

University of Southampton - Mental health and wellbeing support during Covid-19

Introduction

The University provides a comprehensive Health & Wellbeing 'One stop shop' support and signposting portal online. It also has sections on physical health and lifestyle choices, mental health and stress, occupational health and emergency response. Each section includes a range of resources, including advice for line managers.

There is a programme of Health & Wellbeing initiatives throughout the year, e.g. a focus on work from home last year; focus groups and health education 'your health, your wellbeing' regarding Alcohol consumption, Blood pressure, weight and body composition checks. There were also awareness days including Mental Health Awareness Day, World Mental Health Day, Men's health etc using local Wellbeing Champions.

The University provides e-learning to support health and wellbeing e.g. Musculoskeletal Awareness Working at Home and Stress Awareness; as well as face to face Stress Management Training. In collaboration with Solent Mind group, there is online training for those 'Supporting Student Mental Health' and First Aid for Mental Health training is provided across the University. There is an Employee Assistance Programme and Togetherall – a platform for staff to get support online for mental health and wellbeing.

The University has a Staff Wellbeing Working group – driving forward changes to support the wellbeing agenda and providing an online interactive seminar series with advice from professionals and academics specialising in various parts of wellbeing e.g. meditation, mindfulness, benefits of sleep etc. The network of wellbeing champions meet four times a year and provide feedback on any new initiatives.

The University undertakes a staff survey, with two pulse surveys in 2020/21 focusing on safety and wellbeing. A task and finish group was established to deliver actions based on the survey results. Health, Safety and Risk are considering how the feedback and needs should influence the Staff Wellbeing strategic plan, and will work with the Wellbeing Working Group and the Health and Wellbeing Champions to take this forward.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic

- We quickly moved any training and guidance which was previously delivered face to face to the online e-learning portal and site so that everyone could access it.
- Our campaigns and initiatives also moved online
- Academic colleagues were very supportive and keen to get involved which was really helpful as many have very specialist expertise in this area of work.
- We have been working very closely with our Health & Safety union representatives throughout the pandemic in terms of wellbeing which has proved very helpful and is now reaping benefits in other areas of H&S as well.
- We are currently exploring new ways of working with the aim of hybrid work in the future.

Reflections on what has worked best

- The provision of training was very well received especially 'First Aid for Mental Health' and the 'Supporting Student Mental Health' training.
- The Health & Wellbeing site which we adapted for Covid was also well used and received very positive feedback.
- The isolation, anxiety and difficulties that some people faced whilst working at home last year in particular was very difficult to manage in the initial stages. We had to rely on line

managers and union reps keeping us informed but towards August last year we had a good understanding of the size of the problem and were actively addressing it.

- We have signed up to the University Mental Health Charter and we are a signatory of the Mindful Employer.

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