

***Thriving at Work:***

**Supporting mental health and wellbeing**

**2018-20**

## 1. Introduction

The way employers view workplace wellbeing is changing. The focus is shifting from reactive management of sickness absence to a more proactive approach of prevention through promoting wellbeing and improving employee engagement.

The University has been promoting participation in health and wellbeing and preventative professional development events over the last few years and wellbeing is highlighted as a key focus area in the University's strategy '*Open for Change*' and in the People Strategy '*Working together – supporting each other.*' There is specific mental health guidance and support in place for students provided through the Student Support and Wellbeing team which encompasses the UinMind Mental Health Advice Service and the UTalk Counselling Service.

Best practice information from 'Thriving at Work', the Stevenson/Farmer Review of Mental Health and Employers 2017<sup>1</sup>, and the Education Support Partnership has been drawn upon in relation to providing this guidance.

## 2. University approach

The University's approach to mental health focuses on good mental health and wellbeing, prevention and early intervention, to support staff in building resilience and confidence to fulfil their goals and ambitions.

In the same way that we all have physical health that fluctuates, we all have mental health that does the same. The World Health Organisation defines good mental health as "*A state of wellbeing in which every individual realises 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.*"

From an organisational perspective, employee wellbeing is an important factor in quality, performance and productivity and a focus on staff wellbeing will help ensure high levels of student experience and attainment. We know that effective people management at all levels is crucial for supporting the mental health of employees: creating good working conditions can help to support staff with existing conditions to succeed in work and thrive, helping to prevent new mental health problems occurring.

## 3. The role of legislation

Under the Equality Act 2010, there is a legal duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments for employees with a disability. A 'reasonable adjustment' is an alteration that the University makes to enable an employee to continue with their role responsibilities without being at a disadvantage compared to others.

The Health and Safety at Work Act is an umbrella piece of legislation under which a number of Acts and Regulations are brought into force. The Act covers the broad principle of the employer's 'general duty of care', which should ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health (including mental health), safety and welfare of all employees whilst at work.

#### 4. Making reasonable adjustments

Whether a mental health problem is defined as a disability or not, managers are encouraged to make reasonable adjustments for staff who are experiencing mental health problems. As mental health problems can be experienced very differently by different people, any workplace adjustments would be decided in consultation with the individual concerned.

Workplace adjustments themselves do not address the specific mental health problem, but are designed to address the disadvantage that the mental health problem might cause for a person in their role. The types of reasonable adjustments commonly made for people experiencing a mental health problem will depend on the symptoms being experienced by the individual and on the University's resources in terms of what the University might be able to support.

Changes to how employees perform their role might include:

- Agreeing short-term or longer-term flexible hours such a change to start or finish times.
- Increasing frequency of one-to-one meetings/catch-up meetings.
- Agreeing to give the employee time off for appointments related to their mental health, such as GP and/or specialist appointments or therapy/counselling.
- Enabling the employee to arrange their annual leave so that they have regularly spaced breaks throughout the year.

Changes to the role itself (temporary or permanent):

- Agreeing the type of responsibilities the employee can manage if they are on a phased return to work following a period of ill-health.
- Temporarily changing duties, for example changing the balance of desk work and customer facing work, reducing caseloads, changing shift patterns.
- Reallocation of some tasks or amendments to the employee's job profile or responsibilities.
- Redeployment to a more suitable role.

Any workplace adjustments will be decided in discussion with the individual concerned.

It might be possible to provide additional support for the employee such as additional help with managing and negotiating workloads or providing regular opportunities to discuss, review and reflect on positive achievements.

#### 5. Improving mental wellbeing

According to research, there are certain things that can help to boost our mental wellbeing:

- Develop good relationships with colleagues so that you can build up a network of support.
- Connect with people around you: your family, friends, neighbours, spending time developing these relationships.

- Be active: take a walk, go cycling, go to the gym, enjoy the garden, etc. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.
- Keep learning: learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence.
- Give to others: even the smallest act can count such as volunteering at a local community centre, helping to build new social networks.
- Be mindful: be more aware of the present moment, including your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Some people call this awareness 'mindfulness' and it can help to change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

The University has made specific commitments to promote good mental health and wellbeing and to provide a range of awareness events and initiatives. These include:

- **Mindful Employer:** being part of the Mindful employer initiative works to support staff with mental health issues and the University renews its status year-on-year as a signatory to the 'Charter for Employers who are Positive about Mental Health.'
- **Time to Change:** with the Students' Union, the University has jointly signed the 'Time to Change Employer Pledge' to demonstrate its commitment to changing how staff and students think, act and talk about mental health.
- **Coastal West Sussex Mind:** Coastal West Sussex Mind deliver training and development activities relating to mental health issues available to all staff through the Professional Development Programme.
- **Dementia Friends:** the University is registered as an organisation with Dementia Friends.
- **Disability Confident Employer:** as a Disability Confident Employer award holder, we recognise that people with disabilities, including mental health problems, contribute greatly to the University's success. Self-disclosure at recruitment stage and at any point during employment is encouraged, in order that the University can provide better support. Staff can update their details on the Human Resources self-service facility via the Staff Intranet.

## 6. Helpful definitions

In the same way that we all have physical health that fluctuates, we all have mental health that does the same. Just as in any year a percentage of staff will develop cough, colds, flu or other illnesses, a certain level of people experiencing poor mental health is inevitable.

### Mental health:

Physical health conditions affect the body. They can last for a short time or they can be a long-term condition, whereas mental health conditions affect the way a person feels, thinks and acts. We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health, and how we feel can vary from good mental wellbeing to difficult feelings and emotions, to experiencing mental health problems.

### Poor mental health:

Poor mental health is a state of low mental wellbeing where you are unable to realise your own potential, cope with the day-to-day pressures of life, work productively or contribute to a community. Mental health conditions affect the lives of lots of people. They also affect the lives of people who are close to those people with a mental health condition.

### Mental health problems:

We all have times when we struggle with our mental health, but when these difficult experiences or feelings go on for a long time and affect our ability to enjoy and live our lives in the way we want to, this is a mental health problem. You might receive a specific diagnosis from your doctor, or just feel more generally that you are experiencing poor mental health.

### Common mental health problems:

These include depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder, which can lead to one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any given year. Symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to very severe.

### Less common mental health problems:

Less common conditions like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder can have a big impact on people's lives: it may be harder to find appropriate treatment and, as understanding tends to be lower, people may face more stigma. However, many people are able to live with and recover from these diagnoses and manage the impact on their life well. Someone could have a serious mental health condition but, with the right help and support, they can be well at work.

### Work-related stress:

Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as *the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work*. Severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or more severe mental health problems. The University's Stress Management Policy, available via the Human Resources page of the staff intranet, provides further information and support.

## 7. Professional Development opportunities

The University's People Strategy '*Working together – supporting each other*' places health and wellbeing at the heart of the experience of working at the University, offering relevant interventions and services. This includes access to a range of opportunities aimed at supporting staff wellbeing. Provision includes a 'Building Resilience' programme, 'mental de-clutter' workshops, interactive and experiential stress awareness sessions, access to an exercise referral scheme, NHS health checks, Wellbeing 'MOT's, life planning workshops and a range of other approaches to support staff. The programme is available via the Human Resources page of the Staff Intranet and regular updates are provided via email.

## 8. Personal support

Employees experiencing mental health problems are encouraged to discuss with their GP as a first step and to take advice in relation to a return to work and/or remaining in work.

Where a member of staff is experiencing mental health problems and they find that it is impacting on their work, they are encouraged to discuss with their line manager and/or Head/Director of Department/Institute. If for any reason they do not feel able to talk to their manager and/or Head/Director of Department/Institute, they can discuss with another manager, or contact a member of the Human Resources Team.

#### Key contacts include:

Helen Girling, Human Resources Manager, [H.Girling@chi.ac.uk](mailto:H.Girling@chi.ac.uk)  
Charlotte Meneely, Human Resources Manager, [C.Meneely@chi.ac.uk](mailto:C.Meneely@chi.ac.uk)  
Kevin Botto, HR/Professional Development Manager, [K.Botto@chi.ac.uk](mailto:K.Botto@chi.ac.uk)  
Suzanne Jones, Inclusivity & Wellbeing Officer (part-time), [S.Jones@chi.ac.uk](mailto:S.Jones@chi.ac.uk)  
Sarah Carruthers, HR Officer (part-time), [S.Carruthers@chi.ac.uk](mailto:S.Carruthers@chi.ac.uk)  
Elisabeth Whitaker, Director of Human Resources, [E.Whitaker@chi.ac.uk](mailto:E.Whitaker@chi.ac.uk)

Depending on the circumstances, a referral to the University's Occupational Health Physician may be arranged and can be a helpful way for the University and the employee to receive specific guidance in relation to the impact of a mental health problem and/or capacity for work. Further information is available in the University's Sickness Absence Guidance and the Capability and Ill-Health Policy.

#### 9. Useful contacts

If you want to find out more about staying healthy, the following websites provide helpful information:

<https://www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk/services/servicedetails.htm?DirectoryID=16358>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/>

<https://www.rethink.org/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/learn-for-mental-wellbeing/>

<https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/>

Samaritans – open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Call free on 116 123.

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<sup>i</sup> Government Services, Stevenson/Farmer Review of Mental Health and Employers Report 2017