

University of Gloucestershire
Student Wellbeing Strategy 2018-23

Introduction

At the University of Gloucestershire, we aim to provide our students with the support and positive encouragement they need to be successful in their studies. We work to empower them to become successful learners from the very beginning of their studies giving them confidence through to completion, and beyond.

With national statistics reporting that students are experiencing significantly lower levels of wellbeing than the national population, and with these results showing a worsening trend (HEPI, 2018), it is more important now than ever to create a framework for a whole University approach to recognising and addressing this issue.

The University's Strategic Plan 2017-22 outlines our goals for the next five years as follows:

- i. Goal 1: To provide a breadth and richness of experience that enable all our students to reach their full potential
- ii. Goal 2: To provide teaching and support for learning of the highest quality
- iii. Goal 3: To undertake research and professional practice which enrich students' learning and create impact and benefit for others
- iv. Goal 4: To build partnerships which create opportunity, innovation and mutual benefit for the communities we serve

This Student Wellbeing Strategy supports the Strategic Plan, and notably links with Goal 1 through its ambition to support the lives of our students beyond their course or studies:

"...our commitment to students goes beyond the formal curriculum and the achievement of qualifications, essential though they are. We have a broader and richer purpose, to give all our students an experience of higher education which will best prepare them for whatever they want the rest of their lives to be. That includes equipping them with the skills and confidence to succeed in their chosen careers, achieve personal fulfilment, and contribute to their communities." (Strategic Plan 2017-22)

Wellbeing has been defined as: "a positive state of body and mind. It is the subjective state of being healthy, happy, contented, comfortable and satisfied with one's quality of life. It includes physical, material, social, emotional ('happiness'), and development and activity dimensions" (Waddell & Burton, 2006, page 4).

This strategy describes our ambitions in relation to supporting the wellbeing of students and the steps we will take to achieve them.

Our Guiding Principles:

1. Promoting the wellbeing of our students is an essential element of a student's learning experience at the University of Gloucestershire, both within and outside their academic programme
2. The support for our students' wellbeing and welfare is a University-wide responsibility, shared by academic staff, professional services staff, the Students' Union, other partner organisations and the students themselves
3. Academic and professional services staff will work in partnership, to make best use of expertise and resources to maximise the ethos of pastoral care across the University
4. Wellbeing and personal resilience can be promoted through a wide range of everyday social interactions within our community, through clubs and societies, in living accommodation, in social networks and peer groups, as well as through more formal settings and professional services
5. Ultimately, responsibility for maintaining wellbeing lies with each individual student and we will enable them to access opportunities for support and make well-informed decisions based on their individual circumstances and requirements
6. Our goal is to promote positive wellbeing for all students, both mental and physical, and thereby seek to minimise the number of students experiencing mental or physical ill health requiring professional or medical interventions
7. Promoting the wellbeing of our staff is an essential element of our People and Culture strategy; and we recognise the inter-dependence between the wellbeing of students and staff.

Our Approach to Promoting Student Wellbeing

The University has a strong history of supporting its students to be successful both in terms of academic achievement, as well as within their wider student life. There is a real sense of pastoral care alive within the institution, and this is manifested through:

- Support being available through the Student Services Department, which is made up of professional colleagues offering information, advice and guidance across the following services:
 - o Accommodation & Housing
 - o Chaplaincy & Faiths
 - o Counselling
 - o Course Administration
 - o Disability and Mental Health and Wellbeing
 - o Helpzones
 - o Medical
 - o Money Advice
 - o Study Skills
 - o Welfare Support

- Guidance and support being offered to students through its Academic Schools, primarily through the Personal Tutoring system. Tutors offer advice and support in relation to:
 - o General academic skills advice
 - o Advocacy for mitigating circumstances
 - o Career direction, employability and further study
 - o General welfare support

- Support being available through the Students' Union, which includes:
 - o Advice & advocacy for students related to University procedures
 - o General welfare support
 - o Access to sports & societies
 - o Provision of entertainments and events
 - o Encouraging students to get involved, make friends and take part in social activities
 - o Volunteering opportunities

- Access to support and facilities through a range of other departments within the University, including:
 - o Sports facilities and activities
 - o IT and Library support
 - o Work placement opportunities and careers advice
 - o Catering and bar spaces
 - o Faith Spaces and the Chapel

- Support for staff members who provide a range of services that enhance student wellbeing, including:
 - o Bespoke training related to supporting students facing welfare difficulties
 - o An accessible occupational health advisory service
 - o Appropriate 'clinical' supervision for staff delivering therapeutic (or equivalent) interventions
 - o Informal advice and guidance from specialist staff to colleagues facing complex student presentations
 - o Training and advice to staff on issues relating to faith and religious literacy

The University has twice been classified in the Top 10 for 'Student Support' in the annual 'What Uni Student Choice Awards' (2015 and 2017).

This strategy outlines nine key themes providing a development framework of support for students. Within this framework, consideration is given for all stakeholders in promoting, supporting and maintaining student wellbeing.

The University's commitment to addressing barriers to inclusion underpins all of the themes and includes, but is not limited to, issues around disability, age, gender identity, race, religious belief and sexual orientation.

Strategic Themes

This strategy is focused across 9 Strategic Themes, each of which will have a number of actions to be developed across the life of the strategy; the themes are listed below:

1. Personal Ownership of Wellbeing
2. Mental Wellbeing
3. Physical Health
4. Academic Wellbeing
5. Social Engagement
6. Personal Development
7. Campus & Halls Environment
8. Financial Wellbeing
9. Supporting Staff to Embed the Strategy

1. Personal Ownership of Wellbeing

Key aims are to encourage students to:

- Develop positive **self-worth**. *Be comfortable with who you are*
- Set goals **and living more intentionally**. *Have a sense of direction*
- Build **skills in resilience**. *Increasing their own capacity to bounce back*
- Proactively seek **timely individual personal support** at times of need. *Reaching out when you need to*

Action	Lead	Timeline
1. Actively promote the concept of 'owning your own wellbeing' from enrolment/induction through a variety of media	DoSS	Pilot 2018/19 Across lifetime of the strategy
2. Coach Senior & Personal Tutors and other key advisers in promoting and reaffirming the theme to students	School Management ADU SS	Pilot 2018/19
3. Delivering workshops for students as part of a combined wellbeing programme of events across the academic year.	HoSW	Pilot 2018/19
4. Ensure that joint SS & SU wellbeing campaigns reinforce the theme as a constant	HoSW SU Officers	Across lifetime of the strategy
5. Actively promote the values of the University with regard to equality, behaviours and conduct – leading to students challenging unacceptable behaviours and reporting concerns	DoSS HR	Pilot 2018/19
6. Incorporate into the Your Future Plan programme opportunities for students to build skills and capacity to manage their own wellbeing	HoSE	Annual YFP programme

2. Mental Wellbeing

This can be defined as the extent to which every individual is, relatively speaking, happy and satisfied, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and is able to work productively and make a positive contribution to University Life.

Key Aims:

- Establishing support structures for dealing with the **stresses of University life**, including starting university, financial worries, making the transition to independent living and study, relationship issues, academic expectations and employment
- Encouraging students with pre-existing mental health difficulties to register for support, to **protect and enhance** their mental wellbeing
- Ensure that systems are in place to **offer advice and support** to students encountering significant life events and day-to-day challenges.
- Establish and maintain **clear links** with local services supporting those with mental health difficulties (e.g., Partner GP Practices; NHS 2Gether Trust)
- Advance awareness raising around issues related to mental health and the experiences of managing student life

Action	Lead	Timeline
1. Seek to develop a partnership between Student Services, the SU and local NHS providers to develop materials and information that seeks to encourage students to seek out help when they are in need	HoSW	From September 2019
2. Develop self-help and on-line resources that enable students to engage with appropriate support in a simple and safe way	SS ADU LTI	Pilot in 2018/19 and roll out across the timeline of strategy
3. Train Student Services staff as Mental Health First Aid Trainers; then enable roll out of MHFA training for students and staff	HoSW	Train MHWAs 2018/19 Pilot sessions 2018/19 Roll out across the timeline of strategy
4. Seek to influence local NHS Commissioners in provision of support for the specific requirements of students	DoSS/HoSW School of H&SC /UEC	2018/19 and across timeline of strategy

3. Physical Health

This can be defined as the body's ability to function efficiently and effectively in work, study and leisure activities.

Key Aims:

- To **enable** students to have easy access to a broad range of physical and recreational activities, in order to enhance their level of physical fitness
- To create a **greater awareness** of the opportunities available to students in relation to physical and recreational activities
- To create a greater awareness and understanding of the **benefits** of physical fitness in relation to student health and wellbeing
- To **identify and breakdown the barriers** facing students in relation to participation in physical and/or recreational activity

Action	Lead	Timeline
1. Develop a range of cheap and easy to access opportunities on campus for students to be able to participate on a regular basis	SS&PA Mgr SU Sports Officer	Pilot 2018/19
2. To encourage – through creative use of space on campus – areas where students are able to undertake low level/informal physical activity	SS&PA Mgr DoE	Pilot 2018/19
3. To work with local organisations to actively encourage the student community to be able to access facilities, clubs and opportunities	SS&PA Mgr DoSS	2018-23
4. Seek to develop a regular 'park run' for students (and staff) that is accessible, well managed and caters for all abilities	SS&PA Mgr Estates LTI HR	2018/19
5 Through the University's participation in the Gloucestershire Moves programme, build our understanding of what works in promoting exercise and physical activity for students	SS&PA Mgr SU Sports Officer	Aligned with roll out of Gloucestershire Moves
6 Encourage student social engagement through membership of SU sports clubs, teams and group exercise activities	SS&PA Mgr SU Sports Officer	2018-23
7. Work to ensure the University's catering partner prioritises physical wellbeing as part of the contractual agreement and the business operations.	DoE SU CEO	2018-23

4. Academic Wellbeing

The University's Academic Strategy 2017-22 outlines its commitment to students being able to access excellent support, whilst engaging with the academic challenge and personalised learning. In combination this will provide an overall environment where students are both supported to produce their best work and challenged to achieve high standards.

Key aims:

- To **enable** students to be able to access appropriate support from key academic staff who understand their course and associated pressures
- To **support** students to have the opportunity to be academically successful wherever possible, even when facing challenges to their personal wellbeing, while always retaining robust and rigorous academic standards
- To ensure students can access their **Personal Tutor** to get appropriate support
- Establish and maintain **clear strong links** between academic staff and key advisers within Student Services and other support teams

Action	Lead	Timeline
1. Work with Personal Tutors and Senior Tutors to establish clear role expectations regards student wellbeing	ADU SS	Across 2018/19
2. Further develop systems/processes for appropriate sharing of key information between tutors, Student Services and students to maximise personalised support interventions for students	DoSS	Launch September 2019
3. Ensure that decision-making on academic developments (e.g. assessment policy; new course design; classroom design; introduction of learning technologies etc) has regard to enabling and supporting students to achieve the highest standards of which they are capable	ADU SS LTI	Across 2018-23
4. Develop processes to improve wellbeing support for students who are on placements / internships in workplace environments	DoSS DoSE ADU	Launch September 2019
5. Ensure availability of support for students' study skills and appropriate allowance for mitigating circumstances	HoSD Registry ADU	Across 2018-23
6 Within SS & SU student wellbeing campaigns, help students develop resilience in handling stress	SU HoSW	Across 2018-23

5. Social engagement

This can be defined as students making social and emotional connections with fellow students and the local community.

Key Aims:

- Encourage students to enhance their wellbeing by **interacting outside** of their academic studies
- Foster a **sense of belonging** amongst students within their University communities (e.g., halls, subjects, campuses, etc)
- Provide students with the opportunity to meet, **socialise and integrate** with others
- **Promote** the building of student clubs and societies, to support social engagement

Action	Lead	Timeline
1. Enable the SU to employ an events co-ordinator to develop a quality programme of social events across the University	SU CEO DoSS	Launch Sept 2018
2. Develop a programme of informal events linked to courses/halls/campuses that students can take part in focused purely on developing social networks/groups and build a sense of belonging	SU CEO SS&PA Mgr DoSS HoSH&W	Pilot 2018/19
3. Encourage volunteering activities within the student cohort through emphasis of SU and YFP opportunities	SU CEO / DoSE	Across timeline of strategy
4. Seek to develop a 'peer to peer' mentoring support scheme; for students to connect with and support each other across their student careers (inc. academic, wellbeing, social connectivity)	DoSS HoSD ADU SU	Launch 2019/20
5. Make it a deliberate and considered part of new student induction to provide opportunities to form new friendships and peer groups	DoSS SU	Across timeline of strategy

6. Personal Development

Wellbeing encompasses not only remaining well, but also flourishing and living life to the full.

The university can provide students with opportunities to grow and flourish in many ways, not just mentally and physically, but also emotionally, socially and spiritually. These include:

- establishing a sense of identity and purpose
- making lasting and positive relationships
- providing opportunities to evaluate, own and express beliefs and values – political, philosophical, religious, lifestyle choices etc.
- exploring areas of creativity and self-expression

Providing these opportunities is a key part of promoting wellbeing, whether through teaching and learning, student societies, community ethos, provision of facilities or engagement with staff.

Action	Lead	Timeline
1. Re-launch the Dignity Adviser scheme for students and staff with marketing plan, training programme and emphasis of updated staff and student policies relating to bullying and harassment	E&D Mgr HoSW HoSD	Oct 2018
2. Conduct a survey of the range of opportunities provided across the University for personal development – and analyse to identify strengths and deficiencies	SS SU	2018/19

7. Campus and Halls Environment

The physical on-campus environment is recognised as important to the experience and wellbeing of students.

Key Aims:

- To **promote** the development of a safe, accessible and welcoming University environment
- To **influence** the development of our campuses to engender a sense of community and belonging, allowing students to interact and develop healthy, enriching relationships and interests
- To **support** the creation of spaces and places on each campus, fit to serve a community of varied interests and needs. For example, designated quiet spaces, student social space, Faith Spaces, outdoor spaces that lend themselves to relaxation and calm as well as physical activity
- To **build awareness** of, and engagement with, environmental issues, encouraging individual responsibility in relation to sustainability and ‘natural capital’
- To **enable** innovative and varied student use of the University’s physical space to enable students to take part in a wide range of activities, which will add vibrancy to campus life.

Action	Lead	Timeline
1. Review the use of available space in relation to student wellbeing, identifying possibilities for extending social learning facilities, and quiet, reflective spaces, as well as social and activity spaces	DoE	2018/19
2. Review Subject Community spaces, to determine if student communal areas could be developed to foster sense of belonging and connectivity	DoE School Management	2018/19
3. Consider the design & inclusion of appropriate spaces for different activities (reflection, socialisation, activity, as well as requirements for students with protected characteristics) within new build projects	DoE	2018-23
4. Make better use of the external spaces across the University’s campuses for physical exercise and enjoyment	DoE SS&PA Mgr	Across 2018-23

8. Financial Wellbeing

This can be defined as encouraging and supporting students to become independent when it comes to managing their own financial affairs, with the skills to manage their budgets well.

Key Aims:

- To create a **greater awareness and understanding** of money matters amongst students
- To **support** students encountering financial difficulties
- To **encourage** students to develop their skills managing their personal finances
- To **allocate** hardship funds and other comparable bursaries/awards on an **equitable and transparent basis** to students in need.

Action	Lead	Timeline
1. Develop a range of money-related workshops for students to develop financial literacy (inc. living on a budget; understanding student finance; planning for post-graduation etc)	HoSW SFA Mgr F&P	Pilot 2018/19
2. Develop clear and improved marketing plan for hardship funds and other comparable bursaries/awards	CMSR F&P SU	Sept 2018
3. Inclusion of student funding application dates within SU/SS wellbeing campaigning programme for the year	HoSW SU Officers	Sept 2018
4. With SU, develop shared understanding of students' priorities for value for money, and awareness of how University funds are spent	F&P CMSR SU	2018/19

9. Supporting Staff to Embed the Strategy

Key Aims:

- To ensure that all staff have access to training and advice about how they can better promote student wellbeing, and what support is available
- To ensure that consideration of student wellbeing is linked to the forming and agreement of departmental business plans, major project planning and staff responsibilities
- Seek to empower staff and students to make a positive difference for the wellbeing of the student community
- To ensure all staff are aware of protocols and processes relating to student wellbeing

Action	Lead	Timeline
1. Develop a clear 'at a glance' guidance leaflet for student-facing staff to know who to refer to when managing a student wellbeing concern.	HoSW HoSD	September 2018
2. Develop training programme for STs & PTs in relation to student wellbeing	ADU DoSS/HoSW	2018/19 for full launch Sept 2019
3. Identify appropriate casework supervisory support for Senior Tutors managing complex student wellbeing cases	ADU SS	By January 2019
4. Deliver tailored training on maintaining professional boundaries for student facing staff	HoSW	Sept 2018 onwards

