

Queen's University Belfast Student Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2021

1. Introduction

Queen's University believes that wellbeing is fundamental to a positive student learning experience. It is widely recognised that students who are happy, confident and able to establish meaningful relationships are better placed to achieve their full potential.

The overall aim of the Student Wellbeing Strategy is to enable staff and students to work in partnership to contribute towards creating:

"...a learning environment and organisational culture that enhances the health and wellbeing and sustainability of its community and enables people to achieve their full potential."

(Healthy Universities, 2006) ¹

The University recognises that each student has a unique set of hopes, ambitions and needs, and that these will change throughout their journey through University life. The Student Wellbeing Strategy is informed by research into student experience and good practice.

The most recent NUS-USI Research Report (April 2017), which engaged over 3,600 students across Northern Ireland, offers an invaluable and up to date insight into how students perceive their wellbeing, particularly in relation to their mental health:

"The impact that mental health issues has had upon students is extremely troubling, with 46% of respondents saying that mental health issues had impacted on their quality of life, 44% saying that they had impacted on their studies and grades, and 34% saying they had impacted upon their relationships."

(NUS-USI, 2017)²

According to this study:

- 78% of students have experienced mental health worries over the past year.
- Stress is the top mental health symptom identified by 81% of students, with other major factors being lack of energy, being unhappy or down, and anxiety.
- 55% of students reported being concerned about future levels of debt.
- Stress is significantly more likely to be suffered by people with learning disabilities than those without.
- People who identify as heterosexual are significantly less likely to feel depressed, to self-harm or to experience suicidal thoughts than other identities.

¹ Mark Dooris, M., Cawood, J., Doherty, S. and Powel, S. (2006) Healthy Universities: Concept, Model and Framework for Applying Healthy Approaches within Higher Education in England.

² NUS-USI (2017) Student Wellbeing Research Report [online]. Available at: <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/nus-usi-student-wellbeing-research-report-2017> (Accessed: 4 May 2017)

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Students surveyed in 2017 as part of the 'Mind Your Mood' student-led project at the University reported that the benefits of improved mental wellbeing include: being happier; being more productive; being better able to engage in self-care; having a better outlook on life; and that positive thinking helps you get good grades.

"Mental health is defined as a state of 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"

(WHO, 2014³)

This Strategy focuses on a broad holistic definition of wellbeing which includes, but is not limited to, mental health and wellbeing. It sets out how the University will offer support and development opportunities for students that empower and build upon their personal resources and resilience and will enable them to manage their own wellbeing.

2. Context

The University is committed to promoting a safe and supportive environment for students in which they can thrive and grow in independence, and which celebrates equality, diversity and inclusivity. This commitment is underpinned by the University's Core Values of Integrity, Connected, Ambition, Respect and Excellence which ensure that students are at the heart of service planning, development and design.

The new Student Wellbeing Strategy builds upon successful elements of the previous Student Mental Health Strategy (2009-2011), while acknowledging that resilience and wellbeing is broader than mental health and that a holistic approach is required to address emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual needs. In broadening the scope of the Strategy greater emphasis will be placed upon:

- promoting wellbeing and self-care
- reducing barriers (including stigma) to accessing support
- increasing student engagement

This approach aligns with the University's Education Strategy (2016-2021) and Postgraduate Strategy (2016-2021), which seek to create a stimulating and supportive environment where staff work in partnership with students to encourage the development of the whole person by increasing the focus on student wellbeing and resilience to ensure students have the skills and attributes to respond to new challenges and tackle difficult situations.

³ World Health Organisation (2014) *Mental Health a State of Wellbeing*, Available at: http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/. (Accessed: 4 May 2017)

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3. Wellbeing

The University's Student Wellbeing Strategy acknowledges that student wellbeing is a shared responsibility between students and staff, and a collective responsibility held by all staff, Faculties and Directorates. It recognises that students may need support at any point in their journey through university, and that any staff member may find themselves in a position of needing to respond to a student in distress or requiring support.

This Strategy and its holistic, institution-wide approach to student wellbeing is underpinned by the New Economics Foundation's⁴ (NEF) '5 Steps to Wellbeing' which promote the value of five simple actions to help maintain and improve wellbeing.

The 5 Steps to Wellbeing are well recognised as an effective evidence-based set of actions for supporting wellbeing and are the key wellbeing enablers of many public health campaigns including; the Northern Ireland's Public Health Agency's 'Mind Your Head' initiative.

Based upon NEFs 5 Steps to Wellbeing this Strategy outlines the intentional actions that promote wellbeing and the key priorities that the University will deliver upon to promote, educate and support student wellbeing and self-care, while reducing the barriers to accessing support and increasing student engagement. The actions and associated key priorities are detailed below:

3.1 Connect

Building connections and relationships with the people and resources around us supports and enriches our everyday life.

Key priorities to support, promote and educate this step for students:

- Provide opportunities for students to meet with other students and support staff through Welcome and Induction activity.
- Raise awareness of support available to students within their School e.g. Personal Tutor, Adviser of Studies.
- Provide students with the spaces to meet, socialise and integrate with each other, the University and wider community.
- Promote activity from the Students' Union, including events and activities from the Students' Union Advice Centre, the Students' Union Sabbatical Officers and Clubs and Societies as an opportunity to connect with other students.
- Raise Awareness of extracurricular activities that will support students to achieve their full potential e.g. peer mentoring offered by Learning Development Service; Skills development workshops/events from Careers Employability and Skills and other employability enhancing activities, for example, Volunteering, On-campus Jobs, Degree Plus, Internationalisation opportunities.

⁴ New Economics Foundation. Available at <http://www.fivewaystowellbeing.org/> (Accessed 4 May 2017).

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- Provide access to specialised services such as Disability Services, Counselling, and the Wellbeing Service that enable students to overcome challenges and effectively participate in all aspects of University life.

3.2 Be Active

Participating in exercise and physical activity is proven to improve both our physical and mental fitness.

Key priorities to support, promote and educate this step for students:

- Support Students' Union campaigns such as 'Are Ye Well' at examination time, for example, encouraging students studying for long periods to take a power walk around Botanic Gardens.
- Through resilience and wellbeing initiatives, raise awareness of the importance of exercise on a daily basis and encourage students to plan exercise into their daily routine, for example, taking a longer route to class or going for a run or a walk with friends.
- Create greater awareness of the opportunities available to students in relation to physical and recreational activities on and off campus, for example, Queen's Sport, University Clubs and Societies, Belfast City Council, local leisure and recreational centres and sporting clubs.
- Engage with on and off campus sport, health and wellbeing organisations to ensure that the needs of students are considered and responded to when services and supports are being planned and developed.

3.3 Take Notice

Being observant, taking time to enjoy and reflect on our experiences provides perspective and helps us to appreciate what matters to us.

Key priorities to support, promote and educate this step for students:

- Raise awareness of the importance of taking notice through resilience workshops, small group work and one-to-one coaching sessions.
- Promote Welcome and Induction and on-going social activities arranged by Accommodation Services, and International Student Support, for example, visits to local tourist sites.
- Support and encourage participation at student-led wellbeing activities such as; 'Are Ye Well' and 'Mind Your Mood'.
- Engage with on and off campus health and wellbeing initiatives to ensure that the needs of students are considered and responded to when services and supports are being planned and developed.
- Create new opportunities for students to participate in Mindfulness and meditation exercises, for example, through the Wellbeing Service, Student-Led Mind Your Mood campaign and local community initiatives.

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3.4 Keep Learning

Developing new skills or rediscovering old hobbies improves our confidence and provides us with a sense of enjoyment.

Key priorities to support, promote and educate this step for students:

- Promote range of Student-led clubs and societies that can help students develop or learn new skills.
- Deliver workshops and events that help students manage their own wellbeing and offer guidance on supporting friends.
- Promote range of extracurricular activity organised by Open Learning, Careers Service, Learning Development Service and the Graduate School that will support students to achieve their full potential including volunteering, developing employability skills, Degree Plus and international opportunities.

3.5 Give

Doing something for someone else, volunteering or joining a community group can be incredibly rewarding and supports us to connect with others.

Key priorities to support, promote and educate this step for students:

- Raise awareness of volunteering opportunities through Careers Employability and Skills, Students' Union and in the local community.
- Provide information on peer mentoring programmes available through the Learning Development Service/Schools as a method for students to help other students with aspects of University life.
- Through Wellbeing, support explore ways students can help achieve balanced life and personal satisfaction through giving to family, friends or their local community

4. Framework for Student Wellbeing

As noted, a central tenet of the University's Student Wellbeing Strategy is that the wellbeing of students is the collective responsibility of everyone, requiring a "whole university" approach. To support the implementation of this Strategy, the University has developed a 'Framework for Student Wellbeing' to direct how it will promote and deliver support to students and staff.

This framework outlines underpinning principles, drivers, tiered activities, priorities, deliverables, systems and impacts. Each tier of activity correlates with the others in terms of defining the types of services and supports which will be offered. However, within the framework a student's journey is not expected to be either linear or progressive - a student may access services and supports through any or all of the tiers at any one time or over the course of their time at the University. It is recognised that the majority of students will only engage with Tier 1 of the support framework, therefore, the University's resources are planned and managed to meet this level of demand and expectation.

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The Framework for Student Wellbeing is detailed in Appendix 1.

4.1 Tier 1 - Core Activities

The expressed outcome for Tier 1 of the framework is that all students and staff will be aware of the opportunities, support and services available through the University and how to access them. The target group for this is all of our students and staff. The primary activities for Tier 1 will include awareness raising for students and staff, and guidance and training for staff.

Examples of this include:

- Clear information (online and printed) about supports and services available within Queen's, and how to access them.
- Easily accessible dedicated webpage providing information on a wide range of issues and services including contact details, referral information and links to relevant resources.
- Key messages, including the students' perspective presented in a range of formats (e.g. written, video).
- Programme of activities for students throughout the academic year e.g. targeted Welcome and Induction sessions and Coping with Stress sessions at exam times, that focus on raising awareness of wellbeing, potential pressure points within the student journey through the University, what support is available, and healthy lifestyle choices.
- Guidance, protocols and training for staff in recognising when a student may need support, how to respond to this, what supports are available and how to access advice or make appropriate referrals.
- Baseline training for all staff in key roles (to be agreed) eg Mental Health First Aid.
- Disability Awareness training.

4.2 Tier 2 -Targeted Activities

The expressed outcome for Tier 2 of the framework is that all students who are concerned about their wellbeing, or about whom a potential need for support has been identified, will have access to advice and information from appropriately trained staff. The target group is all students who have specific concerns for themselves or a friend, and staff who have concerns about an individual student. The primary activities for Tier 2 will include advice, signposting, staff consultations, workshops and group work.

Examples of this include:

- Drop-In service for students, using a triage model.
- One-to-one support provided by Student Wellbeing Advisers.
- Signposting and referrals to internal and external services.
- Workshops and group work addressing specific issues.
- Consultations with staff providing advice and support when responding to specific needs of individual students.

- Reasonable adjustments for students registered with Disability Services.

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4.3 Tier 3 - Specialist Activities

The outcome for Tier 3 of the framework is that all students in need of specialist support or guidance, or those considered to be at risk, will receive this in an appropriate, informed and timely manner in line with best practice. The target group is all students with serious or complex needs, or who are considered to be at risk. Examples of the primary activities for Tier 3 include:

- Assessment.
- Diagnosis e.g. Dyslexia.
- Counselling.
- Coaching.
- Student Support Fund.
- Referral to specialist services.

5. Implementation

The Student Wellbeing Strategy will be implemented in line with the University's Education Strategy (2016-2021) and Postgraduate Strategy (2016-2021), which are focused on delivering '*education through partnership*'. The University will work in partnership with students to enhance their experience providing quality support and student engagement opportunities that will proactively empower them to realise their own potential and achieve their individual goals and aspirations.

In order to achieve this, the University will offer a holistic range of activities, services and supports which are accessible, flexible and responsive and delivered through the Framework for Student Wellbeing which is presented in Appendix 1. This Framework is underpinned by the University's commitment to training and support for all staff who may be involved with providing students with support at any level of the framework. The level of training provided for staff will be tailored to meet the needs and demands of job roles and will be supplemented with advice, support and guidance from the University's Disability and Wellbeing Service. The framework encompasses all wellbeing activity and will be discussed at the University's multi-disciplinary Student Support Forum on a regular basis.

The University's aspiration is that every student leaves the University confident that they have achieved their academic potential, equipped to cope with the next phase of their life, whatever that is, and feeling connected and hopeful about their future.

6. Monitoring, Evaluation and Measuring Impact

This Student Wellbeing Strategy will be in place for the period 2017-2021. Delivery against its key priorities will be formally reviewed annually by Student Affairs and reported through to the Supporting Student Attainment Working Group and Education Committee.

Appendix 1: Framework for Student Wellbeing

HIGHER EDUCATION DRIVERS
Student recruitment, retention, experience and achievement;
organisational productivity

