

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**  
**MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY**  
**MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICY**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy underpins the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy by setting out how the University will proactively support staff and students to maintain good mental health and wellbeing.
- 1.2 Mental wellbeing is relevant to all staff and students and everyone can contribute to improving mental wellbeing across the University.
- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to provide direction and guidance to staff, line managers and students on the management of mental health and wellbeing concerns.

**2 DEFINITIONS**

- 2.1 Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community. Sustaining good mental health and wellbeing is closely linked to maintaining good physical health.
- 2.2 Mental health problems range from the worries everyone experiences as part of everyday life, to serious long-term conditions, which are diagnosed by health professionals. The majority of people who experience mental health problems will recover from or learn to live with them, especially if they receive help at an early stage.
- 2.3 Mental health concerns affect individuals differently and symptoms and recovery times will differ, even between individuals who have a similar mental health condition.

**3 USE OF TERMINOLOGY**

- 3.1 The University will endeavour to avoid the use of negative terms in relation to mental health concerns as this may deter staff and students from accessing the support they require within the University.
- 3.2 The University recognises that there's a stigma within society attached to mental health problems and will endeavor to create a work and study environment which encourages those within the University community who are experiencing mental health problems to discuss them with the appropriate source of support.

**4 LEGAL CONTEXT**

- 4.1 The relevant legislation includes:
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
  - The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
  - The Equality Act 2010
  - The Mental Health (Care and Treatment)(Scotland) Act 2003
- 4.2 The University is responsible for ensuring, as far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of its staff. The University assesses the risks to health to which its staff and others may be exposed to whilst at work, and will put measures in place to minimise those risks. The University has a Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy with which this Policy is associated.

- 4.3 Enduring mental ill health constitutes a disability. The University has a legal obligation not to discriminate against staff or students who have a disability and to implement reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled staff or students can undertake their role and/or studies.

## **5 RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **5.1 The University**

- ✓ The University will promote good mental health and wellbeing and embed this into all appropriate university structures and functions.
- ✓ The University will monitor the effectiveness of this policy through regular review. Staff participating in any of the mental wellbeing activities will be regularly invited to provide feedback.
- ✓ The University will communicate this policy to staff and students and will disseminate it through a range of approaches including internal communications channels and staff briefings.
- ✓ The University will work in partnership with the Aberdeen University Students Association and external partners to ensure that its staff and students receive the most appropriate expert advice and support.
- ✓ The University recognises that staff members who support or line manage others who are experiencing mental health or wellbeing challenges will have limits to their knowledge, responsibilities and boundaries. The University will provide appropriate training and advice to those members of staff to allow signposting to appropriate specialist services.
- ✓ The University recognises that workload pressures can contribute to stress amongst colleagues and will equip line managers and staff with the skills to address concerns regarding workload.

### **5.2 Staff**

- ✓ Staff are expected to cooperate with the University in creating a welcoming and inclusive culture.
- ✓ Staff are expected to take reasonable steps to safeguard their own mental health and wellbeing and be mindful of how other staff and students may be affected by their actions at work. (please see Appendix 1)
- ✓ Staff are expected to not knowingly or willingly do anything which may have a serious adverse impact on others' mental health or wellbeing.
- ✓ Staff are strongly encouraged to inform their line manager as soon as possible after being diagnosed with a mental health condition or if they have a disability or medical condition that may impact them at work. Reasonable adjustments or support can then be implemented.
- ✓ Staff are encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities regarding mental health and wellbeing and, where possible, support events which the University holds to positively promote health and wellbeing.

### **5.3 Students**

- ✓ Students are expected to take reasonable steps to safeguard their own mental health and wellbeing and be mindful of how other students and staff may be affected by their actions while at university. (please see Appendix 1)

- ✓ Students are strongly encouraged to inform Student Support as soon as possible after a diagnosis of a mental health condition or if they have a medical condition or disability which affects or is likely to affect their ability to undertake the studies for which they have enrolled. The earlier the University is aware of concerns, the quicker appropriate reasonable adjustments or support can be implemented.
- ✓ Students are also encouraged to notify Student Support if they have concerns about another students' physical or mental wellbeing.

## **6 CONFIDENTIALITY**

- 6.1 The university has agreed a framework regarding confidentiality and this should be consulted when appropriate. Certain areas of the university will operate specific professional standards of confidentiality (e.g. university counselling service). Staff dealing with a colleague or student who has disclosed personal information should, except in extreme circumstances, only pass that information on with the express consent of the individual concerned or in accordance with relevant policies listed below.

## **7 RELATED POLICIES**

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy  
Support for Study Policy  
Policy against Discrimination and Harassment  
Sickness Absence Policy  
Equality and Diversity Policy  
Policy on the Management of Work Related Stress  
Ethical Framework on the Boundaries of Confidentiality  
Protocol for Responding to the Death of a Student  
Protocol for Responding to the Death of a Member of Staff

## UNIVERSITY SUPPORT MECHANISMS

The University has a range of support mechanisms for staff and students to access in relation to health and wellbeing.

<b>SUPPORT SERVICE</b>	<b>CONTACT</b>
Student Support	<u>Address:</u> Students' Union Building, Elphinstone Road, Aberdeen <u>Telephone:</u> 01224 273935 <u>Website:</u> <a href="http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/support/">http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/support/</a>
Multi-faith Chaplaincy	<u>Address:</u> 25 High Street, Aberdeen, AB24 3EE <u>Telephone:</u> 01224 272137 <u>Email:</u> <a href="mailto:chaplaincy@abdn.ac.uk">chaplaincy@abdn.ac.uk</a>
Student Counselling Service	<u>Address:</u> 5 Dunbar Street, Old Aberdeen <u>Telephone:</u> 01224 272139 <u>Website:</u> <a href="http://www.abdn.ac.uk/counselling">www.abdn.ac.uk/counselling</a>
Criticalarc (safe zone app which can be downloaded by staff and students and connects them to the university security team if urgent help is required on campus)	<a href="http://www.safezoneapp.com">http://www.safezoneapp.com</a>
Coaching and Mentoring	<u>Address:</u> Staff Development, University Office, King's College, Aberdeen, AB24 3FX <u>Telephone:</u> 01224 27 3963 <u>Email:</u> <a href="mailto:staffdevelopment@abdn.ac.uk">staffdevelopment@abdn.ac.uk</a> <a href="mailto:mentoring@abdn.ac.uk">mentoring@abdn.ac.uk</a>
Aberdeen Sports Village and Aquatics Centre	<u>Address:</u> Linksfield Rd, Aberdeen AB24 5RU <u>Telephone:</u> 01224 438900 <u>Website:</u> <a href="http://www.aberdeensportsvillage.com/">http://www.aberdeensportsvillage.com/</a>
Occupational Health Service	There are two options for contacting Occupational Health. Your manager can refer you (management referral) or you can contact the service independently (self-referral) by telephoning them on 01224 553663. Staff Counselling is accessed through the Occupational Health Service
Staff Wellbeing Coordinators	TBC
Aberdeen University Student Association	<u>E-mail :</u> <a href="mailto:ausa@abdn.ac.uk">ausa@abdn.ac.uk</a> <u>Telephone:</u> 01224 272965 <u>Website:</u> <a href="https://www.ausa.org.uk/">https://www.ausa.org.uk/</a>
Niteline (overnight telephone support service run by AUSA)	<u>01224 272829</u>
Staff Unions	<a href="http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/unions-116.php">http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/unions-116.php</a>

## **USEFUL EXTERNAL CONTACTS**

### Mind

15-19

Broadway, Stratford, London, E15 4BQ

Telephone: 020 85192122

E-mail: [supporterservices@mind.org.uk](mailto:supporterservices@mind.org.uk)

Website: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

### Samaritans

Telephone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline)

Website: [www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

### Sane

Telephone: 0845 7678000

E-mail: [sanemail@org.uk](mailto:sanemail@org.uk)

Website: [www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

### Young Minds

Telephone: 0808 8025544

Website: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

### Breathing Space

Telephone 0800 838587

[www.breathingspace.scotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspace.scotland.co.uk)

### Rape Crisis Scotland

Helpline 08088 010302 (6pm-12midnight)

### NHS 24

Health Information & Self-care Advice for Scotland

24-hour helpline call 111

### Know Who to Turn To (NHS signposting service)

[www.know-who-to-turn-to.com](http://www.know-who-to-turn-to.com)

## Appendix 1

### Safeguarding Your Own Mental Health and Wellbeing

There are a number of strategies or small steps you can take to support your own mental health and wellbeing.

However, if you are worried about your own mental health or wellbeing, please seek support from an appropriate colleague or agency as set out in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy.

Tips for maintaining good mental health and wellbeing include:

- Look after your physical health by keeping active

Keeping physically active can improve your mental health and wellbeing. Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and help you concentrate, sleep, look and feel better. Exercising doesn't just mean doing sport or going to the gym. Walks in the park, gardening or housework can also keep you active.

Experts say most people should do about 30 minutes' exercise at least five days a week. However, if you are starting to exercise for the first time or after a prolonged break, you are advised to seek advice from your Doctor or other Health Professional.

Try to make physical activity that you enjoy a part of your normal day. Sitting at a desk for long periods is widely regarded as detrimental to physical health, so it is recommended that you take a short walk at regular intervals to combat this.

- Eat a balanced diet

A diet which supports your physical health can also help your mental health and wellbeing. Your brain needs a mix of nutrients to stay healthy and function well, just like the other organs in your body.

A healthy balanced diet includes:

- lots of different types of fruit and vegetables
- wholegrain cereals or bread
- nuts and seeds
- dairy products
- oily fish
- plenty of water.

Eat at least three meals each day and drink plenty of water. Try to limit how many high-caffeine or sugary drinks you have, and avoid too much alcohol.

- Do something you are good at and enjoy

Losing yourself in an activity you enjoy can improve your mental health and wellbeing. Or, taking up a new hobby or picking up a hobby you enjoyed in the past can provide a new focus.

- Get away from it all

Taking a break and getting a change of scenery, even for a short period, is good for your mental health. It could be going for a walk at lunch time, or exploring somewhere new over the weekend. Taking a break may mean being very active. It may mean not doing very much at all.

Take a deep breath... and relax. Try yoga or meditation, or just putting your feet up.

Listen to your body. If you're really tired, give yourself time to sleep. Without good sleep, our mental health suffers and our concentration goes downhill.

- Ask for help when you need it

It is important to realise that everyone struggles at different points in their life. If you are able to recognise when things are getting on top of you, seek help early on to prevent problems getting bigger or re-occurring

There is no shame in taking control of your mental health and wellbeing by seeking support through difficult times.

- Create a supportive network around you

Catching up with family and friends gives you an opportunity to relax and can help you deal with the stresses of life. Friends and family can make you feel included and cared for. They can offer different views from whatever's going on inside your own head. They can help keep you active, keep you grounded and help you solve practical problems. It is also healthy to talk through your feelings and keeping up with friends and family can give you an opportunity to do that.

## Appendix 2

### Signs of Mental Distress

It can be difficult to spot the signs of mental ill health in yourself and others as, quite often, the symptoms will develop gradually over a period of time. Everyone feels anxious or stressed at points in their lives and it is important not to jump to conclusions regarding mental health and wellbeing.

If you have an immediate concern about someone's welfare i.e. they are threatening suicide or to hurt themselves or others, then you should call the emergency services and be mindful of your own safety in the first instance.

If you notice these symptoms in a colleague or student, or if they discuss these symptoms with you, they may be suffering from a mental illness if they are frequently experiencing these symptoms over a period of time:

- Frequently feeling worried or anxious
- Feeling depressed or unhappy
- Emotional outbursts or frequently tearful
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Fluctuating weight or changes in appetite
- Uncharacteristically quiet, or withdrawing from social interactions
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs/substances
- Feelings of worthlessness or very low self-esteem
- Behavioural changes
- Mentioning suicide

In addition, students with mental health issues may:

- Not attend lectures/tutorials
- Consistently fail to meet deadlines
- Submit work which is of poor quality or declining quality
- Struggle to concentrate in classes
- Lose motivation for their studies

### Supporting Someone with a Mental Illness

- Recognise your own limits/boundaries, both in terms of your knowledge and expertise and how comfortable you are with dealing with such issues. Encourage the person to seek support from a professional if you suspect that they have an un-diagnosed mental health condition. If the person is reluctant to do this, it may be helpful to acknowledge that seeking help can feel lonely, and sometimes scary. You can reassure someone by letting them know that they are not alone, and that you will be there to help.

- Simply giving someone space to talk, and listening to how they're feeling, can be really helpful in itself. If they're finding it difficult, let them know that you're there when they are ready.
- Even though it might be upsetting to hear that someone you know is distressed, try to stay calm.
- Let the person with the mental health concern set the pace for seeking support themselves.
- Try not to make assumptions about what may have caused their feelings.
- Part of the emotional support you offer could be to keep things as normal as possible. This could include involving the person in social events, if this is routine for you, or chatting about other parts of your lives.
- Be realistic about what you can do and don't take too much on. Your support is really valuable and, remember that small, simple things can help, and that just being there for them is probably helping more than you think.