

Staffordshire University - Staff mental health and wellbeing case study

New wellbeing strategy

The coronavirus pandemic caused for a major move in the way that the University operated in order to adjust to an unprecedented speed and scale to social distancing practices and a new remote work environment. In doing so, staff wellbeing was at the heart of our considerations. As with most HEIs, the University moved from on-campus working to remote working overnight and organisational learning during this time was key for the University - we recognised very early on how important it was for us to engage with and seek feedback from staff to help inform how we managed wellbeing during this time and in the future - this approach helped to inform, shape and develop our new Wellbeing Strategy.

The University has routinely undertaken staff engagement and pulse surveys and over the last 12 months a significant amount of work has also been undertaken ensuring a strong organisational culture to support and achieve our 2030 Vision and a next generation work environment that is healthy, creative and empowering. Informed by our work in this area, the root causes of wellbeing could be clearly established and the case for improvement and action in developing a Wellbeing Strategy was as a direct response to this feedback. The Strategy aims to embed a culture of 'leadership at every level' and of 'supporting each other' and includes actions and interventions designed to support both positive physical and mental health amongst managers and their teams.

Wellbeing action plan

To support the delivery and to drive forward the Wellbeing Strategy, a wellbeing action plan was created which received full support and has been overseen by the University's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee where representatives from all Schools and Services and Trade Unions attend. The Committee acts as Governance for Wellbeing.

Wellbeing initiatives

The Wellbeing Strategy focuses upon the delivery of a number of initiatives, which include but are not limited to those listed below. The strategy will continue to act as a focus in managing and monitoring wellbeing to ensure that it achieves positive future impact.

- A strong focus on the creation of a coaching culture as part of a refreshed CPD programme.
- Following the publication of 'Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers', the University decided to put the 'health' back into Health and Safety. Although we had an Employee Assistance Programme, there was no immediate support for staff mental health. A call for volunteers in all Schools and Services went out, and to date there are now 66 fully qualified Mental Health First Aiders across all campuses, with more staff interested in the role.
- Resilience training was delivered to line managers that was designed to look at the importance of positive health, wellbeing and resilience through an individual lens to help managers understand what they can do to build their own resilience and that of their teams.
- Incorporation of 'wellbeing' into the Health and Safety Committee structure and conversations at a strategic and operational level across the university together with wellbeing considered explicitly in new projects being developed and approved by the University's Strategic Change Board.
- Faster recruitment to vacancies – staff reported that this impacted on their wellbeing where there were gaps in employment following a resignation. The University worked on ensuring that it recruited quickly to vacant posts.

- Development of a blended working framework designed for a new way of working and learning from the pandemic which took account of the context now and the future direction of travel.
- An infrastructure to support faster communication of major Committee decisions so that staff are informed in a timely way about decisions, their reasons and impact upon them.
- Transformation events held monthly within Schools and Services designed to explore how the working environment can be improved, particularly linked to wellbeing.
- Review and roll out of a range of wellbeing activities for staff which includes recognition of wellbeing initiatives at our Celebrating Staff Success award.
- Roll-out of a new Employee Assistance Provider, with greater emphasis on providing holistic wellbeing support to staff rather than as a tool to respond to a crisis. Additional benefits of the new provider include a dedicated exercise app with tailored fitness sessions, financial discounts and benefits, support with child and elder care provision and personalised wellbeing advice.

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