

University of Greenwich: Fast forwarding delivery for Mentally Healthy Universities

Introduction

The University of Greenwich has always delivered quality assured safety management and student wellbeing services. These have reinforced support for staff wellbeing. In 2018, professional services departments came together with Greenwich Students Union and the Faculty for Health and Human Sciences to develop an integrated Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2022.

The Strategy was based on eight principles with one of the pivotal principles being to appreciate, recognise and acknowledge that everyone will experience periods of low mental health in their lives. As a result, it was considered that the role of the University as an employer and place of study was to offer a range of support in partnership with appropriate internal and external services for its students and staff.

Mentally Healthy Universities Programme

In 2019 the University's partner, Mind launched the [Thriving at Work Standards](#) which is a call to action for organisations to adopt the recommendations of the UK government's independent review for employers to support mental health.

[The Mentally Healthy Universities \(MHU\) Programme](#), funded by Goldman Sachs Gives aimed to pilot the Thriving at Work Standards in the university sector. This was the first time this work was being undertaken and the University of Greenwich was approved in the initial cohort for this programme.

Although the University could meet many aspects of the Thriving at Work Standards through the delivery of its Health and Wellbeing Strategy, there still remained areas for development for reducing mental health stigma, especially with leaders, academic staff and young people. Engaging senior managers to consider how they could talk about their mental health was imperative. It was also important to consider how senior managers could support staff, and how staff could support themselves through having a clear understanding of mental health, "that it was ok to not be ok" and how they should ask for help.

As part of the MHU pilot 52 staff were trained as Mental Health and Wellbeing Champions. Over the course of 2019/20 the Champions promoted a culture for self-care. As a result, staff and students shared their stories on the university's communication channels and engaged to mark national Health and Wellbeing days throughout the year.

Impact of Coronavirus and actions taken

In 2020, with the emergence of the Coronavirus pandemic, support for the Health and Wellbeing strategy and the University's MHU pilot accelerated. Both projects were seen as essential for supporting staff and students' mental health and wellbeing in response to the crisis.

One of the key/noticeable outcomes of the MHU pilot and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy during the pandemic has been frequent leadership messages encouraging staff to seek support either through speaking to a mental health and wellbeing champion, a line manager, the university employee assistance programme, or by accessing information through the University Wellbeing Hub, or pandemic support advice through the Staff Resilience Toolkit.

The University also completed comprehensive equality impact assessments to help understand and mitigate for the pandemic for groups that were from communities that could be considered as having protected characteristics and wider issues i.e. disability, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic

disadvantages, caring responsibilities etc. Resources enabled managers and staff to find support from specialist services especially where additional information and help was being offered to support the particular needs of people and to manage the health inequalities of the pandemic.

The University continued offering a range of training including the Mental Health First Aid programme which aims to train all staff to appropriate levels to improve their knowledge and ability to know of and signpost to services; resilience masterclasses; developing wellbeing conversations during appraisals, and introducing wellbeing in the curriculum in part by integrating Mind's students' workshops into degree programmes. Other initiatives include:

- Working with the Trade Unions, to embed mental health support. Examples of activities included creating a Teams channel which has provided a unified approach for supporting first aid through dovetailing development with mental health.
- Undertaking wellbeing surveys to monitor how staff were coping, which meant the university could adjust and provide further support during the pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic there has been continuous reflection to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of staff and students, and it has been appreciated this connectedness has been one of the positive outcomes of the pandemic, with people knowing they have meaningfully contributed to the sense of community and shared endeavour to support one another.

As the University emerges from the pandemic we know we want to capture and hold onto these attributes, so we can continue to foster a culture that is always learning, compassionate, open and stronger.

Further information

This case study was developed by Laleh Williams, Head of Organisation and People Development at the University of Greenwich.