University of Aberdeen Staff and Student Wellbeing Strategy

2021 – 2025

Introduction and Strategic Context

Caring for the wellbeing, health and safety of our diverse community and supporting all staff and students to achieve their full potential is at the heart of the University's strategic plan, Aberdeen 2040. Our Wellbeing Strategy (hereinafter referred to as the 'Strategy') sets out our roadmap to achieving this and becoming a leader in our sector in promoting health and wellbeing.

We will support initiatives such as Universities UK's Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities which seeks to support universities becoming "places that promote mental health and wellbeing, enabling all students and all staff to thrive and succeed", Universities UK's Suicide-safer Universities a framework dedicated to the prevention of student suicide and Scottish Government Healthy Working Lives that supports employers to promote a safer and healthier workforce.

The University of Aberdeen defines wellbeing "the state of being comfortable, happy or healthy", encompassing all areas of life including personal, study, work, physical exercise, and nutrition, as well as mental health.

Both mental and physical health can be measured on a continuum, spanning from feeling happy and content, to experiencing chronic and enduring mental health difficulties and this can vary depending on a person's circumstances at a given point in time.

The University recognises how important it is to support the physical and mental wellbeing of our community. Consultation with our staff and student body was key when developing this Strategy to ensure that the diverse needs of our community were taken account of and addressed.

Student consultation found that physical, mental and financial health were the most important aspects of student wellbeing. Key to this was feeling happy, content and accepted. The University will encourage self-care and educate our community on the importance of a healthy study-life balance to support wellbeing.

Staff consultation highlighted a shared belief that the workplace has a direct impact on wellbeing. For the workplace to have a positive effect on wellbeing, staff expressed the need to feel comfortable in their role, have manageable workloads, good relationships with colleagues, and a healthy work-life balance.

This Strategy outlines the holistic approach the University will take to support staff and students to maintain positive wellbeing; manage problems and support the prevention of mental and physical ill health through awareness raising, activities and provision of support.

Strategic Aims

01. Develop a shared understanding of wellbeing at the University, including institutional and individual responsibilities

02. Create a wellbeing-conducive working, learning and research environment which supports our staff and students to fulfil their potential

03. Minimise the causes of work and study-related stress and support those affected

04. Empower our community to achieve and maintain positive wellbeing by providing resources to enable them to achieve their full potential

05. Reduce health inequalities within the University and provide easy access to resources and support, enabling staff and students to maintain positive wellbeing

06. Embed a culture of openness and inclusivity regarding wellbeing and mental health issues

07. Create an environment which enables the University community to efficiently identify, respond to and support wellbeing and health issues or concerns

Foundation

This Strategy is underpinned by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy and the Stress Management at Work Policy. The success of this Strategy will be determined by factors such as consistent and exemplary leadership, as well as open and honest dialogue and staff and student participation in wellbeing activities, all of which will support us, as a community, to achieve our shared wellbeing goals.

Our community also has a role to play in maintaining positive wellbeing by utilising support services and raising awareness of these with others.

Our Senior Management Team will lead by example. Delivery of the strategy, through an annual operational plan will be led by the Wellbeing Team under the guidance of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group and other supporting working groups including (but not limited to) the Equality Diversity Inclusion Committee and Dignity at Work and Study Working Group.

We will continue to nurture and develop existing partnerships, in particular with AUSA, and forge new relationships both within and out with the University to advance and support our wellbeing commitments.
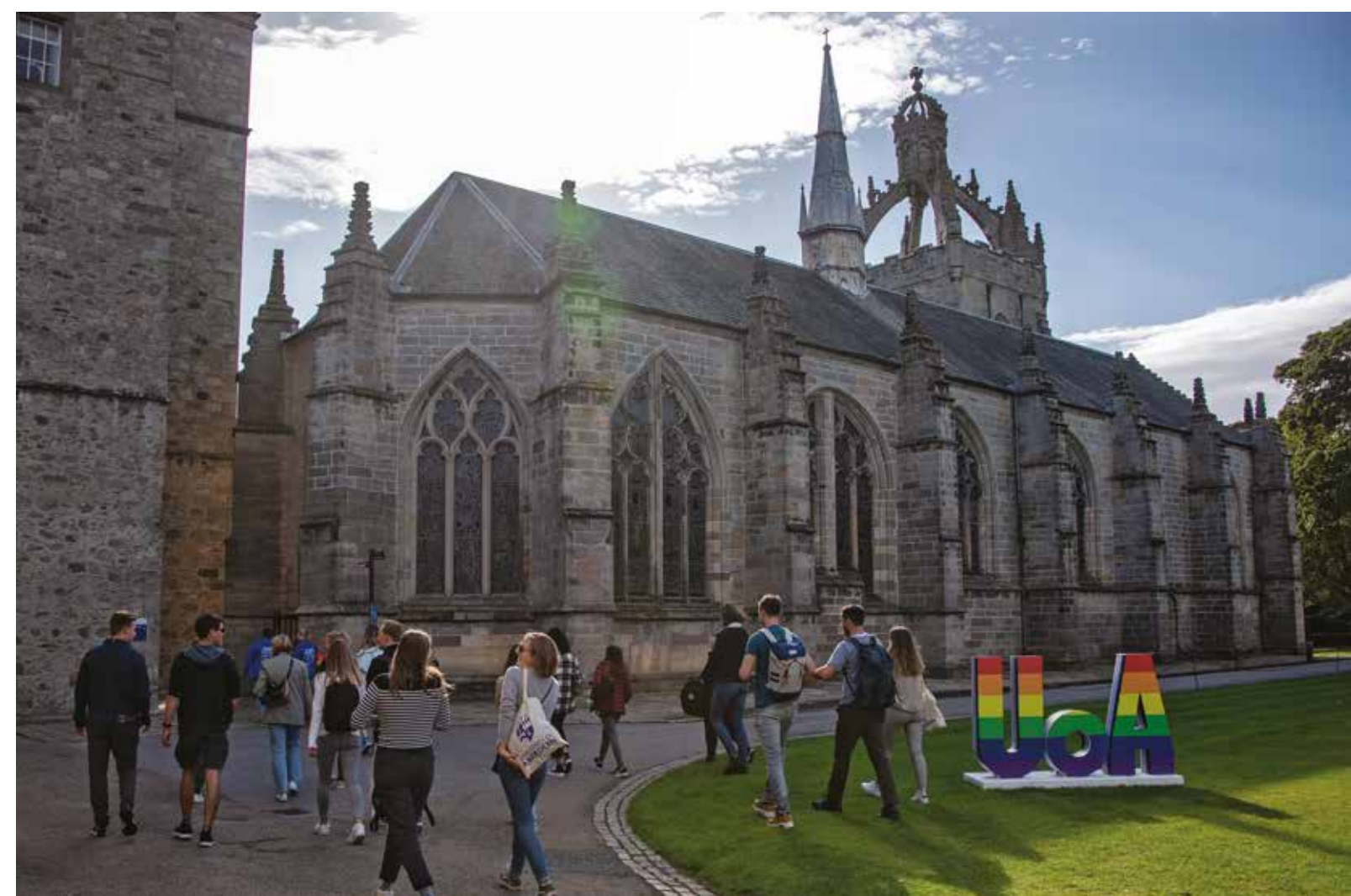
01.

Themes and Priorities
Supportive Environment

The needs and circumstances of our community (varying from staff, PGR, transnational or online students) can vary greatly. Recent data gathered through staff and student surveys indicated that our diverse community is one of our greatest strengths. This Strategy will build on this position by enhancing a positive environment in which our staff and students can thrive. We will:

Staff and Students

- Enhance our network of Mental Health First Aiders and Champions, enabling them to challenge stigma, raise awareness about mental health, and provide supportive listening and signposting to our community.

- Actively align to our activity to support existing institutional policies and priorities including Equality Diversity and Inclusion, Race Equality, Dignity at Work and Study, Environment and Sustainability, and Flexible Working.

- Create an open and inclusive environment for staff and students experiencing issues with ill-health, supporting them with reasonable adjustments in the work or study lifecycle.

Staff

- Through staff induction we will provide our community with information, and thereafter, regular updates and advice on maintaining positive wellbeing and seeking support.

- Enhance our programme of training and support for staff, line managers, personal tutors and other pastoral leads to equip them in supporting our community.

- Offer a varied programme of CPD for all staff to enable them to support their own and others' wellbeing.

- Monitor and develop our services, resources, systems, processes, and procedures to ensure we provide our staff with the best possible support when needed.

Students

- Through student orientation we will provide our community with information, and thereafter, regular updates and advice on maintaining positive wellbeing and seeking support.

- Embed wellbeing across all aspects of the student experience – teaching, learning and co-curricular activities; recognising the impact positive wellbeing has on learning, attainment, and student life.

- Monitor and develop our services, resources, financial support, systems, processes, and procedures to ensure we provide our students with the best possible support when needed.

We will continually strive to create an open and inclusive environment where staff and students have access to the information, mechanisms and support they need to maintain positive wellbeing and support them through difficult periods. We will review and monitor the effectiveness of our services and support, and regularly implement improvements. We will:

Staff and Students

- Deliver a comprehensive programme of wellbeing communication and engagement activity informed by our staff and student pressure point matrix, national campaigns and situational needs.

- Review our provision of information – online and print, ensuring it's concise, relevant, and accessible to all.

- Work with external partners to ensure our activity is consistent with good practice by national and sectoral standards.

- Provide clear and transparent communication about wellbeing related matters, targeting specific groups when required (as outlined in the Annual Wellbeing Calendar).

02.

Themes and Priorities
Informed Community

03.

Themes and Priorities
Positive Culture

We will encourage dialogue to create shared wellbeing values within our community. We will continue to embrace new ways of working and learning with a view to creating a fully inclusive environment. We are committed to supporting staff and students who experience acute and long-term ill health. We will:

Staff and Students

- Reduce the stigma attached to mental ill-health, ensuring that both physical and mental ill-health are prioritised with appropriate support, acknowledging that tailored approaches will be required to meet individual needs.

- Support the ongoing efforts to challenge and change attitudes around mental health ensuring everyone is treated with dignity and respect

- Support the University commitment to develop a specific suicide prevention-intervention-postvention strategy in line with Universities UK "suicide safer university" framework.

- Continue to create an inclusive campus where everyone is welcome, safe, and experience a sense of belonging.

- Provide regular opportunities for staff and students to share feedback on what we are doing and how we can better support wellbeing and mental health.

- Provide our community with the training and tools and supporting them to build resilience and the ability to cope with change both at University and in their personal lives.

- Build and instil a shared understanding of dignity at work and study and empower our diverse community to thrive in a supportive environment.

- Encourage mainstreamed inclusive and accessible approaches in education thus reducing the need for individual adjustments.

Staff

- Support staff in maintaining a healthy work-life balance, e.g. supporting staff in taking their full allocation of annual leave, managing workloads and increasing options for flexible working patterns.

- Empower our staff to prioritise and support their own wellbeing, leading by example and empowering others.

Students

- Support students to maintain a healthy study-life balance and prioritise self-care.

- Promote an understanding of the support and provisions available to students based on their individual needs and circumstances.

- Create a culture where students feel comfortable to discuss their current situation, enabling them to seek specific support and adjustments should they have sensory and physical impairments, mental health conditions and long-term health conditions.

04.

Themes and Priorities
Empowering Community

The University promotes a holistic approach to tackling health and wellbeing issues arising from the workplace, learning environment or from personal circumstances. This includes offering self-help strategies and implementing effective and caring approaches to supporting staff and students who experience wellbeing or mental health difficulties.

Our approach acknowledges intersectionality. We recognise that each of us has many characteristics that combine to make up our lived experience and that everyone in our community may go through periods of difficulties that can be a source of stress. The University will provide relevant support and training to staff and students empowering our community to support each other and manage these situations. We will:

Staff and Students

- Promote and support our inclusion and liberation networks, creating opportunities for staff and students to benefit from peer support.

- Deliver high-quality support, relevant to individual needs.

Staff

- Create guidance and training opportunities for line managers in wellbeing issues which may affect their staff. For example, being able to identify when an employee may need additional support; managing sensitive conversations and knowing how to offer support.

- Provide relevant training and appropriate time to staff who wish to develop their skills in this area.

- Increasing job satisfaction and workplace morale.

- Continue to grow and develop the Mental Health First Aid Network, providing opportunities to further develop skills through additional training courses and awareness sessions.

- Continue to empower staff to utilise the University's flexible working policies and guidelines to support a healthy work-life balance.

- Build on our culture of mutual trust

Students

- Provide opportunities for students to access wellbeing and mental health workshops, raising awareness of and building personal resilience.

- Increase visibility and access to services to support student wellbeing such as the student helpline, counselling service, disability team, multi-faith chaplaincy and financial support.

- Monitor and assess the appropriateness of the financial support available to students.

- Develop resources that provide tools and practical ways to support and encourage positive wellbeing.

- Build on the desire and willingness from students by providing more opportunities to create student digital content to enhance their CV and personal development and to share their own experiences.

05.

Themes and Priorities
Healthy Lifestyle

Develop and expand on the Scottish Association of Mental Health '5 Ways to Wellbeing' Framework ('be active', 'take notice', 'stay connected', 'give' and 'learn') to create and promote a range of opportunities for both staff and students to embed wellbeing into all aspects of their lives.

By aligning with the institutional sustainability and inclusivity priorities, we will enable our community to support and protect the environment whilst maintain positive wellbeing. We will:

Staff and Students

- Maintain suitable bike storage, including lockers on campus and increase the use of the eBike loaning scheme.

- Maintain our Healthy Living Award status, providing healthy balanced meals on campus in line with Scottish dietary targets. Meals will be affordable and cater for specific dietary requirements where possible.

- Increase the number of smoke-free areas on campus. Provide support for staff and students who wish to stop smoking through smoking cessation classes.

- Continue to provide opportunities for staff and students to meet the national recommendations for physical activity, accommodating their personal work or study arrangements.

- Maintain opportunities for staff and students to take part in voluntary activities outwith the University

Staff

- Maintain and strengthen partnership with Aberdeen Sports Village by providing free and discounted staff lifestyle memberships.

- Support staff to participate in active travel and active working practices such as cycle to work scheme, walking meetings and regular breaks from screens.

- Increase opportunities and participation in staff networks that support employee wellbeing.

- Work with partners to provide opportunities for staff to receive discount flu vaccinations annually.

- Continue to enhance a supportive Alcohol and Drugs policy for staff.

Students

- Increase access for students to Aberdeen Sports Village with competitive discounts, lifestyle memberships and sports club access.

- Provide information on how to access the Scottish Health care system.

- Support the Scottish Government initiative to reduce period poverty by increasing access to free sanitary products on campus.

- Work with AUSA to provide meaningful support to clubs and societies to be accessible

Success Target	Aims	Themes
By 2021 we will have introduced the Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA) and refocused the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Network, by broadening scope.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7	1, 2, 3, 4
By 2022 we will have established the new working from home policy and introduced a new way of working for many staff.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7	1, 3, 4
By 2023 we will achieve the Healthy Working Lives GOLD award, a Scottish Government initiative to encourage employers to promote a safer and healthier workforce.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
By 2024, our community will benefit from an enhanced suite of training and support material to support their own and others' wellbeing.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	1, 2, 3, 4
By the year 2025 positive wellbeing will be embedded in all aspects of the student experience including co-curricular, teaching, learning and research.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
An increasing number (year on year) of staff and students indicating they are aware of the support available and feel empowered to support positive wellbeing.	4, 5, 7	1, 2, 4
Identify a baseline metric for measuring lost staff annual leave days per year, decreasing the number year on year.	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 3, 4
Identify baseline metrics in relation to health inequalities.	2, 5, 6	1, 3, 4, 5

Metrics for Measuring Success

Feedback, engagement and participation figures from events and campaigns

Number of staff signed up to flexible working

Uptake with ASV free off-peak staff member and discounted peak membership

Number of staff attending wellbeing training courses

Relevant staff and student webpages link clicks

Numbers of students completing wellbeing orientation module

Internal support service data, feedback, and satisfaction (staff and students)

External support service contract monitoring data

Reduction in indicators of stress, including sickness-absence, grievances, staff turnover

Number of staff trained to recognise the signs of stress on mental ill health

Effectiveness of MHFA to support mental health of the community

Data from the Staff Survey and Aberdeen Student Experience Survey

Assess and monitor Student Reality V Student Expectations through regular feedback

Reduction in student and staff retention data

Sickness and absence data

Effectiveness of workload reduction tools and guidance

1495

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN