

University of Strathclyde & Strathclyde Students' Union

Student Mental Health Agreement

2021/22 Academic Year



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Reflection on Academic Year 2020/21

It is not possible to reflect on the year that has passed, since the development of the original Strathclyde Student Mental Health Agreement, without referring to Covid-19. The global pandemic has impacted every segment of our society and its effects will be felt for years to come. Students at Strathclyde are not free from the lived reality of the current situation but instead have the additional pressures of student life.

During the 2020/21 Academic Year, Strathclyde students have progressed in their studies within this very different and challenging context. The student experience has been fundamentally different from previous years, and while online learning has numerous advantages, the lack of a physical campus presence and social activities has undoubtedly made it harder for students to build their vital peer support networks.

Despite these challenges, students have overcome adversity and made it through one of the most difficult of years. The drive and determination of our students is a credit to Strathclyde and should be both acknowledged and applauded. It is important to recognise however that when additional support was required, students and staff went above and beyond to ensure that no Strathclyde student was left behind because of Covid-19.

The Student Mental Health Agreement 2020/21 was, for the most part, drafted pre-pandemic. Even on approval, early in Semester 1 of the 2020/21 Academic Year, there was some hope for an emerging sense of normality in Semester 2. This return to normal never truly came but that did not stop us from upholding the spirit of the 2020/21 agreement.

Throughout the year both the University of Strathclyde and Strath Union did everything in our power to ensure that the mental health and wellbeing of students was kept at the forefront of all activity and operations. 2020/21 was no ordinary year at Strathclyde and required an extraordinary response to ensure that the wellbeing needs of students were always supported. Special acknowledgement should be given to the University Wellbeing Group, providing practical, on the ground, solutions throughout the year to combat loneliness and creating a sense of campus community.

Throughout the 2020/21 Academic Year service provision at Strathclyde has continued to evolve considerably with significant expansion within the Disability & Wellbeing Service. The service delivered today is a significant evolution of what was being delivered, and indeed deliverable, in previous years. This continued expansion could not have come at a more critical time and has been paramount in the delivery of support to students in such difficult circumstances.

As we look towards the 2021/22 Academic Year, we again begin to see an emerging narrative of a return to some sense of normality. We can look on in hope but firmly in the knowledge that, should the worst happen, we can, and we will continue to support all students at Strathclyde.

Regardless, this year has been an opportunity for learning and growth. We can say with confidence that whatever the next year holds, we will again make progress on improving the mental health and wellbeing of students studying with us at Strathclyde. Their mental health and wellbeing will always be our number one priority.

Student Mental Health Agreement - 2021/22

Introduction and Background

The University of Strathclyde and the Strathclyde Students' Union is wholly committed to student mental health and wellbeing. This collaborative Agreement embodies the commitments made by both parties to work in partnership to ensure that the mental health and wellbeing of students is kept at the forefront of all activity and operations.

The aim of this Agreement is to have a positive impact on student mental health and wellbeing through the delivery of training, promotional campaigns and the creation of a socially inclusive campus community that removes barriers and positively embraces the diversity of the student population.

This Agreement reaffirms the continued support to all students at the University of Strathclyde through different partnerships and undertakings to ensure that the University of Strathclyde remains as a place of useful learning.

The Agreement has been collectively developed by the "Student Mental Health Working Group" comprising representation from Strath Union, Strathclyde Sport and Disability and Wellbeing. This allows a holistic approach to student wellbeing which ensures there is the appropriate support at every stage of the student journey.

This Agreement has been constructed from student feedback gathered from several focus groups developed by the working group and promoted by both Strath Union and the University. The main themes extracted from this focus group sessions were that there should be more effective promotion of university support services, clearer signposting of and streamlined routes to access such services, alongside increased efforts to tackle stigma surrounding mental health of certain student population groups. The feedback from these focus groups have informed this year's Agreement and the key working areas from the 2020/21 agreement were still identified as relevant to structure the document.

This Agreement will support the implementation of the Student Mental Health Action Plan by providing a framework for both organisations to work together to achieve common objectives on student mental health and wellbeing.

Working Areas

The University of Strathclyde Student Mental Health Agreement 2021/22 identifies four main working areas with actions for each. These areas were determined following consultation with the student body in the form of focus groups:

1. Communication & Engagement

to improve awareness of mental health and wellbeing support and other services available to students, and, to create a safe and open environment to enable students to make positive social connections within the Strathclyde community.

2. Training & Education

to ensure that staff and students are mental health aware and equipped to support the mental health and wellbeing of the Strathclyde community.

3. Social Inclusion

to offer targeted support to students who may face additional barriers and endeavour to remove these barriers.

4. Healthy Lifestyle

to promote healthy behaviours, including sport and physical activity, known to benefit mental health and wellbeing, taking a proactive approach to student mental health.

1. Communication & Engagement

to improve awareness of mental health and wellbeing support and other services available to students, and, to create a safe and open environment to enable students to make positive social connections within the Strathclyde community.

Overview

2020/21 required all parties to transition their existing workflow to either an entirely online or blended offering. The significant decrease in face-to-face interaction raised new challenges for both staff and students. It required a creative and flexible approach to ensure our messaging and promotions broke through the, at times overwhelming, quantity of digital content vying for the attention of students.

Looking ahead to the upcoming year where it is likely some element of blended operations will persist for some time; it is important to take what we have learned and ensure that any improvements made that have boosted engagement with services offered are not lost as we return to the new normal.

Highlights of 2020/21

- The Disability & Wellbeing Service successfully transitioned to a fully online environment when required, including the provision of digital Drop-In sessions 7 days per week and online counselling.
- At the height of occupancy within the Halls of Residence every hall was assigned a designated counsellor by the Disability & Wellbeing Service.
- We improved the promotion of the Disability & Wellbeing Service and other key student support services, through avenues such as social media promotion on 'Wellbeing Wednesday' on the University platforms as well as the Sports Union and Strathclyde Sport.
- Strath Union hired a new "Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator" who will lead the development and delivery of a positive and proactive mental health and wellbeing strategy for students with a focus on building a resilient student community.
- The Library Service created a Wellbeing Wall on Level 3 of the Library to aid students throughout the exam period by providing helpful exam tips from students and signposting to relevant support services.
- Student voice was gathered by the means of Strath Union carrying out a Student Forum (a focus group style meeting), collecting information of the impact of Covid-19 on student wellbeing which then fed into our discussions on how best to support students during this difficult time. A further Student Forum was also hosted to understand the needs of Mature Students.
- We carried out a range of activities and events to raise awareness in the run up to World Mental Health Day 2020 such as Yoga sessions and Arts & Crafts, in addition to sharing appropriate resources.

- The Sports Union and Strathclyde Sport ran a campaign for National Fitness Day in September 2020 #PassItOnChallenge encouraging people to get active.
- Around the winter break communications were focused on isolation and loneliness and additional support services were offered including welfare checks for students in halls, mental health daily drop-ins, care packages, additional student staff hired to support those in halls, festive online calendar of giveaways.
- Strathclyde sport recruited a new Active Lifestyle Officer.

Priorities for 2021/22

- We will streamline our processes and make support more accessible by making it easier to find and request support in fewer clicks.
- We will continue to improve the promotion of the Disability & Wellbeing Service, as well as other key services, including promotions available in different languages.
- We will launch a publicity campaign for the newly merged Glasgow-wide Nightline Service in co-operation with other stakeholders.
- Strathclyde Students' Union will launch a Student Mental Health & Wellbeing Survey to gain further data from the student body on their attitudes towards mental health and wellbeing as well as their own lived experiences, and needs.
- We will continue to plan and run six health promotion campaigns per academic year that will aim to promote awareness and discussion about health and wellbeing issues.
- We will promote SilverCloud, the online e-learning programme to support students with mental health issues, using digital platforms.
- We will promote Shout 85258, a 24/7 text support mental health service.
- We will continue to support and promote the on-campus Rape Crisis specialist provision.
- We will endeavour to ensure that students are not overwhelmed by communications via email and that use of language is simple and accessible.
- We will continue to have staff promoting the support services available in academic settings and in staff email signatures.
- We will encourage more students to take up the "How to Create Wellbeing and Happiness" module during induction through more direct signposting.
- We will improve our signposting and keep our list of services available to students up to date. We will set up and operate a text number for students to receive an automated reply with support services.
- We will work collaboratively to support our achievement of the University Mental Health Charter and the GBV EmilyTest Charter.

2. Training & Education

to ensure that staff and students are mental health aware and equipped to support the mental health and wellbeing of the Strathclyde community.

Overview

The working conditions of 2020/21, being entirely online in nature, resulted in some previously running training sessions as well as planned training, not possible.

As we transition to a new normal and can resume more traditional training sessions that have not been possible under current circumstances, we should ensure that we do not lose the valuable resources we have developed over the course of the year. Materials developed for the delivery of online training sessions and modules should be built upon and expanded over the course of the next year.

Highlights of 2020/21

- An online wellbeing module “How to Create Wellbeing and Happiness” has been developed and is available to all students on MyPlace.
- Strathclyde Sports Union developed new online training modules for Club Committee members centred around student wellbeing and introduction to liberation.
- Strath Union successfully secured grant funding from Think Positive to create a series of training videos centred around ‘Collective Care’.
- Sports Union and Strath Union Societies created the new required role of Wellbeing Officer within their club structures.
- Strath Union transitioned many of its previously offered training sessions into an online format to ensure students can receive this in a more accessible way.
- Our Mental Health Adviser has offered training in First Aid Awards in mental health awareness at three levels, including an award for leading and supervising first aid for mental health.
- In partnership with Strathclyde Rape Crisis all incoming Strathclyde Student’s Union Executive Officers for the year 2021/22, as well as numerous student representatives and staff members have successfully completed the Scottish Intervention Initiative Bystander Training.
- Stonewall LGBT+ inclusion training was offered to Sports Union volunteers and Strathclyde Sport staff. This is to be continued into 2021/22 but extended offering across the institution.
- Eating & Exercise Disorder training run for sports volunteers and staff, at Sports Union and Strathclyde Sport, this is to continue into 2021/22.

Priorities for 2021/22

- We will create and promote a training calendar from Fresher's weeks onwards. The calendar will be re-evaluated every June. This should be promoted to all students, including those that do not volunteer with Strath Union.
- We will continue to deliver a rolling programme of suicide awareness training to staff and students including SafeTALK, ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) and START. This will include organising and promoting bespoke Mental Health First Aid for groups including clubs and society committees, sabbatical officers, and staff.
- We will deliver training on topics relating to eating disorders including resources from BEAT and RED-S
- The Sports Union will identify clubs at the start of each academic year that will be required to attend Challenging Hazing and Negative Group Events in sport (CHANGES) initiations training.
- We will increase training for academic and non-academic staff on the use of empathic and supportive appropriate language surrounding mental health.
- We will run semesterly Gender based violence/Bystander training including White Ribbon Scotland and Active Bystander for Strath Union clubs and societies, club committees, class reps, ResLife Assistants and Strath Union staff.

3. Social Inclusion

to offer targeted support to students who may face additional barriers and endeavour to remove these barriers.

Overview

While online operations have made it easier than ever for commuting students to participate in activity, it has proven harder to engage with students who are likely to be less online. Equally, Zoom burnout can result in provision that while beneficial is not desirable as students want time away from screens.

Going forward we must redouble our efforts to ensure that all barriers to inclusion are removed. The mental health and wellbeing of every segment of our student community must be catered for, and target provision offered where necessary to bolster support for students with additional barriers. In the next year it will be vital to plug any gaps that have arisen from online operations this year, with a focus on provision for second year students.

Highlights of 2020/21

- Strath Union delivered a fully online “Welcome” month in Semester 1 as a replacement for the traditional Freshers experience to ensure students still had the opportunity to make vital new connections. Strath Union also ran further events during the start of semester 2, during the intake of students.
- Strathclyde Sports Union oversaw the smooth operation of student sport wherever possible, under the relevant restrictions, to ensure that students could still participate in sporting activity and make connections in person.
- Strath Union, working in partnership with interested students, established a new Strathclyde Wellbeing Society to assist students in building peer support networks.
- A mental health peer support group “Reach Out” ran three times per week over Zoom. The group, facilitated by a third year student, provided students with a space to chat, talk about their feelings and learn how to access support.
- Strath Union progressed the case for, and the Student Experience Committee discussed proposals for, the introduction of Demographic Specific Counselling for LGBT+ and BAME students.
- We offered an enhanced online programme of wellbeing events throughout the 2020/21 Academic Year.
- Strath Union hosted an LGBT+ Sport Forum to gather feedback on how more LGBT+ students can be engaged in sport and to identify targeted support requirements for LGBT+ students and introduce relevant provision.
- We ran a Women & Girls in Sport week campaign to encourage participation in sport, volunteering, and officiating roles.

- We took part in the “Rainbow Laces” campaign to act as active allies and welcome the LGBT+ community in sport.
- We offered free “come and try” sessions for all sports clubs at the start of term, where possible due to COVID-19.
- We continued to promote and grow “Strathactive”, our non-competitive, social sports programme. 2020/21 saw our first year of the Sports Union Development Co-ordinator role to support this.
- The Disability & Wellbeing Service’s group wellbeing and therapy programme has continued to be expanded with new groups available to students online. This includes the recent development of programmes on “Perfectionism and Self Compassion” and “Managing Stress and Anxiety Ideas and Strategies”.

Priorities for 2021/22

- We will recruit staff to develop and support a peer wellbeing support project to set up a range of peer support initiatives across the University for students who may be socially excluded. This will include working with Strath Union, academic departments, and our Res Life Assistants to augment peer support in halls of residences.
- We will pilot the offering of a 24/7 mental health phone support service for students.
- Strath Union will aim to deliver a Freshers programme in Semester 1 of 2021/22 that will be fully inclusive to all segments of the student body and considerate of the needs of second year students, many of whom will be attending campus for the first time, to boost their peer support networks.
- We will run a programme of inductions for all groups including those that join out with the traditional term such as part-time students, distance learners, and PGR’s.
- Strathclyde Sports Union will continue to offer free “come and try” sessions for all sports clubs at the start of the new academic year.
- We will raise awareness of the support available to students who are taking time out from their studies.
- Strath Union will continue to utilise tools such as Student Forums to engage with the student groups who may face additional barriers in accessing support to further develop effective strategies to support them.
- We will host social events for international students at the start of term to provide opportunities for them to socialise and connect.
- We will offer a programme of wellbeing events over the academic year.
- We will offer weekly quiet sessions in Strathclyde Sport gym.
- In collaboration with Glasgow University will offer twice weekly women and Enby only swimming sessions.
- We will run a campaign and create well-informed, appropriate spaces for men to talk about their mental health.

- We will endeavour to identify the needs of hard-to-reach groups and remove any recognised barriers by carrying out further research and working to implement any subsequent recommendations.
- We will promote and utilise the Participation Fund to remove financial barriers from student participation in sport, physical activity, societies, and other relevant opportunities.
- We will increase awareness of provision for students with disabilities within Strathclyde Sport by increasing social media promotion.

4. Healthy Lifestyle

to promote healthy behaviours, including sport and physical activity, known to benefit mental health and wellbeing, taking a proactive approach to student mental health.

Overview

With much of the 2020/21 academic year taking place under either full lockdown or some form of restriction level due to Covid-19 there were periods of time where sporting activity and access to the Strathclyde Sport facilities was not possible. During this period students were offered virtual gym classes and sporting activity in an innovative way in which this has never been done before.

However, the Sports Union and Strathclyde Sport endeavoured to keep sports clubs active and safe, as permitted Scottish Governing Body guidance which provided a vital lifeline for students, many of whom would otherwise have been isolated from their peers.

Going forward sport and physical activity will continue to play a vital role in advancing the mental health and wellbeing of students at Strathclyde. Next year we should make every effort to encourage students to participate in physical activity by making it more accessible and approachable than ever before.

Highlights of 2020/21

- Strathclyde Sports Union established new staffing structure to ensure more focus is given to recreational sport and physical activity promotion for students and staff.
- Strathclyde Sports Union proved itself to be an open, accessible, social and supportive community for all students – in the face of the pandemic and while lowering its annual membership fee for students.
- Strathclyde Sport offered free online activity sessions via Instagram Live.
- Strathclyde Sport launched the ExHALE programme.
- Resistance bands were given to students in halls.
- Virtual Half Marathon training programme and event for all students to take part.
- Glasgow Taxis Cup went virtual and allowed all students to partake in an event that is usually aimed at our highest performing sports club members.
- Wellbeing Wednesday content was extended to Strathclyde Sport in which Healthy Lifestyle tips were given.
- SUSTRANS campaign encouraging staff and students to do a virtual commute.
- We will continue to offer “Kickstart” supported gym induction sessions in Strathclyde Sport.
- Strathclyde Sports Union launched a buddy scheme for volunteers to have a peer support network.

Priorities for 2021/22

- We will run wellbeing initiatives including “Exam Bootcamp” and “Coffee and Croissant” events during exam periods.
- We will implement the University’s Wellbeing Wednesday commitment by academic year 2021/22.
- We will continue to deliver and grow direct referral scheme to Strathclyde Sport for students experiencing mental health issues.
- We will provide an online means for students to order sustainable sanitary products.

Review Process and Signatories

This Agreement signifies that the University of Strathclyde and Strath Union will endeavour to achieve, and promote, the objectives at every possible opportunity.

This Agreement stipulates that an annual review will be carried out by the “Student Mental Health Working Group” which will report back to the Student Experience Committee and Strath Union Student Parliament for joint approval.

This working group shall be comprised of representation from Strath Union, Strathclyde Sport, Disability and Wellbeing, Library services and all other relevant parties. This group will meet a minimum of 4 times per year and shall be chaired by Strath Union VP Welfare, with collaboration from Strath Union VP Sport.

Signed by:

_____ **President, Strathclyde Student’s Union.**

_____ **Principal, University of Strathclyde.**