

Leeds Beckett University - staff mental health and wellbeing case study

Integration of wellbeing approach into appraisals

At Leeds Beckett University, we have redesigned our appraisals to include a much greater emphasis on wellbeing. This was already planned for launch in July 2020, but the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on colleagues' mental health made this new approach more important than ever.

We consulted with key stakeholders to understand their views on the existing appraisal system and found that a common misconception was that the process appeared to be little more than a 'tick-box exercise'.

We set out to create appraisals focused on meaningful conversations, where managers gained, or built on, a real understanding of the individual's wellbeing. One where managers knew how the individual felt about work and any changes that they had experienced and where they could find out how the individual was taking care of their physical and mental wellbeing.

Supporting line managers in the new approach

Managers across the University were now expected to confidently hold appraisal discussions where wellbeing took centre-stage and we needed to give them the tools to do this. We therefore developed a wide range of resources including live webinars, on-line modules, guidance on active listening and also equipped managers with a bank of coaching-style questions as follows:

- 'How are you, and those around you?'
- 'What are you doing to stay well?'
- 'How is your environment affecting your wellbeing while working?'
- 'What is your work / life balance like?'
- 'How can we best support you right now?'

Empowering all colleagues to be equal partners in their appraisals was also essential. We encouraged the use of Wellness Action Plans – not just during appraisal discussions, or as a 'solution' to address poor mental health, but as a pro-active way for all colleagues to identify and share what best supports their wellbeing. For example, in one of our recent podcasts, a colleague who experiences on-going mental health difficulties explained that her Wellness Action Plan has been invaluable in positively managing her wellbeing.

Feedback on the new approach

We have collected feedback on the new approach and one key theme is that articulating positive mental health has been well received and beneficial, encouraging a clearer understanding and deeper conversations about how colleagues are feeling. Given the challenges of the past year, appraisals have facilitated positive conversations, providing opportunities for managers to give feedback and to thank colleagues for their hard work. One experienced manager told us that the new wellbeing-focused approach and resources have 'transformed' her appraisal conversations.

Next steps

While we've seen the emphasis shift away from form-filling to person-centred conversations for many colleagues, this style of appraisal is not yet embedded across the University. So, what are our next steps? We will keep wellbeing as a key pillar of our appraisals and develop further resources so that all colleagues - from cleaners to professors - can get the best from these conversations.

As one of nine universities participating in [Mind's 'Mentally Healthy Universities' pilot programme](#), we have contributed to the new [Mental Health at Work Commitment Guide for the Higher](#)

[Education Sector](#), providing details of our approach to appraisals - please see Mental Health at Work Commitment, Standard 4: Increase organisational confidence and capability for further information.

August 2021