

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING WORKING GROUP
Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2023

PRESENT: Duncan Stuart (DS), Karen Scaife (KS), Brian Paterson (BP), Debbie Dyker (DD), Anna Goldhawk (AG), Dr. Christine Roberts (CR), Ellie Dick (ED), Sai Shradda S. Viswanathan (VP Welfare), Nick Edwards (NE), Jacqui Tuckwell (JT), Janine Chalmers (JC), Jemma Murdoch (JM), Tim Baker (TB), Garry Fisher joined 2.40pm (GF), Chris Berry joined 3.12pm (CB), Johanna Pilskog (JP)

1. **WELCOME AND CHECK IN (DS)**
2. **REVIEW MINUTES AND ACTION LOG FROM MARCH MEETING (APPENDIX 1)**

| Reference | Description | Action by | Status |
|---------------------------|--|---------------|---|
| 130623 Agenda item 2 | ED and VP Welfare are planning discussions with SMT and relevant staff on support for students with specific support needs. Update will be given when further plans confirmed. | ED/VP Welfare | Ongoing A new forum for students with specific support needs will be created pending approval from court in November. Collab between SU and UoA to reach target students for committee roles. Information will be included on the new 365 webpage. |
| 130623 Agenda item 3 | KS to look for training for meeting chairs in relation to incorporating wellbeing in meeting agendas | KS | Complete |
| 130623 Agenda item 4 | LM to link in with CR to offer student support for athletes/those students who need to take time out from studies during professional sporting events. | LM/CR | Complete |
| 130623 Agenda item 5.2 | AG to have discussion with JM/LM on where Student Support fits in/work together with the MHFA role in relation to staff worried about a student. | AG/LM/JM | Ongoing discussion |
| 130623 Agenda item 5.2 | AG/KS to check if we can get stats on 'callouts and other usage for MHFA to get an idea or workload associated with the role. | AG/KS | Complete AG informed we do not have statistics on MHFA call-outs as this is not something that's been actively noted, however metric catchment will be incorporated in future plans. |
| 130623 Agenda item 9 | KS to include ED in conversation re GP registration status to keep SU updated on the situation. | KS/ED | Complete KS confirmed that we have had contact with NHS and GP reg will be available during WW. |

NE informed Anna Shea (Counselling) has started building contacts within more specialised NHS services such as Cornhill hospital.

The minutes of the MHWG meeting held on 13 June 2023 were approved.

3. **REMIT AND COMPOSITION (KS) (APPENDIX 2)**

The question has been raised if the Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group is becoming too large and a review will be done to look at composition. Where practical we will look to limit number of staff from the same area.

DD informed that the 'Staff Experience committee' has been created as a respond to a gap, focusing on Mental Health and Wellbeing matters specifically for staff. First meeting for this committee will be held on 1 October 2023. Relevant matters from the MHWG will be fed into the Staff Experience committee.

For clarification, matters related to stress still falls under the Health and Safety committee (led by GF).

5. **REVIEW OF 2022/23 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2023/24 (KS) (APPENDIX 3)**

Great progress and achievements reached by teams on our action plans.

DD highlighted that our successes should be highlighted to the community and Trade Unions, and this will be incorporated into Communication plans by the Experience, Engagement & Wellbeing team.

Biggest challenge faced on the action plans has been how to incorporate wellbeing in the teaching and learning environment. This is being taken forward by VP Welfare and JB.

6. **STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AGREEMENT 2023/23 (AG/ED) (APPENDIX 4)**

A new working group has been formed to take forward the SMHA year 2 action plan.

Main projects are the Student Welfare committee and Student Welfare Champions.

A short discussion was held on how recruitment of relevant students to the roles would be done. KS suggested Student Advice and Support team might be able to suggest some specific students to target based on their involvement with their services.

Suggestions on how to reach the relevant students welcome to Sai (ausawelfare@abdn.ac.uk) or AG (anna.goldhawk1@abdn.ac.uk)

7. **UOA ANIMALS ON CAMPUS POLICY (GF) (APPENDIX 5)**

After lockdown there has been an increase in pets being brought onto campus and a policy review has been requested due to UoA being one of few organisations who currently does not have a clear policy regarding this matter.

A need for policy review comes from concerns being raised in relation to Health & Safety matters such as allergies, disease control, fear of animals and control of animals during e.g. fire alarm. A small working group was established to look at this.

GF clarified that assistance dogs and emotional support animals (e.g. Therapets) as per report will be allowed on campus no matter the outcome of the review as they fall under a different category.

A discussion was held on both implications and positive changes if the policy is approved with points made to animal welfare concerns (how can these be guaranteed on campus), practical arrangements for staff who are used to taking their pet in and now have to make other arrangements, if a University-wide policy would affect Hillhead halls (accommodation), and safety needs for staff in relation to allergies or other that with the current approach cannot be guaranteed.

A case-by-case approach was suggested, however deemed challenging to follow as personal opinions can hinder consistent and fair approval for different teams.

A suggestion was made that if policy is implemented there should be a transition period to allow staff to make suitable arrangements for pet sitting.

Comments on the policy are welcome to Garry Fisher (garry.fisher@abdn.ac.uk) from members of this working group. If receiving feedback from your team please collate this before passing onto Garry. Policy and feedback will be fed back to the Health & Safety committee early November. It will then go to SMT who have the final decision.

8. **BEWELL AND INCLUSION WEEK 2023 (KS) (VERBAL UPDATE)**

[BeWell & Inclusion week 2023](#) is being held 9th – 13th October. Dates chosen due to highest retention window amongst students.

There will be a range of free activities for both students and staff, including fayres at Foresterhill and Old Aberdeen campus.

Teams will be encouraged to enter a competition and promote World Mental Health Day.

On 27th September Aberdeen Sports Village (ASV) and the Students' Union are hosting a "Try it Out day" with open doors and taster sessions for students into the Sports Village. This is to encourage physical wellbeing in our community.

9. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

KS asked for thoughts from the working group on staff engagement in relation to wellbeing activities. There tend to be a big uptake on these around events such as BeWell & Inclusion week, however this engagement falls out with this week. Suggestions welcome on how we can empower staff to take time out for activities during the rest of the year.

A discussion was held where it was noted that this could just be natural surges of interest, or that many staff might not want to prioritise activity over lunch break/having to work back time taken out for an activity during their work day.

CR suggested that ASV should be included in this conversation for the possibility to organise short "lunchtime" classes/activities that could fit into staff schedules.

BP suggested a review of the 35 hour work week to include time out for wellbeing activities as this would be clearer guidance for managers and staff might feel more empowered to use this opportunity if expected within your schedule.

Meeting was concluded with some encouraging words from AG.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 12 DECEMBER 2023

ACTIONS SUMMARY

| Reference | Description | Action by | Status |
|---|--|------------------|-----------------------|
| 130623 Agenda item 2 (recurring) | A new forum for students with specific support needs will be created pending approval from court in November. Collab between SU and UoA to reach target students for committee roles. Information will be included on the new 365 webpage. | ED/VP Welfare | Ongoing |
| 130623 Agenda item 5.2 | AG to have discussion with JM/LM on where Student Support fits in/work together with the MHFA role in relation to staff worried about a student. | AG/LM/JM | Ongoing discussion |
| 060923 Agenda item 6 | Suggestions on how to reach relevant students for welfare committee/champion roles welcome to Sai/AG | Everyone | |
| 060923 Agenda item 7 | Comments on UoA Animals on Campus policy to be shared with GF. | Everyone | |