Enabling Success:
A Strategy for Creating A Mentally Healthy University

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Our Ambition

Cardiff University is committed to creating a mentally healthy learning, working and living environment where every member of the University community can thrive.

We will work in partnership with our staff, students and the wider community to ensure that supporting positive mental health and wellbeing is an integral part of everything we do.

Our aim in developing and publishing Enabling Success: A Strategy for Creating A Mentally Healthy University is to be challenging in our aspirations, clear on our agenda for action and realistic in our expectations.

The strategy supports the The Way Forward 2018-23: Recast COVID-19 commitment to "ensuring a high quality and consistent student experience" and providing excellent student services. It also supports our commitment to making Cardiff University a great place to work.

"Approximately 1 in 4 people experience poor mental health, and 75% of chronic adult mental illness starts before the age of 24. Independent research commissioned by Universities UK in 2017 confirmed that over the past 10 years there has been a fivefold increase in the proportion of higher education students who disclose a mental health condition to their institution. At Cardiff University, we understand that success is underpinned by the way in which we approach mental health and wellbeing for staff and students."

Professor Colin Riordan, President and Vice-Chancellor

Background

Our strategy draws on the higher education sector's 'Stepchange' framework approach to mental health, which Cardiff University was instrumental in developing.

We support the vision set out in 'Stepchange': "Higher education transforms lives and communities. How universities understand and approach mental health is at the heart of this mission, including how students and staff are enabled to thrive and realise their potential as well as how those in distress or experiencing mental illness are supported."

Cardiff University was one of three initial pilot sites for the 'Stepchange' framework. It was part of a project aimed at raising the strategic importance of mental wellbeing across the higher education through sector wide engagement, implementing local approaches and developing a toolkit of resources and support for Universities. The partnership brought together the University of the West of England, Cardiff University, the University of York, Universities UK and Student Minds to test the strategic approach set out in the 'Stepchange' framework.

The project finished and reported in December 2019. This strategy is part of the output from the project. As part of our ongoing commitment we will continue to develop and enhance our whole University approach to mental health through the actions and plans that sit under this strategy.

Enabling Success: A Strategy for Creating A Mentally Healthy University is supported by our People Strategy and our forthcoming Staff Wellbeing Strategy, which sets out a clear commitment to fostering an "inclusive and supportive work environment where the wellbeing of staff is a priority".

Consultation and engagement

In developing Enabling Success: A Strategy for Creating A Mentally Healthy University we consulted widely across the University, engaging with staff, students and external stakeholders. We also engaged the National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) to develop a cohort study of a sample of our students to help inform our understanding of need. We will continue to work as a whole institution to understand where we can develop and improve our understanding of mental health.

Our Five Priorities

We have developed the Universities UK 'Stepchange' Framework to focus on five priorities for Cardiff University. These are:

Purpose

We will improve the mental health of our University community by creating and embedding a culture that is compassionate, well-informed and responsive in everything that we do. We will collate and analyse data and feedback to inform improvements to our provision.

We will do this by transforming how members of the University community approach their own mental health and the mental health of others. Staff and students will have the tools to ensure they are better informed about how to maintain positive wellbeing and mental health and how to support and signpost others. Promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing will be embedded in all activities, with trained staff and student champions creating an inclusive and compassionate culture across the University community. This will inform decisions for improvement of our practice and service.

We will build on existing programmes of staff wellbeing to run workshops on a range of issues from stress, resilience and sleep to mental health awareness for managers. We will continue to embed wellbeing in all University management and leadership programmes and encourage and enable managers and leaders across the University to hold regular wellbeing discussions and check ins with staff.

People

Positive mental health and wellbeing will be seen as everyone's responsibility. Our leadership, staff and students will actively inform our approach.

We will do this by ensuring that our leaders and senior managers are proactive in the creation of a mentally healthy university community supporting both students and staff. Our staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and our Student's Union will actively inform our approach to building a mentally healthy and restorative University community.

We will strengthen our current induction to staff and students to provide an excellent introduction to mental health and wellbeing. We will review how we celebrate staff who champion and role model good mental health and we will celebrate students who champion and role-model positive mental health through our Celebrating Excellence awards.

Our Five Priorities continued

Partnership

Our approach will be founded on collaborative partnerships with our staff, students and external services, groups and charities to facilitate a consistent and integrated service offering.

We will do this through the formation of new and the strengthening of existing partnerships. Partnerships will be established or further developed, both externally and internally, with agencies, groups, charities, our staff and students to focus on our practice and provision.

We have established a partnership with the National Centre for Mental Health to conduct a longitudinal study into student mental health. This includes the expansion of PhD studentships in this area. We will also develop formal partnerships and agreements with NHS Wales to address gaps in support for student mental health and to position student mental health within local health agencies.

Provision

Support to meet the mental health needs of our student and staff community will be tailored to take into account best practice in prevention, early intervention, improving transitions and addressing vulnerability.

We will do this by creating a diverse, flexible, appropriate and timely means of supporting staff who undertake pastoral work with our University community, responding to our distinct staff and student populations. We will promote positive wellbeing and mental health and intervene early when people have mental health issues. We will continue to support staff and students who experience mental health issues and respond appropriately, within the remit of our service delivery, to concerns about vulnerable individuals.

The curriculum and programme delivery will be designed to be supportive and inclusive of anyone struggling with their mental health and will aim to enhance mental health, wellbeing and academic performance and attainment.

Places

We will continue to review and enhance the University's physical and virtual environments to promote a culture of positive wellbeing and mental health.

We will do this by considering the wellbeing and mental health of our students and staff when developing our estate and planning activities. Our environment will empower our students to mature and thrive. It will facilitate a sense of place, academic home and community to empower early intervention to support staff and students with mental health issues.

We will use our new Centre for Student Life to establish and develop a centralised hub of support services, including provision offered by external partners, to promote mental health and wellbeing for the student community.