

# Student Mental Health Strategy



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH

## Purpose of Strategy

The purpose of the Strategy is to ensure that the University is recognised as a community that promotes the good mental health of its students and treats all students with respect and empathy, and that students who experience mental health difficulties at the University of Edinburgh are well supported.

## Overview

The Strategy sets out the University's vision and aims for student mental health, provides an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the University's current approach, and sets out a range of priorities.

## Scope: Strategy

The Strategy applies to students at the University, and to staff (eg those responsible for delivering front line support services to students and for delivering or supporting learning and teaching)

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## Document control

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<b>Approving authority</b>	Senate Learning and Teaching Committee (also endorsed by Central Management Group, 28 February 2017)				
<b>Consultation undertaken</b>	Students (EUSA generally and the Disability and Mental Wellbeing Liberation Group specifically) University staff, especially <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Those who deliver or support learning and teaching</li><li>• Those in front line support services</li></ul> The University Counselling Service and the Student Disability Service Chaplaincy The Healthy University team Associated professionals eg GPs in local surgeries; NHS mental health services staff; other support agencies / organisations				
<b>Section responsible for Strategy maintenance &amp; review</b>	University Secretary's Group				
<b>Related policies, procedures, guidelines &amp; regulations</b>	n/a				
<b>UK Quality Code</b>	n/a				
<b>Strategies superseded by this strategy</b>	n/a				
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## STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY 2016-2019

### VISION:

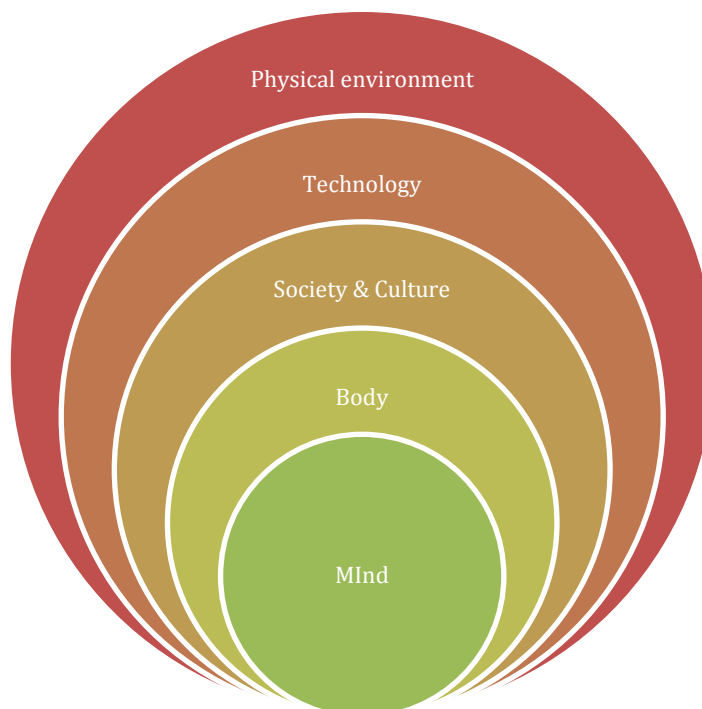
Good mental health is “a state of [mental] well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community”.<sup>1</sup>

Good mental health is essential to students’ academic success and to their participation in a high quality and rewarding student experience. Empowering students to participate in maintaining or improving their mental health sets the foundation not only for academic success, but also in terms of self-esteem, personal resilience and self-confidence, with increased ability to sustain good mental health throughout their lives. Our vision is therefore that the University of Edinburgh should be an environment which enables and supports our students to flourish. Psychologists define “flourishing” as a state in which individuals have “high levels of emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being.”<sup>2</sup>

In the flourishing University, therefore, our students will be academically and socially engaged, committed to learning, and oriented towards personal growth.

### SCALE AND SCOPE:

Good mental health is developed and supported at many different levels, rooted in the individual mind but influenced by and dependent on many other factors:



Wellbeing “map”, based on the work of Dr Neil Thin (University of Edinburgh)



This strategy must therefore be broad in identifying:

- the range and type of interventions and developments that are necessary to sustain good mental health, and
- the areas of the University that have a role to play in supporting the good mental health of all our students.

**AIMS:**

Through implementing the actions, policies and processes outlined in this strategy we aim to ensure that:

**The University is recognised as a community that promotes the good mental health of its students and treats all students with respect and empathy**

- The University delivers effective communications to students from first point of contact and throughout the student journey that:
  - highlight the importance of good mental health and how to develop / maintain it
  - tackle the stigma that is often associated with discussing or disclosing poor mental health
- The University trains key staff to understand the enablers of good mental health and sources of further support and guidance
- The University always considers the impact of its policies and procedures, including academic regulations, on student mental health in addition to other impact factors
- The University always considers the impact of its estate on student mental health
- The University helps students take responsibility for their own wellbeing and develop practices that support good mental health
- The University supports and offers access to activities which aid good mental health
- The University gathers and uses data effectively to monitor and manage the impact of its strategy on student mental health

**Students who experience mental health difficulties at the University of Edinburgh are well supported**

- All students at the University of Edinburgh know how to access support if they experience mental health difficulties
- Students transitioning to the University with pre-existing conditions are supported to navigate local NHS support and receive joined up care
- Students who experience mental health difficulties:
  - Receive timely, appropriate support from the University, including access to specialist support if needed
  - Are referred to other forms of support (eg from the NHS) where necessary
- All key staff who work with students know both how to support and to effectively refer on students who experience mental health difficulties
- Students supporting other students can access advice and guidance
- The University supports student-led initiatives



- The University works effectively with NHS Lothian to support students who experience mental health difficulties
- The University gathers and uses data effectively to monitor, evaluate and inform the impact and development of its services in this area
- The University is mindful of its legal obligations towards students with mental health issues under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Duty.

#### **SWOT:**

- Strengths:
  - Scale, scope and quality of services offered by eg SCS, SDS, Chaplaincy, Res Life
  - High levels of satisfaction with specialist services
  - Professional accreditation of services
  - Links between services and with key stakeholders eg University Health Centre
- Weaknesses:
  - Ability to manage exceptional demand for specialist services
  - Communication of offering is fragmented
  - Levels of non-specialist support; ability to support staff who are supporting students
  - Focus on reactive demand management vs proactive wellbeing strategies
  - Ability to meet / shape student expectations
- Opportunities:
  - Institutional and national interest in mental health issues – now is a good time to be talking about this and seeking support
  - Service excellence and simplification projects – a renewed focus on streamlining service provision and processes
- Threats:
  - Very high growth in demand continues and undermines attempted strategic developments
  - Continued under-capacity in NHS -> UoE attempting to “backfill” NHS services (services that often don’t exist)
  - Increasing numbers of international students and students new to the University arriving with mental health disorders, perhaps making transition more difficult

#### **STAKEHOLDERS:**

In drawing up this strategy the University has identified and consulted the following key stakeholders:

- Students (EUSA generally and the Disability and Mental Wellbeing Liberation Group specifically)
- University staff, especially
  - Those who deliver or support learning and teaching
  - Those in front line support services
- The University Counselling Service and the Student Disability Service,



- Chaplaincy
- The Healthy University team
- Associated professionals eg GPs in local surgeries; NHS mental health services staff; other support agencies / organisations

The University has also considered best practice recommendations from The Royal College of Psychiatrists, (2011) and sector guidance from Universities UK (2015) and the Higher Education Policy Institute (2016), as well as the recommendations from the thematic review of Mental Health Services commissioned by the University's Quality Assurance Committee (2016).

## ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

### a) Promoting good mental health

- Develop and implement a formal study of student wellbeing at Edinburgh, eg using the Warwick-Edinburgh Wellbeing scale
- Student recruitment and pre-arrival
  - Develop material on “looking after your mental health when you start at University” for use in recruitment, outreach (incl LEAPS) and pre-arrival activities including material for use in overseas markets (in other languages as needed) including Open Days, including addressing issues such as cost of living, accommodation, alcohol etc.
  - Provide training in mental health awareness for outreach and recruitment staff
- Welcome week / orientation:
  - Build on existing Counselling, Student Disability Service and IAD-delivered initiatives and develop a strand of Welcome Week activity that focuses on maintaining good mental health while at University
  - Embed messages on good mental health in key activities eg Parents' Talks, School welcome talks, International Day
- Policy, regulations & services:
  - Review Special Circumstances / IoS / other Concessions regulations / forms / committees - against considerations of mental as well as physical health
  - Evaluate and if needed improve support for students while on interruptions of studies
  - Review the use of Equality Impact Assessments and seek to introduce consideration of impact of policies and procedures on good mental health alongside evaluation of impact on those with formal protected characteristics
  - Review and enhance University communications around sensitive processes, eg financial difficulty, course or exam failure, progress difficulties etc
- Mental Health Awareness Week:
  - Support an annual campaign that brings together EUSA, EUSU and University to raise awareness in the University community of the prevalence of mental health issues, including specific activities designed to reduce the stigma associated with talking about or disclosing mental health difficulties
- Alcohol and drugs:



- Develop and deliver an appropriate alcohol and drug awareness campaign to raise student awareness of the risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption and drug abuse (including on mental health)
- Physical environment
  - Gather evidence on how our estate supports mental health and social quality and develop guidelines on facilitating good mental health and social quality through the University estates strategy
  - Offer training for key Estates staff
- Existing and new small scale initiatives:
  - Map / identify existing initiatives promoting positive student mental health and bring into the scope of this strategy for evaluation
  - Resource and support the further development of pilot work both centrally and in Schools on :
    - Early warning and intervention
    - Student resilience / self-care training
    - Mindfulness training
    - Sports & Exercise / physical activities
    - Empathy / compassion initiatives for the general student population
- Student and staff training:
  - Raise awareness amongst academic and professional services support staff, and students , of the enablers of good mental health and of sources of further support and guidance on these enablers:
    - Sleep
    - Diet / alcohol (Alongside the University's Good Food policy)
    - Accommodation
    - Finance
    - Sport and physical activity
    - Study skills
  - Provide information on student wellbeing as part of new staff induction
- Develop a communications plan to deliver a range of information and messages for students and for staff supporting students on good mental health including:
  - Advice and guidance on wellbeing and good mental health, (including eg “wellbeing maps”) with links to further resources and support opportunities

## **b) Supporting students with mental health difficulties**

- Student recruitment and pre-arrival
  - Strengthen referral pathways and processes for students with pre-existing mental health issues to make the University aware of these
- Specialist support:
  - Develop a formal model to forecast demand for specialist services such as Counselling, the Student Disability Service/ Mental Health Mentoring over a 3-5 year period; routinely benchmark demand for these services against a number of equivalent HEI's in the UK. Report on these analyses to LTC/CMG as appropriate
  - Develop a range of scenarios and proposed responses to further increases in demand including
    - No further increase in demand
    - Modest annual growth in demand



- Sustained high level growth in demand
  - Discuss these scenarios and options widely with key stakeholders across the University community.
  - Secure recurrent funding for the continued provision of Big White Wall or an alternative online solution for 2017/18 and beyond
  - Group sessions: increase the number, range and take-up of courses offered on a group basis, including an expanded programme of Mindfulness courses.
- Support for underserved groups:
  - Carry out further analysis of student mental health by different characteristics incl: Level of study / Gender / Place of term time / Residence / Sexual orientation / Age / Disability / Socio-economic status (SIMD) / Nationality
  - Build on the data gathered above to identify groups that may require further support on the basis of greater need (eg disabled students), lower than expected participation in services, (eg male students, some international students)
- Links to NHS
  - Review and strengthen the systemic and operational links that exist between the University and specialist NHS services including referral mechanisms/protocols, potential for stepped care agreements
  - Raise NHS Lothian and Scottish government awareness of and generate increased support for student mental health issues through focussed communications with key stakeholders (stakeholder analysis needed) and periodic strategic fora (working with other Edinburgh / Scottish HEI's as required)
- Schools / services
  - roll out targeted training during 2016-19 in supporting students with mental health issues, including data disclosure issues, to:
    - all personal tutors
    - all student support teams
    - supervisors
    - security staff
    - other professional services staff as needed
  - Enhance the quality and accessibility of information available to staff who need to support students with mental health issues
  - Develop a network of trained, specialist support staff (eg one senior SSO in each school) to act as a first point of contact for students wishing to discuss mental health issues or for other staff who have concerns about a student
  - Create a network for key staff to share practice / stay up to date / debrief / connect with professionals in other services
- Peers
  - Develop training for peer mentors including both UG and (as it develops) PGT schemes
  - Investigate the potential for a system of PGT peer mentors
  - Enhance the quality and accessibility of information available to students so that they can support fellow students or intervene if needed as bystanders
  - Support the activities of student-led societies and initiatives which have formed to focus on mental health and well-being promotion
  - Provide enhanced support for PALS mentors and officers / members of student mental health societies
- Policy



- Review the University's Support for Study policy in 2016/17 and evaluate its usefulness in helping students with mental health issues and staff in supporting such students
- Identify ways to evaluate student fitness to study prior to return, for example resourcing of access to occupational health services for students
- Develop a communications plan to deliver a range of information and messages for students and for staff supporting students on good mental health including:
  - Easy to access and navigate information on what to do if things are not going well, with links to relevant policies, further resources and support opportunities
  - Improve accessibility and usability of online and print information for students seeking to access services

#### **GOVERNANCE:**

- Establish a task group under the Deputy Secretary (Student Experience) to have oversight of this strategy and to update LTC on its implementation

#### **TARGETS AND KPI'S:**

- Outputs: Implementation of the strategy commitments (against time, budget) will be monitored and reported on to the Strategy Task Group and annually to Senate Learning & Teaching Committee
- Outcomes: Use of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale to evaluate the wellbeing of a representative sample of UoE students starting in 2016/17, repeating the evaluation annually thereafter to track any changes to reported levels of wellbeing.
- Impact: design and develop a periodic appreciative inquiry summit to consider institutional progress towards becoming a flourishing University and to envisage / recommend future developments.

Note: we see potential longer-term benefits to student satisfaction measures such as the National Student Survey from an increased focus on good mental health and an increase in the numbers of students who are supported to flourish at the University of Edinburgh.

#### **REFERENCES:**

1. World Health Organization, (2014), "Mental Health: A State of Wellbeing" (online) Available at [http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/) Accessed 23/09/16
2. Keyes C. L. M. Toward a science of mental health. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.). Oxford handbook of positive psychology (pp. 89-95). New York: Oxford University Press