

Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2025

Vision

The University of Kent and Kent Union aim to ensure that they offer an environment in which students can reach their full potential, working in partnership with local voluntary and statutory agencies where appropriate. Our vision is to work together as a whole University to:

- Ensure that issues of student health and wellbeing are intrinsic to the University decision making process, embedding support mechanisms across the institution via Academic Schools, Professional Services Departments and agencies with a key focus on the student experience such as Kent Sport and Kent Hospitality.
- Promote student health and wellbeing across all campuses and centres, including the European Centres
- Promote cultural awareness and best practice in equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) practices and embed these practices into the way we work
- Provide students with the life tools to safeguard their own health and wellbeing
- Ensure that all students¹ have access to a variety of services that can be adapted to their own individual needs and requirements to minimise any adverse effects of mental ill health on academic life.

Strategic Aims

1) Leadership

- Ensure that mental health is a strategic priority and student health and wellbeing is considered when planning and developing wider University policy and strategy.
- Ensure that the College Life Agenda is closely aligned to student support and wellbeing, capitalising on the sense of community and belonging within the Colleges.
- Ensure that a sense of community and belonging is promoted for postgraduate taught and research students via the College Life Agenda, the Graduate School and Academic Schools.

2) Partnership

- Establish a co-ordinated, 'whole University' approach, collaborating between the University of Kent, Kent Union and GK Unions across all campuses to engage all areas of the university community to advance the student health and wellbeing agenda.
- Build on existing strong collaborative links with external agencies and partners (including the NHS) to share data and best practice as appropriate, promote continuity of support and care across organisational boundaries and ensure that service provision meets the needs of our students.

3) Prevention and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing

¹ All Students refers to undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students

- Identify key transitional moments² for students, providing additional guidance to support students at periods of high stress during their university career
- Provide an environment free of discrimination, bullying, harassment and other negative behaviours that is conducive to physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Build cohesive communities that promote values and behaviours which support wellbeing
- Promote inclusive learning, teaching, research and assessment to meet the needs of different students
- Promote online and self-help resources to help students to manage their wellbeing

4) Early Intervention

- Raise awareness of mental health issues and run campaigns against stigma
- Provide mental health literacy training to staff and students to increase confidence to discuss and identify mental health issues
- Promote and develop peer support initiatives and mental health champions

5) Support

- Provide a range of effective and evidence based support services for mental health issues integrated within wider student support services and other agencies such as Kent Sport and Medway Park and the Graduate School.
- Support individual students in need at all campuses, including those who are less likely to seek support through outreach services
- Ensure effective signposting to additional support both within and external to the university
- Ensure that academic policies and adjustments align with support
- Ensure robust arrangements are in place for students with a history of mental health difficulties who are required to undertake a period of time studying off campus, including those studying or working abroad
- Develop a suicide-safer strategy and action plan

6) Data

- Conduct high quality, student-centred health and wellbeing research, utilising data, research evidence and feedback from students and staff to capture the student experience and evaluate and improve services for undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- Report to University Council on an annual basis with a view to identifying future enhancements and priorities in promoting student mental wellbeing.

7) Campus Environment

- Shape the University's social, physical and digital environments in order to regulate, support and improve healthy cultures within them.

² 'Transitional moments' include, but are not limited to, starting University as a foundation or undergraduate student, moving from an undergraduate to postgraduate degree programme, moving from a postgraduate taught to postgraduate research degree programme, studying in a British University as an international or European student, going on, or returning from a Year Abroad or Year in Industry.

Action Plan

The 2019-2025 Action Plan will meet the Strategic Aims in the following key areas:

1. Leadership

What we currently deliver:

- Commitment to supporting students' mental health and wellbeing is shared by University managers and leaders
- Support of Vice-Chancellor to health and wellbeing agenda
- Commitment of Student Union to health and wellbeing agenda

What we aim to deliver:

- Provide strong leadership to ensure that the health and wellbeing agenda is embedded within University policy and practice at all levels
- Ongoing commitment to address areas for improvement in relation to policy, protocol and practice.

2. Partnership

What we currently deliver:

- Mental Health Planning Group with key representatives from staff and students³ across the University
- Multi-disciplinary Team Meeting with University Medical Centre, Campus Security and Nursing Services
- Suicide-safer Communities initiative - the University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University, supported by their respective students' unions, have established a joint multi agency initiative around suicide prevention in the universities communities.
- Links with external providers who also come onto campus including Psychological Therapies, Forward -Drug and Alcohol services, Early Intervention in Psychosis Team, Rising Sun domestic abuse service, Samaritans and third sector organisations e.g., Umbrella Centre, Take Off, Sunlight Centre, Carers First and Insight.
- Kent Union / GK Unions Advice Centre to support students across a range of issues including academic support, visa problems, finance concerns and housing issues.

What we aim to deliver:

- Work towards achieving and maintaining Suicide-Safer Community designation to give this serious problem the prominence it warrants, whilst also providing a structured approach to our work.
- Consider further opportunities for joint action with partner institutions and bodies.

³ Students refers to Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research students

- Consider the applicability and implications of student mental health-related policies and procedures in respect of arrangements with collaborative and other partners such as further education colleges, placement providers, schools and employers.

3. Prevention and promoting health, mental health and wellbeing

What we currently deliver:

- Big White Wall – 24/7 free, online support for issues around mental health and wellbeing
- Mental Health Awareness Week activities, Wellbeing Festival, wellbeing zones on campus, including the Templeman Library Chill Out Zone, Canterbury Oasis Garden and the Eliot Labyrinth
- Canterbury Sports Centre with a variety of facilities and classes, sports teams and societies and a cycle hub where students can hire a bike for the day and a referral service for students with mental health conditions.
- A range of clubs, societies and volunteering opportunities
- TG Pals on the Canterbury campus support group for transgender students and a transgender student support policy. Global Diverse-Ability blog

What we aim to deliver:

- Address barriers to inclusion for all, with specific focus on protected characteristics (e.g. disability, age, sexual orientation, race, gender, religious belief)
- Promote healthy lifestyles and coping strategies to students and equip students with the life-skills to safeguard their own mental health including access to online resources to support self-care
- Build resilience to challenges students face in life, including, but not limited to, work or study related anxiety, hardship, homesickness, change, relationship break-up, money matters, failure and death
- Raise awareness of mental wellbeing, through events including but not limited to, World Mental Health Day, University Mental Health Day, Mental Health Awareness Week, Wellbeing Festival and Suicide Awareness.
- Enable students to have access to a broad range of physical and recreational activities, including supporting students who are in financial difficulties

4. Early Intervention

What we currently deliver:

- E-learning training module for University staff (academic and non-academic) on supporting students with mental health conditions
- Encourage students' with pre-existing mental health difficulties to register for support, to protect and enhance their psychological wellbeing
- Orientation days for specific student groups
- Extensive programme of wellbeing events and activities, including exam de-stress, Wellbeing Café, and Wellbeing Workshops

What we aim to deliver:

- Provide further mental health awareness training for staff members (academic and non-academic) to enable better support and signposting for students in mental distress, including awareness of pressure points for students in the academic lifecycle
- Identify areas of potential academic and social culture shock for international students and introduce mechanisms to support this transition period
- Engage PGRs and other agencies to raise the profile of PGR mental health literacy and implement more visible support for PGRs to include wellbeing checkpoints and mentoring
- Continue to develop a wide range of evidence based wellbeing events and activities for students and staff
- Identify and break down barriers to students accessing support both from the University of Kent and Kent Union / GK Unions (including the Advice Centres)

5. Support

What we currently deliver:

- Wellbeing Advisers who offer specialist mental health advice and support, Outreach Adviser who can visit students at a place of their choosing on campus, International Student Adviser
- Counselling services
- Crisis drop-in sessions every week day in term time
- College system providing co-ordination of support to students, a range of policies and procedures, including Support to Study
- Kent Union / GK Unions - Advice Centre and Nightline service in partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University and Christ Church Students' Union

What we aim to deliver:

- Ensure support systems are in place for students in mental distress and are easily accessible throughout term and vacation periods
- Explore ways to encourage students reluctant to disclose their problems to seek help when needed and develop culturally aware support for international students
- Diversify the range of support available to students to include liaison with academic schools regarding targeted interventions such as support groups or workshops to specific student groups
- Ensure a wider range of policies are available to cover the diverse needs of students, including students who present as a cause for concern and those returning to study after a required withdrawal

6. Data

What we currently deliver:

- Review of current practices including wait times for accessing support and feedback from students and staff
- Monitoring and evaluation of counselling service

What we aim to deliver:

- Continue to monitor and evaluate services to allow the identification of successful interventions and interventions that can be developed or improved
- Carry out high quality research projects to monitor, evaluate and improve current and newly developed interventions for different student groups

7. Campus Environment

What we currently deliver:

- Respect at Kent Policy and the Graduate Attributes Framework
- Wellbeing zones, including the Library Chill Out Zone, Oasis Garden and Labyrinth
- Accessibility tours to assess the campus environment from an accessibility perspective
- OPERA Project to create an accessible information environment at Kent
- Kent Digital Accessibility Working Group, to ensure web accessibility regulations compliance

What we aim to deliver:

- Promote the development of a safe, secure and aesthetically pleasing University environment
- Support the creation of buildings that engender a sense of community and belonging, allowing students to interact and develop healthy, enriching relationships and interests
- Support the creation of accessible spaces and places on each campus, fit to serve a community of varied interests and needs. For example, designated quiet spaces, student social space, outdoor spaces that lend themselves to relaxation and calm as well as physical activity
- Provide students with accessible spaces to meet socialise and integrate with each other and the wider university

[Strategy Review](#)

This Strategy, Action Plan and Implementation plan will be kept under review by the Mental Health Planning Group, with an annual report submitted to the summer meeting of the Student Experience Board.