

# Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

2022-2027



Edge Hill  
University

# Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027

## Contents

Introduction from the Vice Chancellor .....	3
Context.....	4
Strategy.....	6
Vision .....	6
Strategic Aims .....	6
1. Leadership and Culture.....	7
2. Prevention .....	7
3. Early Intervention .....	8
4. Support .....	8
5. Partnerships.....	9
6. Data and research.....	9
Endmatter.....	10

## Introduction from the Vice Chancellor

Positive mental health and wellbeing is a key component in the success of the University. At Edge Hill we are committed to a whole university approach to wellbeing which will enable both staff and students to thrive and succeed to their full potential.

We know that the pandemic has impacted negatively on mental health and wellbeing in society as a whole, and the impact on some groups, including some young people, has been more significant than others. Although restrictions have lifted and the University has returned to a pre-pandemic experience of working and studying, the impact of the pandemic on health and wellbeing should not be underestimated.

Over the past few years significant progress has been made to improve our internal mental health and wellbeing services, with significant investment in core services supporting students and staff. We have also concentrated on upskilling line managers and personal tutors across the University so that they are in the best position to support others.

We must continue to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of our whole community and create an environment and culture free from stigma which promotes disclosure, early intervention, personal responsibility and healthy behaviours. We will work together, co-designing and co-creating initiatives and projects which promote good health and wellbeing and are designed to be preventative. We will also continue to invest in responsive services, providing timely and appropriate support internally, and strengthening our partnerships and relationships with external agencies. By listening to the voices of staff and students and working in partnership, services will be flexible and adapt to the needs of our diverse University community.

By continuing our work, we will ensure that colleagues understand their roles and responsibilities to themselves and to others in supporting a mentally healthy university culture, facilitated by effective and ongoing induction, training and development.

The impact of positive mental health on staff retention and productivity, and on student retention and success, is well reported, and this strategy underpins our ability to secure and enhance our position as an increasingly successful University. By working together in partnership, I am confident we can successfully achieve the vision and aims of this ambitious strategy.

## Context

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*Over the past 10 years there has been a significant and steady increase in the number of – people declaring a mental health condition.*

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Mental health has been a growing concern in the sector even prior to the pandemic, but more recent data suggests that the period covered by this strategy document could pose significant challenges for Universities. In 2021 UCAS<sup>1</sup> announced a 450% increase in mental health declarations from UK students over a decade and an NUS survey in 2020<sup>2</sup> found that 52% of student respondents indicated that their mental health had deteriorated or been negatively affected by Covid-19. The local context reflects a similar trajectory, with HESA data for Edge Hill University demonstrating a 188% increase in students disclosing a mental health condition over the 5 years to 2020, and internal data indicating a 90% increase in students accessing Counselling and Wellbeing services over 3 years to 2021.

This is similarly repeated for our staff where mental ill health has been a significant and growing challenge over the past few years and affects one in four people at some point in their lives. Research by the CIPD<sup>3</sup> on the impact of COVID-19 on working lives confirms this trend with **43% of employees reporting their general mental health has worsened since the pandemic**, rising to 52% for those with an existing mental health issue.

This is reflected in the University staff absence data. Mental health continues to be the number one reason for sickness absence at the university. 28.2% of all absences in 2020/21 related to mental health, and data from the recent staff survey found that 48% of staff are at risk of having poor mental health. Although more students and staff than ever are disclosing mental health conditions to the University there is still stigma, misunderstanding and discrimination relating to mental health in the University as there is within society as a whole<sup>4</sup>.

Even though students and employees are able to slowly resume their pre-pandemic lives, the effects of lockdowns, restrictions and Covid-19 could be considerable for many. Research carried out by Mind in July 2021<sup>5</sup> showed that those who struggled with their mental health before the pandemic are struggling more than ever, and that

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<sup>1</sup> [UCAS; Starting the Conversation, 2021](#)

<sup>2</sup> [NUS; Coronavirus Student Survey phase III November 2020](#)

<sup>3</sup> [CIPD survey insights, April 2020](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Mental Health Foundation, 2021](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Mind; Coronavirus: the consequences for mental health; July 2021](#)

young people are more likely to use negative coping strategies. With a limit to in person activities during lockdowns, a closure of sports centres and gyms, and limited medical interventions in the NHS, there have been inevitable impacts on mental and physical health.

People in the UK faced unequal challenges with their mental health prior to the pandemic but the Mind research also demonstrates that Coronavirus has heightened that inequality. Different sectors of society have been hit particularly hard including young people and those on lower incomes. Data from the Office for Students<sup>6</sup> shows the challenges of dealing with a mental health condition are compounded and made more complex by intersections with other factors such as ethnicity and sexuality. The EHU community is more diverse than ever before, and therefore any strategy must have an inclusive approach and address these inequalities.

There is an increasing body of evidence to support the link between mental health and student and staff retention. Research by Randstad in 2021<sup>7</sup> revealed that 48% of students they surveyed stated they had considered leaving their course because of their mental health. Although our internal data doesn't specifically identify mental health as a category, when telling us their reasons for leaving Edge Hill University in academic year 2021-22, 21% of students cited health reasons<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, a report published by Deloitte in 2022<sup>9</sup> found that 61% of employees surveyed who had intentionally left or planned to leave their job, indicated that it was in full or in part due to poor mental health.

Important research with university students undertaken by Wonkhe/Pearson in 2022<sup>10</sup> found that belonging, inclusion and mental health are all connected, and that the state of students' self-assessed mental health is consistently associated with their sense of belonging. Unsurprisingly we find that the same applies to staff. Research by McKinsey & Company in 2021<sup>11</sup> conducted across 5 countries and multiple industries into the resignation of staff found that 51% of staff surveyed quit their jobs because they didn't feel a sense of belonging in their workplace.

Promoting and supporting wellbeing must be at the heart of what we do. To gain real benefit, wellbeing priorities must be integrated throughout, embedded in our culture, leadership and people management, and co-created by staff and students to allow the University community to flourish and reach its full potential.

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<sup>6</sup> [OfS; Mental health Are all students being properly supported?; Nov 2019](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Randstad; the impact of the pandemic on student wellbeing; Feb 2021](#)

<sup>8</sup> Based on Local internal withdrawal reasons of 451 Registered and Withdrawn students in 2021-22 academic year up to end of April 2022.

<sup>9</sup> [Mental health and employers – the case for investment, pandemic and beyond, March 2022](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Wonkhe/Pearson; Students' perceptions of belonging and inclusion at university; Feb 2022](#)

<sup>11</sup> [McKinsey & Company - the Great Resignation—and what is driving it, 2021](#)

## Strategy

A whole University approach is crucial to the success of this strategy and will involve collaboration and coordination between students, staff and the Students' Union.

The strategy is informed by and aligned to sector guidance including the UUK #Stepchange strategic framework<sup>12</sup>, the Student Minds Mental Health Charter<sup>13</sup>. It is also underpinned by the People Plan. Policies and practices delivered as part of this strategy will also be embedded into other strategies, including our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy. The focus of this strategy is on mental wellbeing. However, we also recognise the importance of physical wellbeing, and the relationship between these two aspects of our health.

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*Universities and colleges need to keep working towards comprehensive whole-institution approaches to mental health*

*Rosie Tressler OBE - CEO Student Minds*

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## Vision

We will place wellbeing at the heart of what we do and how we do it across our entire community. Enhancing our inclusive and supportive environment to promote positive health and wellbeing and ensure that members of our community are supported to thrive, succeed and achieve their potential.

## Strategic Aims

We have set six strategic objectives to provide a framework for our actions over the next 5 years, to ensure our whole organisation can deliver our vision. To meet these objectives, we will respond both with proactive measures, designed to create an environment which helps reduce the causes of mental ill health or threats to our people's wellbeing; and with reactive measures, responding to and supporting people experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing. Our implementation plan details the steps we will take over the next 5 years.

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<sup>12</sup> [UUK; Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities; May 2020](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Student Minds; The University Mental Health Charter; 2019](#)



## 1. Leadership and Culture

Foster a whole university approach that is driven by our Vice-Chancellor with appropriate governance structures to embed positive mental health and wellbeing throughout the organisation.

- a. Student and staff leaders across the University and the Students' Union will promote a whole University approach to mental health and wellbeing, demonstrating a visible commitment to the strategy.
- b. Staff across the University in academic areas and professional services will work closely together, sharing relevant information and will get involved and contribute to the overall agenda.
- c. Resources and investment will continue to be made across the University to support services and new initiatives and to ensure that these meet the needs of all members of the community who require these services.
- d. A culture will be established where the stigma surrounding mental health is eliminated, everyone is included and welcome, and where all members of the community feel a sense of belonging with the University.

## 2. Prevention

Develop an environment that promotes wellbeing, positive mental health lifeskills and emotional resilience in our community.

- a. The importance of personal health and wellbeing will be promoted across the University community, supporting all to develop a greater individual awareness of these factors and highlighting the importance of maintaining positive healthy lifestyles.

- b. The mental health and wellbeing of staff and students will be considered in all strategic decisions, and we will recognise and respond to peak stress points within the academic calendar, reducing or eliminating these where possible.
- c. Student wellbeing, life skills and emotional resilience will be prioritised within the curriculum and when considering academic assessment, but also in the range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities that are provided to and promoted to students.
- d. Proactive work will continue to be enhanced to prevent harassment and sexual violence, improve access to support with alcohol or drugs and to reduce the impact of financial stress which are all known to impact on wellbeing.

### 3. Early Intervention

Develop the skills and confidence of others to create the right conditions for disclosure, intervene early and direct to services.

- a. Staff and students with existing mental or physical health conditions will disclose this to the University at the earliest opportunity due to the effective systems in place, supportive culture and strong encouragement to do so.
- b. During their time at University, students and staff will know how to access support for themselves or for others, feel comfortable to do so and will be able to access it easily in a timely way, with support being proportionate to their needs.
- c. Staff in key roles supporting our community such as Personal Tutors, Campus Support staff and line managers, will feel confident to recognise signs of mental health issues, provide initial low-level support and refer-on appropriately, having received a robust and effective package of training.
- d. The development of well understood referral pathways both within the University and with partners and external agencies will enable students and staff to receive the appropriate support smoothly and quickly.

### 4. Support

Deliver effective well-resourced services that are accessible, meet the needs of our community and are underpinned by appropriate and supportive processes.

- a. Professional support, risk management and clinical intervention will be provided via effective and sector leading Counselling, Wellbeing and Occupational Health services which are appropriately resourced.
- b. Students with complex mental health challenges will be supported to continue and succeed in their studies, referring to the NHS or external parties, or implementing the Fitness to Study/Practice procedures to support students as required.
- c. All support services will undergo regular internal and external evaluation, investment and improvement to ensure they remain fit for purpose, adapt to the changing need and can flexibly meet demand throughout the academic year.



- d. Staff working within Student Services will receive a comprehensive package of training which is flexible and considers culturally appropriate support to meet the needs of students and staff from all backgrounds.

## 5. Partnerships

Enhance and develop collaborative external partnerships to support delivery of our services and to further improve the wellbeing of our community.

- a. Current links will be enhanced with NHS, local charities, national agencies and other external groups to enhance services and enable sharing of current best practice, training and clinical knowledge in both directions.
- b. Data will be shared between partners where confidentiality and data protection permits, in order to improve risk management, provide joined up support, enable continuity of care, and to meet the diverse support needs of our community.
- c. Put a renewed focus on issues of mental health and wellbeing when working together with our partner organisations, especially our trusted student placement providers e.g. in the NHS and the school sectors.
- d. New internal relationships will be established to ensure a joined-up package of support for staff and students across multiple areas, and all parties will be well informed about their role and boundaries.

## 6. Data and research

Develop our management information and research, both internally and nationally, to measure success and to identify improvements using evidence-based decision making.

- a. All mental health and wellbeing interventions and initiatives will be data informed so that resource is directed towards projects that are most likely to have a positive impact on those areas of the community that are most in need.
- b. Trends in the sector will be monitored and we will conduct academic research and keep abreast of sector best practice in mental health and wellbeing in Higher Education to improve services.
- c. Management Information from our own internal services will allow us to respond flexibly and quickly to changes in demand or need from our staff and students and to continuously improve services.
- d. Mental health and wellbeing services will be evaluated regularly, and we will develop processes to learn from any issues or incidents to inform continuous improvements.

## Endmatter

Title	Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
Policy Owner	Director of Student Services
Policy Manager	Student Services Compliance Officer
Approved by	Academic Board
Date of Approval	July 2022
Date for Review	July 2027

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*"All children and young people should understand the importance of wellbeing and good mental health. They should develop the skills and resilience to keep well, and to understand the signs of being unwell and be confident to ask for help. They should expect that the support available in education, the community and the health and care systems meets their needs."*

*Professor Dame Sue Bailey, Chair, Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition*

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