

# Increasing mental health and wellbeing awareness in the university population

## Examples of Practice, The Student Mental Health Evidence Hub

The Student Mental Health Project is an Office for Students (OfS) funded project that aims to help higher education providers develop their student mental health interventions. The project has developed a Student Mental Health Evidence Hub, a free resource consisting of an evidence-based toolkit, evaluation guidance, examples of practice and the results of our sector engagement and student panel work. The project was led by The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) as part of a consortium with What Works Wellbeing, SMARteN, Student Minds and AMOSSHE, the Student Services Organisation.

This document contains an example of practice to support student mental health in higher education. This is one of a number of examples which have been collated as a result of calls to the sector issued by TASO. Please note that the information contained in these examples is not endorsed by TASO, and TASO has not been involved at any stage of intervention development, delivery or evaluation. We are grateful to the participating higher education providers for sharing information to facilitate the development of these examples.

## Contents

Brief overview of the intervention	2
Intervention approach	2
Resources required	2
Intervention evaluation	2
Recommendations	2
Next steps	2
References	2

## Overview

<b>Higher Education Provider:</b>	University of East Anglia
<b>Intervention Title:</b>	Increasing mental health and wellbeing awareness in the university population
<b>Intervention Type:</b>	Active psychoeducation
<b>Target Group:</b>	Universal and targeted
<b>Date:</b>	November 2023

## Brief overview of the intervention

In 2021, the University of East Anglia introduced a student Wellbeing Training Team into its wellbeing department. The intervention consists of the Wellbeing Training Team creating and delivering content related to wellbeing via several channels such as regular social media posts, a monthly podcast, a YouTube channel, pop up wellbeing events, workshop events and timetabled sessions.

The overall aim of the intervention is to increase the general awareness around mental health and wellbeing amongst the University's population. The project is early interventionist, aiming to reach students before their challenges become overwhelming and negatively impact their student experience. Specifically, the Wellbeing Training Team aims:

- To raise students' awareness and accessibility of wellbeing services;
- To normalise talking about wellbeing and mental health among the student population;
- To work with the student population to raise students' awareness around mental health and wellbeing and how they can manage their mental health and wellbeing.

## Intervention approach

The introduction of this team came following a number of student deaths, students who were not known by the wellbeing service. The team was developed in part to increase visibility and awareness of support available to all students, not just those actively looking for support. By raising awareness amongst peers, the aim is to encourage a whole community approach and ensure peers are aware of where to direct concerns about others to should they arise.

The Wellbeing Training Team designs and delivers wellbeing workshops to several student groups:

- all students. (via self-referral)
- all first year and foundation year students. An 'Introduction to your Mental Health and Wellbeing at University' is delivered as part of the students' timetabled teaching within the first month of university
- students in Students' Union (SU) clubs and societies
- students in peer support roles (in collaboration with the SU)
- students within an academic cohort (tailored to specific needs of a department).

The activities of the Wellbeing Training Team consist of workshops, timetabled sessions, social media posts, podcasts, YouTube videos and pop-up events.

### Workshops

There are centralised workshops which are available to any student to self-book on to. In the academic year (22/23), 1352 students booked onto these workshops, but actual attendance can drop by 50%. This academic year (23/24), the Wellbeing Training Team are reducing the number of these and moving booking in school timetabled sessions. Workshops focus on coping with university-related stressors, such as, 'Motivation', 'Managing change', 'Managing procrastination' and 'Maintaining wellbeing on your PHD journey'. Workshops also address

how students can have a positive impact on their peers such as in the 'How to support a friend' session. A number of skills-based workshops explore how to manage difficulties in personal wellbeing such as, 'Wellness action planning', 'Managing stress', 'Managing emotions', 'Improving self-esteem', 'Managing unhelpful thinking', and 'Building resilience'.

### **Timetabled sessions**

Timetabled sessions can be booked by schools, societies, clubs and groups. In the academic year 22/23, the team delivered 82 sessions with 3700 students attending these. This includes the start of year wellbeing awareness sessions booked for all first-year students as part of their first six weeks of teaching.

### **Social media posts**

Social media posts happen between two and five times a week with a consistent 'Wellbeing Wednesday' post weekly. The official Instagram handle of Student Services, UEA is @ueastudentservices.

### **Podcasts**

Podcasts are released monthly and 20-30 minutes long. Sometimes there is a 'spotlight' edition, where the team promotes particular awareness days such as University Mental Health Day or Black History Month. The podcasts are available at:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/59GCkmBAp9fbkK5jhZ27uD>

### **YouTube videos**

Videos tend to be linked to monthly themes which dictate the video content and are often linked to the podcasts. The videos are YouTube shorts (approximately two minutes per video). The videos are available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@ueastudentservices>

### **Pop up events**

There are approximately 12 pop up events a year including wellbeing stalls and activities at International Arrivals and Undergraduate Welcome Week. The team also runs events which give opportunities to meet peers called 'Connect Events' as well as events in the exam period three times a year called 'Address Your Stress'. There are additional events for promoting wellbeing to postgraduate students and awareness raising days linked to University Mental Health Day, Time to Talk Day and Mental Health Awareness Week.

## **Resources required**

This work is done by the Wellbeing Training Team (the Wellbeing Team is a much broader service of which the Training Team is a part). The Wellbeing training team plan, design, implement and deliver the intervention. Analysis and evaluation of the implementation of this Wellbeing Training Team's work have been conducted by the Wellbeing Training Team. The team works closely with the sabbatical officers in the SU, student societies and clubs such as sporting clubs and peer mentors to reach a variety of student groups. Students on work placement with the team in the last two years have also consulted on content from a student perspective and have co-delivered workshops and delivered their own wellbeing-related campaigns.

The main costs of the intervention are for the team's salaries as well as a budget of £2000 a year for promotional resources. The Wellbeing Training Team consists of:

- three full time members of staff; two trainers (grade 6) and one manager (grade 7)
- two therapists, half a day each
- two wellbeing advisors, half a day each
- two advisors half a day a month
- sabbatical welfare offices, between 1-5 days a month, depending on activities.

## Intervention evaluation

The evaluation has followed a mixed methods approach, collecting quantitative and qualitative data. First, quantitative demographic data was collected about students attending the workshops. This data was used to monitor the accessibility of the workshops to various student groups. Second, qualitative feedback has been collected from students about the team's work, particularly the wellbeing workshops. Long-term outcomes, such as attainment or progression, have not been measured.

The Wellbeing Training Team believe that the project has supported a culture change in terms of reducing stigma surrounding mental health and wellbeing in hard-to-reach student groups. Though this has not been measured, it has been observed in the team's reflections on the efforts to offer targeted support where it is known that those groups are less likely to access wellbeing support, such as men's sports groups, for example.

The evaluation has produced the following findings:

1. Some suggestive evidence of increase in referrals to the service following the Wellbeing Training Team's delivery of workshops and events. Data shows a strong correlation between the amount of referrals into the wellbeing service from faculties with higher attendance rates at workshops and events. Those that are engaged in workshops and events are approximately 20% more likely to seek support from the wellbeing service.
2. The demand for group workshop delivery across the university (workshops booking by schools, clubs groups and societies) has seen a significant increase in recent years. A total of 3,700 students were reached by the training team during the 2022-23 academic year. They have so far already met that number in semester 1 of 2023-24.
3. Students talk to one another and will listen to a peer in a different way than to a professional. This promotes a ripple effect of promoting awareness and healthy habits.

## Recommendations

The Wellbeing Training Team has made the following recommendations based on the outcomes the project, outlined above:

1. Use a portion of the Wellbeing Training Team's resources to raise awareness of the university's wellbeing services and to help equip students to know when and how to seek wellbeing support.

2. Devote some of the Wellbeing Training Team's activities to awareness-raising and skills development for all students, rather than only to those students identified or self-identifying as needing wellbeing help. This approach enables more university students to grow in their understanding of wellbeing, and their ability to identify and navigate challenges before they become problematic for the students.
3. Work collaboratively with the university population, particularly students. In doing so, the team would hope to equip the university community to better support one another and enable the Wellbeing Training Team to reach many more beyond those who access their support or attend a workshop. The team asserts that it is through this kind of intervention that real culture change will be seen.

## Next steps

The Wellbeing Training Team plans to collect data to evaluate how the team's project links to student satisfaction, retention, and success during their studies. The Wellbeing Training Team would also like to evaluate how their team's work links to student graduate outcomes. The Wellbeing Training Team also plans to invite students who the team have identified as being less likely to attend wellbeing workshops to contribute to the development of new wellbeing initiatives.

The team is currently working on creating a wellbeing site on Blackboard (the University's virtual learning environment). This wellbeing site will host self-help material, wellbeing information and support available for students. This initiative was born from student feedback which showed that students' engagement with traditional sources of information, such as the university web pages and web-portal, were poor, but that the students' engagement with Blackboard was more significant because this is where the students engage with their course materials.

In the future, the type and number of workshops may vary depending on demand and identified need; new workshops may be added and existing workshops may be altered. It is hoped that the team will create digital versions of all workshops to aid accessibility. Podcasts and social media engagement will continue on as before and YouTube videos will be added to as needed.