

## **1.0 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICY**

### **Synopsis**

This document sets out the University of Aberdeen Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy.

This Policy applies to all staff and students of all Schools/Directorates.

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**Approved by: The Policy and Resources Committee**

**Date: 14<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

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### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

This policy details the University's commitment to care for the wellbeing, health and safety of its diverse community, supporting and developing people to achieve their full potential, as outlined in the University's strategic plan, Aberdeen 2040.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy underpins the University's Wellbeing Strategy. It details how the University will support staff and students to maintain good mental health and wellbeing. It also sets standards and responsibilities for the management of mental health and wellbeing for all staff and students.

The University has a legal duty of care to its community and is committed to exceeding its minimum legal requirements. The University will continuously enhance its mental health and wellbeing services support sector-wide initiatives as outlined in the Wellbeing Strategy.

### 4.0 LEGAL BACKGROUND

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and subordinate regulations, place a duty upon the University to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of its staff, and to others who may be exposed to risk by the activities of the University.

The Equality Act 2010 places a legal obligation on the University 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. (Enduring mental ill health may constitute a disability under the Act).

Employment Law, such as the Employment Rights Act (1996), governs employment matters such as contracts of employment, pay and conditions. This and case law define what is expected of a reasonable employer.

### 5.0 DEFINITIONS

The University has chosen to adopt a holistic approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing, which includes both physical health and mental health, as it recognises that they are closely linked and interdependent.

There are various definitions for mental health and wellbeing, but the University has selected the following as being most appropriate for use in this policy:

**Health** is *'not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing'*. ([World Health Organisation](#));

**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 contribute to their community. ([World Health Organisation](#));

**Wellbeing'** is defined by the Oxford dictionary as *"the state of being comfortable, happy or healthy", and encompasses all areas of life including personal, study, work, physical exercise, and nutrition, as well as mental health.*

## 6.0 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICY STATEMENT

The University will create an environment that is conducive to the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students.

The University recognises that each of us has many characteristics that combine to make up our lived experience and the intersectionality of those is important in determining outcomes related to mental health and wellbeing.

The University's strategic plan, Aberdeen 2040 places people and inclusivity at the heart of its vision and the institution aspires to lead our sector in promoting good mental health and wellbeing and celebrating diversity.

The University will achieve this through implementation of its Wellbeing Strategy.

## 7.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### 7.1 Management

The Senior Management Team (SMT), Heads of School and Directors of Professional Services play an important role in championing the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy. They are responsible for dissemination of information, across Schools and Professional Services, and putting in place effective systems to support, as far as it is under the University's control, the mental health and wellbeing of its staff and students.

Line managers have a responsibility to embed and implement the policy in their areas and to actively promote and reinforce the policy.

### 7.2 Staff

All staff should be mindful of their own health, safety and wellbeing and have a responsibility to contribute to an institutional culture that supports the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students.

Staff are expected to:

- Cooperate with the University in creating a welcoming and inclusive culture.
- Take reasonable steps to safeguard their own mental health and wellbeing and be aware of how other staff and students may be affected by their actions at work.
- Not knowingly or willingly do anything which may have a serious adverse impact on others' mental health or wellbeing.
- Inform their supervisor or 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 (to enable reasonable adjustments or support to be implemented).
- Take advantage of training opportunities regarding mental health and wellbeing and, where possible, support relevant University events to positively promote health and wellbeing.
- Raise with the individual, their line manager or Human Resources, as appropriate, if they have concerns about a staff member's physical or mental wellbeing.

### 7.3 Students

Students are expected to:

- Be mindful of their own mental health and wellbeing and aware of how other students and staff may be affected by their actions while at university.

And 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 (to enable appropriate reasonable adjustments or support to be implemented);
- Notify Student Support if they have concerns about another student's physical or mental wellbeing.

## **8.0 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

### 8.1 Wellbeing Strategy

The Wellbeing Strategy sets out the University's Strategic Priorities detailing major areas of work and how the institution intends to deliver the commitments made under this policy.

### 8.2 Annual Action Plan of the Wellbeing Strategy

An Annual Wellbeing Strategy Action Plan will be created for each academic year, setting out the key tasks that will need to be undertaken to progress the priorities identified in the strategy. Resource and leads will be allocated to each.

These are put under the following headings: Policy, Organisation, Communication; Competence, Implementation; Monitoring, Review and Audit to ensure that each part of the whole management cycle is developed annually.

If any tasks are not delivered in the academic year actions can be carried forward and/or modified to ensure that the overall aims are delivered against the strategy.

### 8.3 Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Group meets 4 times a year and oversees the implementation of the strategy, through the annual action plans. Its work covers both staff and students. Further detail is provided on its membership and how it operates in its Terms of Reference (see section 10 below)

This work is overseen by the Health and Safety Committee and Student Support Committee.

### 8.4 Data Collection, Monitoring and Review

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group monitors progress against the Annual Action Plan as a standing item at each meeting and provides updates to both the University Health and Safety Committee and the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee at least three times a year.

It is a fundamental principle of this policy that wherever possible, quantitative and qualitative data are gathered for all significant Mental Health and Wellbeing related activities in order to measure uptake and effectiveness.

Questions related to Mental Health and Wellbeing, Health and Safety at Work and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are included in the staff survey.

## 9.0 RECORD KEEPING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The University has agreed a framework regarding confidentiality. This should be consulted when appropriate (see section 10 below).

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 (such as when there is a serious and imminent risk of harm), only pass that information on with the express consent of the individual concerned or in accordance with relevant policies listed below.

## 10.0 REFERENCES

### 10.1 University Policies

The University has other policies which should be referred to in conjunction with this policy. The following is indicative of these but is not exhaustive:

- Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Support for Study Policy
- Sickness Absence Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Staffing Policy against Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace
- 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
- Data Protection Policy
- Drugs & Alcohol Policy
- Gender Based Violence Policy
- Religion and Belief Policy
- Workload Policy, Modelling Principles, and Parameters
- Smoking Policy
- Dignity at Work and Study Policy
- Flexible Working Policy

### 10.2 Other internal documents

Other useful documents, available on the University Intranet pages, or available upon request from the Health, Safety and Wellbeing or Student Experience Teams include:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group Terms of Reference
- Wellbeing Strategy 2021-25
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan
- Student Partnership Agreement
- Student Communication Policy
- Health Lives 3 Year Plan
- Healthy Working Lives and BeWell Calendar
- Student Mental Health Agreement

### 10.3 National Guidance

The following may also be helpful references in achieving good practice.

- [Arday \(2020\) Mental Health issues of Black and Minority Ethnic Staff in Higher Education](#)
- [Advance HE](#)
- [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(2019\). Tackling racial harassment: universities challenged.](#)
- [HSE: Employee Mental Health](#)
- [Hughes & Spanner \(2019\). The University Mental Health Charter, Leeds: Student Minds.](#)
- [NUS Think Positive](#)
- [Smithies & Byrom \(2019\). LGBTQ+ Student Mental Health: The challenges and needs of gender, sexual and romantic minorities in Higher Education, Student Minds.](#)
- [Stevenson & Farmer \(2017\). Thriving at Work: the independent review of mental health and employers.](#)
- [Universities UK \(2018\). Guidance for universities on preventing student suicides.](#)
- [Universities UK \(2020\). Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities](#)
- [Universities UK \(2020\). Beginning the conversation: responding to domestic violence and abuse in higher education communities during covid-19 pandemic.](#)

### **11.0 REVIEW RECORD**

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Summary of changes from previous version</b>
Draft 1	Dec 2020	New policy to replace version 1.0 to be linked to a new 5-year strategy.
Draft 2	Jan 2021	Incorporates various changes following consultation with Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee.
Draft 3	Feb 2021	Incorporates additional wellbeing relate references and changes following consultation via the Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group (incl. the Equality and Diversity Adviser & Dean for Student Support).
Draft 4	April 2021	Incorporates minor amendments to wording to clarify some statements and corrections of typographical errors.
Draft 5	May 2021	This amendment was done following the meeting of EDIC on 17 <sup>th</sup> May. EDIC approved this policy go to PaRC with only corrections of 2 typographical errors and that the strategy be changed from 5 to 4 years to align with Aberdeen 2040 Commitment 1.
Draft 6	June 2021	This amendment includes the name of the new Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy and makes some changes to the policy statement (section 6) to align it with the strategy content. It also removes some content from the data collection, monitoring and review content detail (section 8.4) as this is included in the strategy and the new version of the Management of Work-Related Stress Policy.