward. We will closely monitor this activity to ensure that it is having the desired impact and delivers for our students and staff. We recognise the diversity of our university community and we will work to ensure that our services better reflect the diversity of clients accessing them.

These measures include

Investing in an improved offer on campus

Students will benefit from investment in new provision on campus this year, which will be available 24 hours a day, every day. This includes a new student centre with chillout space from September 2018 and spaces for societies to meet, providing additional facilities alongside our Centre for Sport, and Atrium café. This will help to ensure that all of our students have opportunities to develop themselves, engage with others and enjoy their whole university experience outside of studying.

Engaging parents and carers

From September 2018, all parents, carers and families of students will be invited to learn more about the support available and will be provided with new guidance that explains this for them.

#LetsTalkNow campaign

An important part of our work to raise awareness involves encouraging our students and staff to talk about their mental health. Our #LetsTalkNow campaign supports this work, by providing information in prominent locations across campus and online for students and staff.

Curriculum design

Any attempt to support students' mental health and wellbeing must consider their learning experience at university. We have developed an approach to learning and teaching that enhances opportunities for students to get to know each other and build strong, mutually supportive communities. This approach is shaped around the principle of an inclusive curriculum, which ensures that students progress through their studies and feel well prepared for their next steps after graduating. These principles are:

- Being inclusive.
- Designing the curriculum in a way that creates 'course communities' and maximises collaboration opportunities amongst students.
- Ensuring the curriculum is transformative, enabling progression of students' learning throughout the programme so that they leave the University as ready and able graduates.

All programmes will be reviewed in the next five years to ensure they are meeting these principles.

Mental health module for students

By September 2019, all students joining UWE Bristol will be expected to complete a short online module that raises awareness of mental health, expectations of them whilst at university and the support available.

Enhanced induction

As part of an enhanced induction to their programmes, all students will receive information about the support on offer during their time at university. This will include promotion of the importance of good relationships and raise awareness of looking after their mental health and wellbeing.

Creation of a Global Centre for International Students

The new Global Centre will offer opportunities for students to interact in a social setting, using Global Ambassadors and Global Buddies as people who can listen in an informal setting. We will work with student groups to develop understanding of, and address any stigmas relating to, mental health and the best way for students to engage with the Wellbeing Service at UWE Bristol. We will develop Peer Assisted Learning mentors to work with at risk groups including care leavers, BME and international students.

Learner analytics

Over the coming year, we are investing in a market-leading learner analytics solution. This will measure engagement with specific academic activities, such as lecture attendance, virtual learning environment usage and coursework submission, to support and encourage students to realise their full potential whilst at university. UWE Bristol's sector-leading system will use future-facing, smart-enabled technologies to benefit students at all levels of study, across all faculties and campuses.

Academic personal tutor toolkit

A specialised toolkit will be created and rolled out in the coming year to support staff when dealing with student mental health and wellbeing issues.

Staff development

Mental health and wellbeing will form a key part of the induction process for new staff and all staff will be appropriately trained through existing and new training programmes related to mental health and wellbeing.

Staff support

We will develop our services and processes for staff so that a range of mental health and wellbeing support is available and accessible to all staff and line managers at the point of need.

About UWE Bristol

The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) is home to around 30,000 students and 4,000 staff across three Bristol campuses and one in Gloucester. We also have 15 partner universities in ten countries around the world.

UWE Bristol is one of only three universities nationally, alongside Cardiff and York, piloting Universities UK's 'Step Change Framework'. Launched in September 2017, this aims to embed a whole university approach to tackling mental health and wellbeing in universities around the country.

Our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Steve West, is the chair of Universities UK's Working Group on Mental Health in Higher Education, taking a national role in delivering the Step Change Framework to the UK's Higher Education sector.

Find out more at: www.uwe.ac.uk/mentalwealthfirst

