

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AGREEMENT

2020-2022

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Overview

The Student Association continues to work in close partnership with South Lanarkshire College to create our Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA). Previous versions of our Student Mental Health Agreement are located on the Student Association webpage, available by clicking [here](#).

At the centre of this is our commitment to ensuring student mental health is at the forefront of our support services. This is more important than ever during the current climate and the SMHA provides an opportunity to highlight all the important work taking place within this area.

Commitment

We recognise that attending college can create many exciting opportunities but there can also be challenges along the way. As a result of the global pandemic, both the College and Student Association recognise that the availability of support services to students is crucial. As such, we were incredibly keen to be involved in the NUS Think Positive initiative for 2020/22 to improve upon our existing mental health support strategies.

By talking openly about mental health and promoting strategies surrounding positive mental health, we hope to create an environment where all students feel comfortable discussing their mental health and can easily access the College's support services.

Student support services within the College include the following:

- ✓ Free student counselling. Further details are available by clicking [here](#).
- ✓ Weekly mindfulness classes
- ✓ Free weekly yoga classes
- ✓ One to one support from Student Services and Guidance Tutors
- ✓ Access to Togetherall (an online platform available 24/7 to support mental health and wellbeing. Click [here](#) for more information).
- ✓ Student Association support available in-person or by emailing student.association@slc.ac.uk
- ✓ Dedicated Student Support email at student.support@slc.ac.uk
- ✓ Student Teams page for various activities. Click [here](#) to join our SLC Student and Health group

Mental Health and Wellbeing Initiatives

1. Addressing Student Poverty

Free Soup & Sandwich Initiative

The Student Association has been working hard in partnership with the College to provide our students with free soup and a sandwich at lunchtime. There has been a great deal of discussion surrounding digital poverty and alongside this the SA wanted to tackle the issue of student poverty. In a climate where employment opportunities are diminished then there is a real risk of increasing numbers of students facing poverty, which ultimately impacts on mental health. Alongside this, there is clear research about the impact of eating well and the effect this has on concentration levels. Furthermore, Think Positive conducted their own research highlighting the link between students' mental health and poverty, with 49.9% of students highlighting that lack of money and financial pressures have a negative impact on their mental health¹. As such, the College and SA wanted to address this issue by introducing small steps to help tackle student poverty.

The free soup and a sandwich initiative was introduced in the 2020/21 academic year and took place on different days each week, thereby allowing as many students as possible to have access to a healthy, free lunch. Going forward we will be continuing to look into how we can continue to provide this service as more students access campus, this may be in the form of during certain events such as Freshers' and Health & Wellbeing Week for example. We are very proud we were able to provide this service during such difficult times.

Measures of Success

- By working in partnership with Inspire Catering to provide this service we were able to monitor the number of students accessing the initiative. For the 2020/21 academic year we supported **856** students, thereby ensuring students on campus were able to access a healthy lunch option.
- Going forward, we would be looking to create a student feedback survey to gain further insight into benefits of this service. To date, anecdotal feedback has been incredibly positive surrounding the initiative both from students and staff.

Job Vacancy Advertisements

Acknowledging the fact that securing part-time employment for students is much more difficult than it has been in previous years, the SA decided to use the Student Wellbeing Teams channel to research job vacancies and advertise them via Facebook pages

¹ <https://www.thinkpositive.scot/2020-mh-research/>

and Teams. A new dedicated Teams channel was established to promote these vacancies to students. These were uploaded on a weekly basis during the 2020/21 academic year and is something we would be keen to continue going forward.

The purpose behind the promotion of this is to help alleviate stress that may be linked to students being furloughed or suffering job losses because of the pandemic. It was also intended as another small step towards addressing and tackling student poverty by highlighting opportunities available within the community. Volunteering posts were included to increase the skills and experience of students applying for job vacancies.

Measures of Success

- The introduction of advertising part-time job vacancies on the Teams Channel resulted in increased positive interactions with these posts with students contacting the SA for further support and guidance.
- Our social media channels provided feedback on this initiative with analytics showing that the vacancies posts are often the most viewed on this platform.
- Due to the success of this initiative, we will be working with our Marketing team to create additional ways to promote this.

Digital Poverty

To mitigate unnecessary stress, it was essential that students could participate in class and submit their coursework without worrying about how to access courses. To facilitate this the College rapidly increased its capacity for laptops and introduced a new long-term laptop loan application system, alongside a short-term allocation.

To date over 200 long term laptops have been provided to students for the duration of the 2020/21 academic year. This is in addition to hundreds of disposal devices and short-term loans. This has been hugely important in allowing students to engage with their class groups and lecturers, thereby reducing isolation for those unable to attend class in person.

Digital inclusion is also not just about ensuring access to classes but also as a means of tackling social isolation. By providing laptops and access to wifi devices, this ensures students can keep in touch with their course tutors, peer networks and support services, such as online counselling sessions.

Measures of Success

- Over 500 laptops were provided to students over academic year 2020/21. This includes long term and short-term loans, as well as disposal laptops that the College no longer required.
- Laptops will be refreshed over the summer and re-allocated to students for 2021/22 to ensure continuation of digital access.
- Extensions provided over summer to allow students to complete coursework and alleviate stress of not being able to complete their qualification.

2. Student Communications

Student Communications

Due to the introduction of blended and remote learning for this academic year, we felt it was more important than ever that the College and SA were visible and available for our students. The aim of this was to tackle feelings of isolation or loneliness due to the increase in working from home.

We introduced several new communication tools such as the following:

- ✓ Weekly SA emails which highlight all the events and news relating to the SA
- ✓ Increased social media posts via Facebook and Instagram.
- ✓ A shift towards using video as a way of sharing important information.
- ✓ Creating virtual events such as our Care Experienced students' lunch or during Estranged Students Solidarity Week.
- ✓ Launching the dedicated Student Wellbeing Teams page, including the introduction of our Friday Student Lunch.

Measures of Success

- Quarterly newsletters sent out to all students outlining the mental health support in place and introducing new initiatives such as yoga classes.
- Weekly SA emails sent to over 4500 students directly.
- Attendance at virtual events, such as the Care Experienced lunch, was hugely successful with follow-up lunches scheduled. Peer support network created where students can chat with each other whenever suited.
- Monitoring of social media channel usage and interaction, including feedback, statistics, etc to ensure relevant and useful information provided in a timely manner.

Student Mental Health Survey

During the 2020/21 academic session, the SA launched a mental health survey to get an overview of the services students were accessing and what more could be done to support student mental health. The overall purpose of the survey was to ensure we are providing the right type of support and to gauge student awareness.

The introduction to the survey outlined the existing support services available within the College and included questions such as whether students had accessed these resources; if they found them beneficial; suggestions for improvements/promotion and if there were any other services they would like the College/SA to provide.

The survey was then promoted through various channels such as through social media channels, weekly email and SA newsletters. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, with many students who completed the survey accessing the services.

Measures of Success

- Most students who accessed the survey advised they had used at least one of the College's support services.
- Very positive responses to the services being used, particularly in relation to counselling support.
- Feedback from the survey illustrated that more could be done to help promote services and raise awareness. The SA and Student Services team will work closely together to discuss additional ways of promoting services. This may include more video promotion, in person class visits, etc.
- In the 2021/22 session we would be keen to build on this survey and encourage more responses in order to increase awareness of support services. We would hope to update and promote the new version of the survey during Health & Wellbeing week in October 2021.

Counselling Team Promotion

To help introduce our counselling team to new and existing students, we increased promotion of the service including a 'meet the team' initiative. This involved each of our counsellors 'introducing' themselves along with their picture and background, which was then posted on the College and SA social media accounts. The service was also rebranded as the Counselling and Wellbeing Team. The intention of this promotional work was to break down any barriers to accessing the College's excellent support services and remove any anxiety that may be involved when starting a new service. As illustrated in Think Positive's own research, we are aware that there is a divide between awareness of mental health support services and the level of course being studied. For example, four times as many HE students are aware of support services compared with those studying at FE². As such, we want to ensure as many students as possible are aware of the student counselling service.

As part of this promotional campaign the dedicated webpage was updated to include the introduction of digital and phone counselling support. Further details of the service can be found by clicking [here](#).

Furthermore, the College offered online and phone-based counselling services and promoted these as alternatives to face to face support during lockdown and remote learning. Additional CPD was undertaken by the team to ensure students received excellent support in a bid to tackle isolation and any negative impacts of being unable to attend sessions in person.

² <https://www.thinkpositive.scot/2020-mh-research/>

Measures of Success

- Student feedback on the counselling service has been consistently high for many years and this was reflected in the recent feedback forms for 2020/21.
- Feedback forms were provided at the end of counselling sessions to gauge their success. As part of student feedback, several students reported they would be keen for digital and/or phone counselling services to continue. Due to blended learning continuing into 2021/22 then we are committed to continuing to provide this online/phone sessions where requested. In order to provide flexibility within the service we will continue to provide this option beyond the 2021/22 academic year, if requested.
- 100% of respondents to the feedback questionnaire felt they had benefitted from their support, with 90% advising they rated the service ‘very good’.
- The majority of those attending counselling were made aware of the service via their course tutor or Student Services. As such, there is still work to be done on promoting the service and we will be looking to increase awareness via social media in the 2021/22 academic session.

3. Mental Health Events & Activities

Free Student Yoga Classes

Starting in February 2021, the College began to offer free student yoga classes virtually over Teams. The inclusion of this to support mental health is due to the intrinsic link between physical activity and positive mental health, with yoga being an excellent way to help relieve stress.

Provided by one of the College’s own trained lecturers, students can participate in these free classes to improve their physical and mental wellbeing. The classes were promoted via Teams, social media, newsletters and weekly emails. Free yoga mats were also provided to all students who signed up for the class. This was to help encourage everyone to take part and break down any financial barriers that may have prevented students from joining.

To ensure easy access the sessions are also recorded to allow students to attend at a time that suits them best without interfering in studies, family commitments or employment.

To find out more students can email student.association@slc.ac.uk.

Measures of Success

- To date the yoga classes have been a great success with 433 students joining the Yoga channel on Teams.

- Attendances at each of the weekly classes has been consistent with over 20 students joining some sessions.
- Overwhelmingly positive responses via the Teams chat from students attending classes. These comments highlight the positive effect of the sessions and often mention looking forward to the next session.
- Over 40 yoga mats were delivered directly to students during the 2020/21 session, with an additional 50 mats purchased for the 2021/22 session.

Free Mental Health Resources & Wellbeing Packs

As students began to return to campus, we wanted to provide wellbeing resources at points throughout the year. One example of this was World Mental Health Day, which took place on Saturday 10 October 2020. To highlight this event, the SA purchased mindfulness books and colouring pens for students to collect, prior to finishing for the October week. The aim was for students to use these books over the weekend to help reduce stress. These resources were so popular that they were all collected prior to the end of the day.

Due to the success of this idea, the SA decided to create health and wellbeing packs which consisted of reusable face coverings, hand sanitiser and a SA branded, reusable water bottle. Fifty of these packs were created for students to collect for free and again all items were distributed by the end of the day. As outlined above, these packs were also useful in tackling issues of student poverty and financial worries for students who faced barriers to purchasing wellbeing products in line with government guidance, such as reusable face coverings.

When handing out free resources we promoted these on our social media channels and via weekly SA emails to encourage students. We aim to roll out these free wellbeing packs at multiple times during the year to highlight the importance of looking after our mental health, as well as providing any necessary health resources as required.

Measures of Success

- All books and colouring pens bought within 24hrs.
- Over 50 health and wellbeing packs distributed within 24 hours.
- Additional health and wellbeing Smile Boxes to be purchased for distribution during Freshers in 2021/22 session.

Virtual Events

Usually throughout the year the College and SA would work closely together to bring students a host of fantastic events such as Purple Friday, Freshers', Mental Health Awareness Week, Equality and Choices and many more. This year has been more

challenging but has allowed us to be more creative in how we can engage with our students.

To date we have hosted several virtual events such as Virtual Graduation, Freshers', Refreshers', Care Experienced lunches and a lunch for Estranged Students Solidarity Week. Great fun has been had setting up and taking part in these events with students.

At the core of many of these events is the importance of taking time to support our mental health, as well as the importance of events bringing people together – albeit virtually. For example, during Freshers' Week & Refreshers' the SA provided talks about mental health and the support services available within the College. We also invited guest speakers from partnership organisations, such as LAMH who provide mental health support within the community.

Looking forward we hope to provide more on campus events that students can attend. The first of these being our Student Wellbeing Morning in the 2021/22 session. This session will focus on the theme of positivity to help combat poor mental health. Suggestions for the morning include providing students with a free breakfast on campus (once restrictions allow), a key speaker to provide a 30 minute session on the benefits of positive thinking and finally a mindfulness or yoga session to end the morning.

Measures of Success

- Feedback from events has been overwhelmingly positive with a student at our Care Experienced lunch events mentioning that having a conversation and lunch with other people had really 'lifted their spirits' and they requested that similar events continue to take place.
- For our Student Wellbeing Morning we will be providing feedback forms to gauge the success of the event.

Covid Resilience Workshops & Student Relaxation Group Sessions

Following on from our promotion of the counselling services, our Counselling and Wellbeing team developed and delivered new in-house Covid Resilience workshops and Student Relaxation Group Sessions.

The Covid Resilience workshops featured a strong focus on resilience strategies, in addition to outlining the various support services. The purpose of these one-off sessions was to introduce the concept of resilience, address what stress means, how to recognise when we are stressed and provide practical tips on how to develop resilience. Alongside class group sessions, we ran workshops over Freshers' & Refreshers' as virtual events. An additional workshop was scheduled for our Construction Department as part of the Movember campaign activity addressing men's mental health. Due to the ongoing uncertainty during academic year 2020/21, these

sessions were welcomed as an opportunity for students and their lecturers to discuss how they were feeling at the time and encourage open discussion about mental health, thereby reducing any stigma attached to this.

Later in the year, the Counselling and Wellbeing team provided Student Relaxation Group Sessions as a way to tackle stress due to pressures of remote working, exam deadlines and the ongoing social restrictions across society. These sessions were created as a 6-week course with a different theme each week including tackling anxiety; sleeping concerns; helpful coping strategies; confidence and self-esteem. These sessions were mostly interactive within a class setting to encourage students to talk to their peers about how they were feeling and provide support to each other.

Looking forward we will continue to provide the Relaxation workshops for class groups, as well as updating the Resilience workshops to ensure they are relevant to student needs.

Measures of Success

- Feedback was gathered for both the Covid Resilience & Relaxation workshops, with both being very well received.
- Reduction of barriers to access support services due to in-house counselling team taking sessions.
- Students remarked on being made aware of new techniques they could use to aid relaxation during stressful times.

If you require any further details about any of the above support services then please email student.association@slc.ac.uk or student.support@slc.ac.uk.

Signed by:



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