

University of Northampton - Staff mental health and wellbeing case study

At University of Northampton (UON) we believe that what we put in place should benefit staff and students. Over the last five years we have placed increased focus and importance in the mental health of our staff through implementation of support services and running events to encourage more people to talk about mental health and break down the stigma.

Provision

We currently have an Employee Assistance programme that provides advice, guidance and support for a whole range of issues. Staff and their families at the same address can access free counselling, and guidance for mental health as well as financial, employment, legal advice.

We have just signed up to Togetherall for students and staff to supplement this offering.

We work with a network of mental health professionals and charities in the Northants area to provide better support for staff and students, providing facilities for the Northampton IAPT service to hold clinics on campus and bringing in peer support workers to hold talking point sessions. This network has enabled local services to come together and identify areas for improvement.

Mental Health First Aid, and Stepchange

Since November 2017 we have rolled out Mental health first Aid training to staff, which over 400 staff have engaged in either the two-day first aider course or a half-day awareness course. Our nursing team in the Faculty of Health, Education and Society have also delivered the two-day course to over 600 nursing students as part of their curriculum.

We are currently working through the Universities UK Stepchange self-assessment and working with researchers in the institution to undertake evaluation of current initiatives and to identify gaps we can then explore. Our mental health first aid training continues as do supporting the various mental health awareness events that occur during the year to break down the barriers and stigma.

We have been recognised for our work by being awarded the first Inside Out mental health award for MHFA.

Impact of Covid-19

During the pandemic we have had to change the way we interact with staff and recognise the impact that such a big change to working lives has. We have implemented a series of coffee and chat sessions lead by a variety of colleagues across the University to enable staff to air their concerns, or just to connect with people in similar situations. These have been informal sessions that any staff member can join and have been focused on different areas such as: returning to work after parental/ family leave; staying physically well while sitting; mental health and wellbeing; balancing time for yourself alongside work and family responsibilities; parenting; homeschooling and work; balancing work responsibilities alongside caring responsibilities; six weeks of yoga classes online; returning to work from long term sick; wind down tunes session. Feedback is that they have been great for sharing ideas on how to cope in their circumstances.

Wellbeing survey

In December/ January we ran a staff wellbeing survey to understand how staff feel we have handled the pandemic and the impact that covid has had on health and wellbeing. This has informed how we move towards different ways of working post pandemic to enable staff to achieve better work life balance and to be happier, effective and productive in work.

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