

## University of Sunderland - mental health case study

The University People Plan sets out the key areas of strategic and operational importance for the institution, with wellbeing of staff identified as being an essential component.

During the pandemic the University has strived to provide a comprehensive suite of wellbeing resources for staff ranging from online guidance, Wellbeing Champions, promotion of professional support services including Counselling, and hosted a range of wellbeing events.

### Better Health at Work Award

As part of this commitment to wellbeing improvements, the University participates in the Better Health at Work Awards. This scheme is aimed at recognising the efforts in addressing health issues within the workplace. The University has worked through Bronze, Silver, Gold and attained Continuing Excellence level in 2020.

### Wellbeing Champions

Wellbeing Champions are a key strand of the University's wellbeing strategy and have been heavily relied upon during the pandemic. Around 65 volunteers from all across the University are trained in mental health first aid to enable them to provide support and signposting. They also participate in a development programme to enhance relevant knowledge and skills e.g. 'A life worth living' suicide awareness. Champions promote and cascade centrally designed wellbeing initiatives, newsletters, webinars, events etc within their own respective areas. Champions are also encouraged to run their own wellbeing events locally; these have included themed events on topics such as sleep, anxiety and healthy eating.

Champions provide an invaluable feedback mechanism from department staff, ideas and comments are escalated to the strategic University Mental Health & Wellbeing Group. The aim of this Group is to provide a forum for enhancing staff and student wellbeing and the development of related policies, initiatives, training and processes that seek to create a positive and supportive working environment at the University.

### Campaigns, initiatives and resources

During the last year, there has been a calendar of wellbeing campaigns developed and delivered (online as opposed to face-to-face due to Covid) for both University staff and students including; smoking cessation, cancer awareness, mental health awareness.

A range of online wellbeing tools and resources are made available to staff through the University internal webpage. This provision was revised and greatly enhanced as a result of responding to staff feedback that alternative topics and means of support were required due to Covid impacts. This support included a specific video message from the Vice-Chancellor on the importance of personal wellbeing, signposting to information on emotional resilience and physical and mental wellbeing.

During lockdown, regular wellbeing newsletters were prepared and issued to all staff. Topics of focus have included; Empathetic Listening, Hope, Switching-off and Men's Health. These newsletters continue to be developed bi-monthly with topics based on staff feedback proposals to remain relevant.

Another new Wellbeing initiative implemented was 'Love Your Lunchtime' campaign, where once a month staff can learn a new activity. Activities delivered via Teams include; talk by a local author, bookbinding, pottery throwdown, drawing. Feedback from staff attendees has been positive about the opportunity to take a break from work and engage with other staff across the University.

## **Future planning**

A staff wellbeing survey has just been completed. This will assist in determining the support that staff will require in relation to their wellbeing post-Covid, shaping the University wellbeing strategy from 2021 onwards.

August 2021