

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**  
**MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING WORKING GROUP**  
**Minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2023**

**PRESENT:** Duncan Stuart (DS), Karen Scaife (KS), Brian Paterson (BP), Debbie Dyker (DD), Tim Baker (TB), Garry Fisher (GF), Anna Goldhawk (AG), Dr. Christine Roberts (CR), Lesley Muirhead (LM), Ellie Dick (ED), Sai Shradda S. Viswanathan (VP Welfare), Wendy Love (WL), Dr Mary Pryor (MP), Nick Edwards (NE), Johanna Pilskog (JP)

**FOR DISCUSSION**

**1. WELCOME**

DS welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed that KS would be chairing today due to schedule conflicts.

**2. REVIEW MINUTES AND ACTIONS FROM MARCH MEETING**  
*(APPENDIX 1)*

KS and JB looking at the potential for an internship project to work with academics on progressing wellbeing in the teaching and learning environment.

AG and GF had discussion about target groups for MHFA training. Further details given in agenda item 5.2.

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.

The minutes of the MHWG meeting held on 07 March 2023 were approved.

**3. INCORPORATING WELLBEING INTO MEETING AGENDAS**

KS opened the floor for reflections on how we could incorporate Wellbeing into meeting agendas. This does not mean asking people to openly share how they are feeling but rather to simply reflect and acknowledge their wellbeing and consider how they are in that moment.

NE shared that they tried to do this in the Student Support Committee and found it challenging to get engagement. Might be more valuable to include themes that we know impact wellbeing for staff, and hence making a safe space to discuss these issues.

TB shared that in LLMVC they trialled 'Good News' or 'Joy' as agenda items, with the experience that it did create some confusion, but staff did engage with the topic. Another trial has been to add a delay to the start of a meeting and allow a social conversation before the meeting begins. In general, the feeling is that it is easier to incorporate these adjustments in in-person meetings, rather than online/hybrid.

DD added the importance of taking into consideration peoples' volume of meetings and the size of meetings. Need some consideration what the objective of incorporating this would be.

AG suggested that this might be more suitable as part of the team wellbeing sessions, small team workshops which include suggestions on how to understand each other's workstyles and communication style.

GF shared his challenges with getting 'health and safety' as a standing item agenda, and when it is it is usually a quick tick box exercise without further discussions. Would recommend instead to focus on one wellbeing theme at the time and encourage discussions around that theme.

BP summarised the points made to be about culture change at work. Welcomed the change, but suggested the change in mindset should be a slow and incremental one. Perhaps introducing this sort of thing at team/local meetings rather than institutional wide ones might be beneficial.

VP Welfare shared experience from the role as a student officer, expectation is to keep personal life to the side when representing the student body, as it would fit the objective of attending a meeting. Support the idea of mental health champions to lead on something like this, and for it to be in different forums than committees/larger meetings.

**ACTION:** KS summarised points made and highlighted that she will look at incorporating something into training for meeting chairs – KS.

ED added that they have used a 'Check-in' approach in some meetings e.g., the show of thumbs up/down just to create awareness among teams of people's current wellbeing.

DD finished the reflections off by tying it back to stressors at work, managers awareness of workload and deadlines and how this impact staff wellbeing.

#### **4. SPORT AND EXERCISE TEAM UPDATE**

KS introduced Dr Christine Roberts (CR) to the meeting.

The Sports and Exercise (S&E Team) team sits under Experience, Engagement & Wellbeing/ The People Directorate. They work closely with ASV and the Students' Union, as well as national governing bodies to deliver different performance sport programmes and wider community engagement with e.g., sport projects for local disadvantaged school children (which includes volunteering experience for UoA students). There is also academic links to the sports and exercise sciences departments at the Rowett Institute.

The S&E team have more recently started working closely with the Wellbeing team due to the overlapping links between sport and wellbeing, shared objectives, and future opportunities.

Current projects they have been linking up on are:

Staff Corporate ASV membership – looking at how to increase engagement and monitoring success.

The Staff BeWell Network – further promote activities that are of interest to staff, big success with staff weightlifting classes with good attendance.

Creating opportunities for UoA staff to interact with legacy sporting opportunities, such as Tennis (Wednesdays)

Supported campaigns such as 'Walking month' and 'Men's Health Week.'

Supported work on Corporate Games – looking at how to turn it into legacy opportunities when the games have finished.

Working with ASV on a ‘Try it Out’-day to encourage all students to come along and test out activities for free, linking it in to our upcoming ‘Active Together’ scheme that will target the type of student who are keen to go to the gym, but too nervous to go alone. Date TBC but looking at start of term or BeWell & Inclusion week.

Also looking at EDI matters to ensure an inclusive environment to cover e.g., body positivity, neurodiversity adjustments and more.

**ACTION:** 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.

## **5. WORKLOAD AND STRESS MANAGEMENT SUPPORT**

*(APPENDIX 2)*

The Management and Team Wellbeing training is ready to be rolled out. When active please encourage colleagues to book it, there are both school level and directorate level sessions for managers.

Item 3.4 – Thoughts and feedback welcome on the [workload reduction management webpages](#) to KS by 22 June.

Discussion took place on how we can ensure that these resources are applicable to all staff across the institution, within both academic and support services. **ACTION:** KS to continue to enhance the content and have follow up meeting with BP to discuss technical staff.

## **6. MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING UPDATE**

### **5.1 TRAINING AUDIT**

We currently have a good overview of what is available of training and those that both directly and indirectly contribute to workload and stress management and have begun the process of identifying where we may require enhancements, this is ongoing.

We have an ambition to provide a general Mental Health 101 Overview session that could be offered to all. The Wellbeing Team will be rolling out our Wellbeing Sessions for teams and managers.

As part of the proposed learning opportunities for MHC's there are some sessions that we are looking to develop that may then also be able to be adapted for a wider audience.

We will continue to look at streamline and enhance what currently exists and repackaging in a more accessible format.

JM and AG will be looking at the development of Student Mental Health Support Awareness sessions/workshops that will be delivered across schools and departments. This will give an in depth look at the support available for students as well as looking at case studies and signposting skills.

It is also worth noting that there has been a roll out of Financial Wellbeing sessions for staff, more dates have now been added due to their initial popularity.

Look After Your Mates training is being delivered with PGRS These have been well received and will continued to be offered throughout the year. The hope then is to develop these sessions to be able to be offered to a wider audience than just PGR School.

In relation to training for students, we will incorporate the sessions being offered to students around GBV topics into the audit document in discussion with LK/NE.

Recent meetings with the Student Mental Health Group and SeeMe have centred around the offering of 'it's okay to talk' workshops for students. Currently the group is short on members with the training to provide the workshops in any meaningful numbers, so we are currently liaising with See Me to arrange 'train the trainer' courses for some of the group. This is hopefully to take place over the summer with the view of being able to start offering some dates for workshops in the new term. Depending on the piloting of these workshops they would be keen to expand the range of sessions they could offer. We will continue to support them with the organisation and promotion of these sessions when they become available.

## **5.2 MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID NETWORK RESTRUCTURE** (APPENDIX 3)

All course dates for MHFA training have been fully booked, so still an appetite amongst staff for this.

See paper for recommendations on restructure of the MHFA network. Feedback to AG by email.

### **Highlights:**

Role will be more clearly aligned to support the aims of the wellbeing strategy.

Want to move away from the medical term and reactive support of a 'first aider' and more towards 'Mental Health Champion,' with focus on awareness raising, empowering communities, and encouraging culture change.

A discussion was held regarding the name change with worries mentioned as the 'champion' role wont sound as serious as a 'first aider' role and that if we have many 'champions' the word can lose its value. Further discussions will be held on the title as well as workload management implications of the role. Further information will be circulated to the group for comment. ACTION AG

**Action:** AG to have discussion with JM/LM on where Student Support fits in/work together with the role in relation to staff worried about a student.

**Action:** AG to check if we can get stats on 'callouts and other usage for MHFA to get an idea or workload associated with the role.

## **7. STUDENT HELPLINE APP DEMO AND DISCUSSION**

The Promotional video for the Student Helpline app was showed to the meeting participants. There is a promotional campaign in place and would encourage anyone in a student facing role to regularly signpost the app to students.

You can explore the web version of the app here: [Spectrum.Life](https://spectrum.life) (set up a user with your UoA-email address and org. code ABERDEEN to get access to UoA specific content)

The BeWell UOA Tab content is changed on a regular basis in line with our student pressure points matrix.

We can suggest content to Spectrum.life, if you think there is anything missing, please feedback to [wellbeing@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeing@abdn.ac.uk)

#### **FOR INFORMATION:**

### **8. WELLBEING QUARTERLY REVIEW & STRATEGY UPDATE**

(APPENDIX 4)

#### **Highlights from paper:**

Planning for Welcome Week – looking to include a “Welcome hub” for additional registration services – further info tbc.

Started looking at BeWell and Inclusion Week for October – An overview will be provided at the next meeting.

Working on ‘Suicide safer university’ strategy and action plan.

### **9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **Update on the current GP registration freeze:**

LM reports that disabled students who need medical support documents can put in a ‘subject access request’ for their medical records.

Please refer students to Student Support if any queries related to this.

**Action:** KS to include ED in conversation re GP registration status to keep SU updated on the situation.

### **10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 6 SEPTEMBER 2023**

## ACTIONS SUMMARY

| Reference                    | Description  | Action by     | Status |
|------------------------------|--|---------------|--------|
| 130623<br>Agenda<br>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 |        |
| 130623<br>Agenda<br>item 3   | KS to look for training for meeting chairs in relation to incorporating wellbeing in meeting agendas   | KS            |        |
| 130623<br>Agenda<br>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         |        |
| 130623<br>Agenda<br>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      |        |
| 130623<br>Agenda<br>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         |        |
| 130623<br>Agenda<br>item 9   | KS to include ED in conversation re GP registration status to keep SU updated on the situation.  | KS/ED         |        |