

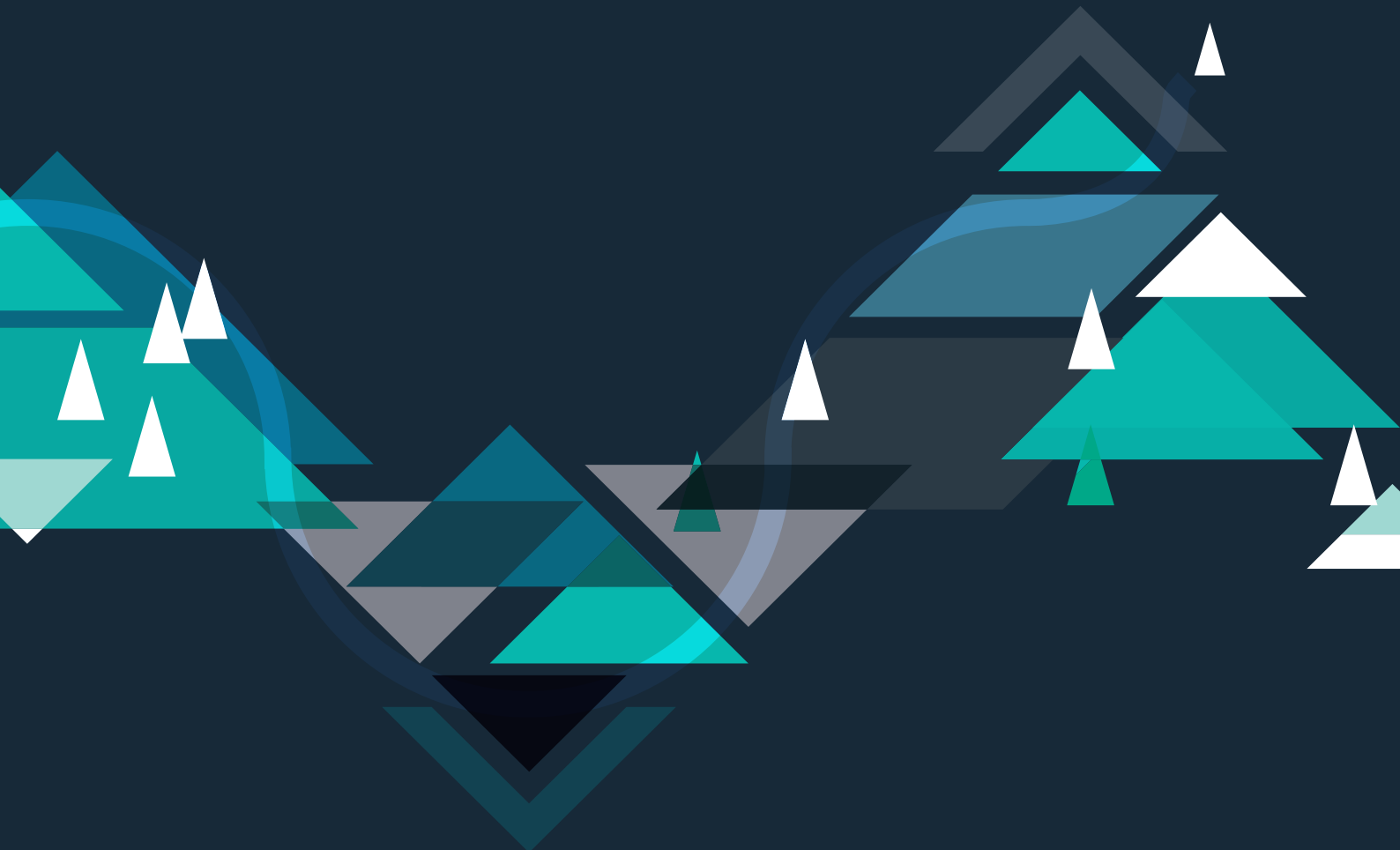


UNIVERSITY
of York

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Working Together for Student Mental Health

2017-2020



1. Vision of the University and aims of the strategy

Students' mental health is everyone's business. As an organisation for learning and research, the University of York aims to ensure that it offers an environment in which students can reach their academic and personal potential. The University's leadership is committed to promoting the wellbeing of our community. This strategy supports that goal.

Our vision is to work together as a whole University to promote students' wellbeing, to ensure that students who experience mental ill-health whilst at the University are well supported and to minimise adverse effects of mental ill-health on academic life.

Our strategic aims are to:

- establish a co-ordinated, "whole university" approach, engaging all sections of the university community to advance the student mental health agenda and ensure that student mental health is considered when planning and developing wider University policy. We will create a University virtual Student Mental Health Hub to integrate actions and provide a single portal for students to access advice and support
- establish close collaborative links with external agencies (eg the NHS, City of York Council and voluntary organisations), share data as appropriate, promote continuity of support and care across organisational boundaries and ensure that service provision meets the needs of all our students
- create a university environment (academic and non-academic) that is conducive to mental wellbeing, which minimises contextual risk factors for mental ill-health and suicide and reduces the stigma associated with mental illness
- support individual students to manage risk factors and so prevent mental-ill health
- identify pre-existing conditions and early signs of distress and mental ill-health and to intervene in a timely and proportionate way or refer appropriately to health services
- support students who are less likely to seek help when they need it, such as postgraduates and those from cultures/backgrounds where there is more stigma around mental ill-health
- make good use of data, research evidence and feedback from students and staff to evaluate and improve our provision
- conduct high quality student-centred mental health research (based on our excellent track record in applied mental health research) and use this to better understand the student lived experience and ensure our approach is effective and efficient.

This strategy lays out the specific contribution made by various parties involved in supporting student mental health and wellbeing at York. It sets out what is being done and what we plan to do in order to improve our provision, working collaboratively with internal and external partners. It is informed by strategies developed by City of York Council and others.

We are one of three UK universities, working with Universities UK (UUK) and Student Minds – a national student-led charity – to pilot a framework for improving mental health in higher education developed by the UK-led Mental Health in Higher Education programme.¹ This strategy aligns with that Framework.

2. A continuum of students' mental health needs

Mental health problems² arise when changes in our emotional state, thinking and behaviour interfere with our sense of wellbeing and day-to-day functioning, including academic and work performance, family and relationships, social and private activities. Such mental health problems exist in a continuum, from emerging and mild common emotional problems to severe, acute or enduring mental illness. Mental health goes beyond the absence of mental illness; it can relate to our strengths and abilities to think, act and feel in ways that are protective and helpful for us. Mental illness and mental wellbeing correlate but are different concepts: mental illness represents specific signs and symptoms that negatively affect our mental health, whereas mental wellbeing reflects the positive aspects of our mental health.

Many students are well and experience good wellbeing most of the time, but others may sometimes experience mental health problems and compromised mental wellbeing. Mental health problems may exist prior to and on arrival at the University, or may develop during the period of study at the University. Contextual or environmental factors increase the risk of mental health problems in students. These include: living away from home; isolation; bullying (including online); sexual harassment and assault; peer pressure to drink too much alcohol, use drugs or gamble; and stress resulting from the academic and social demands of studies and assessments. In addition, individual risk factors can be accentuated in a university setting, such as learning problems (eg dyslexia or developmental problems such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or Autism Spectrum Disorders) and approaches to working, such as perfectionism and avoidant coping styles.

Mental health problems in University students may:

- reduce student ability to learn effectively and reach their potential
- increase the risk of study interruption or discontinuation³
- affect fellow students and staff who live or work at the University
- increase the risk of suicide.

¹ universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange/Pages/default.aspx

² Common examples of mental health problems in young adults include:

- anxiety disorders (excessive worry, sleep problems, fears, rituals, avoidance, procrastination, and social or performance anxiety)
- depression and other mood disorders (low mood, loss of interest, lack of energy, feeling unmotivated and hopeless; or distinct changes from feeling depressed to feeling elated and tireless, having racing thoughts and being disinhibited or reckless)
- suicide and self-harm (having thoughts or plans to cause death or intentional harm to oneself)
- eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia and binge eating)
- substance misuse (binge drinking, taking recreational or non-prescribed addictive drugs, alcohol dependence)
- psychosis (delusional ideas, seeing/hearing things that others cannot see/hear, extreme self-neglect and chaotic behaviour, extreme social withdrawal, disjointed or incoherent speech)

³ Published UoY UG completion rate fell from 96% in 2011 (ranked 6th in sector) to 92% in 2017 (27th).

The Strategy covers the full spectrum of prevention, early identification, support, focused intervention and referral to health professionals. This includes:

- preventing problems by creating an environment where contextual risk factors are minimised or mitigated and helping students with individual risk factors cope better with university academic life
- provision of support and advice from a range of formal and informal sources, either in person or online, to help students maintain wellbeing.

A graduated, student-centred approach to needs delivering the most effective, yet least resource intensive, intervention to students first, and only ‘stepping up’ to intensive or specialist services as clinically required.

Given the variation in needs across different students (as individuals, at undergraduate and postgraduate level) and for each student over time, the strategy aims to take a whole university approach.⁴

Rather than focusing on isolated interventions or services this joined-up approach embeds the student mental health agenda across all University policies, curricula and practice, permeating all aspects of its work. This involves collaboration and coordination between academic staff in departments, Health and Safety, Human Resources, the Open Door team, Student Services, Security and College staff and the two students’ unions, as well as external partners such as the NHS, the City of York and voluntary organisations. We will follow the UUK model of a whole university approach, which describes four domains:

COMMUNITY

Empowering communities and promoting community awareness and cohesion; involve students and staff in all stages of the improvement journey

LEARNING

Recognising that curricula and teaching practices have a significant impact on mental health

LIVING

Shaping social, physical and digital environments in order to regulate, support and improve healthy cultures within them

SUPPORT

Resourcing and reviewing support services appropriate to the needs of students

In order to help achieve this goal we will create a high profile Student Mental Health Hub which brings together, helps coordinate and prioritises activity and initiatives, integrating information, guidance, support and services for all our students (including those on distance learning programmes). This would be strongly driven by tapping into the lived experience of our students of all types. We have mapped the current pathways and roles in respect of different types of need and will be developed as we identify gaps in current provision and ways of better coordination.

⁴ universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange/Pages/whole-university-approach.aspx

A key resource for taking forward this strategy is the Open Door team which provides the University's specialist support for mental ill-health. This team liaises with, and where necessary leads on coordinating, the various internal and external services which contribute to this model. Its purpose is to provide therapeutic interventions which support students in managing or overcoming their mental health difficulties. The staff in the Open Door team also provide advice to University staff and students. They represent the University in fora of practitioners and policy-makers working across the city to improve mental health in the population and specifically its students.

3. Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing

Promoting positive value and behaviours

Mental health will be supported in an environment where there are respectful communications and where discrimination, harassment and bullying behaviours are not tolerated. The Together York commitment⁵ sets out reasonable expectations that the University and our students have of each other. The University of York is a community built on respect, fairness and compassion and we hold each other to these expectations and call out inappropriate behaviour. Enhancing these values and associated behaviours will help reduce environmental risk factors for mental ill-health. Led by the University's Assistant Registrar for Community Cohesion and Respect, we will work with our students' unions to promote mutual respect and discourage harassment and non-consensual contact.

Colleges

Colleges play a major part in building cohesive communities and promoting values and behaviours that support wellbeing. As most undergraduate students live in college in their first year at the University, colleges play a central role in building healthy communities and promoting wellbeing. The colleges provide workshops on various topics to promote ways of managing good mental health and minimise the impact of stress or distress. We will seek ways to extend these benefits to students with weaker college affiliations (especially postgraduate students) and others living off campus.

Learning and teaching approaches

By promoting inclusive learning, teaching and assessment the University aims to design our curricula and prepare learning, teaching and assessment activities that meet the needs of different students and enable all students to achieve their full potential. Our aim is to minimise the need for individual adjustments by providing learning teaching and assessment in a way which accommodates our students' diverse needs. Lecture capture, effective use of the Virtual Learning Environment and the sensitive design of learning and teaching spaces all contribute to making the learning experience accessible to all.

We anticipate that the approach to learning outcomes and programme design promoted through the York Pedagogy⁶ will reduce stress for students by making the structure of their programme and their academic work more transparent. We will further explore ways to reduce academic stress by looking at forms of assessment, encouraging regular feedback, running individual or group sessions to support students via stress management training focussing particularly on those with difficulties possibly due to individual risk factors. We will support academic tutors and PG supervisors by training them to help them point relevant students to the support available.

⁵ york.ac.uk/about/together-york

⁶ york.ac.uk/about/departments/support-and-admin/sas/sas-staff/currentprojects/yorkpedagogy

Future career concerns

Many students experience worry associated with their career beyond University. By introducing the York Futures immersive event into the first year of undergraduate study we aim to help students to understand strengths they bring to their employability. This experience will also help students to understand and to plan what strengths they need to develop in their remaining time at the University.

Self-help resources

Recognising that many students will manage their own wellbeing, and that there are many sources of advice and support available online, the Open Door team promotes online advice and self-help resources, for example, healthy sleep patterns and ways of addressing exams stress. We will expand the range of issues covered by these resources including: offering support for finance and housing problems, life events such as bereavements, prevention of gambling, excess alcohol and other factors which cause stress.

Promoting exercise and volunteering

We recognise the contribution that physical activity can make to wellbeing and reducing risk of mental illness. College sport provides a way for all students, including those whose ability is modest, to participate. We will work with colleges and the students' unions to ensure that a full range of exercise opportunities are available and that negative social pressures associated with some competitive sports are minimised.

We will encourage student volunteering informed by evidence that volunteering is associated with improved mental health and wellbeing.⁷

4. Early identification of problems, signposting to support and early intervention

Early identification of and response to mental distress and developing mental ill-health are an essential part of effective approaches. The University, jointly with the students' unions, runs campaigns to destigmatise mental health issues. Students with pre-existing mental health problems will be encouraged to disclose this appropriately before the start of studies so that appropriate support can be put in place.

Students need clarity as to where they can go for appropriate advice and support. Our staff need to be better able to identify and refer appropriately students who show early signs of mental health concerns. The creation of a Student Mental Health Hub will help ensure everyone knows where to look for advice and support (the details of which will be developed during 2017/18).

Signposting where to seek help

Some students are unsure about who they should disclose their distress to and this can inhibit them from seeking the help they need. The University will improve its signposting so that students on and off campus are clear where they can get support (including outside of term dates). This work will address the issue of the reluctance of some students to disclose their problems to supervisors (or even family) for cultural and other reasons.

⁷ biglotteryfund.org.uk/-/media/Files/Research%20Documents/Wellbeing%20in%20England/National_Well-being_Evaluation_Final_Report%20August%202013.pdf

Clear guidance for students who are worried about the mental health of a friend or colleague will be developed jointly with the NHS and well-advertised.

Academic supervisors

Academic supervisors are the first point of contact for academic and personal problems which may impact on student's ability to study and are expected to meet at least termly with their students.⁸ Many students look to them as the person who is most likely to have an interest in their wellbeing. Beyond showing that they care and recognise that their student may be experiencing stress or anxiety, or a more significant mental health difficulty, the supervisor's role is to signpost and advise their student to access the appropriate support from the variety of services provided by professional services teams.

Training staff to recognise problems

The University is rolling out a programme of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training which aims to promote a positive culture around mental health and wellbeing for both staff and students. The training aims to tackle stigma and discrimination, and also increase staff confidence in discussing and identifying mental health issues.

We aim to ensure that all colleagues in academic departments and professional services who work directly with students have the basic level of skill to identify and appropriately refer students who show signs of developing mental ill-health or the early phase suicidal ideation. Given the relationship of research students with their supervisors, we will ensure PG supervisors are appropriately trained. We will evaluate the effectiveness of training provision. Some colleges are developing, with Student Minds, a network of recruited, trained and supervised student peer supporters. These student peer supporters will encourage other students to manage their wellbeing more carefully. They will also support students who are experiencing low mood, mild anxiety or similar concerns.

Open Door

The Open Door team has introduced a triage system, using an online form, to evaluate the severity and criticality of need and to provide the most appropriate support available given students' presenting needs and resources available. Such help might include directing the student to guided self-help, offering a variety of talking therapies or referral to appropriate NHS provision. All students with problems should be encouraged to make themselves known to Open Door, which works closely with Disability and relevant NHS providers to ensure that the adverse effects of ill-health on study can be minimised and appropriate strategies and adjustments can be supported.

Other ways to identify those at increased risk

Several universities are using data on student engagement and learning analytics to reduce dropout rates and to identify early signs of students who may be withdrawing from student life due to mental distress or ill-health. We will explore whether more robust and better integrated data on student attendance and other forms of engagement would enable us to identify more reliably those students who may be suffering mental distress or ill-health.

Crises

In case of a crisis (eg psychotic episode, threatened or actual suicide) the response on campus should be to contact Security Services on extension 3333 and request the emergency services. Security may provide support before the emergency services arrive, if required, and will ensure that the emergency services are directed to the incident location.

⁸ The University Policy on Taught Student Supervision: york.ac.uk/media/staffhome/learningandteaching/documents/policies/Policy%20on%20Taught%20Student%20Supervision.pdf

Fitness to study

Some students may be too unwell to engage effectively with their studies, or behave in ways which severely jeopardise or risk their health or that of those around them, and some may be unfit to study. We will work with them to help them prioritise their health and return to study when they are well enough.

Fitness to Study Policies⁹ will be further developed to help us manage these complex cases in line with our duties to the student, the law and our wider community. Our duties in relation to providing adjustments for disability and inclusive teaching and learning will also be further developed.

5. Delivering high quality professional care and support

Open Door and Disability

Staff in the Open Door team offer a range of therapeutic approaches which are focussed specifically on helping students through their academic journey. Disability staff provide advice about reasonable adjustments to staff and students for students with pre-existing or longer term mental health conditions, which are defined as a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

Open Door and Disability work closely with the medical team at Unity Health, the NHS general practice on our campus, via a new linked post which is responsible for a case load of students whose needs are most acute.

Students on leave of absence remain patients of Unity Health and the link post will be able to support them as patients of the NHS during their period of absence thus supporting their recovery, assessing them and helping them prepare for their return.

NHS Mental Health Service provision

The University will continue to work with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHS primary, community and secondary care providers to monitor the quality and adequacy of services and help ensure that services are sufficient to support student mental health needs, that there is good coordination and that transitions between organisations are as seamless as possible.

There are concerns that provision of some specialist mental health services in York, such as access to IAPT,¹⁰ are not at the levels required to meet local needs.

⁹ york.ac.uk/staff/supporting-students/academic/taught/fitness-to-study
york.ac.uk/staff/supporting-students/academic/research/fitness-to-study

¹⁰ england.nhs.uk/mental-health/adults/iapt

6. Leadership and governance



Adoption of a whole university approach requires strong and strategic leadership, engagement of multiple constituencies and partners and sustained prioritisation.”¹¹

The commitment to supporting students’ mental health and wellbeing is shared by managers and leaders at all levels. The Vice-Chancellor, through his engagement with this agenda at the national level, has set the tone for our commitment. The University’s Student Mental Health Forum, with broad representation from students, staff and the NHS, oversees the delivery of this strategy and the effectiveness of support for mental health and ill-health. It reports to Student Life Committee.¹²

The creation of a Student Mental Health Hub will aid the governance of the various functions and processes and provide coordinated leadership with the NHS and other partners.

The University leadership’s commitment to supporting mental health is matched by that of our two students’ unions. Together we will continue to address areas for improvement, in respect of policy, protocol and practice.

Departmental Boards of Studies are expected to monitor and consider annually trends in student behavioural and pastoral concerns as they impact on academic life, consider the contribution of University-level services to support staff in the Department and to respond to students’ needs.¹³

7. Data, evidence and research

We will ensure that our services are informed by research evidence making best use of management information and where possible, rigorously evaluated.

Data and information about needs and provision

We use Patient Case Management Information System (PCMIS) HE, a mental health case management system developed by researchers in York to provide data to identify needs and gaps in provision, to target specific interventions, to evaluate and improve our practice and monitor wellbeing in the student community. We will communicate and share appropriate data with Unity Health to form a holistic view of overall needs and, in line with best practice, to optimise care for individuals. We hold regular Open Door users’ forums from which we learn from students how we can improve our provision.

We will carry out some additional work to understand the specific mental health needs of the postgraduate student community and how the strategy may be refined to meet those. We will also conduct further work with groups less likely to report problems to assess how our provision can be more culturally appropriate.

¹¹ universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange/Pages/whole-university-approach.aspx

¹² york.ac.uk/about/organisation/governance/sub-committees/special-cases/sec

¹³ york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/contacts/department-committees

Research

The University has a strong portfolio of applied mental health research overseen by the Mental Health Research at York Steering Group, and we will develop and conduct relevant research, co-produced with our students, to help inform best practice and demonstrate University national leadership in responding to the mental health problems of students. This will be conducted as part of the University's founding partnership with the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust which is interested in understanding causes of and improving responses to student mental health conditions. Funding will be sought to conduct a student mental health rolling cohort study to assess levels of need and determine key risk and protective factors for the development of psychological difficulties while at University. It will also provide a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions along the continuum.

8. Further development and implementation of the strategy

A full implementation plan listing the variety of actions referred to in this strategy (see summary in section 9) will be reviewed regularly. It will be revised in the light of discussion of the strategy in all the major fora where the academic and support services in the University are planned and delivered. It will bring together all the key related actions in order to achieve a more joined up approach. We will also share learning and collaborate with those coordinating work to promote staff mental health and wellbeing.

Implementation will be supported by the Marketing team within External Relations to develop the Student Mental Health Hub and ensure effective communication with students (eg that web pages are up to date and easy to navigate, to deliver student messages on digital screens and social media and to advertise services and activities designed to support wellbeing). They will also support communication with University staff so they are more confident and better able to recognise problems and support students. The Events and Public Engagement team will continue to work with relevant colleagues to help organise student and public facing events on mental health related issues.

This strategy is approved by the University Executive Board Committee, following consultation through the Student Mental Health Forum. Delivery of the Strategy is overseen by the Student Mental Health Forum which reports to the Student Life Committee.

It will next be formally reviewed and updated in 2019/20, though the full implementation plan will be reviewed and revised regularly.

9. Summary implementation plan

The University, jointly with students, will:

1. Establish a virtual Student Mental Health Hub to coordinate information, support and service provision, jointly with the student unions and the NHS, so that students are sure where to go for help with welfare or mental health issues.

Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing

2. Ensure that the benefits of Colleges are extended to students with weaker college affiliations (especially postgraduate students) and others living off campus.
3. Strengthen support for students making the transition into university life.
4. Further develop our inclusive approach to learning and teaching and explore methods of assessment which reduce stress whilst maintaining academic standards.
5. Offer and evaluate approaches to help students manage stress.
6. Engage students early to enhance career planning and employment skills.
7. Coordinate campaigns focused on causes of psychological problems such as the misuse of social media, alcohol and use of illegal drugs.
8. Promote opportunities for students to engage in physical activity and in volunteering.

Early identification and early intervention

9. Promote the use of our online referral and triage tool to make it easier for students to seek help and explore ways to encourage students reluctant (for cultural or other reasons) to disclose their problems or seek help when needed.
10. Strengthen training of supervisors so they can better support students and refer them to appropriate sources of support.

Care

11. Ensure the effectiveness of the Open Door provision, prioritising on the basis of need, and extend access to evidence-based online resources.
12. Work with the NHS to ensure that service provision meets student needs.

Leadership and Governance

13. Provide strong leadership to ensure the strategy is embedded at all levels and that professional services in support of student wellbeing is sufficiently resourced.

Data, evidence and research

14. Develop a programme of applied mental health research with our students to evaluate the impact of interventions and help inform best practice.

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